

THE ROLE OF FABIANA AZIZA CUNNINGHAM
IN STEPHEN ADLY GUIRGIS'
THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT:
A PRODUCTION THESIS IN ACTING

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of Theatre

by
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B.A., The George Washington University, 2004
May 2009

Acknowledgments

First, I must thank John Dennis for accepting me into the LSU Graduate Program, and especially for making acting both fun and profound for me again. Great thanks to my other graduate teachers: Christine Menzies for challenging me to truly work and reach beyond what is easy to find what is unusual; George Judy, Nick Erickson, Les Wade for challenging me intellectually; Joanna Battles, Rick Holden, Molly Buchmann, Kristin Sosnowsky for mentoring and befriending me; Karli Henderson for providing the consummate example of professionalism; Vastine Stabler, the M.F.A. class before me, Andrea Frankle, John Koch, and all the others who have unofficially inspired me during my time here. Thanks to Michael Tick for guiding this thesis and supporting me on stage. A special extra thanks to George Judy for giving me this wonderful role to work on and trusting me to perform it well. Thank you to my entire graduate acting class: Kenneth De Abrew, Amber A. Harris, Andrew Fafoutakis, Yohance Myles, Jessica Wu, and Scott Woltz. Three years is a long time to play together, and I cannot do justice to your impact on me. We have become an ensemble for life. I must offer a huge thank you to my parents who remain the best examples I have found of complex individuals. Thank you for your love and spirited debate. Great credit is due to my brother, Jon, whose kindness is unique. Mom, thank you again for your help with this thesis.

Finally, gratitude and love to Scott Woltz. Knowing you makes my life better, on stage and off. The future is blessed because I have the promise of you in it.

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Abstract

This thesis will follow the experience of Leigh-Erin Balmer in creating the role of Fabiana Aziza Cunningham, a character written by Stephen Adly Guirgis in his play, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. The role of Cunningham is the topic of this production thesis in acting, which will be submitted to the Graduate School of Louisiana State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with the Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre. The thesis contains an introduction; textual analysis and research (regarding author and original production history as well as other text materials); a character study, including a discussion of physical preparation for the role, as well as an investigation of the character relationship between Cunningham and Satan; Balmer's rehearsal journal which demonstrates growth in implementing research in rehearsal and exhibits performance preparation with detailed scene breakdowns; performance analysis, including written critical feedback; and a conclusion. It will detail Balmer's approach to the role of Cunningham and decisions regarding Cunningham's identity, appearance, and character purpose. Finally, the thesis will present a critique of Balmer's successes in the utilization of different acting methods.

Introduction

Yet each man kills the thing he loves
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!
(Wilde, *Ballad 2*)

In the spring of 2008 Professor George Judy, head of the M.F.A. Acting Program at LSU, informed my M.F.A. acting class that he was interested in producing *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* by Stephen Adly Guirgis. The play was to be a fall showcase for the current M.F.A. class and the incoming fall 2008 M.F.A. class. Judy had instructed the M.F.A. 2009 class and knew our capabilities quite well and he had recently seen the auditions of the incoming M.F.A. class, so he assigned roles in *Judas* without holding auditions. As the summer of 2008 began, I learned I would be playing the part of Fabiana Aziza Cunningham, an agnostic woman trapped in Purgatory. I had no previous knowledge of my character though I was familiar with her creator, playwright Stephen Adly Guirgis. I had watched scenes from *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* and I had read *Our Lady of 121st Street*, both by Guirgis, but I had never read *Judas*. After I finished my first reading of *Judas*, my character, Fabiana Aziza Cunningham, defense attorney for the deceased Judas Iscariot, captivated me. During the course of the play, Cunningham, in Purgatory, demands an appeal on Judas' behalf and defends him in the subsequent trial, going head to head with many adversaries, including Satan, star witness for the prosecution. Cunningham appears to be winning the case until an emotional breakdown prevents her from completing the trial.

This thesis charts experiences creating and presenting the role of Fabiana Aziza Cunningham in Guirgis' play. It consists of a textual analysis, containing production history and author research; a character study, implementing acting methodology and research; an account of rehearsal and performance; an actor's journal; and a conclusion. The text analysis includes an investigation into the view of Cunningham as a non-conformist, a reflection of Satan, and a tragic heroine. The rehearsal preparation includes a discussion of the various acting techniques applied to make this character performance ready. Because Cunningham's relationship to Satan is such an integral part of the play, I researched representations of Satan found in the works of other authors and artists, and drew from them to construct my character. I present those representations in this thesis. In addition, at the start of numerous sections I include references from fiction, poetry, songs, and other sources that inspired my understanding of the character. All references are listed in the bibliography of my thesis. My actor's journal charts my discoveries during rehearsal and performance, my scene-by-scene acting breakdown, my feedback and implementation of director's notes, and many other significant moments that helped contribute to the creation of this character.

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot, by Stephen Adly Guirgis was presented by the LSU Department of Theatre at the Hatcher Hall Theatre on the Baton Rouge campus of Louisiana State University, December 2 through December 7, 2008, and the cast was as follows:

Fabiana Aziza Cunningham, Leigh-Erin Balmer; Satan, Yohance Myles; Judas, Scott Woltz; Judge Littlefield, George Judy; Yusef El-Fayoumy, Kenneth De Abrew; Gloria, Lauren Stotts; Mother Teresa, Jessica Wu; Caiaphas and St. Matthew, Andrew Fafoutakis; Loretta, Mary Magdalene, and Sister Glenna, Sarah Smith; Bailiff and Simon the Zealot, Josh Dawes; Sigmund Freud and St. Thomas, Alex Galick; Pontius Pilate, St. Peter, and Uncle Pino, Nick Rhoton; Matthias of Galilee, Natalie Mejer; Jesus of Nazareth, Reuben Mitchell; St. Monica, Michele Guidry; Henrietta Iscariot, Josephine Hall; Butch Honeywell, Scott Siepker; understudies, Butch Honeywell, Steven Bailey; and Caiaphas and St. Matthew, John Fletcher.

The production crew included director, Scott Woltz; scenic designer, Katie Headley; lighting designer, Ken White; costume designer, Sarah Bacot; sound designer, Eun Jin Cho; vocal and text coach, Joanna Battles; dramaturg, John Fletcher; acting coach/directing mentor, George Judy; videographer, Nick Erickson; and stage manager, Nichole Ingalsbe.

Text Analysis

First Impressions: The Play

CUNNINGHAM: Must be nice to have all the answers.

MOTHER TERESA: Must be hard to have only questions.

(Guirgis 29)

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot was originally produced in 2005 for the LAByrinth Theatre Company in collaboration with The Public Theater in New York City. It was directed by Philip Seymour Hoffman and starred Sam Rockwell (Judas), Callie Thorne (Cunningham), and Eric Bogosian (Satan). In this play, Guirgis reexamines one of the world's most notorious betrayers, Judas Iscariot, and in the course of this examination, questions everything from God to Satan to our individual role in salvation and damnation. Writing *Judas*, Guirgis challenges the traditional interpretation of a Bible story that had unsettled him from childhood, recalling to *Catholic Digest*,

Right around third or fourth grade, when they started telling us the story of Judas: how he betrayed Jesus and then he hung himself and went to hell — although it doesn't explicitly say in the Bible that he went to hell. I was young; I just couldn't understand. I thought, *If I could forgive someone, why couldn't God?* ... It led me to question my faith, even as I was learning about it. It made me see God in a way that frightened me. It showed me more of the judgmental God with the sword, than of the compassionate and forgiving God that I thought.

With *Judas*, Guirgis inserts himself into the contemporary drama genre while simultaneously exploring historical issues of Christianity and the afterlife. His fictitious Purgatory provides a new context to explore old ideas and blast apart an audience's expectations of iconic and biblical figures. He shocks the audience and twists what they have been conditioned to accept. If God is all-loving and all-forgiving, why couldn't God forgive Judas for betraying Jesus? How do we come to terms with our own guilt? Who is ultimately responsible for our sentence in Heaven, Purgatory, or Hell? Within the play, is Cunningham's final damnation warranted or tragic? Does Satan hold power or do individuals betray and condemn themselves? To frame these large questions, Guirgis creates a new vision of Purgatory as a wildly comic and intensely dramatic courtroom where lost souls come in an attempt to end their suffering.

Before reading *Judas*, I was wary, having seen Ben Brantley's decidedly mixed *New York Times* review of the original production (see Appendix A: Published Articles). While he has some flattering words for Guirgis' writing, noting that *Judas* possesses "many of the traits that have made Mr. Guirgis a playwright to reckon with in recent years: a fierce and questing mind that refuses to settle for glib answers, a gift for identifying with life's losers and an unforced eloquence that finds the poetry in lowdown street talk," Brantley also bemoans the play's length:

Mr. Guirgis, however, has overfilled his slate with historical references and characters, all ultimately making the same point. Though Mr. Hoffman and his cast keep things moving at a trot, the play feels every bit as long as it is (two hours and 40 minutes), and I noted that two people seated near me had fallen asleep in the second act.

I had previously been cast in or been part of an audience for other two to three hour dramas during my graduate career, so the length of *Judas* concerned me. Undergraduate audiences (even those mixed with older adults in them) are not usually excited about a lengthy night at the theater, and I worried that the production would be doomed solely on this basis. Upon finishing my first read-through of the script, it did seem very long on the page. However, my new excitement over the material outweighed this prior concern. This was a script that spoke to me on many levels. It was intensely funny, inventive and insightful regarding familiar topics, and full of acting challenges for me personally.

Play Synopsis: Cunningham's Given Circumstances

The mind is its own place, and in it self /
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
(Milton 254-255)

Fabiana Aziza Cunningham bursts into Judge Littlefield's courtroom in Purgatory bent on obtaining an appeal for the damned, and now catatonic, Judas Iscariot. Cunningham, an agnostic, argues that the union of "God's Perfect Love versus God's Justice ... can produce only mercy and forgiveness.... If a just God sits in heaven it can fall no other way!" (Guirgis 12) After numerous arguments, and Cunningham's submission of a petition signed by God (whom Cunningham reiterates she may not believe in), the case is accepted and iconic witnesses arrive. Guirgis challenges the audience's ideas about these well-known figures, even, for instance, the most revered of these, Mother Teresa. While Mother Teresa is on the witness stand, Cunningham attacks many of the decisions Mother Teresa made in her life. Cunningham references a Mother Teresa quote blaming the world's lack of peace entirely on abortion and her later opposition of a Vatican reform calling for an official condemnation of anti-Semitism. As the case progresses, it becomes clear that by opposing the accepted rule, Cunningham is fighting as much for herself as Judas. Her examination of witnesses becomes increasingly personal and she reveals a deep dissatisfaction with the paradoxes within Christianity's system. For instance, when Simon the Zealot reveals that Jesus told Judas at the last supper to "Do what you gotta do," Cunningham replies, "But if you were Judas, Simon, and 'doing what you had to do' ended up getting you thrown into despair and hanging from a tree and then sent to hell to live in misery ... would it kinda make you feel like you got fucked?" (Guirgis 33)

The trial continues and Cunningham fights harder, more desperately invested in indicting those who have successfully avoided responsibility for Jesus' death. These include a smug Pontius Pilate (now safely residing in Heaven), and Caiaphas the Elder, whose hypocrisy Cunningham exposes in her heated cross-examination:

Tell us that it did not prick your conscience to turn Jesus, a fellow Jew, over to the Romans! Tell us that handing over a fellow Rabbi to his certain death at the hands of the enemy didn't violate your sense of 'crossing the line'.... Tell us, Caiaphas, that, at the end of the day, there was a *difference*—in the eyes of *God*—between what you did and what Judas did! (Guirgis 53)

To which Caiaphas submits, "... In terms of result: no difference" (Guirgis 53).

The show's climax comes as Cunningham finally cross-examines Satan. Cunningham is the only one in Guirgis' world unafraid of Satan. When she refuses to show him respect, he tears into her. Satan uses only truth to debilitate Cunningham, publicly revealing the hidden shames from her life. Satan rattles off a list: "your mother, the bulimia, the herpes, the booze, the abortions, the rape, the bipolar pharmaceutical adventures, the twin suicide attempts and the abject failures at every relationship you've ever attempted" and the knowledge that she "will never be loved" (Guirgis 66). Cunningham tries to press on, sure that she can get Satan to support her opposition of God, sure that God's prior abandonment of Satan will make him want to indict religion along with her. Satan, however, refuses to attack God, instead forcing Cunningham to confront her own reflection—her hypocrisies and shortcomings—rather than God's. In frustration, Cunningham finally publicly damns God saying, "Either God's not all-powerful and therefore useless—or—God's love for us is conditional which renders that love false and unworthy! ... Is God powerless or spiteful?" to which Satan responds—with Guirgis' imperative stage directions: "*(Not unkindly.)* You're powerless and spiteful, Cunningham—not God" (Guirgis 70). Cunningham emotionally breaks down and gives up, Judas is found guilty and the trial portion of the show ends. I have omitted many important plot points in *Judas* to focus solely on Cunningham's arc.

