

## ABSTRACT

*CRY HARD*: An Original One-Man Show as Insight into Historical Adaptation and

Comic Theory

Calder Meis

Director: DeAnna Toten Beard, Ph.D.

This thesis centers on the writing and production of an original one-man show about Alexander the Great, *CRY HARD*. The popular action film *Die Hard* (1988) apocryphally misrepresents the words of Alexander as noted in Plutarch's *Moralia*, creating the opportunity for dramatic conflict and comic subversion as Alexander attempts correct his misaligned legacy. This creative product serves as a vehicle for an exploration of the intersection of two narrow narrative fields. Adaptation of biographical history into a comic form is without much scholarship. The one-man show is a challenging narrative form with its own set of insular rules dissimilar to those of traditional stage-plays. This thesis posits two inter-connected methodologies to overcome these narrative obstacles. First, when adapting history into comedy, I posit that the primary intent of the playwright should be to make the fact familiar. That is to say, one should distill the essence of the historical fact and connect it to something more universal, so that into it the entire audience can vest emotional interest. More, I assert that a character-writing model centered on the principle of laughter as a socially corrective gesture, as found in Henri Bergson's *Laughter: An essay on the meaning of the comic*, is an effective approach that generates empathetic ambiguity and comic potential.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

DeAnna Toten Beard

Dr. DeAnna Toten Beard, Department of Theatre Arts

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

\_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: 28 April 2022

*CRY HARD*: AN ORIGINAL ONE-MAN SHOW AS INSIGHT INTO HISTORICAL  
ADAPTATION AND COMIC THEORY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Baylor University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Honors Program

By  
Calder Meis

Waco, Texas

April 2022

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: Introduction to the Project	1
Analysis and Discussion of the One-Person Historical Show	3
Inspirations and Background Information	13
Chapter Two: The Writing and Revising Processes of <i>CRY HARD</i>	18
Initial Logistics and Structural Writing	18
Revising and Thoughts on Comic Adaptation	24
Chapter Three: The Rehearsal and Performance Process of <i>CRY HARD</i>	35
Rehearsals	35
Performance	44
Chapter Four: Creative Product, <i>CRY HARD</i>	47
Chapter Five: The Public Talkback and Closing Thoughts	83
Public and Dramaturgical Feedback	83
Closing Thoughts: Theoretical and Practical	90
Appendices	96
Appendix A: Rehearsal Calendar	97
Appendix B: Notes from the Rehearsal Room	98
Appendix C: Correspondence	100
Appendix D: Dramaturgical Talkback Summary	101
Bibliography	105



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks are necessary for the completion of this thesis, and my life up to this point. Love and thanks to my family, as always. Thank you to Dr. Stan Denman, for making me believe in my writing, and giving the greatest college pitch of all time. Thank you to Professor Lisa Denman, who encouraged and emboldened me to find the funny in myself- the things said in STAR Evaluations are not quickly forgotten. Thank you to Professors Brandon Sterrett, John-Michael Marrs, and Steven Pounders, three men who during my time at Baylor showcased kind hearts, keen minds, and pedagogical prowess. An infinite number of thanks to Dr. DeAnna Toten Beard. Without her sage leadership, brilliant intellect, many laughs, and immense patience, none of this would be possible.

Finally, thank you Eduardo Vélez III, Rj Singleton, Shane the Great- you are my brothers for life.

## DEDICATION

This is for Payton Ruth Massey, who has my undying love and for whom I too would attempt to conquer Southwest Asia.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to the Project

Alexander wept when he heard Anaxarchus' discourse about an infinite number of worlds, and when his friends inquired what ailed him, "Is it not worthy of tears," he said, "that, when the number of worlds is infinite, we have not yet become lords of a single one?" - Plutarch, *Moralia*

Between early November 2020 and October 31, 2021, I wrote *CRY HARD*, a one-man show centered on Alexander the Great, the Macedonian king of the 4th century BCE whose conquests in Southwest Asia created an eternal figure in Western mythos of millennia to come. The label 'one-man show' is technically a misnomer when it comes to *CRY HARD*; the workshop production contained 4 actors of whom performance is expected. However, the bulk of the performance is shouldered by one actor, who plays both Alexander and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> The play was conceived and written over the course of that year, with feedback coming from my thesis director, Dr. DeAnna Toten Beard. With her guidance, a creative team was assembled to coordinate an original workshop production. This production entailed a public performance of the play, followed by a feedback session with the audience, led by the dramaturg.<sup>2</sup> The guided conversation shaped my analytical reflection on the processes of writing both historical adaptation of comedy and the form of the one-man show.

---

<sup>1</sup> Final Draft calculated that this actor delivers 98% of the nearly-7000-word play.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Two for an expounded view in the role of a dramaturg.

There were several factors that led me to writing a play for my undergraduate thesis. I knew, first and foremost, that I wanted to pursue a creative thesis. This meant that the options available to me based on my skill set seemed to be writing on acting, directing, or playwriting. Playwriting offered the most control of my destiny. Writing on an acting experience would be dependent on casting choices out of my own control. The Advanced Directing course in the Department of Theatre Arts is by application-only, and even assuming admission, would be guided by class parameters. It would also limit hands-on research to one semester. Writing a play, then, seemed to offer the most freedom. It could be on any topic I desired, which allowed me to incorporate my auxiliary interests that my time in the Honors College has facilitated: history, literature, and the classics. In looking for a way to complicate and specify my thesis, so that it was neither broad nor simple, the idea of writing a one-man show came to the forefront. It would present a major obstacle. My previous playwriting experience was limited to ten to fifteen plays with two to three characters. Writing a one-man show that also touched on those outside interests seemed to be a formidable challenge, one worthy of a thesis-level project.

Enter Alexander. As a figure who is widely known in pop culture and academia, but is still shrouded in mystery, Alexander fascinated me. His legacy was one of contradictions. Scholars still disagree on his cause of death. For how much we know about his impact on history and what he did, we know much less about who he was. That gap in our collective knowledge seemed like an exciting invitation to tell my version of events.

This thesis will have five chapters. First, Chapter One will introduce the project. This will include an analysis of prominent one-person biographical shows from a reading list crowd-sourced by Baylor Theatre faculty. Chapter Two will be a reflection on the writing and revising process. This will include thoughts on adaptation and writing for personal voice. Chapter Three will deliver insight on the rehearsal process and public performance, with special attention to problem-solving issues during that time span. Chapter Four will be the creative product, the play *CRY HARD*. Chapter Five will summarize what was learned during the entire project, highlighting feedback received through the public talkback.

### *Analysis and Discussion of the One-Person Historical Show*

To prepare for writing, it became critical to understand the form of the one-person biographical/historical show. To create a reading list, I solicited the faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts, and they generated the seventeen following titles: *Turn Me Loose* by Gretchen Law, *QED* by Peter Parnell, *Mark Twain Tonight* by Hal Holbrook, *I Am My Own Wife* by Doug Wright, *Ann* by Holland Taylor, *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, *The Belle of Amherst* by William Luce, *Shakespeare for My Father* by Lynn Redgrave, *Give 'Em Hell, Harry!* by Samuel Gallu, *Say Goodnight, Gracie* by Rupert Holmes, *A Huey P. Newton Story* by Robert Guenveur Smith, *Satchmo at the Waldorf* by Terry Teachout, *The Lion* by Benjamin Scheuer, *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* by Lanie Robertson, *Latin History for Morons* by John Leguizamo, *Monster in a Box* by Spalding Gray and *Tru* by Jay Presson Allen. The

seventeen titles were recommended based on both literary merit and critical acclaim. For example, *I Am My Own Wife* won the 2004 Tony Award for Best New Play.<sup>3</sup> Those plays were narrowed down to five by the thesis director; another was the focus of an Honors Contract. I read, and if possible watched, *QED*, *I Am My Own Wife*, *Ann*, *The Belle of Amherst*, *Monster in a Box*, and *Latin History for Morons*. After familiarizing ourselves with the text by reading and/or watching a performance, my thesis director and I would meet and discuss the machinations of each play. What worked dramatically? How did it work? What things are true and patterned of the one-person works we have discussed? In what way does the form follow the function, and vice versa, regarding the mechanics of reducing the play to one actor, if not one character? In essence, we sought to distill the essential components found in a successful one-person show, so that I might include those components in the assembly of my own work. Below is a summation of my exploration of these six shows; for each play there will be a plot summary and the major contributions it made to my understanding of solo performance.

*QED* is a collaboration between playwright Peter Parnell and actor Alan Alda about Nobel-Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman.<sup>4</sup> Its acronymic title refers to both Quantum Electrodynamics and the Latin phrase ‘quod erat demonstrandum,’ meaning ‘that proves it.’ Feynman was perhaps most renowned for his involvement in the Manhattan Project during the Second World War, as well as his participation in the

---

<sup>3</sup> “Winners.” *Winners* | *The American Theatre Wing's Tony Awards*®, <http://www.tonyawards.com/winners/>

<sup>4</sup> “QED, The Play – Richard Feynman.” <http://www.feynman.com/fun/qed-the-play/>.

Rogers Commission, investigating the Challenger disaster of 1986. The play is set over the course of one day near the final report of the Rogers Commission, in his office at the California Institute of Technology. In the first act, the Feynman character was alone, except for occasional phone-calls which assisted segues between familiar, renowned stories from his past and the on-going present; it had a buoyant, driving tone that matched the quirkiness of its subject. This buoyancy was achieved despite some dark subject matter like the atomic bomb, the Space Shuttle, and Feynman's cancer. The second act picked up later that night, after the cast party of *South Pacific* in which Feynman had played the bongos, and took on a somber, existential tone. A student, the only other actor in the play, arrived at the office and their conversations convinced Feynman to choose to combat his cancer through surgical procedure, rather than letting nature take its course.

*The New York Times* review asserted that *QED*'s inner workings were somewhat on-the-nose; it asked large questions and settled on the easy answer of "don't give up."<sup>5</sup> However, it gave several crucial insights into the (technically not a) one-man show. The play was able to strike two massively different tones with relative ease; this seemed to be an advantage of the solo performer. Tone, rather than being produced as a byproduct of the interactions of characters multiple, was reflective of Feynman's emotional state. The playwright had more direct control over what the 'feeling' of any given moment could be. Next, *QED* is largely a solo performance. *The LA Times* called it a "1 1/2 person

---

<sup>5</sup> Ben Brantley, "THEATER REVIEW; 'QED': Iconoclastic Physicist for All Occasions," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2001, sec. Arts

play.”<sup>6</sup> It introduced the possibility of another small character serving some functional purpose, without completely dissolving the integrity of the form. This offers the playwright dramaturgically the capacity to contrast the dynamic between two sets of characters: Feynman and the audience as a character, and Feynman and Miriam, the student. The playwright can then show, rather than tell, the audience how their central character is affected by their circumstance. In *QED*, Miriam drew a gentility out of Feynman that had been suggested but not witnessed up to that point.

*I Am My Own Wife* perhaps best fits the connotative perception of a one-man show.<sup>7</sup> In it, a singular actor plays all forty characters. Playwright Doug Wright, in collaboration with Moisés Kaufman and the documentary-focused Tectonic Theatre Project, wrote the play based on his own conversations with German museum operator Charlotte von Mahlsdorf. Von Mahlsdorf was a transgender woman who operated a museum featuring antique artifacts during the Nazi Regime and the subsequent East German Soviet bloc. The museum became a meeting place for marginalized peoples, and then a target for the Communist government. Charlotte eventually became an informant for the secret police, so as not to lose the museum permanently. Other characters include the playwright himself, as well as other figures in the creation of the play; Charlotte also portrays other figures in her own life. It showcased the viability of switching characters at a practical level; moreover, it provided an example of how switching characters could

---

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, Michael “Making Science, If Not a Play Itself, Sexy,” Los Angeles Times, March 23, 2001, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-mar-23-ca-41464-story.html>

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Weber, “THEATER REVIEW; Inventing Her Life as She Goes Along,” *The New York Times*, December 4, 2003, sec. Theater, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/04/theater/theater-review-inventing-her-life-as-she-goes-along.html>.



have semiotic value. For example, the meta-theatre of the actor playing Charlotte playing the other characters heavily suggested something about the performative nature of living under oppression.

*I Am My Wife* was also structurally significant in my understanding of solo performance. The meta-theatre was interesting to me, and I wanted to incorporate it into my own work. The self-awareness of the theatre act seemed to have a multifaceted effect. It affirms the temporal nature of a theatre piece; recognizing that a piece of theatre cannot be recreated makes the moment more significant. It also insists on a truer vulnerability from the subject of the spectation; just as the fourth wall encourages passivity in an audience, as they watch distinct from any action, I assert that it can serve as an emotional wall for the actor as well. The audience and actor confronting the truth that a theatre act is occurring prevents any distance between them. Both parties exist in the same plane. This intimacy was appealing to me.

Holland Taylor's *Ann* is a true solo performance: one actor and one character throughout.<sup>8</sup> It tells the life story of former Texas Governor Ann Richards, told with her trademark wit and charm. It, like *QED*, is a 'day in the life' play, and uses the phone call to reveal to the audience interactions with big names like then-President Clinton as well as family squabbles. The play opens with a long commencement speech at a graduation, in which Ann, who is also *played* by Holland Taylor, details her upbringing, early adulthood, marriage, and entrance into Texas politics. After this section, the play moves

---

<sup>8</sup> Charles Isherwood, "Fiery, Salty and Brash, This Rose of Texas," *The New York Times*, March 8, 2013, sec. Theater, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/theater/reviews/ann-with-holland-taylor-at-vivian-beaumont-theater.html>.

to her office as the Governor of Texas. From this point to the end, *Ann* explores every facet of Richards' life from her desk: mother, grandmother, Governor, alcoholic, etc. It ends with a return to the speech that opened the play, calling for a politically involved America.

*Ann*'s cyclical structure was fascinating to me, and something I wanted to experiment with in my own original play. While the beginning and end are more ethereal in *Ann*, the idea of returning to the place we began is so fascinating because it immediately prompts the next question: how did they get there? Does the cycle end? *Ann* also showcased the need to establish some form of communication to intercut monologues and crowd work. Having both the phone calls and business with Ann's secretary offstage allowed for some method of diverting Ann's attention from the audience. Those moments create caesuras in the narrative arc of the show and segue into a new portion of Ann Richards that Holland Taylor illustrates. Caesura, from the Latin *caedere* meaning "to cut," can be applied theatrically as a break in the rhythm of a narrative or scene. The phone calls in *Ann* served as caesuras, in that they presented Ann with a new objective that diverted her from the presentational aspect that guides the play. This, like *QED*'s Miriam, gives the audience an alternate perspective on Ann, in that the wall between audience and actor is temporarily reconstructed as we witness her in another world, before she returns to ours.

*The Belle of Amherst* by William Luce premiered on Broadway in 1976, and features one actress playing Emily Dickinson, with that Emily character taking on more

than a dozen others (a la the meta-theatre of *I Am My Own Wife*).<sup>9</sup> The play was an intimate conversation between Emily and the audience, as she addressed the audience as houseguests and invited them in for cake before she sought to rectify her in-town reputation. Emily shares about how she is seen as strange by her neighbors and family, speaks on her poetry, and then tells her life story from her childhood. In the second act, she attempted to have her poetry published by Professor Higginson, however he denounced her work. This did not shake Emily's belief in herself and her abilities; she then vulnerably shared about the death of her father and the stroke of her mother. At the end of the show, Emily thanked the audience for listening, and invited them back for more cake.

*The Belle of Amherst* served as additional evidence to several patterns I had observed. First, the cyclical bookends of an invitation for cake leave the audience with a sense of home and belonging, which seem thematically appropriate to a story of a young woman who creates her own belonging. Second, the cake motif suggested that some form of communion between the audience and actor could aid that sense of intimacy. Lastly, Emily's character in *The Belle of Amherst* was openly endearing and sympathetic. The audience of the show rooted for her victories and was saddened by her losses. This aided the efficacy of the play overall because it generated a sense of investment that would be hard to replicate with a less sympathetic figure. Going into *CRY HARD*, I knew that

---

<sup>9</sup> Mel Gussow, "Stage: 'Belle of Amherst,'" *The New York Times*, April 29, 1976, sec. Archives, <http://www.nytimes.com/1976/04/29/archives/stage-belle-of-amherst.html>.

Alexander would need at some level to be sympathetic, as Emily was, so that his journey for legacy would be valued by the audience.

Next, *Monster in a Box* by Spalding Gray was a stage monologue that was turned into a film in 1992.<sup>10</sup> In *Monster in a Box*, monologist Spalding Gray gave a life update since his last monologue/film venture, *Swimming to Cambodia*, especially centered around his 1900-page novel manuscript (the eponymous monster in a box). This manuscript is semi-autobiographical, about Gray's mother's suicide, eventually published as *Impossible Vacation*. However, in the play, Gray suffered from extreme writer's block and couldn't escape "the box." Instead, he detailed several high-stakes scenarios with potential for stress that instead succeeded comedically: losing an LA agent, being in an earthquake, having an AIDS scare, getting bad reviews in a production of *Our Town*. Gray conquered all the tangents with a blistering, neurotic pace.

*Monster in a Box* was a central influence on *CRY HARD*. The minimalist set primarily centered on a wooden desk, at which Spalding was seated. Behind however, were expressionist shapes silhouetted by a large scrim with colored lights projected onto it. The juxtaposition of the real, familiar desk with abstract designs surrounding the actor gave the impression that he was an isolated point of reality, in a world of absurdity. The contrast between these two elements set up a dichotomy that was mirrored by the rapidly slaloming tone of *Monster in a Box*. Within the first few minutes of the piece, Gray was onto the topic of his mother's suicide; a seemingly tragic conceit, framed in a way that

---

<sup>10</sup> Roger Ebert, "Monster in a Box Movie Review (1992) | Roger Ebert," <https://www.rogerebert.com/>, June 26, 1992, <http://rogerebert.com/reviews/monster-in-a-box-1992>.

immediately elicits laughter. The obfuscation of intent from author to audience was a highly efficacious tool to eliminate any passivity as an audience member; one cannot help but engage with the performance after hearing “that summer, at the end of the theatre season, I went to Mexico to try to vacate and, while I was down there, my mother killed herself. And suddenly, I realized that this probably had a lot to do with why I’ve not been able to take a vacation very easily.”<sup>11</sup>

*Monster in a Box* mocked the performative nature of everyday life. Gray framed his narrative through an unfinished novel and described his misadventures in the film and theatre industries in a manner that seemed allegorical, rather than prescriptive. The comedy generated from these performance industries come in the form of jokes at the expense of starving artists, pretentious writers, and Hollywood elite. However, they always seem to be tied back to Gray’s purview on the human condition, rather than insular. For example, after a disastrous work-trip to Nicaragua intended to inspire a script went awry, a co-worker suggested making up the inspiration. Gray replied, “make something up? I don’t know how to make things up! I would finish my book if I can make things up.”<sup>12</sup> As the book symbolized Gray’s unpacked trauma, his inability to write a script and “make something up” went from a comic misfortune to a greater statement about the inability to cope with modern life.

