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The role of Matamore in Tony Kushner's adaptation of *The Illusion*: a production thesis in acting

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THE ROLE OF MATAMORE IN
TONY KUSHNER'S ADAPTATION OF *THE ILLUSION*:
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
Shawn Halliday
B.A. Louisiana State University, 1999
May 2005

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my beautiful wife Karli Henderson and our adorable daughter, Greyson Elizabeth Halliday. Karli, you are my best friend, my lover, my muse, and make me a better person every day I'm with you. Greyson, you are the best opening night gift your mother ever gave me. Now I have two muses. Thank you both.

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Abstract

The role of Matamore in Tony Kushner's adaptation of Pierre Corneille's *The Illusion* was selected as a thesis project in the fall semester of 2004. This thesis is a written record of the actor's work on the character throughout the rehearsal process and performance in the form of an Actor's Score. It also includes an Introduction, Chapters on the Audition Process and First Reading, Character Analysis, a Production Photo and a Conclusion.

Introduction

In this thesis I will attempt to explain how I created and developed my performance for the character of Matamore in Louisiana State University's production of *The Illusion*. I found this to be difficult at times due to the fact that my training for the past two and a half years has been geared towards how to create and perform believable characters for the stage, not how to write about the process. This in mind, I will use several methods to try to walk the reader through my creative process. This thesis includes two chapters on the Audition Process and the First Reading, a Character Analysis, a Production Photo, and an Actor's Score of the text.

A score is the actor's map or guide as to how the role is performed. It is constantly changing and evolving throughout the rehearsal process and is presented here in it's final form. Listed at the beginning of each scene are the character's goal (Objective), what impedes the achievement of this goal (Obstacle), and the main method in which the character will overcome the obstacle (Essential Action). The score consists of four columns: Text, Tactics, Obstacles, and Focus/Images. The Text contains the dialogue between the characters in the scenes, including stage directions. Tactics are the various actions that the character will employ throughout the scene to achieve his objective. Obstacles are the stumbling blocks that arise in each scene preventing a tactic from working thus forcing the choice of a new tactic. Focus pinpoints a character's center of attention at any given moment throughout the scene. Obstacles and Focuses may be physical, emotional, external, internal, and real or imagined. Images are mental pictures that act as a stimulus to the actor's senses. All references to the text are found in

the 1994 edition of *The Illusion* by Peter Corneille; translated and freely adapted by Tony Kushner.

The production of *The Illusion* discussed in this thesis opened on November 19, 2004 and closed on December 5, 2004. It was produced by Louisiana State University's Department of Theatre and performed in the Reilly Theatre. Steve Young directed the production. The cast was as follows: Pridamant of Avignon, Brace Harris; The Amanuensis, Eric J. Little; Alcandre, Tara MacMullen; Calisto/Clindor/Theogenes, Preston Davis; Melibea/Isabelle/Hippolyta, Michelle McCoy; Elicia/Lyse/Clarina, Sarah Jane Johnson; Pleribo/Adraste/Prince Florilame, Chaney Tullos; Matamore, Shawn Halliday. The set design was a collaboration between Brian Scott and Jim Murphy. The lighting was designed by Heather Gilbert. Lewis Rhodes designed the sound. Costumes were designed by Polly Boersig. Melissa Miller was the Stage Manager and Elena Hansen was the Assistant Stage Manager.

Audition Process

The auditions for this production differed in several ways from most I've experienced. Usually the actor would be asked to prepare a two-minute monologue to present at the initial audition. The director would then choose different actors to read for specific roles from the script of the play being performed. After trying different combinations of actors in various roles, the director would then make the choice of which actor would play each of the roles and the play would be cast. The auditions for this production were somewhat new to me.

All seven of my classmates and myself knew we would definitely be cast. *The Illusion* had been chosen for our showcase so we were each guaranteed a role; we didn't know which role. Next, we did not have to prepare a monologue for the audition because we were jumping straight to the second stage of the audition, readings from the script. We also, had been told to pick what roles we wanted to play and prepare to read for them.

After reading the script, I had narrowed my choices down to the roles of Alcandre, a magician and Matamore, a lunatic. Being the oldest in my class, I knew there was a good chance that I would be cast as one of the "old men." The other character that fits this description besides Alcandre is Pridamant of Avignon, a lawyer and a father in search of his son. Although he is a major character in the play I had already played the "father" part in two previous productions. If I was going to have to play another "old guy," Alcandre seemed like a more interesting choice. I saw him as a cross between Merlin and John Cleese. However, the role I really wanted was Matamore.

Before I even finished reading *The Illusion* for the first time I knew that Matamore was the role I wanted to play. On the page, Matamore is the funniest character

in the play and I have a simple philosophy about roles: “If you can’t play the lead, be the guy who makes the audience laugh the most in the least amount of stage time.”

However, the comedic nature of Matamore was not the only thing that interested me in the character. He also has a well-defined arc. A character’s arc is the journey that he or she takes during the course of the play. In a well-defined arc, the character starts out one way at the beginning of the play, something occurs in the middle, and by the end he changes. Matamore’s journey consists of several things that I will discuss in further detail later in this thesis, but what initially drew me to the character was his transformation during the course of the play from a comedic character to a tragic figure. This reminded me of something that one of my first acting teachers, Jerry Lee Leighton, told me about acting, “Make’em laugh, make’em cry, make’em want to go to bed with you.” Matamore has two out of the three and I could work on the third. First I had to get the part.

In order to prepare for the audition I reread the play and looked over the scenes that included Matamore several times. I was familiar with most of the scenes that I would use for the audition; I wanted to know the scene but not develop a plan or set way to approach the scene. I have learned through my training and experiences that planning ahead too much in theatre, whether it’s for an audition or rehearsal, is not a good idea. I tried to develop a brief analysis of the character using the text of the script. This allowed me to make informed choices, in the moment, during the audition itself.