Constructing Character: Guirgi's Intent

Do you like the world around you?
Are you ready to behave?
Outside of society, that's where I want to be. ...
I was lost in the infinite sea.
I was lost, and measure for measure,
love spewed from the heart of me.
I was lost, and the cost
was to be outside society.
(Smith)

An actor must consider the playwright's intention as to what her character represents and is meant to accomplish within the show. The playwright's purpose should be respected even as an actor works to create a role that bears her specific individual stamp. Cunningham, with her relentless arguments and deep need to challenge the status quo, functions as the outsider within the society of Purgatory. She will not back down from her ideals, refusing the offer of salvation in favor of a solitary, uphill battle. As a discontented individual, she combats the inertia that pervades Purgatory and the injustice of God's kingdom by fighting for Judas. However, Guirgis

uses the character of Cunningham to assert that nonconformists eventually act as their own Satan, betraying and condemning themselves tragically, unable to accept their past betrayals of the system they both despise and desperately need.

With Cunningham, Guirgis constructs a classic tragic heroine whose downfall is brought about by her own actions. While Cunningham's questions are universal and her struggle admirable, she is undone by her inability to face her own flaws even as she forces others to repent for theirs. Guirgis argues that, like Judas, Cunningham traps herself in her own Hell, unable to come to terms with her betrayals in life. Cunningham's fatal flaw is her need as an individual to challenge God and society. As the nonconformist and tragic heroine, she is therefore doomed to punish herself for betraying normative society.

Although Cunningham strives to embody the consummate lawyer, she cannot turn her examination on herself. She refuses to account for, accept, and forgive herself for her former transgressions, and thus, even when offered forgiveness, she cannot release herself. Similarly, Judas will not release himself from bondage, even when Jesus offers Judas forgiveness and freedom from Hell. When Satan reveals her checkered past, Cunningham believes she deserves to be punished. She becomes her own tormentor, refusing to accept grace or stand up for herself. Thomas Merton, the theologian, says, "Despair is the development of a pride so great and so stiff necked that it selects the absolute misery of damnation rather than accept happiness from the hands of God and thereby acknowledge that He is above us and that we are not capable of fulfilling our destiny by ourselves" (qtd. in Guirgis 27). Cunningham succumbs to her own despair and imprisons herself. She searches throughout the play to indict those responsible for injustice, but cannot handle pointing the finger at herself. Early in my analysis, it became clear to me that I needed to focus on creating a character whose flaws were evident even as I constructed someone whose success an audience should and would root for. Cunningham fails, but it was important to me that the audience sees her failure as tragic, not warranted.

While researching the role of Cunningham, I came to the conclusion that Cunningham functions as the mouthpiece of the author, reflecting Guirgis' struggle to reconcile his worldview with Christianity's stringency. As he states, "My last few plays have been about exploring my conflicts with the spiritual side of life as well as what continues to draw me to it" (qtd. in Martin 19). I further decided through text interpretation and directorial guidance that Cunningham is ultimately one of the "two souls" that Satan threatens to take into Hell at the trial's end. However, as I explore later in my section on Cunningham and Satan's relationship, Guirgis uses Satan's character to reflect what's hidden inside the other characters. He becomes a mirror to reflect hypocrisies. He does not entice or trap Cunningham, but rather allows Cunningham to look at herself truthfully and proceed to punish herself. This means that the two souls taken to Hell, Cunningham and Butch Honeywell, finally condemn *themselves*, to punish themselves for perceived shortcomings.

We worked to hint at this ambiguous outcome for the audience through staging: in the final courtroom scene, Cunningham collapses into the same pose as the damned Judas, and can only then see Judas for the first time (as her doorway to Hell opens). She fixates on Judas and disconnects from the courtroom in Purgatory, acquiescing that she has "Nothing further" (Guirgis 70) to ask. She chooses to give up and descend into Hell. With this climactic moment, I

chose (along with the director) to emphasize this complicated, human character as tragic; Cunningham's defect is her inability to accept injustice and her own flaws. She fights for an ideal and when she is denied it in reality, she breaks down. As an actor, I wanted to construct Cunningham as a character whose journey to make sense of Christianity mirrors Judas' and show that when both condemn themselves, it is tragic. In order to do this, I needed to understand that by defending Judas at the trial, Cunningham is attempting to defend her own choices and betrayals. Her emotional breakdown comes when Satan attacks those personal failures, which works to show Guirgis' point that people truly condemn themselves to their fates. Society and religion has no place for outsiders, transgressors, or people who want to challenge the injustice of the prevailing system. When a nonconformist cannot impose order on chaos or reconcile herself to live within an unjust system, she feels she must punish herself rather than promote a lie. She must accept damnation rather than praise God.

My first step to create the character of Cunningham was to consult the text. Guirgis lays the groundwork for an intense and intelligent woman full of contradictions. Cunningham needs and detests God and Satan with equal passion. She cannot move forward because she cannot understand God's decisions, so she tries to indict God rather than understand Him. She is tough and damaged, headstrong in her need to make those in power admit their complicity in betrayal, and unable to accept her own hypocrisies. By defending Judas, Cunningham does not fight to save herself (like other characters), but to defame God for his cruelty and incomprehensible justice. Guirgis defends his desire to side with such desperate underdogs noting, "The characters are losers, but they are fighters. Their plans may be misguided, but they do have a plan; and self-pity isn't part of the plan" (Fisher). As I began constructing my view of who Cunningham is, I consulted Guirgis' text and outlined what Cunningham says about herself and her beliefs and what other characters say about her. With this basis of understanding, I was able to make further decisions regarding how the audience should perceive her.

What Does Cunningham Say About Herself and What She Stands For?

When introducing herself Cunningham says, "My mother was a Romanian Gypsy who settled in Vinegar Hill in Harlem in the 1960s." In another passage, she reveals that her father was "A local parish priest" (Guirgis 16).

She is well educated, citing Hegel and Kierkegaard. Furthermore, she easily recites passages from the Bible even as she asserts, "I don't know that I believe in God" (Guirgis 16).

She is a diligent worker; she thoroughly researches each witness and has a major problem with pat answers. When Mother Teresa attempts to pity Cunningham, she attacks her, retorting, "I can live with my questions, Mother Teresa. But if you can live with those answers, then, with all due respect, I'd say your place is not in heaven with the saints, but with the rest of the dinosaurs living in the Stone Age" (Guirgis 29).

She values science and fact over faith, discrediting El-Fayoumy's expert witness, Mother Teresa, and praising her own expert witness, Dr. Sigmund Freud for his numerous achievements in life.

She refuses to back down to bullies, publicly belittling Pilate as a “liar and a fraud” for his anti-Semitism, saying, “You didn’t wash your hands, Pontius Pilate—History did it for you” (Guirgis 62).

She debases Satan, calling him “a petulant child” (Guirgis 65).

She refuses to interact with the prosecuting attorney, El-Fayoumy, referencing him but responding to him only once in the play.

Guirgis’ Cunningham, in her own words, is a brash, blunt firecracker. She stirs the pot and challenges authority throughout the play, and refuses to let others subjugate or overlook her. The union of her parents is quite interesting and supports the contradictions and unorthodoxy I latched onto during my first reading. She is the product of a Romanian immigrant gypsy and an Irish, New York, wayward priest. Given the collisions of faith and ethnicity between her parents, her multicultural, layered background lends itself to someone who is hard to peg down or easily subdue. She knows how to use the Bible to her advantage, due to her upbringing, but clearly disrespects it and has built up an arsenal of secular support. She is definitely a modern-day David against Goliath, but this underdog has more than a simple stone to throw at her opponent.

What Do Other Characters Say About Cunningham?

Judge Littlefield:

(Responding to Cunningham’s consignment to Purgatory): “Well you shoulda kept your legs closed!” (Guirgis 9)

“Crazy mick bitch” (Guirgis 13).

“Cunningham, you’re the cynical, faithless spawn of a crackpot gypsy and a defrocked mick ” (Guirgis 17).

“Stop your rabble-rousing and get humble” (Guirgis 17).

“I am directing you to hit the off switch on them flapping gums of yours” (Guirgis 65).

St. Monica:

“I was axed to look into the case of Judas Iscariot by this Irish gypsy lawyer bitch in Purgatory named Cunningham. ... I was impressed by *her* nagging abilities—cuz that bitch nagged my ass day and night for forty days” (Guirgis 13-14).

El-Fayoumy:

“You have great legs, Fabiana” (Guirgis 11).

She’s a “juicy, pulchritudinous dish” with “intoxicatingly firm and fervently aromatic flesh” (Guirgis 50).

“Sexy vixen” (Guirgis 50).

“She makes my organs bounce” (Guirgis 50).

Pilate:

“You and your presumptuous nature remind me more and more of my ex-wife Rhonda every minute—and believe me that ain’t no compliment” (Guirgis 62).

Satan:

“I been keeping the light on for ya, Cunningham” (Guirgis 34).

You know what, Cunningham: all those excuses you got wedged between that dubious cleavage of yours: your mother, the bulimia, the herpes, the booze, the abortions, the rape, the bipolar pharmaceutical adventures, the twin suicide attempts and the abject failures at every relationship you’ve ever attempted—all those things do nothing to band-aid the fact that there comes a time when the world stops rewarding potential—and when that time came for you, you threw yourself the world’s biggest pity party and dedicated the rest of your short, pathetic, inconsequential life to finding fault everywhere fuckin’ else but in the return gaze of your own cosmetically altered reflection. (Guirgis 66)

“nasty train wreck” (Guirgis 66).

“You’ll never be loved either, Cunningham, and that’s because you’re incapable of giving it—but you already knew that about yourself, didn’t you?” (Guirgis 66)

“Are you good, Counselor?” (Guirgis 67)

“You aughta expand your consciousness, Counselor” (Guirgis 68).

“Cunningham, please don’t take this personally, but your father never really loved you or wanted you, right? And the only reason your mother didn’t abort you was because she was afraid of scarring—I think she told you that once, didn’t she. ... Just because your parents resented you doesn’t mean that God does” (Guirgis 70).

“The direct answer is that you are completely wrong” (Guirgis 70).

“You’re powerless and spiteful, Cunningham—not God” (Guirgis 70).

Many of the characters have very passionate lines regarding Cunningham and as I analyzed them, my view of this woman began to crystallize. She is sexy, exasperating, intelligent, wounded and ultimately unable to reconcile her ideal desires with an unfair reality. She falls so far over the course of the play that I recognized the need to show her positive, joyful side early during the trial. She seems unrelenting during her courtroom battle (evidenced by her nagging abilities and her repeated refusal to back down to authority), which indicates that she truly loves debating and winning an argument. I realized the chance to try this case could be truly joyous in her mind and that she would love the opportunity to set these past wrongs right.

Ambiguity and Appearance

Surely, O God, you have worn me out. ... You have bound me—and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me ... my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. Men open their mouths to jeer at me. ... God has turned me over to evil men. ... I will not find a wise man among you. My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart ... where then is my hope? (*The Holy Bible Job 16:6-17:16*)

From the first time I read *Judas*, I struggled with the author's intent concerning Cunningham's profession during her time on earth. Did Guirgis want the audience to presume that Cunningham had actually been an attorney? If so, why does his character never reference actual cases? Why doesn't she mention studying law or taking the bar exam? As written, her professional background is ambiguous. Early in my character analysis, I discussed the question of Cunningham's professional background with the director, Scott Woltz, and acting coach, George Judy. With their input, I arrived at the following conclusion: she has never argued a case before. She wanted to become a lawyer at one point in her life, maybe even studied law, but she failed; her failure was the partial cause of her death.

With this background rather than that of a professional attorney, I was free to play with her appearance and her hard edge as the unorthodox outsider. I could emphasize her driving need to be taken seriously so that she could finally realize the "potential" that Satan tells the audience Cunningham was unable to fulfill during her life on earth. This choice also helped the Purgatory courtroom maintain its zany, circus feel: the Judge isn't a real judge; the lawyers don't really know what they're doing, but have an intense need to argue well and win their case; and no one is quite the person the audience expects him or her to be. Once I'd made this decision, Cunningham's look became an exciting way to reflect her beliefs. Cunningham loves to transgress norms and challenge unexplored ideals. I saw her as a provocateur unsettling those around her, and always ready to play "devil's advocate."

I decided that one way this rebellion might be visually suggested was a full body tattoo and discussed the idea with the director. I knew a large tattoo would grab an audience's attention right away. It would also facilitate my desire to play down the idea of Cunningham as a traditional, buttoned-up lawyer. As written, she's extremely intelligent, but she also swears and has a very checkered past. Sarah Bacot, the costumer, decided to dress Cunningham in a transparent brightly colored top, short black skirt, and heels. She decided to draw a large, abstract tattoo design up the entire length of my left leg, and to add another small tattoo (the scales of justice) on the inside of my right wrist. After meeting with Bacot, I asked to add red streaks to my hair and wear it unkempt and messy (See Appendix B: Production Photos). I wanted to insure that the audience would see a woman who visually craves attention, but not in the standard way.

In conclusion, the author's ambiguity as to Cunningham's professional past appeared quite intentional. The audience could easily settle into the idea that Cunningham was an uptight female attorney during her life on earth, but they would be wrong to do so. Her off-color language and her arguments, though ardent, suggest a lack of legal expertise and display little courtroom experience. Cunningham's appearance in our production—her wild dress as well as her tattoos—suggests anything but the stereotypic female lawyer. Guirgis refuses to let his audience make the easy assumption that Cunningham is merely continuing the role she played on earth. Guirgis leads the audience to a deeper question regarding Cunningham: if she isn't a lawyer, why is she acting as one in Judge Littlefield's courtroom in Purgatory? It became my obligation as the actor portraying Cunningham to guide the audience to the conclusion that I believe Guirgis intends—Cunningham is not a professional attorney who is merely doing her job in Purgatory, much as she did her job on earth. Cunningham is not simply defending a client—she is defending her own life choices.