---

<sup>11</sup> Gray, Spalding. *Monster in a Box*. New York : Vintage Books, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> Gray, Spalding. *Monster in a Box*. New York : Vintage Books, 1992.

The final play was John Leguizamo's brilliant work, *Latin History for Morons*.<sup>13</sup> The piece follows John Leguizamo as himself, attempting to connect with son over their Latin heritage, while also re-shaping narratives surrounding America's relationship with marginalized groups. In a paper I wrote about the text, my central argument was that solo performance was a form uniquely suited to unpacking personal trauma, as the audience's perspective is centered on the solo performer with no other actors to diffuse attention. As such, the lived experience of the performer/actor/character much becomes the filter through which we experience the text. In typical fare, themes are often implicit in revelatory, functional dialogue between two or more characters. As this is a shared theatrical tradition, when all but one of those characters are stripped away, the vacuum of the 'scene partner' is filled and substantiated by the audience. They are transformed into a state of activity, rather than passivity. Leguizamo's piece was especially intentional on this front. The audience of the piece is made to feel as if their re-education has just as much urgency as Leguizamo's quest to find connection with his son over their shared heritage. This fascinated me as a theatre scholar and a playwright, and it was a prominent inspiration in my own work. It became my goal that the super-objective of the play's narrative be as personally significant to the audience as it was to the actor, emphasizing the shared act of the theatre.

Reading and analyzing these texts expanded my knowledge of the one-man show as a form and enabled me as a playwright and theatre scholar to determine which

---

<sup>13</sup> I also wrote about this play in an earlier essay: Meis, Calder. "Tense, Tone, and Trauma in Solo Performance: A Descriptive Analysis of John Leguizamo's *Latin History for Morons*" (essay, Baylor University, 2020),

elements aided the success in storytelling. In *CRY HARD*, the influence of each of them is present in structure, content, and form.

### *Inspirations and Background Information*

This section will briefly address the origins of *CRY HARD* from a post in a Reddit forum addressing erroneous citations in *Die Hard* (1988). Then it will outline how the playwriting process was fundamentally guided through philosopher Henri Bergson's comic theory. This outline will particularly focus on the laughter effect, and how Bergson's lens impacted the psychological design of the Alexander character.

There was an amalgamation of concepts I wanted to explore in my piece: education, history, the classics, my own brand of existential comedy. The direct motivation for the premise of *CRY HARD* came from a Reddit post in r/badhistory. R/badhistory is a forum, self-titled "The Mecca of bad history," dedicated to being "your one-stop shop for casual dissertations on the historicity of everything."<sup>14</sup> The post details a situation that became the crux of *CRY HARD*'s conflict; in it, Reddit user tungstencompton relays the evolution of the quote from Plutarch's *Moralia* to *Die Hard*. This "bad history" by the *Die Hard* writers created a widely disseminated misquote, a situation abounding with comic potential, and the opportunity to explore all the concepts listed above:

---

<sup>14</sup> "The Mecca of Bad History." r/badhistory. Reddit, 2013. <https://www.reddit.com/r/badhistory/>.

In that seminal work *Die Hard* (1988), the late Alan Rickman as the terrorist thief Hans Gruber [delivers the quoted line](#), implicitly comparing himself to Alexander the Great with regards to the heist he's about to pull off, adding "the benefits of a classical education". In some bad history of its own, it's sometimes cited that the movie invented the quote out of the air, when in fact there are precedents from the 18th century onwards, with the general idea mentioned in the [The Way of the World](#) (Act II Scene 3) by William Congreve, printed in 1700, then paralleled in "[Why Alexander Wept](#)", in *Thirty More Stories Retold* by James Baldwin in 1905, and "[Of Late I Think of Cliffordville](#)", *The Twilight Zone* (S4E14) in 1963. All of them carry the same connotation - a man is unsatisfied once he gets everything he wants. So, if this saying didn't originate in antiquity, does it have a kernel therein at the very least? The answer is yes, and it is indeed Plutarch, part of any healthy classical education. But Hans was probably snoozing through that lesson, because the *Moralia* [instead says this](#):

Alexander wept when he heard [Anaxarchus](#) discourse about an infinite number of worlds, and when his friends inquired what ailed him, "Is it not worthy of tears," he said, "that, when the number of worlds is infinite, we have not yet become lords of a single one?"

This seems to be an opposite to what's being propounded in the quote: Alexander is complaining because he *hasn't* conquered the world, and even if he did, he'd never get to conquer any others unless he waited for Hero of Alexandria to invent the rocket ship.<sup>15</sup>

The initial intent was to create a purely comic, biographical show exploring Alexander's life. This play would look to subvert expectations of grandeur with historical missteps, beginning with the *Die Hard* bad history. The tone would be light-hearted, flippant, and irreverent. The writing process, however, lended itself to a more thorough, complete play centered less on joke theory. Instead, historical adaptation became a means of familiarizing Alexander to the audience. Rather than simply subverting Alexander the

---

<sup>15</sup> u/tungstencompton. "Gruber, H. - 'And When Alexander Saw the Breadth of His Domain, He Wept, for There Were No More Worlds Left to Conquer.'" Reddit, September 11, 2018. [https://www.reddit.com/r/badhistory/comments/9evd0c/gruber\\_h\\_and\\_when\\_alexander\\_saw\\_the\\_breadth\\_of/](https://www.reddit.com/r/badhistory/comments/9evd0c/gruber_h_and_when_alexander_saw_the_breadth_of/).



Great into a shallow, comic figure, the play attempted to make him a relatable, tragicomic figure.

Henri Bergson, a philosopher and theatre theorist, in his work 1900 *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* explored the reasons behind and the efficacy of the laughter event. Among his findings are that laughter comes only from things that are ultimately *human*:

A landscape may be beautiful, charming and sublime, or insignificant and ugly; it will never be laughable. You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression. You may laugh at a hat, but what you are making fun of, in this case, is not the piece of felt or straw, but the shape that men have given it,--the human caprice whose mould it has assumed.<sup>16</sup>

He includes society in the list of things that are human, as “we are both of it and in it.” He asserts that laughter possesses corrective efficacy; when we see someone behaving out of the bounds of societal expectation and/or obligation, but the violation is seen as within the bounds of acceptability, it is met with the laughter response. By this standard, there are three potential options: behaving properly, behaving improperly with the potential for corrective rehabilitation, and behaving improperly with no potential for corrective rehabilitation. To illustrate, there is no humor to be had in someone successfully walking down a sidewalk. However, we will laugh if they slip and land goofily on their butt, destroying their dignity while affirming their safety. That laughter generally disappears, though, if they slip on the sidewalk, land firmly on their head, break their neck, and die--because there is no potential for a societal corrective. There is an omega effect, then. Like

---

<sup>16</sup> Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Project Gutenberg, 2002.

the curve of the omega, both extremes come back to the same result. The moderate points between are desired; in this case, those points represent laughter.

Through writing and revision, parameters for adapting history into comedy became clear, and echoed the arguments made by Bergson in 1900. The historically comic figure was and is a balancing act; just as the stakes of the sidewalk-slip inform the laughter response, the perceived status of Alexander as a character became the metric by which moderation was necessary to achieve the laughter response. If Alexander was too much of *the Great*, the audience would likely conflate the theatrical experience with pre-existing Alexander mythos and historical knowledge, and lose the *human* essence that Bergson argues is necessary. There is nothing inherently comic about such a renowned general and king.

On the other hand, if the act of subversion went too far, and Alexander was removed of all dignity and status and simply behaved contra-societally, the audience would not produce the laugh response. In layman's terms, if Alexander was so detached from socially acceptable behavior in his unpleasantness, the audience would similarly check out. It would be as if, from a social perspective, he had slipped and snapped his neck, as there would be no potential for corrective rehabilitation. Had there been too much poor behavior, the audience would determine he was too far gone, and not shepherd his behavior back to the mean.

Comedy can be interpreted as a form of the extreme. *CRY HARD*'s adaptation of Alexander, biographical content, and the historicity of his legacy as well the public critique of the work, serve to assert that moderation is the crucial parameter in adapting

history into comedy. The successes of the project were found through attempting a balancing act between the familiar and the academically abstract, and the well-behaved and the misbehaved.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Writing and Revising Processes of *CRY HARD*

#### *Initial Logistics and Structural Writing*

This chapter encompasses the writing and revising processes for the creative product. This will begin with a discussion of the details of the creative product. Then, it will cover the assembly of the creative team that served as an informal writer's room for me during the writing and revising processes, before producing the play. Next, there will be a discussion of the structural format used in the play, and the connotations this format had on its rhythm and practical implementation. Finally, there will be an account of the process of revising, and how both writing, and revision was tailored to suit the performer.

The original intent regarding the parameters of my creative product was a one-man show about the life of Alexander the Great. The show would last for approximately one hour, and I initially believed that would necessitate around 50 pages of written material. The actual product, seen in Chapter Four, was 34 pages of text and nearly 8000 words long. This included 10 interconnected episodes, which I have labeled 'chunks,' containing extended monologues, moments of multiple characters portrayed by a single actor, audience interaction, improvisation, and unexpected callouts in addition to a scripted pre-show speech for the director of the production, two moments of projection from the film *Die Hard*, and Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" near the middle of the show. The objective was to develop a text that could stand on its own and feel complete,

without an overwhelming amount of text to write/perform, etc. Moreover, as essentially the entirety of this project has been within the bounds of the COVID-19 pandemic, a solo performance seemed to be a poignant vehicle for artistic expression.

At that moment, it was my belief that departmental resources would be spread thin, and I would need to minimize my impact- as such, I believed I would perform the written text myself. However, over the course of my thesis meetings in the spring semester of 2021, Dr. Toten Beard had recommended to me the inclusion of at least two other participants (an actor and a director) in a student-assembled team. The driving factor behind the assembling of the said team was the clarity of thought: if I performed my written work, and staged it myself, it would be near-impossible to glean valuable critical insight from the feedback I received.

Instead, in May of 2021, we had decided on an actor and director. Both were seniors BFA Theatre Performance majors, and they agreed to stage and perform my work on January 29, 2022, in front of an invited audience. The inclusion of an actor (besides myself) posed a specific, unforeseen challenge; while the original intent had been to perform my writing, I was now writing for *another* voice. Considering the cadence, style, and strengths of the actor, I began the writing process in the fall of 2021.

To begin the writing itself, I needed to establish a ground plan to follow in my exploration. The survey into one-man biographical texts had led me to an important, albeit obvious conclusion; the elimination of all but one actor requires significant structural changes from the typical theatrical play. Largely, theatrical plays are divided into scenes, in which the conflicting or corroborating desires of two or more characters

incite dialogue and create conflict which produces a small arc in the scene. The scene exists as a microcosm of the play itself. Chapter Four will display the text of *CRY HARD*; most of the show is done with one character onstage, with the minority of two characters being portrayed by one actor. The presence of only one actor inhibited any sense of realistic dialogue and presented several problems for an average theatrical audience which must be addressed by the text.

The first issue that needed to be addressed was practical. Scenes offer creative teams' checkpoints to use when rehearsing and/or staging theatrical productions. Rather than working the two-hour-long play in its entirety, a director and actor can focus on one unit of the play. From the audience's perspective, the end of a scene typically represents a *caesura*, a pause in the action that allows for the room to collectively catch its breath and prepare for the next moment in the play. Scene breaks are incredibly useful tools in a creative process, and I did not want to deprive my creative team of said tools.

The second issue to be addressed was narrative. Moving from a practical to literary standpoint, scenes often contain sub-theses of their own to the larger thesis of the play. Scenes are the chapters of the book and provide a distinction between smaller thoughts so that the greater message is not lost. In being unable to provide traditional scene structure, I was also diligent to not write one incredibly long scene, rather than a one-act show.

As for labeling the units of my play, 'scenes' seemed disingenuous when considering the solo actor, so I settled on writing 'chunks.' While the terminology might seem superfluous, it seemed that it was a helpful title in communicating to my thesis

director and creative team the intent. The ‘chunks’ written would serve as individual thoughts that would typically be distinguished by scene breaks, that in rehearsal could be performed without context, but in practice would be bookended together in a fast-paced, stream-of-consciousness tempo, as inspired by Gray’s *Monster in a Box*.

Thus, chunks became the checkpoints of the *CRY HARD* writing process. My meetings with my thesis director consisted of a discussion of the newest chunk written, oral feedback about the additions (largely focused on the efficacy of humor and thematic elements) and establishing goals for the next chunk. There were three significant meetings over the months of September and October that tracked the play’s progress from having a rough outline of the first four chunks on September 21, 2021, to my thesis chapter submission of *CRY HARD* on October 25, 2021. The version seen in Chapter Two is one that has been further edited from feedback from the creative team over the course of the rehearsal and performance process, but the body is largely the same. Of what became ten chunks of the play, we spent the largest amount of time fine-tuning Chunk 3 because of its implications on the overall message and tone of the play. Chunk 3 delivers the long form joke of the misremembrance of Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave* third hand from the source, followed by a perhaps the first earnest display of the neuroticism that accompanies Alexander’s vanity. Dr. Toten Beard provided both general and specific feedback regarding this and other chunks. For example, in Chunk 3, she highlighted lines that felt “like the play,” such as “consider yourself allegorized;” she also gave the note between the rough draft.

As I wrote and continually met with my thesis director, I also conducted meetings with the actor. These were largely informal, but nonetheless provided valuable information about the clarity of humor within the piece. The actor himself is an accomplished theatre artist and scholar, and as such was able to interrogate the text in such a way that inspired writing directly following meetings with him. As this student was a colleague who had undertaken the short-form playwriting class with me in the fall of 2020, it was valuable to discuss the developments of the work; he was already familiar with my style of writing and had experience in giving me feedback over my written work. So, he unofficially became the other member of a writer's room of two. The subject of our conversations was usually centered on voice. As a writer, particularly in such a narrative story-telling form, my voice and cadence come through; *CRY HARD* is frequently written in the manner Calder Meis would speak. The dialogue between the actor and I then becomes how to adapt my method of storytelling to feel natural for an actor besides myself, and our findings over the course of several check-ins in the fall 2021 semester were as follows: 1) as a friend and colleague of mine, he was familiar with my voice as a writer and could ascertain the method of delivery that was most suitable for the work, and 2) edits could be made for those sections that there was no reconciliation to be had between the text and a natural-feeling delivery for the actor. In fact, at least one of those edits originated a section of guided improvisation for the actor in the piece.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> There are several footnotes in Chapter Two denoting an area of the script where we decided to highlight the actor's improvisatory ability in order to create a sense of spontaneity as well as to ensure that the voice sounded natural and specific to the actor.



The writing itself of *CRY HARD* was largely patterned. The writing process was unlike any I had undergone before, because I knew how I wanted it to begin (and end) before I began writing. This meant that the writing itself merely had to support an arc between those two points. As such, I was concerned less for interconnectivity and more for individual moments. Chunks were useful for this purpose as well. As I wrote in between the bookends of the beginning and end, I had the freedom to mix and match the sequence of events which I did on occasion.

The writing would start with one thematic moment, somewhat derivative of Brecht's *gestus*, with the one moment representing a culminatory attitude for the entire chunk: for Chunk 3 it is Alexander displaying the misallegorized cave and for Chunk 10 it is the body subsumed by the projection, for example.<sup>2</sup> From that moment, the work of writing would continue to move from the broad to the narrow, specifying jokes and historical anecdotes adjacent to the thematic moment. Then, once that outline was laid, I would go back through and populate the chunk with individual lines, as well as transitional statements in between the differing ideas of each chunk.

By late October, I had decided that I had generated all the ideas that needed to be in the initial production of *CRY HARD*, and from that point forward dedicated my efforts totally to aiding production efforts and fostering creative-team-inspired revision. While revision had been constantly occurring to that point due to the collaborative nature of the project, it became my primary focus after that point.

---

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, Edwin, and Goldfarb, Alvin. *Living Theatre*. 7th ed. Norton.

### *Revising and Thoughts on Comic Adaptation*

The nature of this project necessitated that the writing process and the revising process be quite closely interlinked. It was my thinking that because one section of the play, if altered, would affect the pieces around it, it had to exist in an amorphous state where the entire play was in flux until the whole text stabilized together. The piece was being workshopped via constructive and critical feedback during its creation, in the settings that I have detailed.

As with all other creative assignments, notes from colleagues are ultimately suggestions; however, an author must have considerable justification to disregard a note and keep the status quo intact. To showcase the kind of feedback received that led to a revision of the text, here is a line-by-line of my thesis director's notes on the penultimate draft of *CRY HARD*; I also designate whether the note was taken and why.

<i>Chart 1</i> <b>DRAFT NOTES: 10/19/2021</b>		
LINE (CHUNK)	(SUGGESTED EDIT) NOTE	REVISION
He's sixteen, <i>and</i> he's thirty-two, and he's neither. (Playwright's Note)	Checkmark of approval	N/A
"And everybody seems absolutely cool with trusting Plutarch to know my hormonal cycle centuries after the fact." (1)	(INSERT) "And <b>yet</b> everybody..."	I tried this option because it makes grammatical sense, but I thought the indignance of the moment coupled with his immaturity make the 'yet' seem out-of-place.