From the script I knew that Matamore is an egotistical braggart who is always talking about his military conquests and the women who adore him. Isabelle, the object of his latest conquest, is amused by him but is in love with his servant. Matamore is all

bark and no bite. His personality is as huge as the stories he tells. No one but he believes them. Matamore's commitment to these ridiculous boasts is what makes him a comic and eventually, a tragic character, instead of just being a blustering buffoon. There is always more to learn about a character, but I felt that this was a good start for the audition.

The auditions were set for October 3rd at 5:00 p.m. in room 168 of the M&DA Building. I arrived an hour early to warm up physically and vocally and to look over the sides, one more time. We met the director, Steve Young, and he threw us another curve. Instead of having a list of which actors would read with whom, we were told to work it out for ourselves. I read the first scene with Michelle McCoy as Isabelle and Preston Davis as Clindor. My tendency when I'm auditioning for a comedy is to hit it hard and fast. That is what I did. Steve laughed, which is usually a good sign but I left the room thinking that I had rushed a little and had not done my best work. I read for Alcandre once and that also went well but the audition was coming to a close and I had only read for Matamore once. It seemed that unless the director asked to see me again, my audition was finished. I hadn't tanked it but I knew that if I was able to read again I could do better. As luck would have it, I got that chance.

Two of my classmates, Brace Harris and Sarah Jane Johnson, needed someone to read the part of Matamore at the beginning of a scene they wanted to do. I jumped at the chance. It was a different scene than the one that I had previously read but I was still familiar with it. I tried to find something new to bring into the room this time. With my first reading, I felt I had fulfilled the basic requirements for the character but I needed more. I took a few minutes to look over the new side and tried to find what my acting

teacher, John Dennis, calls a “key” or a “way in.” This is a detail or behavior that can launch the actor to make new choices about a character or scene. I found one.

Towards the end of the scene, Matamore describes himself as a “tuskéd boar.” I had read this phrase several times, but this was the first time that the accent above the “e” in tuskéd stood out. This meant the word would be pronounced with two syllables (tusk-ed) instead of one. Seeing this, I wondered what would happen if I gave every word that ended in an “ed” an extra syllable. I looked back over the scene and saw that there were several words that would work with this adjustment. Although, elongating certain words might be humorous, I tried to think of another reason a character would have this syllable shift. I remembered that one of the French knights in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* had a unique speech pattern and that gave me the idea of using an accent. Steve did not ask for any accents, but the play is a French comedy set in Paris so I thought I’d give it a try. I don’t really have a good French accent, but that was taken care of by my next choice. While reading the play over the summer, I had noticed that all of the characters were derived from stock Commedia dell’Arte characters. Matamore was a version of an Il Capitano. I knew from research that I had done before the audition that Il Capitano was never from the region where the story takes place. Also he is usually of Spanish or Italian decent. Lastly, I chose to go with Spanish because Matamore sounds like “matador” and I liked the mental image this word created for me. All of this took place in the few minutes we had before we were to read and now it was time to see if the idea would work.

We walked into the room and Brace and I began the first part of the scene. I didn’t rush the scene this time, but instead tried to physically interact with Brace more

than I had with Preston. I knew after the first line that Steve liked the accent and by the time I got to the first elongated word (temper-ed) I had a feeling that he liked the choice. We went outside and some of my classmates that were listening at the door said they liked it too. I was happy with the work I had done and thought that this was a good ending to a decent audition but Steve had one more thing planned for us.

Steve called us all into the room and thanked all of us for our well-prepared readings. He said he was very happy with what he had seen and just wanted to see a little more physicality. He asked each of us to improvise with a chair for about thirty seconds as an animal of our choice. A few of my classmates presented some very funny dogs, monkeys, and squirrels. When it got to be my turn, I chose to try something different. I knew from his laughter during the reading that Steve was aware that I was able to perform comedy. I wanted to use this opportunity to give him a different look and encourage him to see me as Alcandre or Matamore. I needed an animal with a trait that both characters shared.

I had recently gone to the zoo to watch animals in preparation for my roles in a production of *Macbeth* and some of those images were still fresh in my mind. I chose a tiger because I thought that Alcandre and Matamore both need to possess a certain power in their presence/appearance onstage. I also thought that the images of strength and power I had taken away from the tiger at the zoo would be a good contrast to the comedic aspects that I had shown Steve in my Matamore audition. It went well and after we finished, Steve thanked us again and said that we would know our casting by the next morning. One hour later the stage manager, Melissa Miller, called me at home and told me that I would be playing the role of Matamore.

First Reading

Before we began the first read-through, Steve talked about the play as being simplistic on the surface but he was very interested in exploring the deeper meaning in the piece. The differences in illusion and reality, the folly of love and for Matamore, his lunacy as a result of clinging to the illusion (specifically of theatre) and his inability or refusal to deal with reality.

The first read was fun. Steve had a lot of specific ideas about the piece but still seemed open to our input. During the call back Matamore started to acquire the hint of a Spanish accent. Initially this was an impulse in auditions but after further research it was obvious to me that Pierre Corneille's character of Matamore was derived in some way or closely related to Matamoros a version of an Il Capitano from Commedia dell'Arte. Commedia dell'Arte is a form of comedy developed in the 16th century in Italy consisting of improvised text with stock characters and scenarios. Il Capitano is one of these stock characters and comes with his own set of standard attributes. One of these is that he is never indigenous to the location where the story takes place. And due to the fact that he is usually of Spanish or Italian decent my choice to play around with a Spanish accent in a comedy set in France seems like a direction to keep exploring.

My character is funny as written so the challenge was fleshing out the specifics and mapping the emotional and mental decline of the character. Steve wanted to reveal Alcandre's "illusions" as scenes performed by actors in a troop so I had to explore and hopefully establish the layering of Matamore and the actor who plays him. This was most difficult in the "attic scene" at the beginning of Act Two when I had to negotiate the downward spiral and tug of war between Illusion (Matamore) and Reality (the actor who

plays Matamore). This was a challenge considering the role, our double duty schedule with *Macbeth*, and my own personal life (my wife and I were expecting the birth of our first child sometime during the rehearsal process), but it was quite possibly the funniest and most emotionally real character I've ever played.