Rehearsal and Performance Preparation

The Ten Essential Steps

George Judy, the head of the Master's Acting Program at LSU and acting coach on *Judas*, devised a method for analyzing character that I implemented throughout the play's rehearsal. It could be applied to a specific scene or the play as a whole, and I revised my answers over the rehearsal process. As it gives a broad view of Cunningham, I include it now as part of my early preparation. More in-depth analysis of scene-by-scene objectives, tactics, and relationships can be found in my actor's journal. The following is an overview of the world of the play and my concise attempts to place my vision of the character within it.

1. Relaxation, Freedom, and Release: What kind of preparation do you personally need at this moment?

Prior to each show I did a vocal warm-up on stage to resonate and energize my voice in the playing space. I did a physical warm-up to relieve tension and access my body's entire range. I gradually layered on my physical character choices (discovered over the course of rehearsals). I focused myself and became aware of the transition that would take place on stage. I listened to music that attached me to the world of the play and envisioned the "moment before" I (Cunningham) entered the courtroom: the lack of interaction I have had in Purgatory up until now and my intense desire to make my voice heard and get justice for myself through Judas.

I further incorporated both Linklater and Fitzmaurice vocal training that I had gained during my career at LSU. Specifically, I used the Fitzmaurice "tremor" sequence to relax, open up vocally, and tap into character images. This tremor sequence works to confuse a person's body and voice with an aim to make her unguarded and spontaneous as she attempts to communicate vocally. It forced me to breathe more deeply, struggle against obstacles to reach a visualized goal, and remove any vocal delivery patterns I may have unconsciously set.

2. Identity: Who are you? Physically, emotionally...what is the most distinctive and interesting thing about you at this moment? What makes you unique or sets you apart from the crowd?

According to the script, I grew up in a poor neighborhood to parents who didn't really want me. My mother was a Romanian gypsy and my father was a local New York, Irish priest. I tried to commit suicide twice, had two abortions, an eating disorder, was raped, and had many failed personal relationships. I am very intelligent and excited by debate, research and transgressing the norms. I am proclaimed sexy many times by the opposing attorney. I know about Christianity, I am a professed agnostic, and I live in Purgatory.

3. Place: Where are you? How does this place feed the scene in some powerful way? How are those facts crucial to the scene? What are the most significant physical objects in the environment? How are they personally important to you in terms of the scene?

The play is set in Purgatory. Guirgis imagines Purgatory as a courtroom, and though many characters exist in other abstract spaces, my character only acts within Purgatory. It is

dank, cheap, depressing and bare. The set designer thought it should resemble a Department of Motor Vehicles waiting area; a place people have to go to get something they want, but a place they would rather not be. The dead characters in this play are from different eras and thus look very different from one another, adding to the odd, off-putting feel of the room. As Cunningham, I have my case files and an uncomfortable wooden bench to sit on, and I make my corner of the courtroom my home. I insert myself into the environment, form physical relationships with the bench, the witness chair and my research, and refuse to give up my space until my breakdown.

4. Circumstance: What are at least three powerful things that have happened already that make this specific scene unavoidable and necessary?

What makes this case unavoidable and necessary for me is that I've been stuck in Purgatory not doing anything productive for an endless amount of time. I love a good fight and I'm passionate about opposing injustice, specifically towards Judas and myself. I identify with Judas, scapegoats, and underdogs, in general. I've never gotten satisfying answers to my questions regarding God, life, and death, and this is my opportunity to shake things up and indict the guilty.

5. Relationship: To whom are you talking? What is the most powerful and visceral description of your relationship at this moment? What is your most powerful relationship that is not in the scene?

As Cunningham, my most powerful relationship not on stage is to God. I never get the chance to directly question and accuse God and the inability to have a direct relationship drives me crazy. My most important relationship on stage is to Satan. While Guirgis wants him to function as a reflection of others in the play, my character is unaware that he isn't real. I am totally invested in getting him on my side and forcing him to reveal (what I believe to be) the truth about God publicly. Satan and I have a lot of history and baggage between us and we are great adversaries for each other, but he ultimately has more power than I do and in trying to fight him I destroy myself.

6. Objectives: What do you want? How do you need to change the person to whom you are speaking? How will you know if they do change?

My super-objective for the entire play is to end the suffering (my own and Judas'). I desperately want my opinion respected and believed, and I want to either prove that God can't exist or that he owes us all an apology if he does. I will know I've changed the people around me when I am set free from Purgatory. I don't want to gain access to Heaven, but I want to exist, finally, outside of my present inertia and dissatisfaction.

7. Obstacles and Conflict: What is in the way of getting what you want? What is making it hard to get? What is generating conflict?

So many things stand in the way of my success. My relationship to God and Satan clouds my reasoning, and history and popular opinion stop the jury (and audience) from seeing certain witnesses as I'd like for them to be seen. My personal stake in defending myself (and Judas)

stops me from accepting new information, and my inability to honestly accept my past failures and move forward paralyzes and destroys me.

8. Tactics and Communication: How can you get what you want and need here, right now? What is going to work here? What is this person going to respond to? What power do you have to persuade or control them?

Obviously, my tactics to achieve my goal are generated in the moment on stage or in rehearsal as I respond to what each acting partner is communicating to me. However, some power dynamics are clear between characters. I have much more power in the relationship to Caiaphas than in the relationship to Satan. I try to *bandage* the Judge in one scene whereas I try to *mock* Mother Teresa in another. As Cunningham, I have some definite fall-back tactics that I use repeatedly to help me gain ground: I love to challenge, to awaken, to poke and to tease, but I stay open to discover the best mode of attack in the moment on stage with my partners.

9. Importance, or Point of View: How can you load the circumstances and desires here most powerfully to raise the stakes?

What's at stake for my character in this play is my understanding of some of life's largest questions: the nature of God; good and evil; the purpose of an afterlife; the power of guilt, regret and pride; the ability to accept love and defeat. I stand to win or lose everything with this case. I see Judas, forgotten and damned for eternity, and I know that I can become that if I don't fight and win.

10. Event Preparation, or Journey: What is your state of life, emotionally and physiologically, in the moment before and the moment after? At what moment were you most at risk in the scene? What is the climax of this scene? How would you describe your journey in this scene? How did you take that trip?

I begin the play energized and ready to fight. I am on top of my game, I am thoroughly prepared, and I enjoy the task at hand. As I journey through the play, however, I begin to unhinge and respond emotionally than logically. I identify with Judas and start to sink under the pressure. I'm torn apart by Satan: my cross-examination becomes a boxing match, with him pummeling me repeatedly until I literally collapse and give up. I become another Judas, a lost case responsible for my own damnation.

Physical Preparation

Along with the basic acting homework that I implemented for each scene, I wanted with this role to incorporate physical acting techniques I had acquired during my studies at LSU. For instance, I knew that the application of Chakras would be very useful in defining a character different from myself. A body Chakra is a Hindu idea that proposes that people all have seven basic centers in their bodies from which to radiate energy and protect energy. This translates into someone walking or acting mainly from one area in her body: for example, someone on the street may jut her hips forward as she walks or "puff" up her chest. Discovering a character's center can change the way an actor relates to space or another character, and how she impulsively

responds to attack or defend herself in any given moment. I decided through exploration that Cunningham led from the third eye Chakra, Ajna, and protected the heart Chakra, Anahata. Below is an excerpt detailing the seven Chakra centers:

The chakras or force-centres are points of connection at which energy flows from one vehicle or body of a man to another. ... We sometimes speak of them as roughly corresponding to certain physical organs; in reality they show themselves at the surface of the etheric double, which projects slightly beyond the outline of the dense body. ... That force is sevenfold in its nature, and all its forms operate in each of these centres, although one of them in each case usually predominates over the others. Without this inrush of energy the physical body could not exist. Therefore the centres are in operation in every one. (Leadbeater 2)

As rehearsal progressed, I also implemented Laban physical ideas. Laban is a theory developed by Rudolph Laban about movement through space, and using its ideas can further unlock a character's physical behavior toward others. Laban constructs combinations of dynamic movement that are made by choosing to accentuate one Effort Action over another. The Effort Actions set against each other are Space (which is direct or indirect), Weight (which is strong or light), Time (which is sudden or sustained) and Flow (which is bound or free). As I worked, I decided that Cunningham seemed heavy (not light), direct (not indirect), sustained (not sudden), and bound (not free). This Effort Action combination in Laban is Press: she is habitually heavy, direct, and sustained as she relates to others. As I rehearsed, I tried to lead from my third eye Chakra and relate usually by "pressing" on witnesses. Granted, everyone deviates from her standard physicality to respond to spontaneous events, but understanding and working from these different physical centers helped separate my habitual physicality from the character's physicality and created a more dynamic character to watch.

Below is an excerpt from my actor's journal. It chronicles a rehearsal dedicated to working on character physicality through habitual gestures, Chakras, and in-depth animal imagery work:

Thursday, November 13, 2008: Tonight we started by doing a lengthy character exercise designed to help us physically represent our characters more fully. I've been having trouble reconciling Cunningham's edgier, earthy side with her intelligent lawyer side and therefore only physically showing the lawyer persona. Tonight, while exploring her "habitual gesture" I definitely tend to lead from the third eye Chakra (pretty severely) and protect my heart Chakra. Rhythmically, I tend to move in a square to size up situations and threaten sexually, whereas before this I've been moving very linearly on a line. I find that asymmetric head movement and back, side, front caged steps are useful tonight. We work on creating "Best" and "Worst" exaggerated physical poses to encompass what our character loves and hates most about her

nature. With Cunningham's "Best" physical gesture, I found a pose that incorporates my desire to ward off threats and protect others. I want to be a savior (my own and others). My "Worst" pose taps into the childhood abuse and inability to fulfill my potential: I collapse, bind one arm behind me, look up and beg for help.

We worked later on animal imagery, and I explored the idea of a panther, specifically the panther in Myles' (Satan's) tattoo. The panther's intensity and point of view were right, but I had too much power. Then I imagined myself not free, but in a zoo, and things fell into place. I had more need to fight against my surroundings and assert my value and power. One interesting moment came when we had to size up the other animals and see with whom we were compatible. I saw Myles (as Satan), who looked almost exactly like me. Later we talked and discovered we were both exploring panthers, but he was free (and therefore much more at ease), while I was caged. Myles and I also gravitated towards each other at the end of the Chakra center exercise, finding an uneasy camaraderie as we walked.

Major Character Relationship: Cunningham and Satan

His speech is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
his words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords.
(*The Holy Bible* Psalm 55:21)

Guirgis' creation of Cunningham's relationship to Satan (and by proxy, to God) intrigued me from the start and became the most personally exciting relationship I explored in rehearsal. With *Judas*, Guirgis argues that ultimately *we* create our own Heaven or Hell and keep ourselves there, not any outside good or evil force. Satan in his play exists only as a figure we summon when the need arises. In fact, Jesus reveals at the end that Satan "does not exist, Judas. Rather they must conjure him, and still he is but a vapor blown away by a hummingbird's breath. He is false, he is a lie. He is not real" (Guirgis 73). Though Satan seems very real to the characters, Guirgis' Satan exists within the world of the play only to give us what we need or most fear; he is our best friend or worst enemy because he is only the reflection of ourselves as we wish we were or conversely, at our true, base worst. As a reflection, he illuminates the errors in judgment each character makes. Guirgis, regarding this choice says, "I do think that the idea in the play that's borrowed from a lot of Christian philosophers is true: that we're responsible for our own salvation" (Weber). To me, this is the most tragic idea that Guirgis argues: we damn ourselves and refuse to let ourselves out of our own Hell. Unable to get the answers about God that she needs or handle the truth about herself, Cunningham gives up in death, just as she did in life. In my final moment on stage as Cunningham, I fell to the floor of the courtroom, angry and defeated, broken beyond repair with no one to help me.

Though Cunningham's interaction with Satan ultimately destroys her, throughout the play she cannot resist taking the bait he offers her, believing that he may actually help rather than hurt her. The paradoxical nature of Satan as someone who comforts even as he kills, whom one loves as much as one hates surfaces in many areas of art. In researching this relationship and drawing inspiration to help me connect to Guirgis' world, I found many apropos representations of Cunningham's relationship with Satan in song. As someone who uses music before the show each night to help myself hook into the world of the play I'm about to enter, some songs became invaluable in helping me understand and access this relationship. Specifically, I listened to Tom Waits: with his anguished, growling voice and ominous lyrics, his songs showed me someone on the edge, whose present despair and understanding has only come through a hard fought battle. His song, "Black Wings" contributed to my view of Satan. I listened to the song before the show each night. This portion from "Black Wings" captures the love/hate relationship many people form with Satan: "There are those who say / Beneath his coat there are wings. / Some say they fear him; / Others admire him / Because he steals his promise. / One look in his eye / Everyone denies / Ever having met him" (Waits).