“I always wanted to say, why do I have to use it?” (3)	(EMPHASIZE) “why do I have to <i>use</i> it?”	This was italicized in the performer's final copy.
“ <i>Schoooooooooool's out, forever.</i> Anyways, sorry. Sidetracked. But I remember my first day...” (3)	(CUT) “ <i>Schoooooooooool's out, forever.</i> <del>Anyways, sorry. Sidetracked.</del> But I remember my first day...”	“ <i>Schoooooooooool's out, forever.</i> Sorry. But I remember my first day...”
[The entirety of the <i>Allegory of the Cave</i> long-from joke] (3)	(TRIM) “Make 1st cave time shorter by about 20-25%...cut/trim”	This note was exactly what this section needed. This section went from 976 to 901, not only through cuts, but also complete reconstruction of some thoughts.
“It’s either raining or about hot as...” (3)	(INSERT) “It’s either raining or about <b>as</b> hot as...”	This was modeled after slang I heard in Virginia that I thought was funny, so I kept it.
“This is a metaphor, but think about that. Life outside the cave is just brutal, and everybody is always trying to fight their way in: for blankies, for campfire time, for shadow puppets. All they have on the outside is the literal Sun, which if you think about it is kind of useless. I can light a lighter, or shine a flashlight or something- achieves the same purpose, also I can see at night as long as I have like fifteen minutes to adjust. So really, what would you need...”	(CUT) “This is a metaphor, but think about that. Life outside the cave is just brutal, <del>and everybody is always trying to fight their way in: for blankies, for campfire time, for shadow puppets.</del> All they have on the outside is the literal Sun, which if you think about it is kind of useless. <del>I can light a lighter, or shine a flashlight or something- achieves the same purpose, also I can see at night as long as I have like fifteen minutes to adjust. So really,</del>	I kept these lines in the workshop script because I wanted to see what the actor would do with them in the hopes it would give me inspiration for their replacement. They will be excised from future editions.

(3)	What would you need..."	
<p>"Absolutely chilling. Vibing. And everybody who couldn't get tickets or thought that getting the special at Shorty's was more important, they're the people outside the cave." (3)</p>	<p>(CUT)          "Absolutely chilling. Vibing. <del>And everybody who couldn't get tickets or thought that getting the special at Shorty's was more important, they're the people outside the cave.</del>"</p>	<p>I changed the reference to Shorty's to a more niche one; "And everybody who couldn't get tickets, or thought that prepping for Laramie was more important, they're the people outside the cave." Laramie refers to <i>The Laramie Project</i>, a Baylor Theatre mainstage project at the time of the thesis production.</p>
[Placeholder text labeled 'Dylan Section', which would eventually become a performance of "Blowin' in the Wind"] (4)	"Tell me more."	This section became a performance of "Blowin' in the Wind"
"Why should my legacy be determined by anyone but me?.... Bruce Willis. I can't." (4)	Double check marks of approval.	N/A
<p>ALEXANDER: Yeah... Could I have a moment?          ARISTOTLE: Right now?          ALEXANDER: Yeah. (4)</p>	<p>(SUGGESTION)          "More to be done with this moment?"</p>	I left this up to the director and actor and I decided to keep it.
<p>ARISTOTLE: Sure... I'll come back in a bit, yeah?          ALEXANDER: Sounds good. (4)</p>	"I like this idea of a shift."	N/A
[Placeholder text referring to a section of guided thematic improvisation] (5)	Double check marks of approval.	N/A
ALEXANDER: Just saying...	Checkmark of approval.	N/A

Well, now I'm embarrassed. (6)		
"No no no no. That Berthélemy painting is the cultural icon. And I'm lost in the background." (6)	"Do we see [the painting]?"	The painting was [meant to be] displayed via projector during this section of the workshop production, but technical difficulties disallowed this.
"Do you know that feeling? Like when your whole life... just be Alex." (7)	Checkmark of approval.	N/A
"They're chained. Oh my God, they're chained." (7)	"I like this!"	N/A
"You know what, I am the American Dream. The new one. Because I died at 32 in Iraq for no fucking reason at all." (9)	"I love this!"	N/A

Before the end of the Fall 2021 semester, the production team gathered so that I could collect their feedback too. There were questions seeking clarification on the vernacular the character Alexander uses. How much does he know about the modern world? How young should he sound? I referred back to my playwright's note, that he is all the ages of his life in one singularity. The director and dramaturg identified legacy, repetition, and angst as recurring ideas in the play. I would wholeheartedly agree with their analysis; the desire to prove your value as a person and the bitterness that comes from feeling like the world promised was not the world received both seem like critical ideas in the text. On repetition, the cyclical structures were intentional, and I had intended

they imbue the audience with some existential dread in regard to their seeming endlessness. The director and dramaturg's questions mostly regarded the logistics the mounting of the production would entail: rehearsal spaces, properties, costumes, lighting/projection design, etc. All of these would need to be volunteered by the department and could not conflict with the mainstage production at the time, *Treasure Island* (this was a departmental procedure and a practical necessity; the dramaturg and I were both in the cast of *Treasure Island*).

While the role of the actor and director are incredibly familiar in our cultural lexicon, the role of the dramaturg may not be- it should, as the dramaturg was critical to the revision process in this production. To quote her, "the dramaturg serves the text of the play, and acts as its champion." This is to say, the dramaturg protects the text, even from its playwright. There are collaborative conversations that occur in which the dramaturg ascertains what the play is at its essence, and from then on, their efforts are to emphasize that true center. The Baylor University Course Listing description for THEA 4378 ("Dramaturgy: Theory & Practice" professed by my thesis director) is an "investigation of the functions and methods of the dramaturg such as choosing a season, audience enrichment, new play development, researching production history, and understanding dramatic structure and theory." The dramaturg served as a source of critical feedback, attended rehearsals with me, took notes, created a glossary for the production team of historical references and allusions, and most importantly led a significant talk-back after the show to an audience of over a hundred people.

The revision process was not distinct from either the writing or the rehearsal process. The dramaturg and I sat in on two rehearsals, circled in the calendar, in which I took notes regarding which lines were non-functional for our purposes.<sup>3</sup> The barometer of functionality was a line being practical (easy to speak/be understood/in an accessible rhythm) and efficacious (achieving the intended effect). Many lines were cut or altered for one or both reasons. However, by the end of the rehearsal period, the workshop script was finalized.

Beyond any potential success as a piece of theatre, however, lays a connected but distinct analysis of the play as a work of historical adaptation. My primary reference for the life and personhood of my character comes from Anthony Everitt's aptly titled *Alexander the Great*.<sup>4</sup> This work was readily available to me and seemed to include more about Alexander the man than any of its counterparts. While not a perfect source, nothing in a history so shrouded by legend and mythos can be. In the *New York Journal of Book's* review of the work, Robert S. Davis stated his "Everitt's understanding of the world of Alexander the Great does better at solving the mystery of the man than in solving his death."<sup>5</sup> While this is true, as the book explores two potential deaths of the great king, this criticism was one that seemed superfluous to my field of research; the meat of my work was Alexander the man. Everitt's book provides an excellent insight into that. He

---

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for the Rehearsal Calendar

<sup>4</sup> Everitt, Anthony. *Alexander the Great: His Life and His Mysterious Death*. United States: Random House, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, Robert S. "Alexander the Great: His Life and His Mysterious Death." *New York Journal of Books*, August 27, 2019.

also attempts to undo the tradition of previous Alexandrian biographies, which “reflect the concerns of their own age as much as they do of his. The author confesses that this new work also ‘reflects our own twenty-first-century hopes and fears’ but Everitt’s ‘intention is to understand’ Alexander’s world.”<sup>6</sup> This perspective was invaluable in my work; to subvert the image of Alexander, I needed a foundation as unclouded by modern bias as could be possibly achieved millennia later.

My initial process was to scour the text for circumstances that had comic potential; this was unfulfilling as both playwright and historian. There was nothing beyond the surface-level facade of enjoying seeing historically prestigious figures behave naughtily. Instead, in the adaptation, I adjusted my approach. I started by exclusively attempting punchlines on historical situations, some of which made it into the full show, like the Library of Alexandria running gag. Alexander behaving un-greatly became a subversion of expectations. I ended with a deeper level of subversion altogether that allowed for both a more comprehensive look at Alexander’s historical life and a more thorough emotional journey because the character became more essentially human. Striking the balance led to both comedy and engagement in accessibility, but it raised another issue; the play could not be a laundry-list lecture of historical tidbits about Alexander. Instead, historical references and allusions had to be motivated by progress along Alexander’s emotional journey. In a play about the humanity of a seemingly-

---

<sup>6</sup> Davis, 2019.



superhuman historical figure, and the self-healing he finds after shedding his bravado, prioritizing the facts that supported that journey was paramount.

A brief exploration of some of the allusions and references that made it into the text- a complete glossary of them can be found in the appendices. The ones below represent some of the most significant in the exploration of meta-awareness, existentialism, and the reclamation of legacy. In the academic realm, *CRY HARD* explores the Allegory of the Cave (incorrectly, at first) as well as Plutarch's *Moralia*. Beyond the practical effect of establishing Alexander as a character outside of time (Plutarch wrote centuries after his death), it served the narrative purpose of imbuing the character with academic sensibility to contrast his brash and off-putting behavior. To balance with the neurotic scholar, the allusion to philosopher Callisthenes, who Alexander had executed for undermining his court authority showcases the actions of the warrior-despot. My thought as a playwright was to provide balance at all moments in the process of including/excluding allusions. The goal in this was to avoid a caricature guided by a single character trait. An authentic character with complex emotional states seemed more interesting. By including allusions that pull perception in different directions, the result is a morally ambiguous subject, leaving room for the audience to convey judgment and to project thematic meaning onto Alexander.

The final product is a human story; in fact, at the talk-back an audience member said they thought extensively about how many historical figures could be inserted into the form of *CRY HARD* logically. This to me suggests that the themes are broader than just the subversion of the reputation of Alexander the Great. That humanity is a key to my

findings on adapting history; the accessibility of the character is crucial on the comic side of theory. Writing Alexander was a balancing act. The initial comedy occurs by methods as old as theatre itself: subversion of expectations. We associate Alexander with regalia, conquest, and the traditional masculine hero, and when he is an angsty, petulant braggart, that unexpectedness triggers the comic response. However, if I leaned too far into that character, the audience is repulsed and would no longer want to engage with such an off-putting person, especially with the absence of other actors to diffuse attention.

I would attribute this to a central principle of comic theorist Henri Bergson's *Laughter*; that the laughter act is a "social gesture." We see behavior that is inappropriate without being clearly offensive, and the response is laughter. Bergson's example of Molière's *The Miser* is particularly illuminating on the effect of laughter on behavior of comic characters; "Were Harpagon to see us laugh at his miserliness, I do not say that he would get rid of it, but he would either show it less or show it differently. Indeed, it is in this sense only that laughter 'corrects men's manners.' It makes us at once endeavor to appear what we ought to be, what some day we shall perhaps end in being."<sup>7</sup> A comic Alexander needed to be a figure that was inappropriate by what society has deemed appropriate for someone suffixed 'the Great,' but not offensive past the point of rehabilitation through the laughter act. Ultimately, I thought *CRY HARD* found that balance in the text that was performed, accentuated by the actor's performance.

---

<sup>7</sup> Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Project Gutenberg, 2002.

My penultimate thought about the writing/revising process comes not from writing for the actor's voice, but his skill set. While subverting our majestic expectation for Alexander is a fun exercise for the audience, I was of the belief we still needed to see what made him 'the Great.' It seemed the most effective way to do that was to incorporate elements of theatre practice that would play into the actor's strengths. Upon reflection, I am satisfied that *CRY HARD* was well-tailored for its initial production to the skillset of the actor performing it. The bravado of the opening Alexander, reminiscent of *Commedia dell'arte's Il Capitano*, played into his penchant for physical comedy.<sup>8</sup> He showcased his skill with guitar-playing, folk-singing, and impression during the Bob Dylan section. He adeptly handled the rapid slaloms between comic levity and dramatic tension. While I will address this in more detail in the section on the performance, addressing the success of tailored choices in the writing of the play felt pertinent.

Finally, in order to relax traditional theatrical boundaries between audience and performer(s), I included moments of guided improvisation for the actor. The actor simply had to return to the text eventually or follow a basic outline of a structure in several moments of the show; he was empowered to fill in the rest, in the moment. I had personal experience training in improvisation with him, and I knew it was a powerful skill in his arsenal. It would show him off as a performer and help energize the room to see improvised theatre. But more than that, it felt like a topical choice considering the context of the piece. The actor's excellent improvisation would help create a sense of community between Alexander and the audience. Affirming that relationship would be critical in

---

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, Edwin, and Goldfarb, Alvin. *Living Theatre*. Pg. 168. 7th ed. Norton.

enabling the corrective force of laughter. After all, for societal violations to be diagnosed and treated, there must first be a shared society between the parties. It concreted the urgency of 'now' by clearly distinguishing between the play that seemed could be some metaphysical prison for Alexander, and the human connection that surrounded it.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Rehearsal and Performance Process of *CRY HARD*

#### *Rehearsals*

The winter break of the 2021-2022 school year served as a border between two processes: writing and production. The fall semester concluded, and the time dedicated purely to the narrative of the play was over, and the general body of the play was set. Any alterations from this point needed to be minor, so as not to disrupt the actor's preparation. It should be noted that nearly 7000 words of memorization with no external cues from the dialogue of other characters is a monumental task.

Baylor returned for the spring 2022 semester on Tuesday, January 18, 2022. However, the production team decided to meet the day before for a table-read of the script. A table-read is often an early rehearsal in which the script is read aloud with performative intent but little to no movement is attached to it. It allows for larger texts to be processed without complete readiness. Considering the arduous and largely painful process of memorization, my expectations for memorization on the actor's part were low. In theatre work where the actor holds a script, like an audition or staged reading, there is the "80/20" rule. This is an approach for actors that suggests 80% of their attention should be up and away from the script, while 20% can be towards the script as reference for the lines and any notes they might have made. This allows the actor to simulate what a fully realized performance might look like without requiring complete memorization as

would be necessary for a performance. This, of course, demands a certain level of familiarity with the lines, as well as their sequence, to be able to keep your eyes engaged in the performance most of the time. It was a pleasant surprise that the actor had reached that threshold and was able to engage with large sections of the script without needing the crutch of the script. The actor's performance largely aligned with my expectations for the text, and it was relieving to know that the intent of the work was clear to the production team; I was assured that the production would proceed in a direction of which I would be proud.

Hearing the actor speak the words in the full context of the show allowed me to make several tweaks to the script; I gave these notes to the actor immediately after the cessation of the table-read and followed up with email correspondence of a revised script on January 22. This revised text incorporated notes from the table-read I saw, as well suggestions that came from the rehearsals the actor and director conducted on their own.<sup>1</sup> After giving notes, we discussed the play as a team, discussing major ideas and answering any lingering questions about the intent of any chunks. Then, we established a rehearsal calendar as a group, with the intention that the dramaturg and I would return to watch one more pre-tech rehearsal, and then the final dress rehearsal. The calendar constructed can be seen in the appendices.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Appendices B-C for Notes from the Rehearsal Room

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for the Rehearsal Calendar

The Department of Theatre Arts operates out of the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center. The HSFAC has two mainstage theaters, the Jones, a 356-seat proscenium, and the Mabree, a 246-seat thrust.<sup>3</sup> Besides this, it has a blackbox space, Theatre 11, which has flexible seating that can accommodate around 100 spectators. Additionally, there is a dance studio that can serve as an informal rehearsal space before the introduction of technical elements. All these spaces are assigned weekly schedules, posted in the theatre building at the beginning of the week for directors to claim times in individual spaces. Both mainstages were occupied during the rehearsal schedule of *CRY HARD*: the Jones by the Baylor Opera's rehearsals of Copland's *The Tender Land* and the Mabree by Baylor Theatre's rehearsal of *Treasure Island*. As such, rehearsal spaces were at a premium for all other productions. *CRY HARD* was only permitted four rehearsals in Theatre 11, the site of the public performance. These four rehearsals took place on January 24, 26, 27 and 28. All previous rehearsals took place in the dance studio, or various open spaces around the HSFAC.

The next rehearsal the dramaturg and I attended was on January 24, the first run of the full show in the performance space. There were several reasons why we did not attend every rehearsal in the week between the table-read and this run. First, the dramaturg and I had regular time conflicts that would have pushed rehearsals to late at night, which we wanted to avoid. It also prevented a diffusion of creative power in the room; it would have been difficult to attend rehearsals without feeling the desire to take

---

<sup>3</sup> "Facilities," Theatre Arts | Baylor University, accessed March 20, 2022, <https://www.baylor.edu/theatre/index.php?id=947399>

on the role of director, which I had capably entrusted to the director. Finally, as a script that explores base human vulnerability, it seemed pedagogically sound to keep rehearsals as private as possible to ensure actor comfort and safety.

So, the dramaturg and I returned one week after the initial table-read and watched the first full run of the show in the performance space, Theatre 11. By this point, the director and actor had rehearsed all ten chunks, to varying degrees of familiarity; the first seven chunks were performed “off-book,” or from memory without any prompts from the production team, and the final three were aided by an on-stage script. For the expedited rehearsal process, this was more than adequate. The director had also created the minimalist set as instructed in the stage directions for the piece. He felt that the play should not be over-encumbered by set pieces and instead the actor should create the world with the assistance of a few stage properties, or props. The script gave these suggestions: “We see ALEXANDER. He is crowned. He’s holding a remote control. Onstage are a map of the known world circa 340 BCE, some sort of table, a large whiteboard on an easel, a guitar- like instrument and copies of the Iliad and Plutarch’s *Moralia*, at least.”<sup>4</sup> Below is a ground plan representation of the set that the director arranged and proposed; his arrangement was green-lit. Figure 2 shows a still from the recording of the performance of *CRY HARD*, showcasing the set actualized.