Here are some additional notes I took from the meeting:

1. Love is folly.
2. Matamore is a lunatic.
3. Love exists not as love but as air-not tangible.
4. Final scenes are the actions of a deluded man.
5. Complexities of Desires vs. Reality.
6. Theater is beautiful and reality is drab and harsh.
7. As the play progresses the scenes get more cynical, violent, and real.
8. Scene settings:

(Steve broke the play in to three acts instead of two.)

Act I-1600's

Act II-Napoleonic

Act III-Contemporary (Early 1900's plus)

9. Matamore chooses the "illusion" because reality is too harsh. He never changes costumes.

Character Analysis

What Matamore Says about Himself

“ I crushed the hearts of the pashas of Ranjapoor and battered down the cypress gates of Sinabar...”

“I cracked chariot and shield of a hundred hundred knights.”

“ My visage frights the moguls and the viziers: a fearsome face, and awful, horrible, ghastly face, a face that has sunk a thousand ships, and made six hundred oxen run bellowing into the sea.”

“ My mask of mars clapped on my face I’m fiercer than the tuskéd boar...”

“ It’s natural to flee me; I am so great at times I want to flee myself...”

“ For Matamore’s gaping ears even the stumps of trees divulge such secrets as tree stumps possess. “

“...gross Leviathan...”

“ I never killed a man.”

“ I’m lost and mapless, a wanderer through the world...”

What the Playwright Says about Matamore

A lunatic

What Others Say about Matamore

Clindor:

“ Titan whose countenance is the worlds great terror, you’ve scaled the loftiest pinnacles of glory, and still you dream of conquest.”

“...you have land and gold enough.”

“...your protean brow.”

“You are invincible, I see, in battles of the heart as of the sword, and not even the proudest woman could resist you. Aphrodite herself would collapse at your feet.”

“...temperate and wise...”

“...scourge of heaven.”

“My master, sir, is harmless...”

“Thunder more softly, ...dread Goliath.”

Isabelle:

“When Matamore approaches, everyone retreats...”

“...colossal Matamore...”

Adraste:

“...his madness...”

“...monster of ego run amok...”

“...a pest, but he makes me laugh.”

Lyse:

“Matamore amuses her (Isabelle).”

“...King of Undoing.”

“...poltroon.”

“...madness...”

“...lunatic...”

“You were so frightened by the murder of Adraste you’ve spent four days in the attic?”

“My patron saint; you catechize me: to withdraw my poor heart from the lion’s den, to leave the blood sport of love to my betters.”

Similarities between Matamore and Myself

External:

Larger build

Big presence

Booming voice

Balding

Internal:

Big heart

A loner

Secretly worried about what others think or say

Guards true feelings

Unquenchable Ambition

Pacifist

Romanticizes life

Differences between Matamore and Myself

External:

Matamore

Me

Ugly

Moderately Attractive

Richly dressed

Dresses Casually

Egotistical

Humble

Internal:

Matamore

Me

Humble

Cocky

Lost love

Found love

Backs down in conflict

Stubborn till the end

Weak

Strong

Costume

About a week into rehearsal I asked Steve what ideas he and Polly Boersig, the costume designer, had for Matamore's costume. He said they were talking about a Turkish influence based on Matamore's boasts of his adventures in Ranjapoor and Sinabar. They discussed dressing Matamore in Turkish robes, a turban, and pointy "genie" shoes. My heart skipped a beat and I tried not to show my disappointment. This could not have been further from how I envisioned the character. Usually I try to wear whatever I'm given and smile, even if I hate it. However in this instance, I had very strong feelings about why this costume choice was not right for the character.

Steve was basing his decision on the fact that Matamore was supposed to have fought many wars and killed many knights in the Middle East. However, when studying the script, I had made the choice that although Matamore believes his boasts wholeheartedly, they are in fact just empty lies. This choice is supported in the fact that later in the script Matamore admits to Lyse that he has "never killed a man." This could mean he was in Ranjapoor and Sinabar and didn't fight but I thought that making the whole story false was a stronger and more interesting choice than making it half-true. Therefore, I felt placing him in clothes indigenous to the Middle East, a place that he had never been, would only be confusing. I had fears that the American association of turbans with terrorism and 9-11, however ignorant, would be a hindrance. I also felt that the pointy shoes would make the character too ridiculous. Steve said that although the dress of the

other characters in the play would progress with his timeline, Matamore would stay the same. Therefore I felt his costume should comment more on the character and less on where he's been.

In the play Matamore represents the embodiment of illusion (fantasy/theatre) as a foil to the idea of reality found in the character of Pridamant (real life). He also represents a romanticized view of love. With this in mind, I kept seeing Matamore dressed as a knight errant questing for love and conquest, a la Don Quixote. Like Quixote, Matamore escapes his harsh reality by throwing himself in the romanticized world of the knights of the middle ages. He finds solace in their world of chivalry, honor, and damsels in distress. This in mind, I approached Steve with some questions.

I asked Steve if I could have a helmet and boots. He brought up the turban and pointy shoes and I took the opportunity to discuss some of my ideas and feelings on the matter of Matamore's costume. I told him that I thought boots would lend themselves more to the walk of a soldier and that I loved the idea of Matamore having a rudely fashioned knight's helm and possibly armor that I could take off for the attic scene (pgs. 53-56). In this scene Matamore is stripped emotionally of his illusion (bravado persona). He is the "rope" in a tug of war between reality and illusion. He has also lost his sword to Adraste in the previous scene. I asked Steve if he thought there was any merit in Matamore entering the "attic" scene stripped of his armor and helmet yet clinging to a homemade sword he fashions for himself.