Cunningham clearly respects Satan's honesty and believes that she can use it to her advantage. He, if no one else, will tell it like it is. However, truth comes in many forms, and while Satan does unflinchingly give her truth, it is not in the way she so desperately wants. This failure of the classic "deal with the devil"—where he gives a person what she desires, but in a way that destroys her—remained with me as I researched the devil. I read portions of Dante's *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*, and found this section which encapsulated Cunningham's final examination of Satan:

Beneath the tree I saw shades lifting hands, / crying I know not
what up toward the branches, / like little eager, empty-headed
children / who beg—but he of whom they beg does not / reply, but
to provoke their longing, he / holds high, and does not hide, the
thing they want. (Alighieri 24. 106-111)

Guirgis uses the character of Satan to show our deep need and inability to attain satisfaction within life. We all confront issues of injustice during our lifetime; we feel lost and angry, isolated and unfairly punished. Cunningham fights, but while she so desperately needs comfort and validation, she cannot accept that she truly deserves love or forgiveness. Commenting on this universal problem, Father James Martin, who served as theological advisor on the original production of *Judas* and later expanded on his experience in *A Jesuit Off-Broadway* quotes theologian Johannes Baptist Metz, "Metz speaks of poverty of spirit as the inherent poverty that every human being faces in daily life. ... 'We are all members of a species that is not sufficient unto itself,' writes Metz. 'We are all creatures plagued by unending doubts and restless, unsatisfied hearts'" (qtd. in Martin 101). Cunningham's struggle to find support in her indictment of God reflects Guirgis' own struggles and the universal experience of searching for order, justice and meaning within the world. However, Satan cannot give Cunningham what she needs, which is her own forgiveness and peace of mind. Cunningham keeps reaching out for nothing, and when she is forced to reach inside, she cannot accept the darkness she perceives there.

Actor's Journal

I kept a journal starting with the first read-through to chart my experience, record daily character discoveries, and break down each scene from an acting standpoint. I've included entries that speak to my process of creating and refining Cunningham, and that document the work with scene partners that contributed greatly to my performance. I've outlined each scene on the day that we began rehearsing it. Furthermore, I've attempted to chronicle "my case" to show progression from witness to witness as Cunningham works to convince the jury of Judas' unfair damnation. My successes and struggles implementing acting methodology that I've learned during the Master's Program are reflected and analyzed throughout the process. I hope that the journal provides insight into my working style and helps chronicle my struggles and successes bringing Cunningham to life on stage.

Thursday, October 23, 2008:

First Read-through

Good energy, focus and emotional release from most everyone in the cast tonight. I can see some traps for myself to avoid with Cunningham. At times, I felt like I was getting lost, or becoming a sounding board for some of the witnesses in Act One. Judy spoke about it in broader terms later, noting that because of the trial convention, some scenes could become narrative rather than dramatic. I will need to really specify my relationship to each witness so that I'm not simply goading them to go through a rehearsed conversation between lawyer and witness, but using the information and letting them change me.

I was very surprised (in the best sense) by the energy Myles had as Satan in our first scene. I tried this first reading to stay open to what I was being given by everyone and not to guide the scene too deftly into what I wanted it to be. Before tonight, I knew that Satan was going to be the hardest character for me to deal with, but I wasn't sure what our initial relationship would be. In the read-through, Myles' choices crystallized much of our dynamic. It would trivialize things to say that Cunningham and Satan have a past as characters that resembles very adversarial exes, but there was a sense of past history and intimacy and my turning against him that was evident and useful. Our last scene broke me down pretty badly, and though I let him affect me and really listened to his attacks, I'm not sure if it became too self-indulgent. I'm excited to explore our dynamic further. There are a lot of witnesses, and I need to really set aside some time to analyze my relationships. I find it interesting, for instance, that we only call two female witnesses, Henrietta and Mother Teresa. Is this an intentional choice by the author? Is it a reflection on the Bible's inherent sexism?

Friday, October 24, 2008:

Conference with George Judy and Joanna Battles

Today, I spoke to Judy about my relationship to Satan, specifically how my understanding of this playwright's Satan reveals and reflects my own character and how to incorporate research to make that scene dynamic from an acting standpoint. He said that I needed to let go of the responsibility to "drive" the show and keep the pace up—that I should search and indulge myself for now and really find those moment-to-moment changes. Battles had some

useful vocal notes; she mentioned that I should really focus on digging with my breath and getting a deep, full one to find new ways of responding. She noted that even in those moments where I was totally emotionally open and out of control, I was still only using “half-full” breaths and though I was using those breaths well, I could find some more exciting options if I truly filled myself and experienced moments from this fuller place.

I spoke with Woltz about the first read-through and asked for his impressions. He thought that I let Satan break me down too early, and had no place to go before the true breakdown at the end. He felt like I started playing the same beat too early, and that the final payoff wasn’t as effective as it could be. I’ve been having a hard time because I think that Satan airing Cunningham’s past is very hurtful and debilitating, and I think the audience needs to know that this wounds her more than anything else in the play does up to this point. However, I need to take the note and try to regroup so that the end isn’t ten minutes of self-indulgent acting where the audience just watches me get to tears.

I spoke with Nick Rhoton (Pilate) about our scene. Woltz said that he really liked our chemistry but neither of us (myself or Rhoton) felt like we “earned” our speeches last night or knew how or why we got under the other’s skin. We discussed the possibility that I ultimately blame and hate him because he refuses to save Judas or take responsibility for his own actions. I hate people in power who prey on the weak and won’t reach out to help the less fortunate. I want so badly to make him take responsibility or at least recognize his own complicity in Judas’ downfall and Christ’s death.

Friday, October 24, 2008:
Second Read-through

John Fletcher (our dramaturg and Caiaphas, Matthew understudy) helped facilitate an in-depth discussion tonight regarding the play’s religious themes. We talked about the focus of Guirgis’ Purgatory: how it is similar to and different from the traditional idea of Purgatory. Some of the themes and questions we highlighted as important to consider at this point were:

Salvation: what’s the nature of God’s love for us?

Purgatory: a waiting room where we have endless time to deal with our past choices.

Creating our own Heaven or Hell: *we* torture or save ourselves, not any outside religious figures.

Saviors: those who don’t deserve forgiveness need it most.

The idea of Jesus in this play: God with us—He gives up divinity to be with man. For example, the tangible contact Jesus makes by washing Judas’ feet. The idea of Jesus judging us isn’t present in the play. God’s love and intervention continues past death into the afterlife, but it is still our choice to accept it.

Purgatory as different from earth: in Purgatory things are worked out—we must deal with ourselves; we have nothing but time. Things are negotiated here; there’s a possibility for change. We have some control over an uncontrollable situation.

What is the path out of suffering? How do we end pain? What attaches us to our suffering? What desires are great enough to stop me from accepting forgiveness and moving forward (am I doing this to myself)?

How am I personally on trial—not just Judas?

Why isn't Jesus called to the stand? It's our choice to call and receive him. Are we ready to see him?

Overall Dramatic Action for the play (something that *every* character is trying to do): to end suffering (their own? others?).

Beyond the discussion, we did a reading again of Act One. I found a few useful things. Judy, Woltz, and I talked about my relationship to Henrietta Iscariot: that I might see her as a mother figure (and greatly want her to be one, since my own mother didn't believe in me). Her opening monologue might be her appeal to me to take the case. Perhaps that is why I don't ask Henrietta to testify about more than the Judas and Matthias encounter: because I believe (wrongly) that it's enough to show Judas' character and her love and hope for him.

Monday, October 27, 2008:

Second Read-through of Act Two

We read and talked through Act Two tonight. We discussed the differences in where we are (Purgatory) versus Heaven or Hell again, noting that the characters who are from Heaven or Hell don't feel the need to justify or obsess over their past actions, like those in Purgatory do. In Heaven, you are either at peace with your past decisions and can acknowledge your failures, or in Hell you've given up on yourself and refuse to deal with your guilt. In Purgatory, we are trapped by our past guilt and history and want to justify things. We want someone to account for the unfair wrongs that have been done to us, and want judgment for ourselves before we can "move on" (to Heaven, Hell, another state of understanding, another dilemma). When Jesus finally speaks as a character for the first time he doesn't deal with our past and help us account for guilt. Instead, he absolves our past, identifies with our flaws, and offers an opportunity to move forward with him now if we choose to. The final Jesus and Judas scene also offers the audience a new perspective: if Jesus is in all of us, then Judas is as well. How have we all betrayed a loved one?

I had a couple of nice relationship discoveries tonight in the reading. It became clear that Pilate was a father figure to me. That's where my need to get him to blow up comes from, and why I have such passion to make him account for his actions. He's a figure of absolute unfair authority and I hate that. There's a lot of the Jack Nicholson, Tom Cruise, Demi Moore *A Few Good Men* relationship here; he refuses to get riled up, but I know that if I can hit the right button, he'll want to tell the courtroom, if not about his complicity, then at least about what an egomaniacal freak he is. I talked with Judy more about Cunningham's father dynamic: that her priest father probably molested her and then was absent most of her life. Even though I don't have a relationship with my father that mirrors this dynamic at all, I do know what it's like to argue vehemently for my angle and butt heads with male authority in that way.

Images for Purgatory—spinning the wheels and not moving forward, hamster in a wheel, Sisyphus with the rock.

I've been having a problem figuring out what I originally want from Satan's testimony and I made some real headway tonight. Cunningham believes that Satan can come in and clinch her argument against God. She starts with "You have a long standing feud with God" and

believes that he'll support her and help sway the jury to understand how problematic God is. I need him to say that God's love is conditional (that's why I'm in Purgatory), but he refuses to.

Tuesday, October 28, 2008:

Act One: Scene One, Two—The Writs

Got on our feet tonight and started working with the set. I could see the potential to fall into physical patterns especially while relating to the set and the Judge. I'm frustrated because tonight I felt like I was doing too much of myself, not stretching into this character's physicality. I need to figure out how to communicate the side of Cunningham that's in my head. I don't want to rely on the costume. I need to find that street-smart, edgy, multicultural confusion about her that's provocative and hard to pin down. How do I marry this with the fact that she acquiesces to the Judge frequently and is well spoken? I need to find the physicality and attack on her that's outside of my habitual elegance.

I think she really likes the Judge and wants him to respect her—in a grandfatherly kind of way. Because he also committed suicide, she feels a kinship to him, and wants to connect to and comfort (as well as challenge) him. I think Cunningham is over-prepared for that first day in court, and defensively pulls out all her materials, even the contradictory ones, to impress the Judge. For instance, I bring up Kierkegaard, and then go on at length about Hegel, even though Kierkegaard was reacting against Hegel. Later, when I get the writ from God, the anxiety lessens and I can start to fight with more confidence.

I think the Bailiff is on my side. I can imagine them meeting outside the courtroom, having a smoke, and Cunningham tapping into his desire to do everything by the book and with good intentions. I know I've got a hard sell with this case, but with him on my side it's less of a boy's club and I feel some support in the room.

The First Writ: (1.1)

Objective: I want to win the Judge's (personal) approval, to cement myself into his courtroom (to make him deal with me).

Obstacles: He hates Judas, loves God, easily dismisses, and doesn't respect me.

Tactics: To bulldoze, to awaken, to soothe, to entice.

Relationships: Discovery of El-Fayoumy and joy because I can win against him.

Moment Before (play begins) and Circumstances: Henrietta appeals to me. I visit with Judas, and then research the Judge. I decide on my witness list, prepare, and outline my case argument.

The Second Writ: (1.2a)

Objective: I want to pin down the Judge's assent.

Obstacles: His attack on my lack of faith, on Judas' nature, his constant dismissal of me.

Tactics: To bargain, to toy with him, to indulge him, to bandage him.

Relationships introduced: Mine to Judas, Monica, and God.

Moment Before and Circumstances: Monica speaks to God on my behalf, and gets the writ. I've gotten someone else whom I respect on my side, which bolsters my confidence.

Overall Character Questions:

Cunningham's relationship to space (setting): I have never been in a courtroom as a lawyer before. I have been to a few trials for friends and love to fight and debate. I'm not afraid of claiming space and exploring—I like when others look at me. Love to challenge, negotiate and control a space. I settle in and make it my home. It's a formal place, though; one I'm not used to, and I am shaking up perceptions about traditional lawyers and courts—it is a space where anything is possible and that's exciting. I'm used to transforming unappealing places. I've had bad housing my whole life in New York, and volunteered in poor neighborhoods. I'm not too good for this space. In fact, it suits me better than most of the others and I know I can use that to my advantage. I'll make this place over, assert myself, and do something positive within it as I win my case.

Physicality: Laban—heavy, direct, and sustained equals Press. Animal: Panther. Chakra: leads from third eye Chakra, protects heart Chakra.

Wednesday, October 29, 2008:

Henrietta's Testimony

Objective: I want her to shine the sun on Judas for the jury.

Obstacles: Her guilt, the jury's mistrust of her and Judas.

Tactics: To bolster her, to comfort her, to prod her.

Arc: I think the testimony accomplishes everything it needs to until El-Fayoumy brings up what occurred the next day, which blindsides me.

Relationship: Mother figure I always wanted, hard worker that I respect. I need her approval and I want to make her proud.

Moment Before and Circumstances: El-Fayoumy's just made the case that Judas was damned as a "bad seed" from the start and I need to show his humanity.

We blocked Henrietta and the first Mother Teresa section tonight. Hall's work as Henrietta was very touching and it was hard not to get overwhelmed watching her curse her son and then repent in the next moment. I feel the need to befriend and defend her, even though we are very different women. Judas and Matthias found a wonderful innocence with each other and it was easy for me to feel that affection for Judas—what he once was, what he could've been if Jesus hadn't asked this of him. The scene as written is so sparse for Cunningham, maybe because I believe that Henrietta's one story will be enough for the jury. I decided that I don't know the story in El-Fayoumy's redirect, so when he mentions the shoplifting, it nullifies the headway I've just made with the jury and I have no way to contradict it. That sets me up to really go after Mother Teresa because I've just lost a lot of ground.