---

<sup>4</sup> Page 48



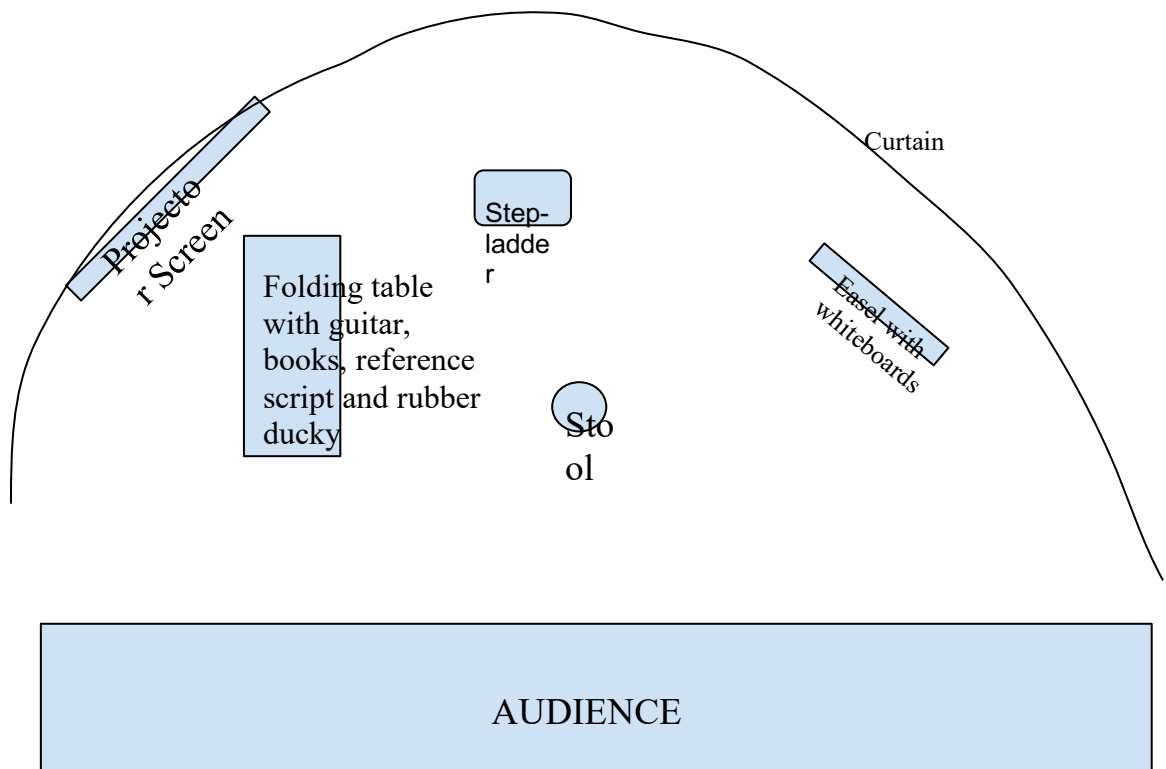


Figure 1



Figure 2

During this run, it was my intent not to take notes unless necessary. Instead, I tried to absorb the performance to make any final changes before the production entered technical rehearsals. As the name would suggest, technical rehearsals are focused entirely on the technical elements of a show and their incorporation. This means that edits, changes, and acting direction needed to be somewhat concrete before technical rehearsals began on Wednesday, January 26. My notes to the actor after the cessation of the run were brief and verbal- I asked for the removal of several phrases that seemed ‘clunky’ without removing them from the script. This allowed for me to revisit them at my own time to fix what I knew was an issue but prevented the actor from having to memorize new lines in the middle of an hour-long soliloquy. There were also several directorial choices that I had the chance to see for the first time in which I was of full support. The two most significant were an allusion to the Alexander Mosaic in the House of Faun (seen in *Figure 3*) in the “*the Great*” interactions, and the depiction of the Allegorical Cave as a phallic figure. These both felt appropriate to the mixed tone of the show, and I approved.



Figure 3

On January 20, the director had reached out to a student in the department who had experience with both lighting design and performance. The student agreed to come aboard the production.<sup>5</sup> At the rehearsal on January 24, the director informed the dramaturg and I of his intentions regarding designing projections for the show. He planned to begin (and end) with the *Die Hard* clip indicated by the script, but in the body of the show to showcase a map of Alexander's conquest, the painting *Alexander cuts the Gordian Knot* by Jean-Simon Berthélemy, and video projection displaying a point-of-view while hurtling through space. He planned on having the student-volunteer operate these cues in addition to light cues and deliver the lines of Plutarch in the script.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix D for Correspondence.



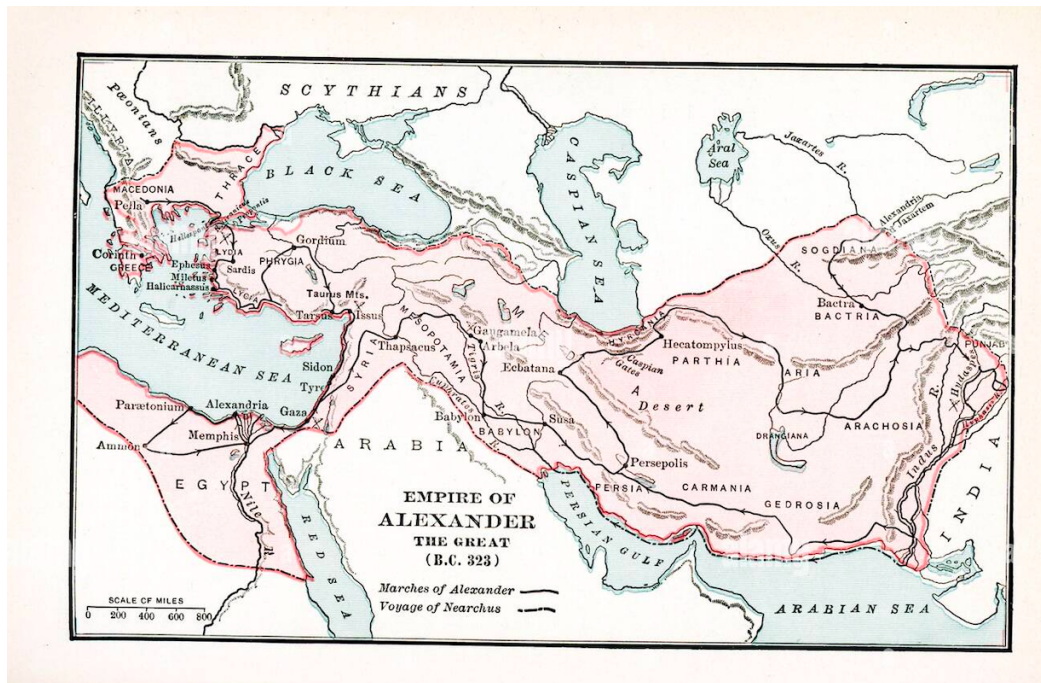


Figure 4



Figure 5

The dramaturg and I attended one more rehearsal- the final dress on January 28. A dress rehearsal is a technical rehearsal in which performers begin wearing costume pieces to get familiar with using those pieces in show conditions. Also, final dress rehearsals often have small, invited audiences to gauge how the audience will receive the performance before opening night. However, as it was still a rehearsal, the production team reserved the right to stop the performance if a technical issue was deemed too disruptive to improvise a solution. This rehearsal was attended by about twelve Baylor students who could not attend the public showing on Saturday for various reasons. This was beneficial as it gave the actor valuable information about comedic timing: he became aware of which deliveries would garner laughter and for how long, so that for the public performance, those intervals of time were ingrained.

Final dress was quite successful. It was well-received by the audience and was an exciting stepping-stone into the performance date. As it had an audience, it gave the actor a chance to practice the sections of the play that required audience interaction and engagement. As Alexander, he needed the ability to improvise the extension or mitigation of certain jokes in the show, as well as being free to interject written lines with improvisatory transitions. Additionally, it gave the show audience members to practice moments of audience interaction, of which there are several: the audience members who leave the cave, the person who chases after the actor post-breakdown, etc.

However, as a dress rehearsal, its primary intent was still to refine the show for public performance. As such, there were several hurdles during the run that needed to be addressed before the public showing. The director's original plan to have the lightboard

operator run projections had to be nixed after the final dress rehearsal. *CRY HARD* calls for two separate instances of displaying video footage onto a visible screen. Theatre 11 was equipped with a projector and large screen, notated in *Figure 1*. However, attempting to control this projection wirelessly from a laptop via Bluetooth connection during the dress rehearsal caused significant latency issues. The video was choppy with a low framerate and was not synced properly with the audio. This was a high-priority issue, as the video clip is the inciting action for the play. After final dress, tasks were redistributed to address the issue at hand. For the final performance, the operator would continue to operate the lighting cues from the catwalks about the stage, as well as call down Plutarch's several lines. However, the director would play his part in the show, sit in the front row, and run the projections off his personal laptop using a wired connection to the projector in Theatre 11. It was our hope that this wired connection would significantly mitigate our latency issues and make the video clip a successful start to the show. With the final dress behind us, there was only one performance left.

### *Performance*

The public performance of *CRY HARD* took place at 7:00 PM on January 29, 2022. As *Figures 1* and *2* showed, the flexible Theatre 11 was arranged in a proscenium-style set-up, in which all audience members were 'in front' of the performer; there was no seating on the sides of the stage. There were approximately 100 in attendance, nearly filling the space. This was composed primarily of students and faculty of the Theatre Arts Department. However, I was surprised by the amount of non-theatre students who came

to support friends involved with the production. I was grateful for the chance to receive feedback from those outside of my departmental culture.

The performance itself lasted for one hour, one minute and forty-five seconds. From the perspective of theatrical technique, comedy is a form that demands precision and the ability to capture an audience immediately; the actor did just that on performance night. I felt incredibly validated in my choice of production team during the public performance; the work of both the actor and the director shone through and was audibly well-received by the audience, with laughter being consistently present. Though theatre-makers are typically a kind audience, it still meant that some combination of the writing, directing, and performance were successful as a piece. Of note was the actor's mastery of physicalizing the different forms of Alexander displayed in *CRY HARD* (the angsty teenager, the fiery warlord, and the lost soul) and handling the significant tonal shift from the beginning to end of the play.

The performance itself had technical errors, like those of the final dress rehearsal. However, as someone who had seen the show several times previously, these mishaps were not distracting, and would likely go unnoticed by a fresh set of eyes. In the transition between Chunks 3 and 4, there was a blackout, in which the map displayed in *Figure 4* disappeared from the screen. After the blackout, however, it failed to return. The subsequent projections also did not appear (the Berthélemy painting as well as the video of moving through the stars during Alexander's climactic breakdown). However, the cyclical return to the *Die Hard* clip that opens the show did occur, and it was a satisfying moment to the audience in attendance. At the moment, I was disappointed because I

believed that the director's projection decisions added to the experience of the play; however, the actor's performance was not at all mitigated by the lack of projections. It can easily be attributed to the fact that the director operating the projections had had no rehearsals to work them from a wired connection to his laptop in the audience.

The audience's critical thoughts in the talkback, facilitated by the dramaturg, will be detailed in Chapter Five. However, their response, as gauged by my presence in the back row, was a supportive and engaged one. One gratifying experience was their particular interest (as I perceived through leaning in, less chatter, and a more focused stillness from the crowd) in the moment of cyclical repetition, and meta-theatre, in which the illusion of the play is fully stripped away, and the names of the actor and audience members are brought into the same world. These were my special interests coming into this work, and it felt satisfying to have them succeed in the room on performance day. Overall, the performance was an overwhelming success, thanks to the brilliant work of the production team: operator, dramaturg, director, and actor.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Creative Product, *CRY HARD*

What follows is the script of the play, *CRY HARD*. It is laid out in a format I have chosen including my notes and suggestions, inspired by the formatting guidelines of the Dramatist Guild for a traditional stageplay. This version represents the final memorization copy, which was presented to the actor on January 22. This script represents some of the edits made over the rehearsal process, and most closely resembles the text spoken by the actor at the public performance. It will continue to be updated with respect to feedback discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

#### PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:

Alexander and Aristotle should be performed by the same actor, in a Leguizamo-esque style of solo performance. Hans Gruber is a projected clip from *Die Hard*, and Plutarch is an unseen voice- and personally, I think it's most funny if you make a stage manager, board operator, or stagehand say his lines (male voice explicitly not required).

As for the meta-theatre, have fun. I think Alexander is out of time. He's sixteen, and he's thirty-two, and he's neither.

## **PRESHOW**

This pre-show text is not rigid. My intent is that the director make some kind of speech that establishes them as a figure connected to the piece, while saying both their name and the name of the actor.

### **DIRECTOR**

Hello! My name is [First Last] and I directed *CRY HARD*. This is the original thesis production of this piece, and I'm so excited for everybody to see the work we've been putting into this text so that the playwright can edit it fully. Before I take another moment, as you know, this has really been an intimate journey- one director, one actor. I have to acknowledge before we get started the tremendous work [actor name] has put into this process. You are Alexander. Alright! Let's get into it. Please silence all cell-phones, and don't be afraid to engage. Thank you again for coming. Please enjoy.

## CHUNK 1

A dark stage. We should sit with it for a second, two, waiting.

ALEXANDER

(in darkness)

Okay. We can fix this. Let's go.

And like air to the drowning man, it arrives.

A projection plays.

We see Hans Gruber. It's *Die Hard*. We have to watch 45 seconds of *Die Hard*. Have fun with securing those rights. Haha, there's no way we could just use it in an entirely educational context, right?... Unless...

HANS GRUBER (PROJECTED)

Hans is walking through an upscale building, when he speaks:

And when Alexander saw the breadth of his domain, he wept for there were no more worlds to conquer... benefits of a classical education.

Freeze frame. In an instant the projector turns off and the lights come up on the stage and in the house as if someone is being ejected from a movie theatre for gross misconduct.

We see ALEXANDER. He is crowned. He's holding a remote control. Onstage are a map of the known world circa 340 BCE, some sort of table, a large whiteboard on an easel, a guitar-like instrument and copies of *the Illiad* and Plutarch's *Moralia*, at least.

ALEXANDER

Would anyone like to tell me what the fuck this is?

Okay, this is *Die Hard*.

Who here has seen *Die Hard*? Hands, please.

*Beat.*

Okay, who here has *heard* of *Die Hard*?

Oh, fuck.

Alright, so, the thing is- I never said- I did NOT weep. Or even cry- didn't happen!

Didn't shed a tear!

In fact, this pissed me off so much that today I am here- do you know how bad it *sucks* to die? How much work it is? It's exhausting. Right off the bat, the title

(gestures to the projected film)

is kind of a slap in the face, for one. But really, *Die Hard* and this fucking tabloid journalism quote made me so irritable that I conquered death. To come talk to you. Okay, you're stuck on the metaphysics. Don't be. Your brain can't handle it. Accept your limits. It's okay, I will hold your hand. Metaphorically. *Not* metaphysically. MOVING ON.

ALEXANDER

I never said that! Plutarch said I said that. Plutarch don't know me like that.

*[Interacting with audience member]*

You. So, uh, what were Sir Francis Drake's thoughts on the intricacies of Spanish architecture? Oh, you don't *know*?

That's soooo crazy. You're a student, right? Because that's was 440 years ago... The gap between me and Plutarch. And *everybody* seems absolutely COOL with trusting Plutarch to know my hormonal cycle down to the single fucking tear.

He doesn't *know* me. Everybody thinks they know me, and they don't, and- you know what.

ALEXANDER

How can you not? Alexander

(he mouths *the Great*, and should get the audience to say it)

*NOT* the Emotional or the Readily Vulnerable. It takes a little bit of elbow grease to get a self-assigned nickname to stick, and I can't leave my name besmirched in good conscience, ya feel me? What's your name? [Name]? Just [name]? Yeah, that checks out.

## CHUNK 2

ALEXANDER

Me? No biggie. I've just got a suffix, is all.

*To the whiteboard. Bolded words in the next paragraph should be written on the whiteboard as well as spoken aloud.*

Lemme hit the highlights. Consider this your crash course on me, because you guys suck and need it. What do you guys think, we'll go from strikingly obvious on?

Greatsoundsgoodtometoolet'sjuststartthenherewego. **HANDSOME**.  
Hmmm.

Big beat. He adds **VERY** in front of  
**HANDSOME**.

*[Gauge]*

Yeah, that's good. What else? Oh, well **BRILLIANT**. Probably shouldn't leave that one out. I never went to college (didn't need it) but I *did* attend the school of Hard Knocks.

(beat)

And also the Lyceum outside of Athens with Big Man Aristotle but I was a transfer taking correspondence courses so it was complicated- anyways. **BRILLIANT** works, we'll keep that one.

So then-if you hear something that confuses you, just know- the fault lies with you. I have explained it correctly. You are wrong. Thank you for your understanding. I will not be taking questions.

To whiteboard.

Okay... what else, what else????

Erases **VERY** and deliberately replaces it with  
**DEVILISHLY**.

Alright, now we're cooking with gas.

Okay, buddy, think, they're taking a test and they need to know the basics-

No that's stupid. Fuck this.

He draws a cartoon sword.

He erases it. Then, he knocks the easel over entirely.

Basically all you really need to know about me, is that I did a lot of cool things. I can show you better than I could ever write for you. I was a leader and a great general, and people LOVED me and also I am the most important man to ever die near the age of 33. I know what you're thinking.

"Oh Alex.....what about Chris Farley? What about Nipsey Hussle?"

The raw fact of the matter is that I could make *Tommy Boy* and rap, uh, *most* of "Racks in the Middle," but neither of those guys could invade Northern India. That's just how it goes. I'd bet a lot of money that neither of them ever stood in a phalanx. Participated even halfway in a shield wall. And that's just intuition, I'm willing to be proven wrong, if anyone has any evidence otherwise, please come forward.

Nothing? Alright, so the gist is if I'm saying "*guy-who-died-in-his-early-30s-who-permanently-and-irrevocably-changed-the course-of history-of-the-world-and-Mankind*" you need to be thinking

(he makes them say *the Great* again)

.... that's right, me. Great job everybody, we're making big strides.

We can't fail if we keep making progress! Keep pushing. I'm sure more information about me will come to light if we all pitch in and really believe.

### CHUNK 3

ALEXANDER

Right. So I'm here. And surely you'd think I'd get some kind of imperial welcome. Yeah. I got a warm water bottle backstage, and an audience of the recently post-pubescent. I love the "I Know Where I'm Going" shirt, bro, it really looks great. Could have at least gotten Bruiser\* to come by. Oh well, what's done is done. Education is wasted on the educated.

Do you like school? Do you like what you're studying? What are you studying? Any theatre majors in the house? One rule for y'all- don't be the way you are for the next hour or so. Plato told Aristotle to tell me to tell you that, so take any issues up with him. Speaking of big P, hellooooooooooooo. My favorite class assignment.

