

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

Dear Committee Members:

This is a very enthusiastic endorsement for Professor Janet Haley in support of her tenure at the University of Michigan-Flint.

I first had the opportunity to work with Ms. Haley in the summer of 2008 during a production of *Julius Caesar* at the Michigan Shakespeare Festival in which I was employed as the Fight Director and she was cast in the role of Portia. The thing that struck me immediately about her was her demeanor and professionalism. Janet has an inner strength that people are naturally drawn to. She is unassuming, and quietly goes about doing her work; this coupled with her approachable and friendly disposition make her a natural leader. She is the ceiling for others to rise to, bringing out the best in her fellow artists.

I was most impressed with her interpretation of Portia. This is a role that can easily be overshadowed by Brutus, getting lost in the sea of male characters of the cast. However, this was not the case in this production. She was a formidable match to her husband, not settling for his evasiveness in their scenes together. Janet brought a lot of depth to this character, creating a fully live back story in her relationship with her husband that spoke of deep love, respect, and recent loss. These elements have often been missing for me in past productions that I've seen or been a part of. It became clear early on in the rehearsal process that these fully vibrant choices she was making were all clearly founded in text analysis and scoring. Nothing was extraneous or arbitrary, but founded in clues that were gleaned from Shakespeare's words. What makes her exciting to watch is that she is a 'thinking' actor.

It also became clear to me that summer that she has a very nice vocal quality on stage. She immediately caught my attention with her very first line calling out to her husband with the single word, "Brutus." She immediately focused my attention, making me watch her. Her voice is a unique instrument that lends itself nicely to archaic text. It has lovely resonance and tone, with flexibility, color and nuance that carries very well through space. You want to keep listening to her speak and weave the details of the story she is telling onstage.

I also got to see her detailed work that summer as the Countess in *All's Well That Ends Well*. She was wonderful in this role that provided a lovely foil to her other work in the repertory setting. It seems that the trap often with the Countess is in her status and stuffiness, often making her unsympathetic or hard to relate to. This was definitely not the case with Janet's portrayal. She found lightness, and a sense of humor and playfulness with the character; she embodied an almost girlish quality while still holding on to the character's breeding and courtliness. I actually felt a connection to this woman's story, which is no easy feat.



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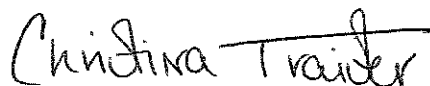
I next had an opportunity to watch Janet's work in the summer of 2011 in her role as Paulina at the Michigan Shakespeare Festival. This female role is arguably one of the most coveted in Shakespeare's Canon and is quite a challenge. Janet accepted the challenge and executed it beautifully. She crafted such a wonderful relationship with Hermione; I truly believed that they were friends, making her admonishment of Leontes one of the highlights of the production. I also so appreciated her attention to detail, specifically in her endowment and handling of baby Perdita, as well as the 'statue' of Hermione at the end of the play. Again, her specificity of choices made me believe the magical realism elements of the play.

That same summer I had the opportunity to work side by side with her as an actor in two separate developmental public readings in preparation for the inaugural production of *Othello* for The American Shakespeare Collective (TASC). One of these was part of the Renegade Theatre Festival in Lansing. Having seen her work previously, I was very excited for the opportunity. Her embodiment of the actor track of Emilia/Bianca/Duchess was exquisite. She was an expert at defining and honing differences between each character in physicality, vocal quality, and status. It was a joy for me to play Desdemona to her Emilia in which I delighted in our moments of genuine give and take, action and reaction.

For all of these reasons, I can only imagine what an asset Professor Haley is to your institution, a true teaching artist who reaches her students through leading by example, continually honing her craft and growing as an artist so that she may impart her knowledge, experience, and wisdom to them. I hope you do give her your utmost consideration; you are truly lucky to have her.

If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me, and thank you for the opportunity to reflect on her work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christina Traister". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Christina Traister, MFA
Alabama Shakespeare Festival

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