When I first encounter Mother Teresa, the jury's reaction to her is what I expect; however, she is not the virgin I expect—she flirts with all the men and is very charming which unnerves and annoys me. She brings up red herrings and digresses and eats up our time. El-Fayoumy takes total advantage of this, letting her run her mouth and repeat statements, and I can't believe the Judge lets him get away with it.

Thursday, October 30, 2008:
Mother Teresa (Cross-examination)

Objective: I want to air her dirty laundry, to discredit her to the jury. I want to break through her placidity (she is not the moral authority on the spirit).

Obstacles: The jury's respect for her, her refusal to get ruffled, my deep dislike for her hypocrisy which takes me over.

Tactics: I want to rile her up (because I know she's capable of saying inflammatory things), to mock her, to silence her.

Arc: I move from teacher to child.

Relationships: Every hypocritical preacher, Sunday school teacher, unfair director who shamed me in public. This is my chance to put them in their place.

Moment Before and Circumstances: El-Fayoumy has built her up to be a godlike saint, and I have to demolish that without making the jury hate me for disrespecting her.

Working through this with Judy, I started to see how to include his prior note to "showboat" for the jury—I do have damning evidence against Mother Teresa, and I need to build it for the jury's benefit. I started the scene tonight from too personal a place, and I need to find the balance—when she refuses to let me ruffle her and cracks jokes for the jury, it ratchets up my personal investment and unhinges me until I have to bring up my abortions. I don't intend to go there initially, but I need to incite some fury from her with an issue I know she detests, and she still refuses to take the bait. I lose it with that last speech and foreshadow what's going to come with Pilate in the Second Act.

I need to concentrate on relating to each character differently. How is my dislike and discrediting of Mother Teresa different from Caiaphas and Pilate? What in particular bugs me about them and how do I deal with them differently? Right now, I think of Mother Teresa as that condescending Sunday school teacher—simplifying complex issues and refusing to account for gross hypocrisies. I think of Caiaphas as every grandfather who was repulsed by Cunningham, who called her a slut and refused to let his grandson marry her. I enjoy playing up the coquettish little girl and forcing him to notice my sexuality *and* intelligence. Pilate is a father figure—absolute unapologetic authority run amok. He preys on the underdog and laughs it off as someone else's fault. I want to nail him down, and I bait him in many ways. I know he wants to flirt with me to make me uncomfortable so I beat him by refusing to acquiesce—I flirt back and then when he's settled, I pull the rug out by browbeating him into an admission.

Simon the Zealot:

Objective: I want to unhinge the jury's understanding of Jesus and Judea.

Obstacles: The jury sees Judas as one of a kind and I need to unite him with someone likeable.

Tactics: To excite him, to prod him, to council him, to soothe him.

Arc: I think I've accomplished my goal, but El-Fayoumy shifts things and I fight harder in redirect to get things back on track. Again, I want to bring things down to a real base level that everyone can relate to, not build up crazy circumstances we can't understand.

Relationship: Support his pipe dreams; encourage him to tell us how things were, his ideals. I'm his representative—I've brought him to speak at Capitol Hill, but he's not used to this place.

Maybe I can big sister him.

Moment Before and Circumstances: I just finished examining Mother Teresa and I want some straight talk for the jury, not aggrandizing. I like him and want to surprise them, not rest on preconceived notions like El-Fayoumy did with Mother Teresa.

I think Simon is Cunningham's type of guy. In life she probably had a lot of male friends like him and loves his passion, his non-condescending connection to street people and even his tendency to lash out. As Cunningham, he excites me, and I respect him as a great contrast to Mother Teresa. He is someone that I want in my corner: someone who fights passionately and recognizes and refuses to accept injustice. I think he can show the jury that Jesus failed his friends—he reneged on the promise to act as the war hero he claimed he was. This was a time of war: Jesus promised to lead, he commanded an officer (Judas) to do something, and Judas suffered terribly for obeying or prompting Jesus to do what he should have.

I loved the image we came up with tonight: Jesus was the grenade, and Judas was the pin. Jesus told him to remove it (or Judas knew that was his mission), and both Jesus and Judas were destroyed.

Another issue that arose tonight was the need to incorporate spatial awareness (for De Abrew and me). Because of the nature of the courtroom drama it's hard to use the space in new and surprising ways. De Abrew and I need to stay aware of the physical pattern the first lawyer creates with a character and find a way to then subvert that and create new shapes in space. For instance, he stays very close to Mother Teresa so I try to stalk the outside perimeter more and relate to the jury.

Friday, October 31, 2008:

Satan on the Stand (No Cross)

We discussed further my relationship with Satan and the idea of our past. When he walks in and identifies me by saying he's "keeping the light on for me," it implies that when I first turned my back on God, I explored a lot of dark things within myself. I found the discoveries deeply unsettling and couldn't get the spiritual closure I needed (to become a comfortable Atheist or Christian). Satan unnerves me to the core in a way no one else is able to, partly (or entirely) because he brings all my secrets into the room with him and I know I can't trust him. He can destroy us at any time (as I destroyed myself in life), but he also loves to play with us and enable us ("You're gonna reap just what you sow"). I see from this testimony how dangerous he is, how much power he has in the room, how much of a boy's club it becomes: the (cruel) alliance between him and the Judge, him and El-Fayoumy, and how he seduced and tricked Judas and led him to his destruction (as he did to me, or rather, as Judas and I did to ourselves). I realize I'm not ready to face him yet, not with this dynamic in the room, and that I might have more power later on to get him on my side, so that he'll say what I need him to about God.

Monday, November 3, 2008:

Act One Run Off Book

Notes from the first off book run: look for absurdity to undercut pathos. Make discoveries; don't plan where the testimonies will go, but use the new info. Find more

positives—give the audience more of a reason to root for Cunningham. Still having problems with physicality—when I see her on the street what does she look like?

Battles' vocal notes: speak from the back of the head to resonate to those behind me. Drop in the images (and speed-through lines for earned pauses); look out for goose necking and holding my breath. Specifically, look at the “mercy” speech—more breath will equal belief and depth. Don't push for sincerity (*please* believe me); use the breath to ground it and fight more.

“Battlefield” speech: it's not just sincere. Drive the rhythm and do something with my point. Find more vocal variety—it was flat this time. Finish the sentences with energy. Open the jaw and breathe in what the Judge is giving me.

General note: find the inner pit bull, the street in me, the disgusting edge. I need more ability to surprise and snarl; to cut through the space with my voice—these people have had hard lives and can turn on a dime—they are dangerous and spontaneous.

Wednesday, November 5, 2008:

Act One Work Through and Final Run

I focused on finding more positivism tonight (more of the manic side of the bipolar). I worked a few times on the “what if God appeared to you, Cunningham” section with the Judge. I still can't figure out how that hits me; I'm trying to breathe it in, but I don't know if it's absurd and I cover myself or if it unnerves me and paralyzes. I need to keep exploring this.

I didn't drive the Mother Teresa scene as hard tonight. I was able to play more to the jury and find the moments to let the personal take over. I took more time with my final dismissal line and tried to avoid playing an attitude.

Thursday, November 6, 2008:

Act Two, Scene One—Sigmund Freud

Objective: I want him to absolve Judas' suicide. I want him to show that Judas shouldn't be in Hell because Judas was mentally ill. I want him to tell me that my failure and death were not my fault; that I couldn't help giving up and he not only understands, but loves me.

Obstacles: The jury might value faith over intelligence. Freud is controversial and you either love him or hate him.

Tactics: To flirt, to engage, to arouse, to ask for assistance, to flatter.

Arc: From nervous blind date to best pickup in a bar. Get even with El-Fayoumy by topping him.

Relationship: College student to professor. Freud is someone I admire, respect, am drawn to and idealize because of his intelligence and discoveries. His dark side loves and encourages mine. I flirt with him and he makes me giddy and gooey inside.

Moment Before and Circumstances: Before this was Satan. I want to get out of the realm of the metaphysical and into the realm of science and fact. We need to stop relying on the Bible to tell us who is good or bad and listen to someone objective and intelligent. He's my expert witness (against Mother Teresa) and I have a particularly personal investment in him because of my own probable suicide and need for closure.

Rehearsal notes: This scene was fun! I love Freud and his testimony says what I need to hear, personally and for Judas' defense. I get to flirt with my expert witness, drive El-Fayoumy crazy, and get off the hook for my own suicide. This testimony really bolsters my confidence in myself as a lawyer and helps me tackle Caiaphas and Pilate with more tricks and less desperation.

Monday, November 10, 2008:

Caiaphas and Pilate

Caiaphas:

Objective: I want to throw hot coals on his lap.

Obstacles: He's so rigid he may refuse to see the points I'm making against him.

Tactics: To wide-eye him, to coo him, to poke him.

Arc: From rigid and separated (like two columns) to close together, like I am crouching over a pile of bubbling goop.

Relationship: Little girl using father's logic to infuriate and irritate.

Moment Before and Circumstances: El-Fayoumy has built him up as an incontrovertible authority figure, and I need to throw him off balance.

Pilate:

Objective: I want to make him boil over.

Obstacles: He's very smart, refuses to give in, and doesn't respect me.

Tactics: To charm him, to unseat him, to caress him, to backhand him, to knuckle him.

Arc: Bad mommy to impassioned torturer.

Relationships: Father figure, evil ex.

Moment Before and Circumstances: What do I need from him (for the jury to hear)? He's the reason Judas descended into despair and killed himself. He's the next one to "get" after Caiaphas—Judas went to Caiaphas, then Caiaphas went to Pilate and Pilate killed Jesus. I've got to follow the path to tear them down along the way.

Rehearsal notes: Tonight was very helpful. I started to really tap into a useful relationship to Caiaphas. He teaches and condescends to El-Fayoumy, but is so uncomfortable with me as a woman (and a provocative one at that) that it becomes really fun to play with teaching the teacher as a little girl. I get to use that wide-eyed logic against him to explain his hypocrisy to the jury slowly and deliberately and then laugh at it. It is the clearest choice I've made yet; it taps into something that I know will unnerve that specific witness and I'm excited to try to clarify the other witness relationships like this.

Pilate was a much tougher scene to rehearse. It's hard for me to reconcile the dual father/daughter relationship and the extremely aggressive sexual side with each other. Cunningham's relationship to her father was very sexually complicated so she can definitely switch easily from relating to a man one moment as a father figure and the next as a sexual object. It's hard for me to figure out the balance and the waves that the Pilate scene goes through right now. Tonight, it got stuck and didn't earn the boiling point that it suddenly jumped to. I need to figure out where the trigger points are and why we (Cunningham and Pilate) are such good adversaries.

Tuesday, November 11, 2008:
Satan Redirect

Objective: I want him to corroborate that God's a villain who is not worth worshipping.

Obstacles: Satan's ability to play another like a violin, and my mental state at the top of the examination.

Tactics: To befriend him, to wake him up, to rile him up.

Arc: Rev the engine and careen over the cliff.

Relationships: This relationship shows me confronting the worst parts of myself—the embarrassing, debilitating things I did that tore me down and stopped me from moving forward and living life fully. It shows my own inability to reconcile questions of faith and my anger at my stupidity and need for (the right) answers to my questions.

Moment Before and Circumstances: Pilate—I get to him and break him. I think I'm ready to take Satan on and get him on my side against God.

Rehearsal notes: Tonight, we worked a lot on the structure, or arc, of the scene. Some initial ideas to work off of: when Satan enters with his outburst, it humanizes him to me. While everyone else is walking on eggshells, when he accosts me, my authority issues make me match him. I want him on my side, but I won't back down when another male tries to belittle me.

When the jury reenters and he reverts back to "charming" Satan, I give him my respect by addressing him as "Mr. Satan" (to try to get him back on my side). In rehearsal tonight, I started playing the same beat too early, attacking Satan even though I needed him to corroborate my story. It becomes more unbearable when I back down and ingratiate myself again to this jerk (who has just torn me apart) to try to get what I need. This way, I try to please him all through the "true" section because it seems like he is agreeing with me, and when he doesn't, the beat change leads us somewhere new. From there, it goes into Satan-in-denial territory: as if I have a good friend who's in denial about her boyfriend. He's a jerk who has beaten her and cheated on her. She keeps insisting that he's a great guy and she's not upset with him, and I insist that she tell the truth. That is what I'm trying to get Satan to do with God. I know Satan must feel betrayed by God turning his back on him. I try to poke at him and to break him like I broke Pilate, but once I bring Judas into the argument, and he refuses to tell me what I want to hear, it becomes totally personal and I walk myself right into my own trap. He tells me the truth about myself (which I can't handle) and after I fail, I look at and "become" Judas. We discussed tonight whether this means that Cunningham is one of the "two souls" Satan says he'll take with him after the trial.

Thursday, November 13, 2008:

Tonight we started by doing a lengthy character exercise designed to help us physically represent our characters more fully. I've been having trouble reconciling Cunningham's edgier, earthy side with her intelligent lawyer side and therefore only physically showing the lawyer persona. Tonight, while exploring her "habitual gesture" I definitely tend to lead from the third eye Chakra (pretty severely) and protect my heart Chakra. Rhythmically, I tend to move in a square to size up situations and threaten sexually, whereas before this I've been moving very linearly on a line. I find that asymmetric head movement and back, side, front caged steps are

useful tonight. We work on creating “Best” and “Worst” exaggerated physical poses to encompass what our character loves and hates most about her nature. With Cunningham’s “Best” physical gesture, I found a pose that incorporates my desire to ward off threats and protect others. I want to be a savior (my own and others). My “Worst” pose taps into the childhood abuse and inability to fulfill my potential: I collapse, bind one arm behind me, look up and beg for help.