ALEX grabs the guitar. He begins strumming.  
He should continue playing increasingly  
intensely as he goes on.

(from memory)

"A mixture of music and poetry...make the soul harmonious". He and Aristotle both were insistent on music being a tool to "dispose" one to good character. Haha. I always wanted to say, why do I have to *use* the guitar? Like beyond using it to make sound, *using* it to change something about myself? Of course, I understand the function and the Stoicism but for fuck's sake can I just play it for a second, to hear it? To enjoy it? I'm sounding ungrateful. I'm not.

Maybe a little. I like to play for fun, sue me; one time, my dad literally said "aren't you ashamed to pluck the strings so well?"  
I dunno, Phil, not really. In fact, Dad, instead of being jealous of my skills which everybody *LOVES*, how about go to therapy? Why are you putting your shit on me?

ALEX abruptly stops playing, looks at the audience, then the guitar, and hurriedly puts it away.

So fuck it. My at-home education was a bit of a mixed bag.  
But.

I liked feeling clever.

I liked feeling clever and in control. The games I played in school felt like they sharpened my mind, and that's supposed to be some kind of good, right? I liked school. I'm a competitor. I wanted to win games and I did. It was innate.



But those games I was playing , the tactics and stratagems that were fun little exercises when I was 14 meant that men died when I was 20. Good men. It was necessary. I thought...it was necessary.  
I made the decisions, so I was meant to make the decisions. Do you know what I'm saying?  
Yeah, and that was it.

ALEXANDER

Sorry, we were talking about school!  
I have been out of school for a couple years now.

Strums and sings for a second.

*Schooooooooool's out, forever.*

Sorry. But I remember my first day like it was yesterday.

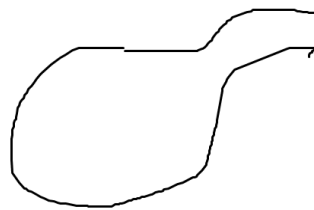
Do you have a favorite teacher?

Yeah? Who? [Name]? Yeah, mine was Aristotle, probably basically the same thing. You get it.

On the first day, he said we were going to learn about a cave, and I was an outdoorsy kid, so that excited me. Y'all are gonna love this. He said his teacher showed him this shit when he was my age, and it changed his life forever. He was a big dude with a bushy beard so I definitely thought we were about to go big-time spelunking but then he started drawing and you could imagine my disappointment. Yeah, we didn't go on a field trip. But what he was drawing was really interesting and also applicable to life and I am really, really, really, really trying hard to remember what it was.

Okay, yeah. There was definitely a cave. Let's start there.

He draws this.



Alright..... Cave.

*[Searches Audience]*

Have y'all heard of this? The cave... the caaaaaaaave. (*struggling to remember*) Why was the cave important?

OH!  
RIGHT!

There were *people* in the cave. That's what got me onto this, you guys are like the people in the cave. Somehow. I will figure out that out as we go. Starting point. There is indeed a cave, as we can see here. And there are people in the cave, the royal you and me. And those people in the cave, they were awesome. They are totally vibing down there, just like us now. Safe and happy and warm, no desire to leave whatsoever. They had a fire- I'm like ninety percent sure that they had a fire. So that's great, they don't get too cold, they have company, because they're all in it together. Actually, it is coming to me!!!! They don't *leave* because they're like *secured* by something, it's like they're really, really cozy under a big weighted blanket and they're so absolutely content that they just vegetate and relaaaaaaaax.

ALEXANDER reflects on his work, running through a mental checklist.

And they are in the cave *becaunuuuse*?.... Whyyyy? Yes. YES. YES! I got it, I'm back, no worries, I never left. You and me, we are down here with our warm blankies keeping us still next to the fire, and actually I missed something kind of important. These fires that are constantly going next to us are behind us, and they're making shadows go on the opposite wall. Are you tracking? It's like when you make the dog out of your hand and the flashlight.

He knows what I'm talking about. So just for those of you keeping score at home, we are in a sick cave, got all kinds of dope stalagmites AND stalactites, we got blankies, a warm fire, and endless entertainment. Literally the set of a Hallmark movie. So the analogy I was going with is that my little thing I got going up here is like the dog-shadow puppet, but first I had to set the scene at the cave for you guys to get why that's significant. Okay, I don't want to get sidetracked. The cave-dwellers themselves, they're literally all chads. Everyone loves them slash wants to be them. And Aristotle was telling us, that it only matters to understand how fucking sick the cave is in comparison to what's going on outside of it. The dichotomy between them is the big take-away. So as truly fucking awesome the inside of this thing is, the outside is just as bad. Like, I'm trying to get y'all in the cave with this little re-education session, but if I hadn't been here, you'da been stuck in the line outside for eternity. Think like the Space Mountain line... worse than *that*. And it sucks man. It sucks to be outside the cave, Aristotle was like, and I'm paraphrasing, but it was definitely along these lines, Aristotle was like "if you're not in the cave, you can get rained on and shit."

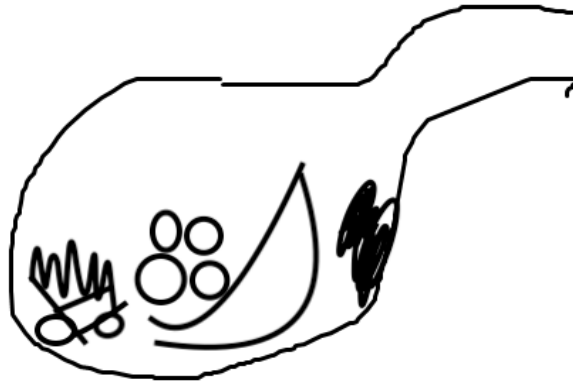
ALEXANDER allows the audience to grasp the profundity of his message.

But yeah, think about it. You're outside, it's gross, it's either raining or about cold as shit, you have no fire- and guess what that means.... No shadow puppets. Yep.

*No shadow puppets.* Can you imagine that existence? This is a metaphor, but think about that. Life outside the cave is just brutal and everybody is always trying to fight their way in: for blankies, for campfire time, for *shadow puppets*. All they have on the outside is the literal Sun, which if you think about it is kind of useless. I can light a lighter, or shine a flashlight or something- achieves the same purpose, also I can see at night as long as I have like fifteen minutes to adjust. So really, what would you need the Sun for that isn't better accomplished by the "Pimp my Crib" setup in this fucking hole in the ground. So, to sum things up, Aristotle taught us about this cave.

(references drawing)

"LET US IN"



Tonight, we are them. And everybody who couldn't get tickets, or thought that prepping for Laramie was more important, they're the people outside the cave. Because, yeah, sunlight, trees, they might sound like beautiful things, but they will die. Trees die. The Sun literally goes away for like 12 hours a day, sometimes. But caves are forever. Rocks? They're pretty old. Aristotle taught me that. So I'm teaching you.

Gestures to the drawing.

Cave. We're in it. Consider yourself allegorized. Boom.

ALEXANDER

I know what you're thinking. Not everybody has the privilege of a classical education. Not everybody can get allegorized in the same way as I was, and you were. I mean imagine, first day of school, I didn't know the teacher's name yet and he was setting up the ethical ramifications of cave dwelling to me. That's the way it had to be. We were always working, achieving, non-stop.

Because of the way I was taught, it is hard to separate the accomplishments of a person from the value of the person themselves.

Our jobs, whatever they were, king, tutor, and how good we were *at* those jobs had culturally become the most significant identifier of our personhood. And now looking back, it just seems like there needs to be more than that. I hope *we* can find that. Like I was a king, yes, like my dad before me. Very successful king. But that's not all I am. I am a handsome king, but a handsome king is not all I am. Does that make sense?

But people, they'll grab onto their perception of you and run even if that perception is just the surface level observation. If you're introduced to them as the Lord of Asia, a walking Deity spawned by the will of Zeus, that tends to stick harder than whether or not I have good table manners or I'm a cool guy.

It's like this impression that people have of me- impressions are valuable don't get me wrong. I love a good title. I understand the weight of reputation and impression and all that shit. My dad bent over backwards to try and get those circle-jerking fucks in Athens to see him as Greek, and not have Macedonia relegated to backwater-status. That's the impression *he* wanted to give off. And you know what the funny thing is? For all that work, all the bribes and plots and tricks and rubbing elbows at dinner tables, and insufferable plays that man had to sit through to be one of the cool kids, it didn't really matter.

You know what it took to be a Greek when I was king? To be owned by me. To be my possession. I was Greece. I superseded it. The things that controlled my father became my toy. Isn't that sick?

Who is America?

What one person is America?

The actor can generate a name or interrogate an audience member.

[Celebrity]? Okay. We know how this goes. Does [Name] pass our litmus test?

It still reads **DEVILISHLY HANDSOME**  
**AND BRILLIANT** with a small sword drawn.

Obviously, this is the standard of excellence because we established that these are my characteristics. Step one.

Could we consider [name] devilishly handsome?

Okayyyyyyyyy. Yeah. Okay. I don't really see where you're coming from on the devilishly handsome front. More impish than anything. Spiky. Not really the next Adonis.

And as for brilliant.....no.

Charismatic champion of military might and tactical prowess? It really depends on the project, doesn't it? They're kind of hit or miss on that front really. Their early stuff was great but now? Really lacking on the strategic flanks and pincer formations. Alright, math nerds. We're zero for three. No one is going to hit these three boxes like I did. NO ONE. Don't you get it?

Big beat. Make it seem like the moment is diffusing until-

He draws a giant zero on the board with all the aggression of a sword slash.

IT IS SIMPLE FUCKING MATH REALLY.

Big beat. The moment truly diffuses in the manner we expected a second before.

Okay. That was a bit dramatic.

I guess.... I guess I just always wanted to be more than (*he mouths "the Great"*) What does it mean, if the Alexander in people's minds is just a figment of our collective imagination?

Lights fade to black. Fakeout ending.

#### CHUNK 4

A warm, amber light rises on Alexander.

ALEXANDER

*Y'all thought it was over??!  
Ha-ha... watch this  
How many roads must a man walk down  
Before you call him a man?  
How many seas must a white dove sail  
Before she sleeps in the sand?  
Yes, and how many times must the cannonballs fly  
Before they're forever banned?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind  
Yes, and how many years must a mountain exist  
Before it is washed to the sea?  
And how many years can some people exist  
Before they're allowed to be free?  
Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head  
And pretend that he just doesn't see?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind  
Yes, and how many times must a man look up  
Before he can see the sky?  
And how many ears must one man have  
Before he can hear people cry?  
Yes, and how many deaths will it take 'til he knows  
That too many people have died?  
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind  
The answer is blowin' in the wind  
Ay, yo...  
Fuck Euripides...  
I'm out...*

A brief moment of transition, where lights and sound return to our normal. Then,

ALEXANDER

But all of sudden, I got this voice nagging at me. This voice that I can't shake. "It is possible that the most prosperous man will encounter great misfortune in his age, as the Trojan legends tell about Priam.

When a man has met a fate such as his and has come to a wretched end, no one calls him happy.” Bro.  
Shut the fuck up.

ALEXANDER becomes ARISTOTLE.

ARISTOTLE

Alexander, this is not the way.

From now on, the shifts from Aristotle to Alexander should happen quickly, but distinctly. Unless notated, the line between them should not blur.

ALEXANDER

(in awe, as in watching a schoolyard fight)

... Ohhhhhhhh fuckkkkkkkk it’s Aristotle.

ARISTOTLE

Hey, kid.

ALEXANDER

Hey. Why are you here?

ARISTOTLE

I’ve always been here, Alexander. Inside of you.

ALEXANDER

Not great phrasing.

ARISTOTLE

Don’t.

ALEXANDER

Sorry.

ARISTOTLE

It’s fine.

ALEXANDER

Hey, uh, I really can’t do this right now. I am not in the right, uh, headspace for this.

What are you talking about?

ARISTOTLE

I gotta go. I have an 8 o'clock.

ALEXANDER

I gotta get out of here.

(aside to audience)

He hides under whatever is available (easel,  
whiteboard, table, etc.) Beat.

I'm still here.

ARISTOTLE  
(from where Alexander is hiding)

Fuck! What the fuck! How?

ALEXANDER  
(scared)

“Your brain can't handle the metaphysics”. Now, please get back in your light so they can see me.

ARISTOTLE

Whatever, I didn't even want to be under there.

ALEXANDER

Yes, you did.

ARISTOTLE

Whatever.

ALEXANDER

What are you doing, kid?

ARISTOTLE

I'm getting out from under there?... I was down there to hide from you, but you found me-

ALEXANDER

What are you *doing*?

ARISTOTLE

I'm telling them about me.

ALEXANDER  
(gesturing to the audience)



ARISTOTLE

Why?

ALEXANDER

Why am I telling them about me?

ARISTOTLE

Why are you telling them about you?

ALEXANDER

...uh... I want them to know about me. The real me, like the *form* of Alexander. What I want to leave behind. I want them to see me for what I am. But they don't have the form. The form didn't last, all that they have is an image of an image of the form, the interpretation of interpreted history, and that doesn't sit right with me. Why should my legacy be determined by anyone but me? Like that fucking movie, *Die Hard*. I have to tell them, man. I can't let them associate me with that bald fuck Bruce Willis.

ARISTOTLE

Why are you special, kid? If the passage of time warps our perception of you and everyone else, for the matter, why do *you* get to stop that?

Beat.

ARISTOTLE

"It is a mark of items susceptible to destruction that their removal from the perceptual field renders them obscure to those that have cognition of them."

Mini-beat.

If you believe you have to fight for your legacy in the minds of these people, maybe that legacy was never yours in the first place.

ALEXANDER

But I'm-

Gets audience to say "the Great".

Wow, that does not feel good anymore.

ARISTOTLE

I know, kid.

ALEXANDER

What do I do?

ARISTOTLE

What do *you* think you should do?

ALEXANDER

I don't know... I just feel angry. And cheated. And like if I could make them see how I *was* actually a cool guy that.... I don't know, that I'd see it too.

ARISTOTLE

And did that work?

ALEXANDER

I don't know. No. I don't feel any better about myself. I feel worse. I sang Bob Dlyan, man.

ARISTOTLE

I know, hey, shhh, shhh, I know. I heard it.

ALEXANDER

(in tears)

Bob Dylannnnnnnnnn.

ARISTOTLE

And now we know... Sometimes you must fail to succeed.

ALEXANDER

I'm dead. I just want a win.

ARISTOTLE

You never lost, kid.

ALEXANDER

Yeah...Could I have a moment?

ARISTOTLE

Right now?

ALEXANDER

Yeah.

ARISTOTLE

Sure... I'll come back in a bit, yeah?

Sounds good.

ALEXANDER

Alexander tracks his movement out.

## CHUNK 5

ALEXANDER

(to the audience)

Sorry, that was kind of intimate and vulnerable or whatever.

(noticing the easel)

Huh, that doesn't look right.

Beat.

Which is gross... right. But maybe necessary. Uh, yeah. Anyways!

I just wanted to apologize to each and everyone of you. For the Dylan. There's no way to rectify that behavior. I'm listening and learning right now. And I want to take back what I said earlier. Uh, while Nipsey Hussle definitely could not have spearheaded an invasion of Persia, I, uh, could not have recorded "Racks in the Middle" either. So we're going to chalk that one up to mutual respect and leave it there.

Beat.

I'm not like, a philosopher. I'm not an idiot, I liked being clever and stuff, like I said- but I'm not a philosopher. He...was always cool with that. He thought Plato was full of shit that kings needed to be- why should I have to be a philosopher when I could listen to him for advice? And I liked that line of thinking- why should the world fall on my shoulders? Because my dad was a mid-tier warlord trying to convince the world he was civilized? Yeah, what a great and fun trade-off for eternal responsibility.

I didn't know he was coming. I wish I could've given you a heads-up.

He walks around, probably a least a little uncomfortable. Wandering the space, the easel depicting the Cave from earlier catches his eye.

Wait a second, that's *definitely* not right.

For quite some time, I believe the theatre space is truly discovered by Alexander. This should take quite some time. The outfits of your space, the curtains, rails, lights, seats, all of it; the bones of your theatre that seemed like protective walls once now feel more like a fence; a cage.

We are caught, not embraced. We are trapped, not defended. This should take at least several minutes. I want to emphasize, Alexander should *discover* the space. I will dictate the lines found during the original production, but your Alexander should find his words for this portion.

ALEXANDER

[dictated lines]

ALEXANDER

Okay, I think I might have misremembered something. This is not good. This is *not* good.

(his voice echoes)

FUCK!

(it echoes again)

Yeah, that's not right at all. I reversed it. The cave is NOT good.

He erases the first cave picture completely. It's a freshly blank whiteboard.

I lied to you. The truth is very important to me. Obviously. I hope you know that. The only way I'm going to remember how to fix this is to do the thing.

(gesturing to a few people in the front row)

You. You guys. Could you leave??? Like just go stand over there.

He gestures behind a curtain in sight of the audience.

Don't worry, you're not in trouble.

Okay, breathe. You won't miss anything, I pinky swear. Okay, shoo.

They are out of the door.

(to the remaining audience)

Do you want the good news or the bad news first?

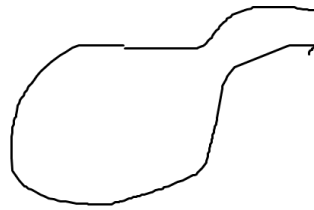
Do not pause.

The bad news? Okay. We are the fucking cave dwellers right now. It is caveman time for you and I.

Ooga-fucking-booga. Here's what that means. Me and you have to do some exploration because we are stuck in this cave. We are removed from the Truth, the Good, all that shit. Aristotle didn't really subscribe to that stuff but we are going to let Plato and Aristotle sort out their differences and we'll stick to the analogy. I know this is going to be hard but we have to turn your world upside-down a little bit.

He begins to draw on the blank white board.

It is the same cave.



ALEXANDER

(while drawing)

It is so important that we get this right. I cannot let this night be taken away by one tiny slip-up. Okaaaaaaay, CAVE.

This looks familiar, right.

My notes are coming back to me. We want to be those people out there. I'll explain why in a second.

SUDDEN REALIZATION---

OH MY GOD! The good news! I forgot the good news! What the fuck guys, why didn't you tell me?