Steve went for all of my ideas except for one. He felt Matamore's armor should represent his social standing. My idea for homemade armor had definitely been influenced by my reading of Don Quixote but based more on the fact that my Matamore

was derived from a stock Commedia dell'Arte character, Il Capitano, whose high social standing is always fabricated. Steve acknowledged the connection but said that he wanted Matamore to be of a higher social class. I didn't argue. Ultimately, as the actor, I have little authority in a character's costume, but it never hurts to ask. After thanking Steve, I walked away anxiously awaiting my first fitting.

I met with Polly about two weeks later to try on my costume for the first time. I have never been more excited about a costume. Polly pulled a costume she had built for a show a few years earlier. The costume was for the character of Don Quixote and it couldn't have been more appropriate. It consisted of black riding boots, knee-high pantaloons, gold stockings, a jerkin with a removable sleeve, a breastplate, and a helmet. She said I could remove the armor and left sleeve and then add bandages to my hands for the attic scene to look more disheveled. I thanked Polly profusely. The costume looked great and it was definitely going to help me to flesh out the character of Matamore. I know it's cliché, but clothes can "make the man."

Movement

My ballet teacher, Molly Buchman, said in class once that she would often see a play and appreciate an actor's performance but not believe them physically. She said although the acting was honest and believable, the physicality of the character was a lie. Since that day I try to keep this in mind when I'm developing a character. Developing any part of a character involves making choices. From the script I knew that Matamore is of a large stature and presence. This gave me a general idea that he probably moves slowly and deliberately but I still needed to make more specific choices regarding his movement. Generalization is death in acting so I needed to get more specific in creating

Matamore's physical life. Steve was setting blocking pretty early in the process and I quickly got the feeling that he was less interested in exploring options and more focused on having a finished product. This is a little different than how I normally work. Usually I like to take my time in finding all of a character's attributes. However, time is not always a luxury that an actor has and this was one of these instances. So I decided to look at the *Commedia dell'Arte*, *Il Capitano*, once again for inspiration.

John Rudlin gives a detailed outline of *Il Capitano* in his book *Commedia dell'Arte—An Actor's Handbook*. I used his entries on stance, walk and gesture as a base from which I built my movement choices. He lists them as follows:

“Stance. Feet planted apart in order to occupy maximum space, chest pushed forward, back straight, hips wide.

Walk. Mountain walk: heels of his high boots come down first, then the foot rolls on to the ball...Big Strides. Step off on ball of foot giving lift and bounce to step. Feet on ground, head in clouds...The actual steps are small (he is in no hurry to get to war, but wants to do so with maximum effect).

Gestures. Extravagant and sustained.” (Rudlin 121,122)

I decided that I would only use the wide stance for Matamore when he was threatening someone or feeling threatened himself. There were several moments like this in the script and I felt this would give the character range if he had varying levels in his large presence. This would allow him to only use his maximum presence in desperate times, like a blowfish. Next, I needed a something to contrast the wide stance and still have a strength and presence in it. I found my inspiration in a picture of *Il Cavaliere*, an unmasked version of *Il Capitano* who is not an imposter but an actual soldier, in Rudlin's book. In the picture, the character stands with his left foot at a forty-five degree angle with the right foot pointing forward and the heel in the arch of the left foot. I knew from ballet that this was third position and thought it would be a nice contrast to Matamore's

large persona. The strength in the stance would come from being firmly grounded in this position, something I had taken from Suzuki, a form of acting training based in the traditions of Japanese Noh Theatre, in which the actor's connection with the ground is essential. Establishing these two formal stances in the earlier scenes would also allow me to break away from them in the attic scene and physically reinforce Matamore's mental breakdown.

I kept Rudlin's walk with the exception of the exaggerated bounce. Instead I tried to keep Matamore's posture as lengthened as possible when walking as if he was always trying to make himself seem taller. At one point, I went up on my toes to make myself taller than Preston Davis, the actor playing Matamore's servant, Clindor. When Matamore enters to give Isabelle her newly revised epigram I did two jetés, large leaps with the legs extended in the air, across the stage to demonstrate the size of his love for her. I also used precise stops and quick turns to accent his movements. In the attic scene, I switched to a more fluid and realistic movement with minor attempts to keep up the formality of the previous scenes. In this same vein, I used broad sweeping gestures in the scenes before Matamore's breakdown and then switched to smaller more naturalistic movements in the attic scene.

Personal Objects

Throughout the scenes leading up to his breakdown, Matamore always has his sword and his book of epigrams. Clindor usually has physical possession of the book, however this is only for dictating purposes. A sword is not mentioned in the script, but on the first day of rehearsal there were some prop swords for the actors to use so I picked one up. Steve wanted me to do something to get Preston, who was playing Matamore's

servant Clindor, to say his first line. When Steve said “go,” I drew my sword and charged Preston. This definitely induced a reaction from Preston and he said his first line. Steve stopped us and explained that each of the illusions or “playettes” that Alcandre produced would begin in a way that would let the audience know what they were seeing was not real. So this meant each scene that introduced new characters would start with each character entering formally and starting the scene from a frozen stage picture. This was an easy adjustment because I knew that an Il Capitano rarely if ever drew his sword and I had charged on an impulse to start the scene in the middle of an action instead of from a stand still. Eventually, throughout the process, I found two and a half times to draw my sword. Once when Matamore threatens Adraste (he is not on stage at the time), another when he finds out Clindor is sleeping with Isabelle (also not on stage at the time), and lastly to offer his sword to Clindor when he is dueling Adraste.

At one point during rehearsal I began giving Sarah Jane, Lyse, my sword. I did this when Matamore states he is resigning his place to Delamont (Clindor). Steve liked the moment but after the sword fight between Clindor and Adraste had been choreographed, Adraste (Chaney Tullos) was taking Matamore’s sword after he lost his own. So now I didn’t have a sword to give to Sarah Jane in the attic scene. Steve suggested I bring in the book of epigrams and give her that. I tried giving her the book and it worked, but there was something about giving her the sword that felt right. I re-pitched one of my previous ideas and asked Steve if I could bring in a makeshift sword at the top of the scene that looked as if Matamore had made himself a replacement. Since the character is supposed to enter the scene disheveled and somewhat broken, he went for the idea but said he wanted me to keep the book too. So I gave Lyse the sword on the

resigning line and the book later on in the scene when Matamore asks her to think of him. Steve said he liked the changes so now Matamore gave Lyse his only possessions before he leaves to go to the Moon. I wouldn't realize the significance that these were the two items until we ran the scene again a week later.