We worked later on animal imagery, and I explored the idea of a panther, specifically the panther in Myles’ (Satan’s) tattoo. The panther’s intensity and point of view were right, but I had too much power. Then I imagined myself not free, but in a zoo, and things fell into place. I had more need to fight against my surroundings and assert my value and power. One interesting moment came when we had to size up the other animals and see with whom we were compatible. I saw Myles (as Satan), who looked almost exactly like me. Later we talked and discovered we were both exploring panthers, but he was free (and therefore much more at ease), while I was caged. Myles and I also gravitated towards each other at the end of the Chakra center exercise, finding an uneasy camaraderie as we walked. I tended to gravitate towards the actors playing Gloria, Monica, and Mary Magdalene, as well.

Tonight, we also worked through the Freud scene and I found one very fun discovery. Freud tends to bring out the best, playful side of Cunningham because she’s so attracted to his intellect. Before, I’ve been a little juvenile and general towards him. Woltz pointed out that Cunningham’s intellectual crush on Freud is exactly like my real life love for many news anchors. This direction tapped me into something more specific and playable immediately.

Friday, November 14, 2008:

Act Two (First Off Book Run)

Tonight was a struggle in many ways. Because it was the first time off book, we were straining to remember lines and as such, many of the scenes weren’t connected, and we lost dynamics and relationships that we had just recently clarified.

My notes from Judy: Find the humor. The show became almost unbearably dark tonight and we need to make an effort to find the light in this Act. I was having a particular problem with my pace tonight, as Judy pointed out. I need to slow down and convey information, pick up my overall energy and especially, cues—but I shouldn’t speed through my lines because it’s tending to “plane out”: flatten and fail to distinguish important bits of information. I think many of my problems tonight were due to an inadequate warm-up.

Battles noted that I was holding my breath a lot tonight. I rushed through speeches and locked my knees, which only further hindered my breath. I need to take more time with multi-syllabic words to convey them to the audience and enunciate and elongate exotic words (like “Sanhedrin”) and especially names. She gave one very helpful note that I want to incorporate: the more despair I feel, the *more* breath that generates, not less. I have been feeling rather paralyzed in these intense moments and the shock makes me hold my breath. I need to work on intense moments moving me to breathe and fight more, not less. I’m sure this problem is connected to feeling exposed and wanting to protect myself. I need to let go.

Monday, November 17, 2008:

Act Two Scene Work

We worked the Caiaphas scene with Fletcher, the understudy, and I started to break down more specifically what El-Fayoumy's points were in his examination, and how I answered them in my cross. For instance, he asserts that Judas approached Caiaphas to betray Jesus, which I don't refute. However, I make the point that Caiaphas betrayed Jesus to the same degree by turning him over to Pilate. Next, El-Fayoumy makes the point that Judas "crossed the line" as Caiaphas says, unlike other pious Jews. My answer is that Caiaphas didn't choose to "obey rather than betray" either. El-Fayoumy says that Caiaphas held his own line against Pilate and I make the point that he actually did worse than Judas by betraying a Jewish Rabbi to Pilate later. Finally, El-Fayoumy lays out the most prized virtues: honesty, loyalty and especially obedience. I prove that Caiaphas wasn't any of these things. First, I work to separate Caiaphas from the "common Jewish man", then I prove that they hated him; he was an elitist Roman in their eyes.

Wednesday, November 19, 2008:

Act Two Run Through

Tonight was the first full run. The pace was sluggish, we were taking too many pauses before we picked up our cues and it was definitely too long. We're going to start making cuts and I think that should help. The show was very dark tonight—we really need to find more humor throughout Act Two; right now Freud and Thomas are the only bright spots. I need to have more fun toying with Pilate and starting the Caiaphas scene.

Thursday, November 20, 2008:

Full Run for Designers

Judy noted that we must fill the space more; in intimate moments tonight we were becoming too soft and unfocused in our enunciation. We have also started to "graze" over the audience and look at the jury with no real purpose or connection. We need to connect to play a moment, and then break away to discover a new spot. I need to focus on the Caiaphas scene—where are the moments where I switch from little girl to Cunningham and when do I improvise? I need to physically set the blocking on "common Jewish man" section.

Friday, November 21, 2008:

Scene Work

In class with Judy and in rehearsal we worked the Mother Teresa and final Satan redirect. It was extremely helpful. We switched up focuses: mine is now on the jury and Mother Teresa's is on me and this redirection helped shift things into place. Now I'm showboating for the jury at the start while she's trying to figure me out and help me.

With Satan we started off more antagonistic and ready to fight and less passive and defensive, which automatically helped add urgency. We clarified the waves (where things crest and fall) and it became less agonizing and more of a fair fight. I was truly frightened of Satan tonight for the first time and I had much more dire needs.

Sunday, November 23, 2008:

Full Run

We're getting better at picking up our cues and not losing the color in our words, but the show was still too long, even with the initial cuts. I'm starting to feel better about the specific relationships I have to each character and I'm having more fun when I can, but the show still needs to tighten up.

I can tell that I still need to set the waves for some scenes (specifically, Pilate and Caiaphas). However, I've mostly been rehearsing those scenes with understudies since Fafoutakis and Rhoton have been performing their other show; tomorrow will be the first time both actors are free to rehearse only *Judas*.

Monday, November 24, 2008:

Technical Rehearsals

We didn't rehearse in the space tonight so our stage crew could continue creating the set for the show. We ran the show tonight and received notes. People were still tripping over lines a lot, and I was having trouble finding the rhythms in many of the scenes. Again tonight, the show was very dark and labored. I need to find more joy and positivism, but I really think all the people trying to remember lines and pausing before cues is what drags the mood on stage down and it's hard to bring it back up.

Tuesday, November 25, 2008:

Tonight was our first night in the space, so we did a stop and go with the crew. It was also the first time seeing most people in their costumes. It really helped me get a sense of how funny some of the characters are going to be, just thanks to the visual aid of their costumes and makeup. The show still ran long, and because we had to stop for tech, we didn't make it through the entire show.

The space itself presented new blocking problems, which was expected. We really need to play diagonals more than we have been in rehearsal. The witness chair in the center cuts the audience off from seeing a lot of the action sometimes. We also need to project much more in this space: before, we could bounce our sound off the walls, but here the open audience space eats up some voices much more than others.

We are about to have a two day break for Thanksgiving, which I hope will refresh everyone and move us to the next level, rather than set us back.

Friday, November 28, 2008:

Today was our first day back from Thanksgiving break. We met for an afternoon rehearsal and worked some trouble spots, then blocked some of the problematic scenes from earlier in the week. After that, we did an "Italian speed through" of the whole show, meaning we spoke all of the lines (with acting and blocking), but as fast as possible to get the energy up and

test our memories. It was fantastic. It became clear that people had made progress with their individual work and the show, instead of running two hours and forty-five minutes like before, ran one hour and twenty-two minutes Italian style. Obviously, we can't go that fast for real, but people vastly overestimate how much time they need to "act" their moments and I hope they realize how much quicker and tighter it should be.

At night we did a full run with no tech. Act One got pretty sluggish again, but Act Two really clipped along and was exciting. We still need to tighten the first two Writ scenes. I found a really nice image for those scenes today that I'd like to keep incorporating: the courtroom is like a pinball machine and as we enter the play for the first time, we are different pinballs bouncing off (of each other and the edges) in different ways with different energies. This is the movement quality I think is right to capture the absurdity of the opening introduction to these characters.

Battles mentioned that I had a lot of enjoyment and color in my speech to Pilate and I needed to find more moments earlier in the play to incorporate this enjoyment of my "lawyer" role.

Saturday, November 29, 2008:

We had another two-part rehearsal day. We worked some problem scenes, did a full speed through, and ran the whole show without tech at night.

I focused again today on incorporating the "manic" side of my bipolar personality to find more joy early on, and tried to have more fun playing with some of the early witnesses, specifically Mother Teresa. I've been trying to clarify my relationship to the Judge as well—how does it change over the course of the play? I really want him on my side and I feel connected to him, but I win and lose arguments with him equally. Sometimes, like in the Satan redirect, I expect the Judge to side with me and he doesn't.

I noticed tonight that I'm losing a lot of the discoveries in the moment as I try to keep the pace up. I'm anticipating my next line and not creating fresh relationships when I see characters for the first time. I need to take in the Judge, Bailiff, El-Fayoumy and each witness more and have fun figuring out how to deal with each of them.

Sunday, November 30, 2008:

Full Tech, Dress Rehearsal

I got a note from Battles saying that I'm really making the adjustment she gave me for Cunningham. I'm enjoying my job more (as in the Pilate scene) and it's helping make the character more sympathetic and softer. This is my tendency: to drive harshly towards things and bypass making the audience root for me. I need to keep this in mind and find those moments (like I did tonight) where I really identify with Judas and love him and feel the weight of when I destroy people, like Caiaphas.

Judy mentioned that the show felt very tired tonight and that we are now ready for the energy of an audience supporting us. We need to connect again to the overall impulse of why

we're driving the play forward and pay attention to the point in each line that sparks our need to respond; this will help us pick up cues organically. I found more love for Judas tonight and more freedom in the courtroom: Purgatory is terrible, this is the best day I've had since being dead, and I will win this fight. Woltz mentioned that tonight he saw the physical adjustments that I've been working on and they really helped establish the griminess of Cunningham better; however, I need to be aware of not jutting out my neck to make points while leading from the third eye Chakra because I was cutting off my breath tonight. Tomorrow, I need to incorporate some Alexander Technique into my physical warm-up to lengthen my spine and connect to my breath.

Monday, December 1, 2008:

Final Dress Rehearsal, First Audience

What a treat! We had a wonderful audience tonight: full of Theatre majors and faculty and they laughed and cried and gave us so much feedback. I had forgotten how funny the show was and the audience laughter really helped drive our energy on. I had more fun and a better payoff in serious moments than I've had in a while. Overall, everyone did excellent work: I tripped up on a few words, however, which was very unusual for me. I think I rushed my vocal warm-up to get into tattoo makeup, and when I returned to warm-up on stage, my adrenaline had taken over. I need to focus my vocal warm-up less on resonance, and really work my articulators. I have a lot of long, complex lines with polysyllabic words that can trip me up and I need to chew these more before I get nervous close to curtain time.

I was relieved that the show felt so solid and that the audience gave us such a great response. I'm worried that our next few audiences will not be nearly as sophisticated or energetic and that our energy will drop due to that. I've included some of the faculty emails I received following tonight's preview:

I know I didn't get a chance to see many of you after last night, but I just wanted to add my two cents, and say WOW!!! I'm very impressed with all of your work, and having had the honor to see the progression of this piece, I applaud your hard work. It paid off in spades!!!
Have a great run!!!!
Break a leg,
Joanna

Joanna Battles
Co-Head Undergraduate Performance
Assistant Professor Voice and Speech, Acting
LSU, Department of Theatre. (Battles)

It was such a great pleasure to watch your work in JUDAS. The production is very strong, and I think (in fact, I know) that you'll be receiving much well deserved applause. Thank you all for your hard work.
Michael

Michael S. Tick
Chair, LSU Department of Theatre
Artistic Director, Swine Palace
Louisiana State University. (Tick)

Tuesday, December 2, 2008:
Opening Night

Tonight's audience was different from the first but still quite responsive and focused. They weren't sure when the show started how much of a comedy it was, I think, so there was light laughter until they got comfortable. Later they didn't want to stop laughing for some of the serious moments, but overall they were quite excellent. I felt like my acting was much more grounded tonight; my articulation was clear, my physicality felt more aggressive and character-driven and I was building my arguments much more effectively. However, my breakdown seemed less connected and exciting than last night, although it still went well. I just didn't release as much as I did Monday. I discovered something very useful about the final breakdown moment, however. When I finally see Judas for the first time I not only realize that I've failed him but also that if I can see him I can see into Hell, which further supports the idea that I'm the other soul that Satan plans to take with him following the trial.

Wednesday, December 3, 2008:

The air conditioner didn't work tonight until halfway through Act Two, so even though I had the coolest costume, I was burning up on stage. The audience was very good, especially given these circumstances, but I felt at times like I was acting through a haze or underwater. However, Judy thought tonight was the best performance yet. I felt more grounded in my physicality and had a good balance of humor and pathos; however, I'm having some trouble releasing at the end. I'm still being truthful but it's not feeling as immediate or free as it has previously. Even though I understand the gravity of the moment and the stakes, it felt labored tonight. I talked with Woltz about it and he gave me a few ideas to try to make it more present tomorrow.

His suggestion (to raise my stakes) involved remembering this: if I can win this case, beyond everything obvious, it will mean that everyone (my parents, my teachers, exes) who has told me I'm wrong or trash or can't succeed will be wrong, and I'll be right—it will prove that I'm worthwhile and smart and justified in my hatred for God and hypocrisy and those who transfer their blame to scapegoats. Woltz reiterated that I'm the only one who isn't afraid of Satan, who stands up to him and drives towards what I need—that's the emotional payoff when Satan destroys me.

The other idea he brought up works for the "I'm not finished" moment. It's at this point that I can see the finish line in front of me; I'm so close and I've done what I need to do to change minds and I'm close to winning the case and proving myself. Then Satan cuts off my legs at the knee, and now I'm dragging myself on bloody stumps towards the line while he laughs at me. I don't want to give up and I need help. I need the Judge (I can't do it on my own); when he turns on me, and Satan forces me to reckon with the image of myself in the mirror, I can't take it

and I finally give up. I love this idea and want to work with it tomorrow. I also want to reach out more concretely to the Judge right before I give up.