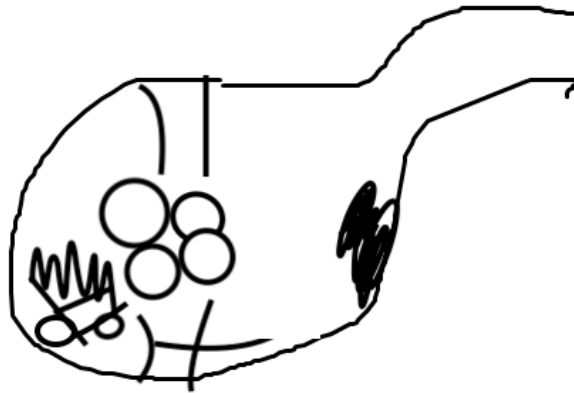
Right, it's not really your fault. Okay, my bad, for real! I'll own up to that.

THE GOOD NEWS! We aren't trapped here forever. We can enlighten ourselves and escape our meaningless imprisonment.

I'll be your guide for the evening, please keep all hands and feet inside the vehicle, except the one you're severing from the chains of your intellectual bondage to falsehood and lies that supplant the Truth. You can keep that hand outside the vehicle. As a treat. I'm bringing the Good News, guys.

He resumes drawing, speaking as he does.

He ends with something like this.



Okay, so me and my gang are stuck in this cave. Right, so we're in here, and we want to be out there, but at least we're comfortable. Stay calm, kid, it's an allegory, we aren't going to deprive you of a blankie for an undergraduate project. Uhhhh, so yeah.

They think the fire to their back is the Sun- and light is important in this whole little scenario because that's like the Truth and the Good. Not truth and goodness but like *the* Truth and *the* Good. Keep that in mind when we're talking about fire or the Sun or anything. So these dudes think the fire to their back IS the sun, when it's not, it's a falsehood. And beyond that, the fire to their back casts these shadows of themselves on the wall, and they think those moving shadow-puppets ARE the world and life and stuff, and they just watch and watch and watch mindlessly.

He crosses his arms and looks sternly-  
archetypal Dad time.

Sound familiar?

Beat.

Anyway, these folks have entertainment and shelter and warmth, so they are contented. I think the idea is that ignorance can be some comfort because wisdom is a burden or something but really they will never be satisfied. Because their light is false and their world is false.

(to the people outside the theatre)

We want to be them. They aren't chained. Their "truth" is the REAL truth, their light the real light, yadda yadda. You guys get it? The Sun is more the intelligible form of light than fire is? Yeah? We can move on? Cool, because I can't really explain it.

(aside)

I'm just remembering the buzz words from a cram session twenty-five hundred years ago. But the goal, for us, is to find the truth and free our minds, and get out of here

(gesturing the theatre)

And get to them out there. Why watch shadow puppets when there are real, honest-to-God actual puppets? The real thing is always better, no?

Okay, guys come sit back down. Don't be weird about it. Thank you, thank you. On your way out everybody, be sure to thank these [three] for their service.

Big beat.

The truth is important. To me, at least.



**CHUNK 6**

ARISTOTLE

Hey, kid.

ALEXANDER

Jesuschristyouscaredtheshitoutofme. I need to put a bell on you, fuck.

ARISTOTLE

Okay.

ALEXANDER

Just saying.

ARISTOTLE

Yeah.

(to the easel)

You changed it.

ALEXANDER

You saw that it was wrong?

ARISTOTLE

Yeah.

ALEXANDER

Well, now I'm embarrassed.

ARISTOTLE

Why would you be embarrassed?

ALEXANDER

Because I did something that *needed to be fixed*.

"Damn, you need therapy" Beat.

ARISTOTLE

That is an... unhealthy line of thinking.

ALEXANDER

I'm just embarrassed-

ARISTOTLE  
Sometimes you must fail to succeed.

ALEXANDER  
You sound like a motivational poster-

ARISTOTLE  
And you sound like a crybaby.

ALEXANDER  
....Okay, ouch.

ARISTOTLE  
I'm trying to help you.

ALEXANDER  
I know.

ARISTOTLE  
So why won't you stop this charade?

ALEXANDER  
Uh.

ARISTOTLE  
Answer me.

ALEXANDER  
Can I speak to you in private?

ARISTOTLE  
I suppose.

ALEXANDER  
I don't want to do this in front of them.

(to the audience)

Hey, this is not your fault. Sometimes grown-ups fight, and that doesn't mean we want your applause at curtain call any less.

Alexander moves to the same spot the audience members went.

ARISTOTLE

We keep coming back to this. Who cares what they think?

ALEXANDER

I do. I wish I didn't. But I do. I wish I could be like you, and not need their approval, not feel their gaze on my neck. I'm desperate for their love. It's hardwired into me, so much so that every moment I spend in this existence where my identity exists outside my own person, where my name has a life of its own that supersedes and conquers my own, is insufferable....there are these threads, right? And each thread is this layer of emotional response to being stuck here and they impossibly bunch and tangle into one big knot and I don't know if I can untie it here and now.

ARISTOTLE

You're revered. You're a cultural icon.

ALEXANDER

No no no no. That Berthélemy painting is the cultural icon. And I'm lost in the background. I don't need reverence. I want to be *known*. Is the difference between those two things lost to you?

ARISTOTLE

You're asking for too much.

ALEXANDER

Maybe.

Beat.

I'll cut the knot if I have to.

ARISTOTLE

You don't need them, kid. I know it feels like you do. But I promise, you are worthy of love from yourself.

ALEXANDER

I have some 'falsehoods' to correct. Coming back in?

ARISTOTLE

I don't think so.

ALEXANDER

Okay.  
Hey...Thank you.

ARISTOTLE

Don't mention it.

## CHUNK 7

Alexander returns from behind the curtain.

ALEXANDER

Did ya miss me?

I missed you, too.

I, uh, I feel ashamed for how I was acting earlier. I'll make it up to you.

First things first, I have to get something off my chest. Earlier tonight, when I was just getting to know you all, I misspoke. It wasn't intentional. Maybe it was. I honestly can't say.

But that quote... from the movie... *Die Hard*? Plutarch didn't write that. So he's not to blame.

I don't know what the fuck is going on in that research department but Plutarch didn't misquote me- the *movie* misquoted *Plutarch*. I'm sorry Plutarch.

PLUTARCH

(the voice of a board op or SM offstage)

Fuck you Alex!

ALEXANDER

Yeah, I probably deserve that.

Because, uh, Plutarch actually somehow got the events down correctly, all those hundreds of years later. And that embarrasses me. Which I'm starting to sense is a common theme tonight.

I promise I'll work on that.

I feel like I have a responsibility to correct my mistake. However painful that might be. Hang tight.

Alex retrieves Plutarch's *Moralia*.

He flips through the pages until he finds one that has a highlighted portion. [Note: This quote is very important. Give it time]

ALEXANDER

“When Alexander-”

(he gestures slowly to himself)

“When Alexander heard from Anaxarchus of the infinite number of worlds, he wept, and when his friends asked him what was the matter, he replied, "Is it not a matter for tears that, when the number of worlds is infinite, I have not conquered one?"

He closes the book.

Big beat.

So I might have cried a little... but I'll stand by the fact that wept is a strong word. Not only did they get it wrong... they got it backwards.

That fucking movie makes me sound like some... psychopathic, warmonger who only wanted to destroy. I hate that. I hate that people *think* that of me. I'd like to think the opposite is true. I was crying because I thought I'd never amount to what seemed all but expected of me.

Do you know that feeling? Like when your whole life is working towards one goal, and you think to yourself “as soon as I get it, that's when my life really gets to start?” It's a sad thought when that one goal is suddenly completely insurmountable, when someone lets you know that there will always be more outside your reach, outside your grasp... it's hard to reconcile. My dad started calling me a king when I was sixteen. I wanted to be called Alex.

So, yeah. I cried. And you know what? I'm tired of carrying that. In my mind, it was preferable to live with that mistruth than to bear myself to you, and I can't express how silly that seems now.

I feel like I can trust you guys...I needed someone to trust. Sometimes a fella gets lonely, yknow?

He notices the easel once more.

They're chained.

Oh my God, they're chained.

They aren't safe and comfortable and warm, they're chained and they don't know it. They don't know life without chains, and so they can't fathom the relief of freedom, let alone comfort. The distraction keeps your eyes off of the locks on your wrists. I hate shadow puppets.

You can't even really have community in a place where there's no concept of what's outside of it. There's no choice, there's no individual. There's just fire. And shadow puppets. That's got to be so lonely. I need you.

## CHUNK 8

ALEXANDER

(the weight of his discovery shadows this  
sequence)

No king without a kingdom, yknow? The idea of being a part of a group has always seemed so important. Like us, tonight- we're a group; no one is a part of this but us. That's special, I think. It's so easy to mock the idea of camaraderie as rah-rah  
(searches for the word)

...whatever, but fellowship is a unique kind of bond. Maybe I'm way off base. Having something in common to just have between two people is really a gift. All those cities being named Alexandria... that was a gift to the people. The perfect icebreaker.

"Where ya from?"

"Alexandria"

"No way, me too!!"

"Egypt?"

"No, Assyria!"

He is proud of this.

Yeah, I loved those cities. It would really sting to think if anything had happened to them or the world-renowned library since I've been gone.

What was I talking about?

Groups! Groups. There's something primal about just *being* in a group. The sacrifices the group makes for the one, and the one makes for the group. Mad cool, if you ask me. Like in the phalanx, the shield wall, you'd think each guy has a shield to defend himself? He *doesn't* ...he protects the guy to his left! Isn't that beautiful? It's the ultimate trust. I don't think I could feel lonely in a shield wall. A guy to my right, protecting his left so I can protect mine.

And I want to give credit where credit is due. The phalanx is not my invention. I wish it was. I wish I could claim it, but I can't. The dude's name who pioneered it? Xenophon. Bet you've never heard of him, right? See. This is why this whole history thing is such a fucking game. Sure, the military tacticians of my era know that the phalanx comes from Xenophon's retreat from Cyrus and those fucking Persians, but that is what gets lost to history, not that I used them in my, uh, exploits. It seems like total land mass covered, body counts and burning fortresses stick in the imagination a lot longer than the strategy it took to get there.

In fact, one of Plutarch's homeboys said "Alexander the Great would not have become great if Xenophon never existed."

And that's the truth. But here's some more truth.

In six months, you're going to remember this night, the play about Alexander where he rambled about caves and his self-image issues, but the name Xenophon will probably never cross your mind again.

And I think that sucks. I really do. That's yet another thing that seems out of grasp. To distribute the renown to everyone else who deserves it. Xenophon.. he wasn't a king or anyone of political note, even... but who's to say I would be without him? Isn't that absurd? We stand on the shoulders of giants, yadda yadda, all that, but really though. I feel undeserving. I really do.

He takes a water bottle and toasts with the audience.

ALEXANDER

To Xenophon the Great!

He sits in this. Drink the whole water bottle, sip by sip.

(to himself more than a toast)

To Xenophon the Great..

Beat

ALEXANDER

It's hard to let yourself feel weak. It's a battle. I'm working on it. Back in the day, that guy Plutarch-

PLUTARCH

Fuck you, Alex!

ALEXANDER

Yeah, him. He wrote about me that "sleep and sex, more than anything reminded him [me] about his [my] mortality." In case it was hard to tell, I wanted to live forever. As long as fate would allow. That was a big reason for the deifying the emperor thing. If I was obscuring the line between god and man, maybe I could slip past the death checkpoint yknow? Yeah, didn't work. But I named all those cities after myself, too. So that my name would continue. And really, thank God that nothing has happened to them. Imagine if they had changed names, hahahahah?

Audience response.

Stop holding your breath. I'm fucking with you, I *know*. And that's me slowly fading away right? The thing about being famous is you get to keep dying *after* your death.

Beat.



Nobody expects to die young. Callisthenes didn't. I certainly didn't. Did I say anything about Callisthenes yet? No? Okay. Callisthenes was, uh, Aristotle's nephew, or uh great-nephew, actually. And he was a philosopher, too, and as a favor to my guy I brought him along as a historian and he documented some of my rule and stuff. It was a pretty sweet gig for him and I didn't have to keep a diary. Win-win. Well, as part of my conquest thing, I would adopt elements of the culture wherever I went into my court. After the Persian campaign, I made an effort to incorporate some of their traditional practices into my own, because I was trying to keep the peace during a military occupation. It's the smart move. It keeps people calm. And Callisthenes didn't like that, see he and his uncle were very firmly on their "Non-Greeks are barely people" horse. And he became more and more public with his criticism of how I ran my court. That was unacceptable. I dealt with it. And with that, Aristotle left my life. Surely he understood that I was stuck in an impossible position, no? If the court historian could be openly subversive, what would stop a coup d'etat? It was him or me. Callisthenes didn't expect to go out young. I didn't expect that *his* mistake would mean Aristotle would cut *me* off. Today was actually the first time I've seen him since... the whole thing. I never liked talking about death... it seemed like an impossible subject to broach, an impossible divide to cross. So it never got fixed. And if I had to tell you my list of regrets, the specific ones wouldn't be that numerous. That's one of them.

Sometimes he would appear to me at the end... during the worst of the fevers. And those were the moments in the last days that I was the happiest.

I did not, and do not, want to go.

## CHUNK 9

But, my friends, our time together is coming to a close. This feels like summer camp. Like in the shortest amount of time possible you people have seen more of me than anyone else. This openness, this vulnerability. It feels addicting. (*genuinely*)

ALEXANDER

I don't want to get on the bus and go home!  
But what better way to end than with the end, right?  
Picture this.

Note: the original production is directed to a mostly college-age audience.

In like eleven years, you guys have won twenty battles, responsible for the deaths of thousands, the prosperity of thousands more, the security of Greek relevance for the millennia to come. And the thing that puts you on your ass? Not a blade across the neck or an arrow to the eye socket. Fucking mosquito bite.. You know what, I *am* the American Dream. The new one, at least. Because I died at 32 in Iraq for no fucking reason at all. There was so much more I wanted to do with my life. The thing that I keep thinking, that I really can't shake... is that I had so much potential. And I know that sounds absurd to say about yourself because it's reflective, and because I *was* good at the military stuff, the tactics, whatever. But me. *I* had so much potential, as a person. As a man. And I feel cheated. I felt the dogs nipping at my feet until the final breath. I felt whatever possible bad fate waiting if I ever stopped to rest. So I couldn't. So I kept going, and I think my driving essence was that one day, when it was all mine, I could live happy. Like with Anaxarchus- maybe if I'd had one world, all those stars wouldn't have been burning into my soul. I sound crazy, right? Who needs that? Who needs to win everything? For so long I blamed Phillip, I blamed Aristotle, I blamed Callisthenes' lifeless eyes, I blamed those fucking Persians. I never wanted to admit that the thing I hated, didn't come from someone else. We want them to be the unfortunate outcome of some external circumstance. But, I can't lie anymore. I did terrible things to quell the insatiable hunger inside of me. And it never went away. And I died.

ALEXANDER

It wasn't *quick* either, it took eleven day- you know what I can't do this.

Alexander takes off the crown. Over the following section the line between character and performer during the breakdown should be invisible.

ACTOR

I can't die again, I can't do it! You can't fucking ask me to.

DIRECTOR  
(from audience or peeking out from  
backstage)

[Actor name]...?

ACTOR  
Fuck off! Get away from me.

He throws the crown on the ground.  
I cannot do this. I can't. Let me go.

DIRECTOR  
Okay, buddy. Okay.

ACTOR  
(to the audience)  
Did you like me?

Beat.  
Was it good?

Beat  
Was I *great*? hahahahha, Sorry! Couldn't *fucking* help myself! Fuck, I told myself I  
wouldn't cry in front of you! I can't fucking do anything!  
I just wanted you to like me.  
That's all I wanted. I've got to go.

Alexander runs out. Most preferably in a way  
that is not offstage, but clearly out of the  
performance space. The following names are the  
actor and his girlfriend. Substitute a parallel  
relationship.

DIRECTOR  
Hold! Macy, are you here? Can you go after Shane?

Any movement necessary to follow the actor  
occurs. When it is almost finished, blackout and  
then blue-out.

## **CHUNK 10**

A dark stage. We should sit with it for a second, two, waiting.

ALEXANDER  
(in darkness)

Okay. We can fix this. Let's go.

And like air to the drowning man, it arrives.

A projection plays.

It's *Die Hard* again.

HANS GRUBER (PROJECTED)

And when Alexander saw the breadth of his domain, he wept for there were no more worlds to conquer... benefits of a classical education.

Freeze frame. The projector turns off

A new ALEXANDER\* [I suggest whoever interacted with Alexander] is crowned. He's holding a remote control.

ALEXANDER  
Would anyone like to tell me what the fuck this is?

## **END OF PLAY**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Public Talkback and Closing Thoughts

#### *Public and Dramaturgical Feedback*

After the conclusion of the show and a bow for the actor, the talkback promptly began. A few audience members had other commitments and left for this portion, but a large majority of the approximately one hundred audience members were still in attendance. The audience remained in their seats, and the dramaturg asked questions from the stage area. This voluntary session took about twenty minutes after the show finished and was well fostered by the dramaturg. We received many pertinent insights.

Before the performance/talkback, the dramaturg had established a list of broad questions to prompt audience feedback on a variety of topics. Here are those questions:

What words would you use to describe the big ideas of the play? How would you describe the person of Alexander? How did you respond to the beginning of play and ending of play looking similarly? Do you have any questions? Is there anything you wish you knew more about? Thoughts on audience interaction?

The format of the talkback was highly flexible. The dramaturg would posit each question, and then gauge the response of the audience to each prompt to decide whether a prompt necessitated further discussion. A friend of the production dictated the talkback to the best of his ability, and the dramaturg compiled those notes into a summary document accompanied by some feedback of her own.<sup>1</sup> This process was incredibly valuable; up to

---

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix E for the Talkback Summary

the point of production, including myself, six people had any familiarity with the text.

This exponentially increased the size of my writer's room.