At the top of the attic scene, a distraught Matamore enters from witnessing Adraste's murder. During the scene it is revealed that Matamore has been in the attic for four days. Lyse says it is because he was frightened by the murder, but Matamore states it was for reflection. Lyse asks him what he's learned and Matamore answers, "That this life of love and violence is too much for a man no longer young." When I got to the line I looked at what I had in my hands, a sword and a book of love poems; love and violence. I didn't plan for it but I looked at the book on "love" and the sword on "violence." Melissa Miller commented on the moment and Steve said to keep it. It was real, it happened in the moment and it helped to open another door for my understanding of the character.

Matamore is love and violence. All he talks about in the script deal with these two things. These two ideas are not only suggested in the objects he gives up, but are the ideals he is trying to flee by going to the moon. Making this connection helped me to get more specific about why the murder affects Matamore on such a monumental level, driving him from reality (even his fantastical version) and further into illusion. There had to be a reason that Matamore moves further into the illusion. I found that reason in the reality of his past.

The Past

I found developing a back-story or history for the character of Matamore in this production to be more difficult than I've encountered with other characters. Originally, Steve wanted the audience to know that each of the characters in Alcandre's illusions was being played by actors in his troupe. One way he suggested this was with the staging of the scenes, having each one start out with a repeated formal entrance. At one time during the process, the end of the show involved all of the actors coming out before Pridamant's final speech wearing their street clothes. This posed an interesting question for me as the actor. If I was playing the character of Matamore and Matamore was being played by an actor in a troupe during the early 1900's, who was this guy playing Matamore?

At first the answer to this question seemed like it would be a very complicated one. I would not only need to develop a back-story for Matamore but also the actor playing him. I started asking questions about the character and found that I had to two separate lists. The added layer of an actor playing Matamore also muddled the attic scene. Steve wanted me to drop my accent during this scene, which indicated to me that the actor playing Matamore was having a break down at the same time as his character. Eventually Steve said that dropping the accent confused him and that I should keep it throughout the play. This helped a little but the fact that I was supposed to be playing a character who was playing another character, although very Brechtian in concept, was getting confusing and did not seem to be working in this production. The duality of the characters was not being addressed enough in the staging and when Steve finally cut the reveal of the entire cast at the end of the play, I thought that the audience was going to be just as confused as I was. How would I, or the audience, know when I was supposed to

be Matamore or the actor playing him? The answer was simpler than I thought and was within the character all along.

Matamore is described as a lunatic and his “madness” is mentioned several times in the play. He has a hard time telling the difference between his fantasies and reality and I began to wonder if the actor playing Matamore might share this trait. The more I thought about it the more it seemed to work. I began to think of the actor as an older method actor who fully submerses himself in his role. He’s always in character and won’t even let the other actors address him by any other name than Matamore. Over time this method becomes the actor’s madness. He has blurred the line between self and character for so many years that he can no longer tell where he stops and Matamore begins. This helped to merge the characters and meant I didn’t need to know as much about the “actor”. Being somewhat of a method actor myself I didn’t want to know anything about him that he couldn’t remember about himself. However, this did raise one huge question that needed a very specific answer. Why? Why did he do this? Why would an actor go so deep into a character, to the point he loses himself permanently? I thought he could just be dedicated, a perfectionist, or suffering from Alzheimer’s, but all of these answers seemed too general and didn’t really do anything to raise the stakes or heighten the need of the attic scene. I needed some event in his past that would induce and mirror Matamore’s need to shun reality.

Matamore’s illusion is broken when he sees Clindor murder Adraste. He is confronted with the reality of seeing a man murdered, something he has never done or seen before but is always boasting about. This pushes him even further into his madness because he is no longer able to cling to his fantasies of love and violence. Matamore is

running from reality and hiding within his own illusion so I needed to know why the actor playing him would hide from reality within the illusion of the theatre. Also, if Matamore's loss of his lie is revealed to him by witnessing Adraste's murder, what is it about the murder that drives the actor further into his own fantasy? However fabricated, Matamore is questing for love and violence. I figured that the actor playing him had to be running towards the theatrical illusion of these ideals because he couldn't handle the reality or memory of either. Like Matamore, the reason for this running had to deal with loss. I tried to think of what, in my life, if lost, could drive me to madness. There was only one answer that fit, my wife.

With this realization I came up with the following brief history for the actor playing Matamore. He was a prominent businessman of his time who married the love of his life. One night they were walking home from the theatre and two men accosted them. The robbers took their belongings and while the actor, frozen with fear, stood and watched, his wife protested and slapped one of the thieves. The robber grabbed her and she clawed his eyes. Her husband tried to shout and plead for her to stop but the robber's friend stabbed him in the side with a knife. The actor fell to the ground and watched the robber cut his wife's throat and flee. The actor passed out from the loss of blood and awoke to learn that his wife was dead. He left everything behind and began to wander the countryside. Eventually he came across Alcandre and was offered a job as a stagehand. Over the years he worked his way up and began to act in the troupe. The fantasy world of theatre eased the pain of the awful reality he had to wake up to every day. Like a drug addict, his need for the euphoria of being someone else grew as time went on. He had to delve deeper and deeper into his characters, eventually settling on

Matamore, who was the antithesis of the coward he had been and who's many loves filled the void left by the absence of his wife. All of this was destroyed when the troupe played a new scene for Pridamant where Clindor kills Adraste. This murder triggers the long-buried memory of his wife and drives the actor further into his madness just like Matamore. Both are searching for a peace in the illusion that they cannot find in reality.

