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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

To Be Young, Gifted, and a Black Woman in a Graduate Theatre Program

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Kimberly Monks

Committee in charge:

Marc Barricelli, Chair
Eva Barnes
Ursula Meyer

2018

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The Thesis of Kimberly Monks is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2018

DEDICATION

This dedication is to the Lord, who is the ruler of my life and the source of my strength and joy. May you continue to order my steps . May you never allow me to walk through any door without you, or go anywhere where you are not in the midst. May I continue to honor and worship you in all that I say and do. May you continue to show yourself in my work and in my life. You, Lord, are my rock and my safe haven. With you, there is nothing that I can't do. I love you more than I can ever put into words. Thank you God for all you've done, are doing and will continue to do in my life.

To my Grandmother, Annie Marie Hawk. As you rest in heaven, I hope that you are smiling down on me and are proud of me. I hope that you are filled with much satisfaction and joy that your Kimmy is the first of your many *many* grand children to graduate with her Master's Degree. It is because of you that I am here and have come this far. It is because of your heroism that I survived. Thank you for loving me. Thank you for saving me. Thank you for raising me as your daughter. Thank you for being the best mother I will ever ever know. Thank you for believing in me and supporting me. You are truly an angel and though it hurts that you are gone, I still feel your presence and hear your voice, so I know that you are still with me. Because of you, I have known the greatest love of all time, and I will carry that with me for as long as I live. I love you Reeree.

To my sisters, though there are too many of you to name, I thank each and every one of you. You all inspire me to be better and do better. There is nothing that I wouldn't do for you. May we continue to love on one another, uplift each other and hold each other accountable. The bond that we share is truly unbreakable and I hope you all know just how loved you are by me.

To my brothers, and my "brother's from another mother," I am so lucky to have a support system that is made up of nothing but strong, beautiful, smart and very talented Black men! You guys have watched me grow and have supported me in every chapter of my life. May greatness continue to follow each of you. May you continue to take this world by storm with your art. You men are one of a kind, and that makes me one lucky woman to have you.

To my Dad, Brandon Rainey: I was a girl who felt fatherless and abandoned. I was lost and had no idea who I was. I wanted to and tried to quit life so many times and each time, you were there reminding me of my worth and how meaningful my life truly is. You too are my hero. You took me under your wing and loved me the way a father is supposed to love a daughter. I did not know a father's love until I met you. Thank you for introducing me to the Lord and to theatre because now I am a force that cannot be tamed nor stopped. I love you dad, and I thank God for you!

To my partner and soulmate. You've made this grad school experience bearable. I am beyond lucky to have had you every step of the way (literally since the first day of school we've been inseparable). I look forward to our future. May your light continue to shine and don't let anybody try to dim it (Or they will have to answer to me). I love you Babe!

To my Yoni and my Mo! You are gifts to the world. I *see* you and I love you. The world needs more people like you in it. Your hearts are big and you share them with everyone you encounter. You are lights in this dark world. You love hard. You are talented beyond belief. I am so excited for your futures! May you never change for a single soul. May you always remember just how great you truly are. I love you both more than you know!!!

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Many thanks to my Acting faculty whose training has really changed and sharpened my work in ways that I think are magical. Marco, I am a Shakespeare Goddess because of you. I am going to infiltrate shakespeare companies all over the world and thrive as a shakespearean actress, and it's all because of the way in which you trained me. Your love for Shakespeare rubbed off on me, so thank you. Eva and Ursula, you are the true magicians. Thank you for the way in which you got my voice to expand and reveal itself to me. To Charlie Oates, one of the greatest movement teachers and directors I have ever worked with. Thank you for your honesty and your dedication to me and my journey, you are missed. To Jennifer Chang, my goodness you are just stunning and I am so very grateful for your mentorship and your advocacy. Thank you for listening and supporting me. Thank you for really seeing me and for allowing me to be who I am and encouraging me to be proud of it. You are a gift to this department. To Richard Robichaux, thank you for seeing me and listening. Thank you for your honesty and your passion for the work. You have made me so excited for the future of this program. To Kim Rubinstein, the first thing you said to me on the first day of rehearsals for *A Raisin in the Sun* was "I am going to take good care of you." To hear those words and then for you to really and truly keep your word will forever be cherished. As an actress of Color in this program, you have no idea how much that meant to me! Kim you are indescribably genius. You are a teacher and an actor's director- to be great at both of these things is stunning and there are no words to describe how lucky I am to have worked with you. Thank you for taking care of me. Thank you for encouraging agency and collaboration in the room. *A Raisin in the Sun* was the best theatrical experience that I had at UCSD and that is because of how devoted you were to our process. I felt like I could finally use what I had learned in grad school in the rehearsal room because you made that your priority. Thank you for trusting me and my instincts. Thank you for letting me play. Thank you for seeing into my soul and reading my mind. Thank you for your passion. I hope you continue to direct productions at UCSD because I think every actor should leave here having experienced the gift of being in the room with you. To Naomi Iizuka and Deborah Stein! Where do I even begin? Thank you both for pushing me towards more, and encouraging me to really embrace playwriting. Naomi your constant support has meant the world to me. Thank you for thinking of me and for all your words of affirmation as it relates to my acting and my writing. More than anything, thank you for going the extra mile for me and for including me in the playwriting fold even though I'm an acting student, thank you for allowing me to be one of your playwrights as well. I am honored to have you in my corner. Deborah, I tear up as I type this because I don't even think you know the impact you've had on my life. Thank you for encouraging me to share my truth no matter what. Thank you for your consistent support and mentorship even when you're miles away! Thank you for pouring into me and investing in me because of your belief in me. I am honored to know you. Deborah and Naomi, you two are blessings to this department. To all the badass female directors that I was privileged to work with: Kyle Donnelly, Zora Howard, Marcela Lorca, Leigh Silverman, Katie Pearl, and Kim Rubinstein. You are all powerhouses and I cannot wait to work with you again! To the class of 2018, it's been one hell of a journey with you all. Now it is time to show the world what we are made of. Thank you all for three hard years together. It's been real!

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

To Be Young, Gifted, and a Black Woman in a Graduate Theatre Program

by

Kimberly Monks

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

University of California, San Diego, 2018

Professor Marc Barricelli, Chair

I am a Black woman. My Blackness is my strength that will not be diminished for the American Theatre. It wasn't until I landed the role of Grumio in the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, that I began to really fight for my integrity and for my Blackness. In the play, Grumio is Petruchio's slave; his servant- this was very triggering for me and caused me to be very disappointed in how I was cast. Therefore, I decided that I wasn't going to be anyone's slave or servant, regardless of whether it was written on the page or not (sorry but not sorry to disappoint you Shakespeare). After many muscular conversations about why it will never feel okay to be cast as the servant or slave, my voice was finally heard, my choices were respected and when all was said and done, I enjoyed my performance as Grumio. The rehearsal process of this production impacted me in two ways: firstly, it taught me how to speak up for myself in the room when something goes against who I am and what I stand for as a Black woman, no matter who it inconveniences. Lastly, it reminded me that since I will be a Shakespearean Goddess, that I cannot be afraid to challenge Shakespeare himself by saying, "No, I will not be the slave or the servant in Shakespeare's plays because that is not who I am in the world," I am more, much more. People will always remember and love my performance as Grumio, but they will never know what it cost me; I, on the other hand, will never forget.