I will review and explore some of the responses to each of her audience prompts here, going question by question. Some questions necessitated single-word responses, and others more complete thoughts. In response to the first question, the audience described the big ideas of the play with the following words: legacy, death, truth, validation, regret, ego, and vulnerability. This was a reassuring start. Those descriptors matched the result I was aiming for tonally. As for describing the person of Alexander, they similarly provided a list of their impression after having just watched the show with these thoughts: [that he was] insatiable, vulnerable, frustrated, super-charismatic, that he felt close as if talking with a friend, relatable, and childish, teenage, college-aged, and thirty-three all at the same time (those ages came from four different audience members). In my playwright's note, I had included this sentence; "I think Alexander is out of time. He's sixteen, and he's thirty-two, and he's neither." I was pleased to find that that detail shone through in production, as I felt it contributed to the idea of portraying Alexander's loop as a metaphysical, timeless prison.

On that loop, the dramaturg asked the audience next about their experience with the cyclical systems in the play, with not only the *Die Hard* clip bookends, but recurring motifs throughout. The repetition of beginning and end was my first creative step in the writing of this piece, so I was especially interested in the thoughts regarding those bookends. This question asked for more complete thoughts than the previous two. Moreover, it was more interpretative than definitive. This meant that the audience answered with perspectives and valid insights on the cyclical nature of the play that I had

not considered previously nor intended when writing. Feedback of that nature, that surprised me as the playwright, was incredibly exciting as it affirmed the play had a life of its own beyond my machinations, and that I was continuing to explore it alongside the audience. One audience member saw the recurrences as the dropping of a facade; that the beginning was “how he wanted us to see it” but the end was “how he really felt about it.” Another drew a parallel to the Platonic Forms, raising the question of the repetition of the events of the play is the printing of another image further from the Form. One person posited that his unreliable recollection of the Allegory of the Cave was due to his lack of agency in telling his own story. Lastly, another audience member said the passage of cycles as an act of redemption for the mistakes of youth; Although not all the thoughts, these stood out to me as interpretations that are valid textually but were unintentional when I wrote the text.

Next, the dramaturg asked if the audience had any questions, giving them space to address moments in the play that could be clarified. The question after that was “is there anything you wish you knew more about?” I will group these questions as the responses for both largely apply to the other. There were several questions that stemmed from the nature of the production, or otherwise did not necessitate future revision. The director and actor over the course of rehearsals had found this story about Diogenes, and a rubber ducky was placed on the set as a form of inside joke. It was the only thing not prescribed by the initial stage directions; everything else was used or referenced. As such an audience member was distracted by it and asked what it was for; the duck will not be included in future productions. Someone was confused as to the identity of Plutarch. As most of the audience understood, I do not feel that edits are warranted. Another audience

member felt it was odd that the actor, after performing most of the script from memory, referenced a legal pad for his final speech. This was both an interpretative decision by the director to create a eulogic feel, and a practical one- it was one less speech in an hour-long monologue to learn. While these notes did not warrant revision because they were products of the limitations of the initial performance, there were several queries that will shape future revision. There were several questions, however, that did require answers in future versions of the script. Among these were “how many times has Alex told this story? Is he making that choice?” and “how many men before the actor and director have told this story [in reference to the Iraq section]?” and how many more need to? While I do not have an immediate answer to this question, it is something that I will continue to ponder as this script is edited.

The dramaturg lastly asked about the concept of audience interaction. The consensus was that the audience interaction was successful when implemented, but the audience wanted more of it. They felt it relaxed the theatrical experience and allowed them to enter the story, and created an empathic effect near the end, in that the emotions experienced by the actor on stage were mirrored by the audience rather than absorbed. So then, when Alexander experiences his breakdown in the final chunks, that tension and anxiety was felt by the audience as well, rather than the pity/sympathy for someone who one witnesses having a breakdown. Fine-tuning is needed in the interactive final explanation of the Allegory of the Cave, in which Alexander sends two audience members outside. It was unclear as to the purpose of them leaving, and what it contributed to his visualization of the allegory.



In her summary document of the talkback, the dramaturg also contributed feedback from a dramaturgical perspective; that is, she worked in service of the play, rather than the playwright. Her full notes can be found in the appendix, but the essence of the notes was as follows.

<i>Chart 2</i> <b>DRAMATURGICAL NOTES FROM PUBLIC PERFORMANCE (1/29/2022)</b>		
LINE (CHUNK)	(SUGGESTED EDIT) NOTE	REVISION
Who is America? (3)	“Additionally, perhaps even moving toward language like “Who does everybody love/who is someone everybody loves?” would eliminate political or controversial figures, keeps them moment anchored in comedy rather than becoming polarized or uncomfortable (if that is the intent).”	Will adjust with this note in mind. Her note correctly diagnosed the issue with that moment, and by de-politicizing it, audience interaction will be more free-flowing.
You. You guys. Could you leave??? Like just go stand over there. (5)	“When the students leave the space, I love the jarring nature of “can you two leave?” However, I think we need a little more language to keep the audience tracking with why they leave even if they are formerly unfamiliar with the cave analogy. As Alexander teaches, would he mention that they are synonymous with the people outside the cave?	This point was echoed by Professor Lisa Denman of the Department of Theatre Arts. In a future version, there will be clarification and addition to the role the audience members who become those outside Plato’s Cave play into the greater narrative.

	<p>Would they experience any better treatment outside the cave in order to keep in line with the analogy? Perhaps this is a moment that can be augmented with audience interaction. Do you have snacks or crew to fan the people outside and make their position desirable, and how do you relay the better situation outside to the people inside the cave?”</p>	
CHUNKS 7-10	<p>“I wonder if this final third could do with some cuts (around the Callisthenes monologue) or if leaning into the comedy in future iterations can fix this issue. I personally wondered if Xenophon was the last dark/serious moment before the breakdown.”</p>	<p>Again, correct. I made some initial cuts to this section over the rehearsal process but will continue to refine it.</p>
CHUNK 9	<p>“Overall, can we set up the breakdown in a clearer way? Why is he breaking down, and why right now?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We may also be able to help at this moment if, in future productions, the replacement Alexander is in the same costume as Alexander, even if they do not look alike.”</li> </ul>	<p>In the next version of the script, I think there will be a specific moment that incites the breakdown rather than it being a gradual build to an overwhelming panic. Currently, the replacement Alexander puts on the crown of the original Alexander, but this got lost in the staging of the moment. I think you’re correct that identical costumes would make the thesis of that moment clear.</p>
CHUNK 10	<p>“What is the ending trying to communicate (again, it can be a multiplicity, but I</p>	<p>I think this point was an interesting one, and in future versions, I will leave</p>

	<p>wanted to offer up some questions here)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ POV of Alexander as an individual v. POV of historians on Alexander the Great</li> <li>• No matter how hard Alexander tries, he will always be known for his military prowess and conquests rather than his personhood. Is a history professor giving a cold, distant lecture without engagement Alexander's worst nightmare?</li> <li>▪ Suffering/Endless Cycle of Suffering</li> <li>• Is his death inescapable and inevitable, and are we meant to empathize with this/witness it firsthand?"</li> </ul>	<p>the question unanswered. I think the post-modern concept of assigned and prescribed meaning trumping authorial intent is quite powerful and would rather foster all these possibilities than narrow it to one.</p>
<p><i>Blowin' in the Wind</i> (4)</p>	<p>With this, the joke of Aristotle-rebelling-against-philosophers-that-frown-upon-art-and-taking-a-moment-to-enjoy-what-he-wants played earlier with the first song made the joke first.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Is the shorter bit all this moment needs?</li> <li>o What is the effect of three iterations of this same joke?</li> <li>o Can we keep the song but tighten it up/make it less of a big deal? What is the flippancy v. poignancy of this moment?</li> </ul>	<p>I think making the moment more concise would help. In the production, the laughter had stopped by the last verse; as the playwright, though, I didn't mind that. What was initially absurd, Alexander the Great singing a Dylan tune, became a more subdued, introspective moment. I thought it was successful.</p>

Considering the feedback of the audience and the dramaturg, I was pleased to find that no comments were along lines of inclusion or exclusion from the text. There were no gaps missing, nor any sections that were obviously extraneous to be cut. Instead, there were moments to be clarified and refined, which made me feel that the text as a body of work was solid.

### *Closing Thoughts: Theoretical and Practical*

Compared to other theatrical processes, like acting and directing, playwriting in this cross-section of length, form, and style presented unique challenges but afforded unique benefits in turn. As an actor one is beholden to the vision of the director; as director one is beholden to the text itself. As playwright, however, I was beholden to nobody. The text was mine to shape and craft as I saw fit. This was equal parts invigorating and terrifying. While it presented a new freedom, that new freedom was a horizon I had not explored at this magnitude. Previous plays I had written capped out at around ten minutes long, nowhere near the one hour mark.

The editing and revision process (detailed in Chapter Two) provided crystalline insight into theoretical approaches to playwriting. For example, the lens of the narrative was altered by the feedback of others. Instead of my thoughts, opinions, and personal biases existing alone in the writing space, I had intentionally included the perspectives of at least four other people. Theatre is an inherently communal act, and the proclivity for writer's rooms speaks to how community is necessary in generating that kind of work. However, even with the inclusion of the lens of others, mine was still central. At first, as someone who began as an actor and strove to accept every note, it was difficult to embrace the fact that I had agency to filter through feedback as beneficial or not to the

text. For example, in the talkback, there were some notes on the periphery that I believe a fully realized production would have clarified, and some with which I disagree. It was a validating and relieving experience to receive a note and be assured that it was within my power to choose not to incorporate it.

Moreover, the communal nature of theatre was reaffirmed by the specificity of notes. The moments that I suspected were unfinished coming into the performance were just that, and the audience confirmed it. Looking back to Bergson and his idea of laughter as a corrective, it is significant in a play that is so much about social pressure to calibrate that pressure perfectly. The corrective presence of the audience was necessary to perform that calibration. In that sense, Bergson's assertion that laughter is a social corrective necessitates the process of workshopping a piece of theatre. In Bergson's model, laughter should indicate not only a well-crafted joke/punchline/gag, but a text that honestly establishes, subverts, and perhaps restores societal expectations for behavior.

One moment drew attention in the talkback and oral defense. Chunk 9, which includes the 'Iraq monologue,' as it was referred to during writing, was perhaps the most successful moment of the performance. In it, Alexander compares his anti-climactic death with the fruitlessness of American military intervention in the Middle East in the last twenty years. The feedback suggested that the moment transcended in that the piece became allegory for the countless soldiers who cannot tell their stories, and the study of masculinity in war and death.

This field of masculinity studies is expansive, and to explore Alexander in this text through the lens of those studies would warrant a separate paper entirely. If I were to explore the topic, I would likely cite the *Routledge International Handbook of*

*Masculinity Studies*, and its sections on masculinity and geopolitics, as well as depictions of masculinity in American media.<sup>2</sup> I would likely also reference *Keeping It Real: Drama, Masculinity and Performance*.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation explores the relationship between masculinity and performativity, as well as analyzes performance spaces (like the one Alexander occupies) as a tool to address that masculinity.

The entire process, culminating in the talkback, provided a testing ground for adapting history into comic narrative. Ultimately, through trial and error, I eliminated several methods, most prominent among those transforming a laundry-list of significant facts about Alexander into the set-up of stand-up style jokes. Instead, the most successful method I found to adapt history into comic bio-theatre was to couch the facts in the familiar. For example, an audience member has no idea what it feels like to be the king of a country: the pressures, expectations, etc. However, they do know what it's like to feel like you're letting your father down. Using that framework and trying to find the familiar in all the things that made Alexander "the Great," succeed. The history then becomes a springboard for an exploration of humanity rather than a lecture hall. This is ultimately what opened the door to a vulnerable Alexander rather than a cartoonish one.

On a practical level, the performance/talkback process afforded the feedback necessary to refine the text to a level for professional submission. I will incorporate notes given by faculty and students in the talkback, as well by my mentor and dramaturg in

---

<sup>2</sup> Gottzén, Lucas, Mellström, Ulf, and Shefer, Tamara, eds. *Routledge International Handbook of Masculinity Studies*. Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>3</sup> Lortie, Philip D. "Keeping It Real: Drama, Masculinity, and Performance". ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2005.

private correspondence and write a new draft of *CRY HARD*. The revisions will combat several distinct issues. First, I will address the clarity of the climax, breakdown, and meta-theatrical ending. The initial sequence with the *Die Hard* clip and subsequent interrogation is one such instance requiring clarification. One note I received suggested inserting a second showing of the movie clip, after the line “MOVING ON” on Page 49. This will help cement the central conflict of the show, an inherent misunderstanding between actor and audience. Next, I will more specifically incorporate audience interaction throughout, with special attention to refining the Allegory of the Cave interaction and creating several more moments of guided improvisation. The Allegory of the Cave edits will potentially include some performative signpost indicating that the explanation is incorrect, cluing everyone into the gist of the joke, instead of only those with previous experience regarding the Allegory. Once those structural changes are complete, I will make several passes looking to thin the entirety of the text, clipping excessive words and streamlining the piece.

Upon reflection, there are several concerns with the methodology of how I arrived at my conclusions about the work and the process. It is difficult to experiment and fine-tune comedy with peers. Theatre-goers are generally a kind audience, and more so when the playwright is a friend or acquaintance, as was the case with this piece. That begs the question: were they laughing because they liked it, or because they liked me, or because they liked the actor? If I was to restart the project, I would aim for a workshop showcase of a more mixed background, so that my peers were not the overwhelming majority. In that case, laughter would have to be sustained outside of my friendship demographic and would accurately represent a typical sample of theatre audiences.

My analysis of a Bergson-inspired approach to Alexander being successful could also be a case of confirmation bias. As the playwright, who wrote the character with the hope that his conflict and eventual breakdown would be successfully empathetic, it is hard to separate my desire for the event from my recollection of it. In a concerted attempt to be objective, I believe this approach to writing Alexander's character was met with positive feedback. Audience members described him as "relatable, teenage, childish, angsty, frustrated, charismatic, ego(tistical)." This array of sometimes conflicting descriptors indicate that the character was complicated and ambiguous in a manner that balanced between the extremes explored in Chapter One. However, these descriptors were given tangentially. Given the chance to, I would address this issue by asking specific questions about perceptions of complexity/ambiguity and how those affected emotional responses to Alexander. This approach would have mitigated the opportunity for confirmation bias in my analysis of the talkback.

However, to conclude, the show ultimately performed as desired. The audience laughed, until they didn't any longer. Alexander managed to be a sympathetic figure despite his machismo. There was emotional engagement from the audience, meaning that their laughter at him did not cause any alienation. This indicated a redemptive aspect to Bergson's socially corrective laughter; after the correction takes place, there can be emotional rehabilitation. The play served as an analytical tool to tinker with historical adaptation into comedy, finding that the best method to translate historical record into comic narrative is to anchor the fact into settings familiar. It was an experimental writing in the form of a one-man show, a narrative challenge, that provided great insight into



writing without dialogue as a central tenet. All said, the writing and production of *CRY HARD* proved successful as both a creative and academic venture.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

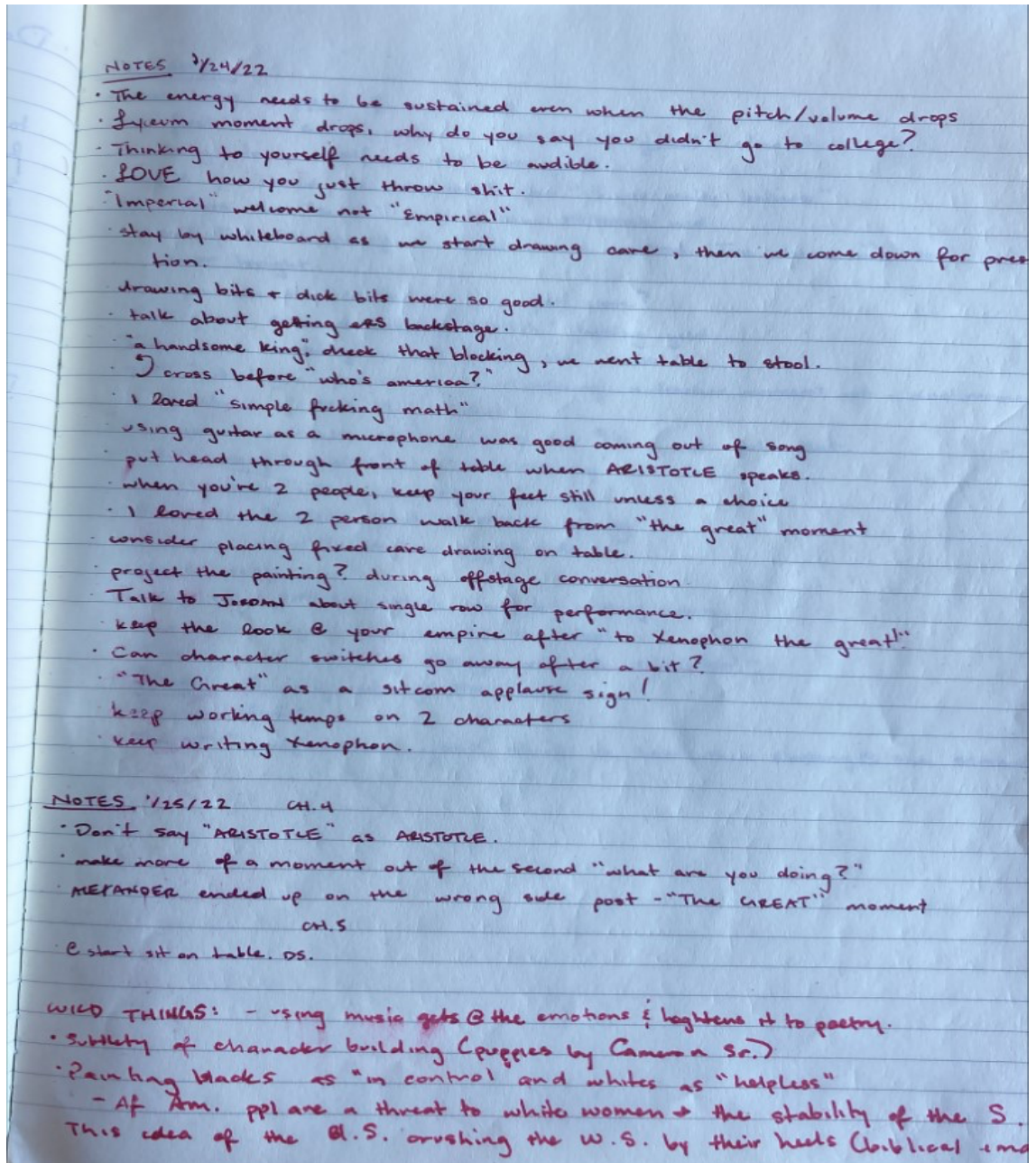
### *Rehearsal Calendar*

January						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18 Rehearsal 6-7:30 Chunks 1, 2, & 3	19 Rehearsal 6-7:30 Chunks 4, 5, 6	20 Rehearsal 6-8 Chunks 7, 8, 9	21 Rehearsal 6-8 Rough Run	22 Rehearsal TBD Mid-Run Check
23 Rehearsal TBD Polish	24 Rehearsal 6-8 Run and Polish	25 NO NO NO NO REHEARSAL	26 TECH RUN	27 FIRST DRESS	28 FINAL DRESS	29 The Night of Nights
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix A. This is the rehearsal calendar as established by the director and actor and disseminated to the production team.