Actor's Score

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>Objective: To get him to set out on a new quest Obstacle: He wants me to stay Essential Action: To recruit</p> <p>pp 24-28</p> <p>CLINDOR: Master, it amazes me, Titan whose countenance Is the world's great terror, You've scaled the loftiest Pinnacles of glory, and still you Dream of conquest. Do you never rest?</p> <p>MATAMORE: Never, slave, and now I must decide Whose kingdom I should next acquire, The King of Crete's or the Queen of Britain's?</p> <p>CLINDOR: Both are island kingdoms; you would need A navy of a thousand ships and Ten thousand men to sail them.</p> <p>MATAMORE: Ships? Men? I need no ships, I'll swim the Hellespont on Monday</p>	<p>to nudge</p> <p>to sell</p>	<p>he's trying to stop me</p> <p>he doesn't believe me</p>	<p>Focus: he's touching me</p> <p>Image: a fly</p> <p>Focus: his doubting face</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>And the Channel Tuesday morning. And as for Troops I need none, other than This mighty arm...</p> <p>CLINDOR: Mighty indeed!</p> <p>MATAMORE: ...And this fist of tempered steel. I crushed the hearts of the pashas of Ranjapoor And battered down the cypress gates of Sinabar With little else. The splinters like spears Slew the gate's defenders by the dozens And with the hinges I cracked chariot and shield of A hundred hundred knights. The blood ran Ankle deep; it's not a thing I like to talk about. Let Crete and Britain Look to heaven: Matamore is near!</p> <p>CLINDOR: Oh let them live, great master, you Have gold and land enough.</p> <p>MATAMORE: Half the planet.</p> <p>CLINDOR: More than half. I spoke before Of conquests sweeter but</p>	<p>to herd</p>	<p>he hasn't moved</p>	<p>Focus: his feet are glued</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>More difficult to win...</p> <p>MATAMORE: You speak of Isabelle. My genius Leaps pages ahead to grasp your meaning.</p> <p>CLINDOR: I bow before your protean brow.</p> <p>MATAMORE: Then speak of Isabelle, but do not speak Of difficult conquest. I know: My visage frights The moguls and viziers: a fearsome face, An awful, horrible, ghastly face, A face that has sunk a thousand ships, And made six hundred oxen run bellowing into the sea! But look: I can transform this mask of Mars To something of transplendent, masculine Yet gentle Beauty (<i>He does this</i>)</p> <p>CLINDOR: Sorcery. You are as invincible, I see, In battles of the heart as of the sword, And not even the proudest woman could resist you. Aphrodite herself would collapse at your feet.</p> <p>MATAMORE: She did, in fact, and begged for me.</p>	<p>to tug</p>	<p>he hit a nerve</p>	<p>Image: Isabelle's face</p> <p>Focus: my reflection</p> <p>Image: face of a wolf-man</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>CLINDOR: But you spurned her.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: Utterly. She interfered with my military campaigns. Always clinging, eager for amour. Since then I'm more careful displaying My face of love.</p>			
<p>CLINDOR: Temperate and wise! But don your face, my godlike lord, For Isabelle is near!</p>			<p>Focus: the top of her head coming up the path</p>
<p>MATAMORE: Isabelle! You gave to her The sonnets I indicted to her beauty?</p>	<p>to poke</p>	<p>he surprised me</p>	<p>Focus: I'm nervous</p>
<p>CLINDOR: I did., my liege.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: And what was her response?</p>			
<p>CLINDOR: She read them carefully, and wept.</p>			

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>MATAMORE: Tears of joy, no doubt. And here she comes, I... She is accompanied by my rival; Like a tick, he clings to her inseparably. <i>(He starts to exit)</i></p>			Focus: they're closing in
<p>CLINDOR: Where are you going, scourge of heaven?</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: He's a weak man, and weak men are foolish. He might be tempted to challenge me.</p>	to side-step	he's calling my bluff	
<p>CLINDOR: Then you could obliterate him.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: I never fight with my love face on, I worry that it might get scratched.</p>			Focus: if I can see them
<p>CLINDOR: Put on your terrible mask of war, then, And slaughter him.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: What? With Isabelle so near? Are you mad? My mask of Mars clapped on my face I'm fiercer than the tuskéd boar</p>	to shove	he's a statue	

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>And I might gore them both, Skewering my love and rival both.</p> <p>CLINDOR: I spoke rashly. Perhaps we should retire instead.</p> <p>MATAMORE: Perhaps we should. I'll lead the way.</p> <p><i>They exit. Isabelle andAdraste enter.</i></p> <p>Objective: To win her favor Obstacle: She's distressed Essential Action: to lift</p> <p>pp 30-32</p>		he's a deer in headlights	Focus: the quickest exit
<p>MATAMORE: Madam, do not be alarmed To see your gutless suitor fled away. He saw me coming...</p>	to pat		Focus: she's on her knees
<p>ISABELLE: And instantly ran. He shows better sense in this Than I'd have guessed him capable.</p>	to steady	she's upset	Focus: her face she's been crying
<p>CLINDOR: Kings and emperors, after all, Would do no less.</p>			

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>ISABELLE: When Matamore approaches, Everyone retreats; in fact, I feel an urge myself...</p>		she's leaving	
<p>MATAMORE: It's natural to flee me; I am so great, At times I want to flee myself; But stay with me; I'll extemporize Another sonnet to your grace.</p>	to hold		
<p>ISABELLE: Oh don't do that! I mean, not while The sweet music of the other twelve you wrote Is still ringing in my ears; let me savor that.</p>		she's jumpy	
<p>MATAMORE: You're as beautiful as you are wise! As excess of sweetness is as disagreeable As a lack of bitter gall. HmMMM. That's rather good! Delamont!</p>	to stroke		Focus: her devilish smile
<p>CLINDOR: Um, it's Clindor, sir.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: Delamont, record that last remark. (<i>To Isabelle</i>) I'm collecting My pithiest sayings in a book.</p>	to tickle	she seems confused	