Judy also mentioned something interesting about the last scene. He said that while I'm attacking Satan, this is when he (as the Judge) and El-Fayoumy start to recognize their humanity and their inability to save me from myself. They're watching me look at myself in the mirror and reckon with my demons and destroy myself, and it's terrifying to watch because it's what they've done to themselves as well.

Tonight's scene with Pilate was different. The audience usually seems to twist back and forth on the love/hate line with Pilate—he's fun but his blatant anti-Semitism really bothers them. Tonight, the racism didn't seem to faze them—I had a hard time getting them on my side and proving his guilt and that was hard for me as an actor.

Thursday, December 4, 2008:

Some moments aren't landing in performance and others are improving steadily. The Caiaphas scene was hard tonight—no impact on me emotionally, weird energy with the scene partner and slow. The Satan scene was fantastic, though. The disconnection I felt last night was gone tonight and I was emotionally overwhelmed by the new racing image Woltz gave me and new images that hit me during Act Two tonight. I started substituting people and it heightened things incredibly. I also used the Judge relationship more tonight—when I appealed to him during the breakdown I made tangible contact with his stand and used it for support. Physically connecting to the setting proved really helpful. It was a great last scene but I need to work on spontaneity in Act One.

Friday, December 5, 2008:

I met with John Dennis (former Head of the M.F.A. Acting Program at LSU) today to discuss Monday's performance and what I should work on. He said that the breakdown scene was wonderful and he really cared about Cunningham but that he didn't care enough before that. He felt like my performance was too planned and things on stage weren't surprising me. I need to do more crazy stuff and mess with myself to keep it fresh and not plan ahead. Right now, I'm in control of the scenes too much.

I might bring blow-pops on tonight or draw weird pictures on my legal pad, kick off my shoes or hitch up my skirt to surprise myself. I need to let go of being well behaved; I've been too afraid of stealing focus. I've got to crack myself open and surprise an audience into being intrigued enough to figure me out, not let them understand me immediately and then disengage. I'm concerned that I'll continue to play on autopilot but I'm going to try to shake things up more.

I got an email from Judy about Thursday's performance that helped me, so I'll include a portion:

Thursday night's show seemed to me to have some danger signals
... having to hold the house is always difficult for actors as we are

building to a particular moment, but that, as they say, is a good problem to have. ... We are getting a bit "comfortable" and losing the fundamental need that is driving the actions; the edge ... show was less dangerous, less alive. Lots more unnecessary pauses and indulging of moments ... and then when the play feels flat we tend to push to try to get it going when we would do better to breathe deeper and really find the driving desire that makes us talk and act. One of the most difficult things to do consistently as an actor is to feel the rhythm of a play and make adjustments with each new audience ... doing and saying for the first time. Let's make that our goal for tonight; find the edge; really live the lives of these people as if for the first time! (Judy "Judas mid run check in")

Saturday, December 6, 2008:

Two Performances (Butch Understudy Performing Matinee)

Today's matinee had the lightest attendance, probably because the date was accidentally left off of the poster. The audience was good, though, and I felt like we were relaxing into the show in the best sense of the word.

My parents came to the night show, so my energy was very high and I think it was a much more energized show, all around. I communicated many moments much more intensely than I had before, which was somewhat expected. Anything that touched on being a parent, like Henrietta's monologue or Satan's assertion that my father and mother didn't want or love me, hit home and hurt with my parents in the audience. The humiliating moment when Satan called me out on my life choices was much more unnerving with my mother watching in the seat nearby. I had been starting to relax the last few times in performance, but I felt intensely connected tonight. My parents really enjoyed the show; they thought it was the best show I'd been in during graduate school and the best work they had seen from me.

Sunday, December 7, 2008:

Two Performances, Closing Night

The matinee was good, but the night show was excellent—the best by far in my opinion. Our energy was crackling but not unfocused or nervous like earlier in the week. I felt grounded, purposeful and totally connected to the moment. I played with Caiaphas, unexpectedly touched and unnerved him, took off my heels and rubbed my feet during Mother Teresa's scene and generally had more fun when I could on stage. My parents were there again, which emotionally kicked me into gear, and since it was the last show I was already pretty emotional. I became overwhelmed during the last scene, but I don't think it was self-indulgent. I used the emotion and fought through it for my goal, which made the breakdown even harder on me. I love this show and I'm sad to finish it, but I do think that with such a limited run we infused every performance with energy and we grew every night. I'm happy that we ended much stronger than we began and grew in our love and understanding of the show as well. That often doesn't happen, but I feel very proud of this show and the work that went into it.

I've included a portion of Judy's written assessment of my work:

Leigh-Erin has always been the standard setter for her class in terms of effort and ability. She is an attractive and gifted young woman with solid physical and vocal skills and great facility. ... She is always prepared and ready to explore and demands nothing less than excellence from herself and others. Her scene-work in studio has been inventive and displayed freedom and softness we do not get to see often enough in her work on stage. The very gifts of a passionate driving energy which is often electric and that gets her cast in roles such as the ones she has this semester are also a trap in that they play into tendencies to rush and push with generalized intensity rather than fully experience the life of her characters. Her work in JUDAS fell into this trap at times, but there were also many moments that displayed increased range and variety as she relaxed into the role over the run. Her performance work on Sunday was significantly evolved from the preview performance. I regret there was not more time to explore her acting process during rehearsal, but Leigh-Erin is a classic case of being more fully prepared than those around her and thus left too often to take care of herself while directors and coaches deal with more immediate "problems." She always delivers an interesting and vital performance and JUDAS showed her talent and commitment in terrific ways. (Judy "fall 08")

Performance

She said that all we did was done in His sight so He must have seen her weep, into my hair, and slip my soul from between my ribs like a tiny hotel soap, He washed His hands of me as I washed my hands of Him. Is there a God in the house?
(Olds 25)

I was very nervous when the first audience arrived for our invited final dress performance. Although I had done my best to prepare, I wasn't sure how an audience would respond to the show's length (it was still two hours and thirty minutes long); whether the cast would continue to trip over their lines and slow things down even more; nor was I sure that the audience would appreciate both the irreverent humor and dark, dramatic moments. First performances are always surprising. The cast is used to the show and has forgotten how funny moments are, so the response from a first audience can be a great wake-up call. *Judas* was tricky, however, from this actor's standpoint. Guirgis is a smart playwright, who knows how to toy with familiar ideas of historic people and their views on weighty religious issues. He plays some very revered figures for laughs (such as Mother Teresa, whose difficult hearing lends itself to levity). Then he turns those humorous figures around and surprises the audience with dark revelations from the same character.

This show's journey was intriguing to chart night by night. At the beginning of each show, the audience was usually unsure as to the play's tone. As written, Guirgis starts *Judas* with a very sad monologue from Judas' mother, and he follows the mother's mournful tale immediately with a ridiculously comic introduction to the courtroom in Purgatory. Once the first courtroom scene was underway, however, the audience usually relaxed into the oscillating dark and light moments and invested in the story. Guirgis' playfulness is a great test of the actors. There were nights when the audience did not want to stop laughing, even when things were becoming dire on stage. It was difficult to get them to switch gears sometimes, and this emotionally impacted me as I fought to win my case. Abundant audience amusement is a luxury, however, and the fact that this play, epic in length and dark in subject matter, could win over the audience night after night, was truly a gift.

During rehearsal, the director decided to set the character of Judas on stage for the entire play. The idea that no one in the courtroom was able to "see" him (until Cunningham's breakdown) succeeded some nights and failed others. Because this show was played in the round, with the audience sitting on all four sides of the stage, a portion of the audience missed significant acting moments as the staging forced the actor to turn away from some of them. Consequently, my climactic breakdown moment of "seeing" Judas for the first time impacted only part of the audience each performance. There was no easy way to correct this issue, and I feel that my interpretation of Cunningham's descent into her own Hell did not play as well as I had hoped.

Beyond that, the interpretation of Satan as merely a reflection of Cunningham and the others was a choice that registered after the fact for the audience rather than in the moment. Guirgis does not have the character of Jesus reveal that Satan isn't real until after the trial ends,

trusting the audience to reflect and piece together his intent. Audiences I spoke with seemed to understand the concept, more or less, and Myles (Satan) and I worked hard to crystallize some key moments through staging and repetition to show the two characters as obvious reflections of each other.

Because the run of *Judas* was so short (only nine performances total) the show never had a chance to become stale. This was one of the few shows I've done that grew impressively in quality throughout the run and ended at what I consider its peak. For me, the last two nights were very exciting and fulfilling. With my parents in the audience for the weekend performances, many lines resonated for me in new ways; their presence tapped me into the moment and made me fight much harder for my victory.

Conclusion

Do not be afraid of the past. If people tell you it is irrevocable, do not believe them. The past, the present and the future are but one moment in the sight of God. ... The Imagination can transcend them and move in a free sphere of ideal existences. Things, also, are in their essence what we choose to make them.
(Wilde, *De Profundis* 117)

Assessing and reflecting on my theatrical work is a necessary step in growth. However, how much insight can an actor have regarding an ephemeral experience on stage? There is no just record of what is created in the momentary, live transfer between actor and audience. I will write that this production stuck with audiences and moved them more than I expected. As I mentioned at the start of this thesis, I worried that the show's length and its dark and irreverent subject matter would turn off the younger portion of our audiences, but I was, quite simply, wrong. The feedback I got from young and older audience members, religious or otherwise, was positive and passionate across the board. Everyone seemed to connect to the struggles within the show and all remarked on how strong the performances were from the entire cast.

With the role of Cunningham, I set out to create a character that would incorporate many of the techniques I had learned during my graduate career. I wanted to use Chakras and Laban's physical work, Fitzmaurice's vocal technique, Judy's Ten Essential Steps, and my research to aid my character decisions. I hoped to portray Cunningham in a way that was unique to me, and in a manner that honored Guirgis' dramatic intent. I sought to align Cunningham and Satan and show an individual's tragic downfall. These were lofty aims, but they proved very motivating to me throughout the rehearsal process. In the end, playing out Cunningham's circumstances in the moment on stage, some work was unconsciously highlighted and some faded into the background. I am humble enough to know that I did not succeed in every area, but confident enough to assert that the work that I put into Cunningham, from the first reading to the final performance, viscerally resonated in me as I acted each night and strengthened my performance.

I feel very gratified to have chosen this show as my thesis project. It has been intellectually fulfilling to delve into this research, and challenging to explore these relationships and circumstances. I am fortunate to have been part of a very committed, talented and lively cast. Everyone cared and worked hard to put the best product forward for the audience. Of course, with time away, I start to gain perspective and question acting choices I never thought to try, and relationships I could have explored further. However, I am proud of this show and my work within it, and genuinely enlivened by the chance to fully apply and document the techniques I used in creating this role.

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Appendix A: Published Articles

Tiger Weekly

Hatcher Hall hosts a tragic comedy that won't betray you

By Jason Andreasen

So you allegedly betrayed Christ? That doesn't mean your legal rights are stripped from you, does it?

Apparently not in downtown purgatory. At least that's the way Stephen Adly Guirgis saw it when he wrote 2005's, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. Having been performed off-Broadway and at London's Almeida Theatre, the controversial comedy/drama finally made its debut at LSU's Hatcher Hall on Tuesday, December 2 and will run through Sunday, December 7.

Although the play is set in an unfamiliar location, its themes are undeniably universal. Just over two hours long, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* is a courtroom drama unlike any other you've likely been exposed to. It centers around an appeal hearing with more than just evidentiary concerns and habeas corpus at issue. Instead, the players involved here are at odds over the release of Christ's most notorious disciple, Judas, from the depths of Hell. And while one might understandably postulate this to be a dry, tedious study of Christian text, co-director and star of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, Scott Woltz, assures that such thought is blasphemy.

"You don't have to have a religious background or a strong religious knowledge to understand what's going on. You really don't even need to know who Judas is because it's all explained," said Woltz. "There might be jokes here and there that might be caught on by the people who have a better understanding of religion, but it really is a show that everybody can come see and understand."

The play's accessibility has a great deal to do with the language and speech patterns employed by Guirgis' writing. Guirgis, a native New Yorker, applies the attitudes of modern-day New York to the setting of the play by using verbiage that one might easily hear in the Bronx or on the Upper East Side.

"The language is very contemporary, very urban. You can follow it, you can understand it," explained Woltz. "It's very humorous. We definitely updated it so it doesn't have a classical feel to it."

Another aspect of the play that adds to its accessibility is the wide ranging cast of characters it calls on. During the trial, testimony is heard from both fictitious and recognizable characters, Biblical figures and secular icons. In fact, everyone from the powerhouses of Jesus Christ and Satan are called to the stand.

"We go through fictional and non-fictional information about Judas. We hear testimony from different saints, Pontius Pilot, Sigmund Freud and Mother Teresa," explained Woltz.

As Woltz continued, he repeatedly returned to the idea of ideals and spiritual quandaries. As is the case with anything spiritual or religious in nature, the play deals more with questions than it

does answers. *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* presents a number of questions within its relatively short running time and whether or not it answers any of them might be up to the interpretation of the audience.

“It goes along with the question of, ‘If God is all powerful, then why is he not all-forgiving as well?’ It talks about love, forgiveness, faith and truth,” said Woltz in the midst of a virtual laundry list of questions raised by the play. “Is Judas responsible for his own despair or was there some reason why Judas did it beyond the fact that he was just the betrayer that everyone knows him as? It touches on the idea of who Judas was and can that change who we think he is; and in turn, who we believe we are.”