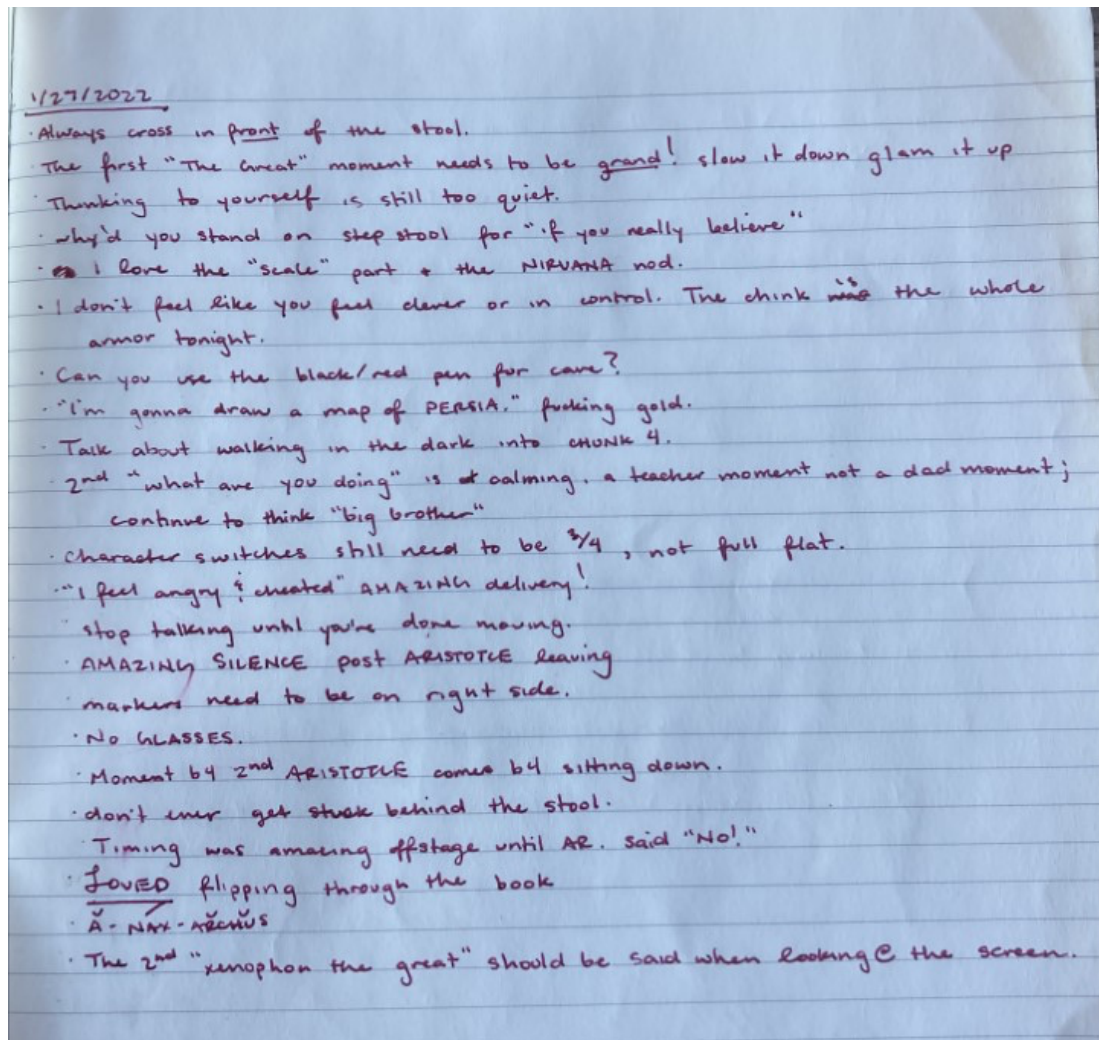
## Appendix B

### Notes from the Rehearsal Room



Appendix B. Notes from the first two rehearsals in the performance space, Theatre 11. The 1/24 run was attended by the full production team.

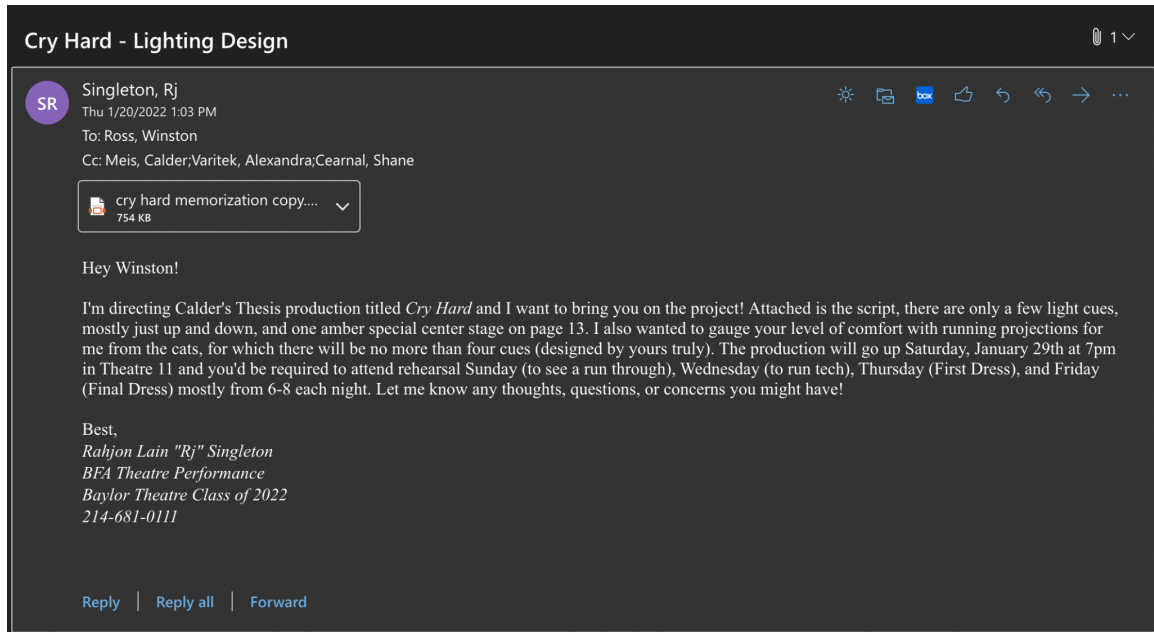
## Appendix B (cont.)



Appendix B (cont.). Notes from the first dress rehearsal, and the last run-through of the show with no semblance of audience.

## Appendix C

### *Correspondence*



Appendix C. This email marked the addition of our fifth production member who operated the light board and played Plutarch.

## Appendix D

### *Dramaturgical Talkback Summary*

#### **CRY HARD TALKBACK**

**Note: this is not entire, just as much as could be gathered**

**What words would you use to describe the big ideas of the play?**

- LEGACY
- DEATH
- TRUTH
- VALIDATION
- REGRET
- EGO
- VULNERABILITY
- SHANE'S AWESOME - that's my mom

**How would you describe the character of Alexander you saw?**

- Insatiable
- Vulnerable
- Frustrated
- Super charismatic
- felt close, like talking to a friend
- young, almost childish at times
- modern lingo that kept him college aged
- his need for validation made him feel relatable, he felt teenage
- student athlete vibes
- Overall, RELATABLE
- 33, but does he ever feel that old? -Shane

**How did you respond to beginning of play and ending of play looking similarly?**

- nicely bookended (Stan)
- how he wanted us to see it (beginning), how he really felt about it (end)
- were we actually seeing the Form or just another image of it?
- (the ending repeating) reminded me of the line about famous people dying over and over
- the ending was not a perfect replication because he couldn't write his own story
- cave story is like when you're taught something as a kid but can't understand it, but as you're older you can finally understand it and get redemption (Alex coming to terms with the bad things he did)
- singular/individualistic at first. Unique to him in his mind at first, but when RJ does it, Alex realizes it's not specific to him (universalized)

**Questions?**

- What other historical character could be put in this same format? - many characters could play the same script
- No matter how far Alex got, he still ended up in the same place.
- At the end, "not wanting to have to do this again" how many times has Alex told this story? Is he making that choice?
- Cyclical story lends itself to unfinished business similarly to Alex dying at a young age before he could accomplish everything he set out to do.

Appendix D. The dramaturg's compilation of audience feedback.



## **Appendix D (cont.)**

- Something powerful about seeing Shane as an actor saying he can't do this anymore - speaks to how performers are asked to fit in a mold and to perform over and over. Vulnerability is a gift, but not at the expense of our mental health. (Marian)
- Alexander tells a story and we wonder how many people has he tried to reach? RJ speaking up felt like Alexander finally got to someone who understands his story well enough to tell it for him.
- In telling his story, he is being vulnerable to that second death.

### **Thoughts on audience interaction?**

- Confused why people left, and why nothing really happened when they came back. How does it relate to allegory?
- Initially, audience interaction took stress off of audience members, makes it chill and easier to enter the story.
- Play could benefit from more audience interaction. (Cassie)
- Really well cued, we knew when to jump in.
- Never felt my blood pressure spike more than when Shane broke down - really well done.

### **Anything you wish you knew more about?**

- Who was telling Alex "Fuck you?"
- Duck on table?
- Weird that he wrote down the ending thoughts/read them on paper... up to this point felt spur of the moment but that moment felt planned.
- Forgetting/losing his place, eventually by the end, I'm just one more guy who went and died in Iraq - feels like Shane was not the first one. Another one of the countless men who feel the need to tell their story – Stan
- Phallic shape of the cave connected to ideas of masculinity and all these "men" deep in their thoughts on story-telling in a different way than just "telling". Cool that it was delivered through shape and form of the play and not just being told to us. (Cassie)

### **Follow-Up Email Responses**

- One audience member referenced confusion with the Bob Dylan moment, not understanding really why a song was used, especially in succession to the smaller guitar moment, but also why Bob Dylan in particular? The through-line was "out of their reach" as said audience member noted. "Did I miss something important?"

### **Biggest Audition Repetitions in Response**

- More audience interaction/lean into audience interaction
- Lack of clarity on why Alexander breaks down
- Tone of the wtf in final scene... comedic or unsettling?
- Loved the relatability of Alexander

Appendix D. The dramaturg's compilation of audience feedback.



## Appendix D (cont.)

### DRAMATURG'S THOUGHTS

- **“Who is America?”** After watching this moment in previews, I realized the subtext of this line in terms of the script is not communicated in this language. In the preview, the moment instantly became politicized... Is that what you wanted from the moment? If not, this is a suggestion: *can we change the line so that it reads with a subtext more like **who is someone everyone in America would know (like how everyone in the Greek empire knew him)?*** Chris Evans and Kanye fit this moment in tone better, so how can we cultivate answers like that? Like Lady Gaga? Timothee Chalamet? Additionally, perhaps even moving toward language like “Who does everybody love/who is someone everybody loves?” would eliminate political or controversial figures, keeps them moment anchored in comedy rather than becoming polarized or uncomfortable (if that is the intent).
- **The Cave Interaction:** When the students leave the space, I love the jarring nature of “can you two leave?” However, I think we need a little more language to keep the audience tracking with why they leave even if they are formerly unfamiliar with the cave analogy. As Alexander teaches, would he mention that they are synonymous with the people outside the cave? Would they experience any better treatment outside the cave in order to keep in line with the analogy? Perhaps this is a moment than can be augmented with audience interaction. Do you have snacks or crew to fan the people outside and make their position desirable, and how do you relay the better situation outside to the people inside the cave?
- **Pace after second Aristotle encounter:** Overall, I think the pace of the final third of the play slowed considerably. Part of this may have been this iteration's tendency toward a melancholic portrayal of Alexander (meaning they leaned more into the seriousness of his stature than the comedy toward the end). I wonder if this final third could do with some cuts (around the Callisthenes monologue) or if leaning into the comedy in future iterations can fix this issue. *I personally wondered if Xenophon is the the last dark/serious moment before the breakdown.*
- **The Breakdown:** With the pacing, I think the breakdown portion got a bit muddled. I wonder how making the balance of the melancholic/serious moments with the comedic/angsty/cocky/flippant moments affects the impact of these final moments. In this production, the melancholic was just as prevalent as the comedic angst. If we outweigh the serious (i.e. make the serious moments less frequent), how would this change the impact of the breakdown?
  - **Why does Alexander break down?** What is the dramatic question here...
    - It is because history lacks things about himself he wants to include, lacks emotional and personal demographics?
    - Is it the fact that he has to die again that pushes him over the edge?
    - Is Alexander happy that he's alive again, trying to enjoy every second because seconds are leaving?
    - Does he fully abandon prior lighthearted and smart and witty tones in this moment?
    - Does he know it's over but can't bring himself to end the play?
  - Why does he leave twice?

Appendix D. The dramaturg's takeaways from the public talkback, as well as reflections on and insights to the text.

## Appendix D (cont.)

- ***Overall, can we set up the breakdown in a clearer way? Why is he breaking down, and why right now?***
  - We may also be able to help this moment if, in future productions, the replacement Alexander is in the same costume as Alexander, even if they do not look alike.
- **The Ending**
  - What is the ending trying to communicate (again, it can be a multiplicity, but I wanted to offer up some questions here)?
    - POV of Alexander as an individual v. POV of historians on Alexander the Great
      - No matter how hard Alexander tries, he will always be known for his military prowess and conquests rather than his personhood. Is a history professor giving a cold, distant lecture without engagement Alexander's worst nightmare?
    - Suffering/Endless Cycle of Suffering
      - Is his death inescapable and inevitable, and are we meant to empathize with this/witness it firsthand?
- **Bob Dylan Song:** We got an email response about the Bob Dylan song, and I wanted to present some thoughts and questions on this moment. In our iteration, we have three successive songs based on director input: the strummed song earlier, School's Out moment, and then the Bob Dylan moment. With this, the joke of Aristototele-rebelling-against-philosophers-that-frown-upon-art-and-taking-a-moment-to-enjoy-what-he-wants played earlier with the first song (Nirvana? I couldn't quite pick out the specific song, just notes of familiarity) made the joke first.
  - Is the shorter bit all this moment needs?
  - What is the effect of three iterations of this same joke?
  - Can we keep the song but tighten it up/make it less of a big deal? What is the flippancy v. poignance of this moment?
- **Random Thoughts**
  - How soon before this lecture was Alexander "reborn?"
  - Is he seeing this *Die Hard* clip for the first time with us?

Appendix D. The dramaturg's takeaways from the public talkback, as well as reflections on and insights to the text.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Project Gutenberg, 2002.
- Brantley, Ben "THEATER REVIEW; 'QED': Iconoclastic Physicist for All Occasions," The New York Times, November 19, 2001, sec. Arts
- Davis, Robert S. "Alexander the Great: His Life and His Mysterious Death." New York Journal of Books, August 27, 2019.
- Ebert, Roger. "Monster in a Box Movie Review (1992) | Roger Ebert." <https://www.rogerebert.com/>, June 26, 1992.  
<http://rogerebert.com/reviews/monster-in-a-box-1992>
- Everitt, Anthony. *Alexander the Great: His Life and His Mysterious Death*. United States: Random House, 2019.
- Gray, Spalding. *Monster in a Box*. New York : Vintage Books, 1992.
- Gussow, Mel. "Stage: 'Belle of Amherst.'" The New York Times, April 29, 1976, sec. Archives. <http://www.nytimes.com/1976/04/29/archives/stage-belle-of-amherst.html>.
- Isherwood, Charles. "Fiery, Salty and Brash, This Rose of Texas." The New York Times, March 8, 2013, sec. Theater. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/theater/reviews/ann-with-holland-taylor-at-vivian-beaumont-theater.html>.
- Meis, Calder. "Tense, Tone, and Trauma in Solo Performance: A Descriptive Analysis of John Leguizamo's Latin History for Morons" (essay, Baylor University, 2020)
- Phillips, Michael "Making Science, If Not a Play Itself, Sexy," Los Angeles Times, March 23, 2001, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-mar-23-ca-41464-story.html>
- u/tungstencompton. "Gruber, H. - 'And When Alexander Saw the Breadth of His Domain, He Wept, for There Were No More Worlds Left to Conquer.'" Reddit, September 11, 2018.  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/badhistory/comments/9evd0c/gruber\\_h\\_and\\_when\\_alexander\\_saw\\_the\\_breadth\\_of/](https://www.reddit.com/r/badhistory/comments/9evd0c/gruber_h_and_when_alexander_saw_the_breadth_of/).

Weber, Bruce. "THEATER REVIEW; Inventing Her Life as She Goes Along." The New York Times, December 4, 2003, sec. Theater.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/04/theater/theater-review-inventing-her-life-as-she-goes-along.html>.

Wilson, Edwin, and Goldfarb, Alvin. *Living Theatre*. 7th ed. Norton.

"Facilities," Theatre Arts | Baylor University, accessed March 20, 2022,

<https://www.baylor.edu/theatre/index.php?id=947399>

"QED, The Play – Richard Feynman." <http://www.feynman.com/fun/qed-the-play/>.

"The Mecca of Bad History." r/badhistory. Reddit, 2013.

<https://www.reddit.com/r/badhistory/>.

"Winners." Winners | The American Theatre Wing's Tony Awards®,

<http://www.tonyawards.com/winners/>