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>CLINDOR: <i>(Writing)</i> This one, sir, is full of pith.</p>			Focus: she laughed
<p>MATAMORE: Thank you. Read it back to me.</p>			
<p>CLINDOR: "An excess of sweetness is as disagreeable As a lack of bitter gall."</p>			Focus: it doesn't sound as good now
<p>MATAMORE: My God that's good. One problem, though.</p>	to pump up	she's not pleased	
<p>ISABELLE: What's that?</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: It makes no sense. Ah well, I'll have to work on it.</p>			
<p>ISABELLE: Oh do! Polish it up, in some private place, And give it to me as a present. I adore a well-polished epigram.</p>			Focus: she's beaming
<p>MATAMORE: I have a thousand others...</p>			
<p>ISABELLE: No. I want this one. Go. To work. Your messenger of love</p>			

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>LYSE: She's down in the arbor making love to your servant.</p> <p>MATAMORE: I beg your pardon?</p> <p>LYSE: Isabelle, that Gleaming, Beaming Wonder, Is at this moment in the arbor with your serving man, And their not pressing grapes.</p> <p>MATAMORE: Do you mean to imply...</p> <p>LYSE: I do.</p> <p>MATAMORE: Affronterous pimple! Presumptuous homuncula! Foul dustball, perfidious chamber pot, Do you mean to imply that...</p> <p>LYSE: Go there, see for yourself, Isabelle and Clindor are...</p> <p>MATAMORE: Poodle, cease your yap! Trullish chambermaid, do you think That such a gross Leviathan as myself would stoop</p>	<p>to pry</p> <p>to heel</p>	<p>she's slandering my goddess</p> <p>she's lying</p> <p>she's out of control</p>	<p>Focus: her smug face</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>To spy upon my future Queen, The soon-to-be Empress of my limitless realms In some seedy grape arbor with my little minion, Thinking to catch them at illicit palaverings? It is grotesque! It is vile! It is loathsome! Where's the arbor?</p> <p>LYSE: Down this path.</p> <p>MATAMORE: I knew that already. I am there. Thus saying thus, swept the offended Matamore away.</p> <p>Objective: to make him run away like a little girl Obstacle: he could beat me up Essential Action: to bob and weave</p> <p>pp 45-48</p> <p>MATAMORE: Let Jove in heaven with thunderbolt split This usurperous dog, this treacherous equerry! I... <i>(He faints)</i></p> <p>ISABELLE: Oh God! Is he dead?</p>	<p>to spur</p> <p>to charge</p>	<p>it might be true</p> <p>he didn't move</p>	<p>Image: him whispering in her ear</p> <p>Focus: the path</p> <p>Focus: the lack of fear in his eyes</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>CLINDOR: No, not dead, merely Overcome by prolixity. Let me talk to him.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: Unspeakable machiavell! False-foreswearing Judas-lips! Et tu, Delamont?</p>	to cut	he's being nice to me	
<p>CLINDOR: Thunder more softly, I beg you, dread Goliath.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: I have no need to shout. You know what you have done. A crime so ghastly I cannot bear to pronounce it.</p>			Focus: I can't get up
<p>CLINDOR: I have stolen Isabelle.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: Precisely You have two choices. One: To be seized by the heels and flung Straight through the celestial crystalline spheres Into an abyss where the elemental fire will consume What parts of you remain unripped by broken crystal-</p>	to ambush	he's not retreating	

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>CLINDOR: Sounds bad.</p>			Focus: he's smiling
<p>MATAMORE: It is. Or Two: To be transformed by a spell I know Into that lowliest of creatures, the Naked Mole Rat, Thereafter to be stepped upon by my puissant boot After which your skin will be made into a little Ratskin purse for Isabelle to wear, Embroidered with the words: Thus died Delamont, traitor to his lord.</p>			Image: a shaved guineapig
<p>CLINDOR: Actually, there's a third choice.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: There is?</p>			
<p>CLINDOR: Yes. I could beat you to a bloody pulp.</p>			Focus: his clenched jaw
<p>MATAMORE: I see. And which of the three will you choose?</p>	to tap	he's had enough	
<p>CLINDOR: Guess.</p>			

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>MATAMORE: Look, you've obviously learned A great deal from me. The ignominious deaths I've mentioned ill-befit so well-trained A soldier as yourself. Say you're sorry, Promise to abjure the sight of Isabelle forever And we part as friends. Do you prefer that?</p>	<p>to spin</p>	<p>I'm scared</p>	<p>Focus: can she see how frightened I am?</p>
<p>CLINDOR: I prefer to throw you in the river.</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: I can't swim.</p>			
<p>CLINDOR: That's too bad.</p>		<p>he's not going to give up</p>	
<p>MATAMORE: Your spirit is astonishing! My warrior heart Cannot but thrill to hear so brave a boast! Spoken like a soldier! I am magnanimously moved; I give her to you As one warrior, however greater, to another warrior, However less. I have so many lovers, I can share.</p>	<p>to tickle</p>		<p>Focus: he's laughing is that good or bad?</p>
<p>ISABELLE: It breaks my heart to lose the chance To be your concubine, but I take solace In knowing how relieved The Queen of Iceland will be.</p>			<p>Focus: she touched me</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>MATAMORE: She will; her icebound beauty, Great as it is, Was never match, my Isabelle for you.</p> <p>ISABELLE: Pronounce on us, colossal Matamore, Your blessing and your benediction, A thing my father won't provide...</p> <p>MATAMORE: Let me be your father, then, if that's The role I'm meant to play. Pledge each other your vows. I stand, for once, as silent witness.</p> <p>Objective: to get away Obstacle: she won't let me leave Essential Action: to ally</p> <p>pp 53 - 56</p>	<p>to bondo</p>	<p>I've broken her heart</p>	<p>Focus: the longing in her eyes</p>
<p>MATAMORE: Aaaahhhh! The maid! Oh please, Abuse me not, dread Medusa of the linen closet, Neither giggle nor sneer, oh dour farouche! Your laugh might make to marbleize My much-tormented soul.</p>	<p>to grasp</p>	<p>she startled me she doesn't want me touching her</p>	<p>Focus: she's the first person I've seen in days</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>LYSE: I'm not in a laughing mood tonight.</p> <p>What are you doing in Geronte's house, This late, alone? Where have you been?</p>			Focus: where he died
<p>MATAMORE: Three days ago there was a ruckus; someone <i>died</i>. I...I've been in the attic ever since.</p>	to pinpoint	she doesn't understand	Image: my wife's limp body
<p>LYSE: In the attic! There are rats in the attic!</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: Oh, I know, man-sized rats! My strength from battling them Is sorely taxed; I thought the house Would start and wake at the sounds our battle made: Their screams of rodent agony, my shouts of glory As I waved my sword....</p>	to sell	she's not buying	Image: the Rat King
<p>LYSE: The footman said he heard noises in the attic...</p>			
<p>MATAMORE: It was I.</p>	to juke	she's cornering me	Focus: her knowing eyes
<p>LYSE: He said it sounded like someone weeping.</p>			