Perhaps Woltz comes off as a bit overly sympathetic to Judas. That would be understandable given that, in addition to co-directing, he plays the title role.

“Judas is not the lead character, though. He is on stage the entire time, but he’s in a catatonic state. There are times where he comes out of it, but it’s really about the courtroom scene, the two lawyers, the judge and the testimonies you get to hear,” said Woltz.

While ideas such as a sympathetic Judas, the play could easily upset some religious stalwarts. However, the combination of levity and intensity lends itself to self-reflection for all.

The show will run through Sunday, December 7, so there are a number of opportunities for you to catch *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. However, as Woltz warned, theatre students are required to see the play which means long lines and some might be turned away. Woltz advises anyone looking to get a good seat with their \$6 ticket (only available at the door) to get there early. There will be matinee performances in addition to the evening shows on Saturday and Sunday.

Originally Published: Issue 714 - December 3, 2008.

The Advocate

‘Judas’ focuses on forgiveness, faith

By Robin Miller

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot

WHAT: An MFA production by the LSU Department of Theatre.

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday, Dec. 2-7. There also will be 2 p.m. matinee performances Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 6-7.

WHERE: Hatcher Hall Theatre, LSU

ADMISSION: Tickets are \$6 and are available at the door.

INFORMATION: Call (225) 578-4174 or visit <http://www.theatre.lsu.edu>.



PHOTO BY ANDREW V. STABLER

From left, Leigh-Erin Balmer as Fabiana Aziza Cunningham, Kenneth De Abrew as Yusef El-Fayoumy, and Yohance Myles as Satan, share a scene in *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*.

Scott Woltz hasn't given it much thought until now.

Until someone poses the question. And it was only fate that someone would.

Judas? At Christmas?

"Gosh," he said.

"You know, it really didn't occur to me."

And it's understandable. Woltz is juggling the jobs of director and lead character in the LSU Department of Theatre's production of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*.

The play is an MFA production, featuring the theater department's master of fine arts students in all the roles except one, which will be played by an undergraduate.

The play opens Tuesday, Dec. 2, in Hatcher Hall Theatre on the LSU campus. It will continue to Dec. 7.

"And people should get there early," Woltz said.

He's not being overconfident in making this statement. It's just that productions at LSU Hatcher Hall have been selling out early during the fall season with lines forming at the box office at least an hour before the play begins.

And this is the last play in the theater department's fall line-up.

"So, it might be good to get there early," Woltz said.

And once inside, audiences will play witness to the darkly comic, imagined world between Heaven and Hell. The story was written by Stephen Adly Guirgis. It premiered March 2, 2005, off Broadway in The Public Theatre.

Oscar winner Philip Seymour Hoffman was the director, Sam Rockwell played Judas Iscariot and Eric Bogosian played Satan.

That's only naming a few of the personalities that show up in this play.

"Jesus makes an appearance toward the end," Woltz said. "And there are the characters from the Bible like St. Peter, St. Thomas and Mary Magdalene. And there are even some iconic characters like Mother Teresa."

All of which combines for an interesting story. But again, this is the holiday season, where Christmas takes precedence, the celebration of Christ's birth.

And Judas? He usually doesn't come into the picture until Easter. Then again, Christians seek forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ, don't they? And since this is a play that examines forgiveness and faith, maybe an exploration of Judas, his life and his sin of betrayal might be a good subject for Christmas.

"It's about faith versus truth and betrayal versus forgiveness," Woltz said. "It's about seeking forgiveness and redemption and seeking love and not being able to find it. And it makes us ask, if God is all-powerful, shouldn't he also be all-forgiving? "

The Last Days of Judas Iscariot tells the story of Judas while in Purgatory. A courtroom is the setting for this play, where Judas' lawyers launch an appeal to clear the name of their client, Christ's most notorious disciple.

For it was Judas who ratted out Christ to the Romans for 30 pieces of silver. Does the terminology here seem a little too modern? Well, that's how Judas' betrayal would be seen these days, especially in the modern trial to take place in Hatcher Hall.

The story plays out in contemporary language through a cast of flamboyant, street-savvy characters. Sigmund Freud and Satan among them.

And in the end, the story takes the audience to the heart of its own questions about spirit, love and despair.

Woltz and his cast have been rehearsing four hours a day, six days a week for six weeks. The play originally was scheduled as part of the theater department's Studio Series until Hurricane Gustav altered the Main Stage schedule.

Suddenly, *A Cry of Players* had to be pushed back on the schedule and couldn't be fully staged. So, more attention was focused on *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*.

"It's definitely Main Stage quality," Woltz said.

The play not only will be fully staged but will have technical effects, as well.

George Judy chose the piece, and was originally set to direct it. Judy is director of the theater department's master of fine arts program.

"He's playing the judge in the play," Woltz said. "And I was set to play Judas, but then George asked if I'd be interested in directing. I'm in my third year in this program, and I wanted to direct a play before I graduated."

But directing and acting, well, that's different.

"It's really different," Woltz said. "It's something I've never done before, and it's hard, because I have to go back and forth from character to director, from director to character. George steps in and helps when I have to be on stage."

Still, playing Judas does have its advantages.

"He's not exactly the main character in that he doesn't have many lines," Woltz said. "But I did focus in on his psyche and his end suffering. Every character in this play has some bit of suffering."

Now that doesn't mean the play is heavy with guilt and grief. As billed in the beginning, it's a dark comedy, filled with funny, light moments.

“It makes us look at Judas in a very human way, no matter what religion you are,” Woltz said.

Which is very much within the realm of Christmas spirit.

The cast includes: Satan, Yohance Myles; Gloria, Lauren Stotts; Mother Theresa, Jessica Wu; Judge Littlefield, George Judy; Caiaphas and St. Matthew, Andrew Fafoutakis; Loretta, Mary Magdalene, and Sister Glenna, Sarah Smith; Bailiff and Simon the Zealot, Josh Dawes; Sigmund Freud and St. Thomas, Alex Galick; Pontius Pilate, St. Peter, and Uncle Pino, Nick Rhoton; Matthias of Galilee, Natalie Mejer; Jesus of Nazareth, Reuben Mitchell; Judas Iscariot, Scott Woltz; St. Monica, Michelle Guidry; Henrietta Iscariot, Josephine Hall; Butch Honeywell, Scott Siepker; Fabiana Aziza Cunningham, Leigh-Erin Balmer; Yusef El-Fayoumy, Kenneth De Abrew; understudies, Steven Bailey, Butch Honeywell; and John Fletcher, St. Matthew, Caiaphas.

The crew includes: director, Scott Woltz; scenic designer, Katie Headley; lighting designer, Ken White; costume designer, Sarah Bacot; sound designer, Eun Jin Cho; vocal and text coach, Joanna Battles; dramaturg, John Fletcher; acting coach/directing mentor, George Judy; videographer, Nick Erickson; and stage manager, Nichole Ingalsbe.

The New York Times

Judas Gets His Day in Court, but Satan Is on the Witness List



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Sam Rockwell, left, as the title character and Eric Bogosian as Satan in "The Last Days of Judas Iscariot," written by Stephen Adly Guirgis.

By BEN BRANTLEY

Published: March 3, 2005

The players are at first glimpse as familiar as the faded figures in a Perry Mason rerun: the old crank in judge's robes; the passion-flushed defense lawyer; the oily, overeager prosecutor. But it takes only a few minutes for "The Last Days of Judas Iscariot," the new play by Stephen Adly Guirgis, to reveal that its true setting is not the courtroom but the classroom. Make that a

classroom in a progressive parochial school where the subject may be religion but questions are encouraged.

Thank heaven - a subject much discussed in this debate of a drama about the Bible's most famous betrayal - that at least the person in charge is the class cutup instead of some pruny old martinet. And that he is popular enough to recruit some really cool friends (including Eric Bogosian, Sam Rockwell and the show's director, Philip Seymour Hoffman) to help him make his points.

This latest work from the author of "Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train" and "Our Lady of 121st Street" does indeed bring to mind an unusually lively senior class project. "The Last Days of Judas Iscariot," which opened last night at the Public Theater in a production from the Labyrinth Theater Company, shares many of the traits that have made Mr. Guirgis a playwright to reckon with in recent years: a fierce and questing mind that refuses to settle for glib answers, a gift for identifying with life's losers and an unforced eloquence that finds the poetry in lowdown street talk.

What the show lacks, which Mr. Guirgis could be relied upon to deliver in the past, are characters that pulse with personalities all their own. The colorful vernacular speech, studded with obscenities and brand names, and flashy performances, steeped in Frank Capraesque whimsy, can't disguise the impression that the play is a heavily footnoted position paper on a big, big subject.

Set in a courtroom in a corner of purgatory called Hope, "Judas Iscariot" considers nothing less than the conflict between divine mercy and human free will. If God is all-forgiving, the play asks, then why is Judas condemned to an eternity in hell? That's the question that rankles in the breast of Fabiana Aziza Cunningham (Callie Thorne), an agnostic defense lawyer who obtains a writ from the God she doesn't believe in to force a retrial for Judas.

To present Cunningham's case, Mr. Guirgis sets up his own cosmic judicial system, suitable for a contemporary purgatory where, as one character notes, contemplation has been replaced by litigation. Presided over by a bilious judge (Jeffrey De Munn), who hanged himself during the Civil War, the rules of procedure are pretty ramshackle. But they do allow Cunningham and her prosecutorial adversary, a young sycophant named Yusef El-Fayoumy (Yul Vázquez), to bring on a parade of historical witnesses.

These range from the mother of Judas (Deborah Rush) to Mother Teresa (Liza Colón-Zayas), from Pontius Pilate (Stephen McKinley Henderson) to Sigmund Freud (Adrian Martinez). There are also some floating "I remember Judas" monologues, delivered by coevals like Mary Magdalene (Yetta Gottesman) and St. Peter (Craig "Mums" Grant).

Judas himself (portrayed by the talented Mr. Rockwell, of the film "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind") is mostly seen in a coma of despair, but he occasionally comes to life in flashbacks that reveal his conflicted nature. Jesus of Nazareth (played by John Ortiz, a vibrant star of the Labyrinth company) makes an intense cameo appearance.

Mr. Guirgis is a zealous and empathetic researcher, and he presents dilemmas of ancient Galilee in terms winningly accessible to the 21st century. He also has a genial feeling for anachronism and absurdity. (“This is purgatory, Caiaphas,” the defense lawyer says. “I got all day.”) And a stirring sense of Christian existential pain, which wonders at the paradoxes of faith, surfaces in several ardently acted scenes.

Mr. Guirgis, however, has overfilled his slate with historical references and characters, all ultimately making the same point. Though Mr. Hoffman and his cast keep things moving at a trot, the play feels every bit as long as it is (two hours and 40 minutes), and I noted that two people seated near me had fallen asleep in the second act.

“The Last Days of Judas Iscariot” does present a diverting cram course for those who want to catch up on or be reminded of some troubling aspects of Christian theology. Less philosophically minded theatergoers are most likely to come fully awake when Mr. Bogosian’s Satan takes the stand (twice), wearing a shiny black Gucci suit and a languorous hangover.

Fans of Mr. Bogosian, a playwright and performance artist (“Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll,” “Talk Radio”), know that few actors are better suited to embody the jaded, testy king of hell. Mr. Bogosian does not disappoint, exuding an acrid, morning-after perfume of disdain and burned-out hedonism. In purgatory as it is on earth, it’s the devil who steals the show.

‘The Last Days of Judas Iscariot’

By Stephen Adly Guirgis; directed by Philip Seymour Hoffman; sets by Andromache Chalfant; costumes by Mimi O’Donnell; lighting by Japhy Weideman; sound by Darron L. West; fight direction, Rick Sordelet; production stage manager, Monica Moore. Presented by the Labyrinth Theater Company, Mr. Hoffman and John Ortiz, artistic directors; and the Public Theater, George C. Wolfe, producer; Mara Manus, executive director. At the Public Theater, Martinson Hall, 425 Lafayette Street, at Astor Place, East Village; (212) 239-6200. Through April 3. Running time: 2 hours, 40 minutes.

WITH: Eric Bogosian (Satan), Liza Colón-Zayas (Gloria/Mother Teresa/Ensemble), Jeffrey De Munn (Judge/Caiaphas the Elder/St. Matthew), Stephen McKinley Henderson (Pontius Pilate/Uncle Pino), John Ortiz (Jesus of Nazareth) and Sam Rockwell (Judas Iscariot).

Appendix B: Production Photos



Above: Cunningham and Freud (Photo by Nick Erickson)



Above: Cunningham with Judge Littlefield, Satan, and Judas (Photo by Nick Erickson)

Vita

Leigh-Erin Balmer was born in Kansas City and grew up in Spring Hill, Kansas. Upon graduation from Blue Valley High School, she received the Presidential Arts Scholarship in Acting from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She was selected for membership in Phi Beta Kappa during her senior year at The George Washington University. That same year, she was awarded the Theater Department's Kevin Peter Hall Memorial Award as the Outstanding Senior Actor. She graduated *magna cum laude* from The George Washington University and was awarded a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Dramatic Literature and Theatre. After touring the country with the National Players Tour 56 out of Olney Theatre in Maryland and working professionally with various theatres, she began studying for her Master of Fine Arts Degree in Louisiana State University's Professional Actor's Program. After graduation, she plans to resume her career as a professional actor.