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>MATAMORE: It must have been someone else.</p> <p>LYSE: Who?</p> <p>MATAMORE: The rats. They wept.</p> <p>LYSE: Weeping rats?</p> <p>MATAMORE: Weeping rats; a gruesome sight.</p> <p>LYSE: You were so frightened by the murder of Adraste You've spent four days in the attic? What did you eat?</p> <p>MATAMORE: Kitchen scraps and garbage, stolen at night, Hannibal, they say, when crossing the Alps, Would eat the dung of his elephants. So thought it was hard For a man like me to root in the trash heap for moldy meat, I knew I was in good company. And I didn't retire to the attic for fear, But rather as a place of reflection. I needed time to think.</p>	<p>to flare</p> <p>to tractor beam</p>	<p>she's got me</p> <p>she's laughing</p>	<p>Focus: she's letting up</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>LYSE: And in these four days, your belly full of garbage, What conclusions did you reach?</p> <p>MATAMORE: That this life of love and violence is too much For a man no longer young.</p> <p>LYSE: It's wearing hard on everyone; We're all suddenly growing old.</p> <p>MATAMORE: But youth has its advantages still- In these games of passionate exertion My young apprentice, Delamont, Has learned so well he far surpasses me. I never killed a man. I resign my place to him. I plan to become a desert monk, a hermit in a cave.</p> <p>LYSE: There are no deserts in France.</p> <p>MATAMORE: I thought the moon.</p> <p>LYSE: The moon?</p>	<p>to ignite</p>	<p>she's placating me</p> <p>she's in the dark</p>	<p>Focus: my sword</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>MATAMORE: Yes, that moon, there, I've given up hope for this cannibal world; No good will come of it, or of its creatures, But ah! The moon... It's cold and bleak up there, they say Perhaps in a cave, on a comfortable rock, Viewing the expanse of some lifeless lunar desert, I'll learn to dream smaller, less tumultuous dreams.</p> <p>LYSE: If you do learn, come back And give me instruction...</p>	<p>to illuminate</p>		<p>Focus: the moonlight</p>
<p>MATAMORE: I can't, mop-and-bucket; I'm not coming back. But think of me up there, My peaceable catechism, draw patient forbearance From that silvery light.</p> <p>LYSE: I saw a moon-map once; there's a sea I remember called Tranquility...</p> <p>MATAMORE: Yes, yes, I'll find that sea, Where respite's granted every wanderer Weary of war, sick of desire; I'll drink a cup of water for you, Adieu, adieu, remember me....</p>	<p>to free</p>	<p>I can't take her with me</p> <p>she won't let go</p>	<p>Focus: my book</p> <p>Image: glimmering ice blue water</p>

TEXT	TACTIC	OBSTACLE	FOCUS/IMAGE
<p>Objective: to leave Obstacle: I don't know which way to go Essential Action: to calibrate</p> <p>pg. 83</p> <p>MATAMORE: I want to leave this planet; don't like it here! Pardon, sir, can you tell me the way to the moon? I'm lost and mapless, a wanderer through the world... <i>The Amanuensis points. A huge white moon and stars appear, floating in space.</i> That way? You're certain of that? Yes.</p>	<p>to gage</p>	<p>he could be wrong</p>	<p>Focus: his pointed finger Image: the luminous moon</p>

Conclusion

Acting is not an exact science. In the realm of theatre, two plus two can equal orange. This makes it difficult for me to say that my portrayal of Matamore is just a sum of the parts listed in this thesis. Hopefully “live theatre” denotes that it is, in fact, living. At least this is how I try to approach theatre and the craft of acting. Therefore, my Matamore was an ever-evolving living work that continued to grow with each performance. I tried to improve on the night before instead of recreating the previous performance. There is always more work to be done. One of the main things I learned about acting and life, during this process and the past two and a half years, is that they are both about the journey, not the destination. Every night I would walk off of the stage thinking about what I could work on the next night to improve my performance but at the same time, because of my training and the experiences that I’ve had in graduate school, I was able to be happy with the work that I accomplished that evening. I will continue to strive towards the work that I want to accomplish while being content with what I have accomplished.

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Appendix: Production Photo



Matamore (Shawn Halliday) enlightens Clindor (Preston Davis) in Act I.

Vita

Shawn Halliday was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, in December of 1973. He has lived in various locales during his lifetime. He graduated from Slidell High School in Slidell, Louisiana, in 1992. Shawn received his Bachelor of Arts in theatre from Louisiana State University in 1999. He is currently pursuing his Master of Fine Arts in theatre, also from Louisiana State University, and should complete it in May of 2005.

Shawn has performed in numerous productions with the Louisiana State University Department of Theatre. Regionally, he has performed with Kansas City Repertory Theatre, the Coterie Theatre, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, The Unicorn, and Swine Palace.