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Using Stanislavsky's Toolkit for Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Part I: Research on the Text and the Play

An actor's training continues throughout his/her professional career, yet they rarely have the time or inclination to write in detail about their processes, when building a character, to provide documents for inquisitive peers. In this two-part article, Bella Merlin articulates the discoveries made playing Margaret in *Richard III* at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival in Summer 2012, directed by internationally acclaimed actor-director Tina Packer (co-founder of Shakespeare and Company with Kristin Linklater in 1978). Merlin highlights how the shift from teacher to actor reactivates the 'willing vulnerability' that she demands of her own students. She focuses on Stanislavsky's three avenues of research: on the playtext; on the world of the play and playwright; and on the self. There can be resistance by some theatre practitioners to the application of Stanislavsky's tools to Shakespeare's texts, often due to a perceived over-psychologizing. Here, Merlin challenges some of these resistances. She demonstrates that Packer's insistence on connecting voice with thought to release the imagination implicitly harnesses Shakespeare's structure with Stanislavsky's underpinnings. Packer also lays emphasis on contemporary resonance, freeing the natural voice, and the significance of Shakespeare's female characters in *Richard III* for awakening an audience to the consequences of violence. The journey is unsettlingly personal and startlingly global. Part I, which follows, addresses research on the text and research on the play, drawing upon history, biography, accounts of grief, and chilling footage of the Rwandan genocide. Part II, planned for the next issue, uses the immediacy of a rehearsal journal to address research on the self. Bella Merlin is an actor, writer and actor-trainer. Acting includes seasons at the National Theatre with Max Stafford-Clark's Out of Joint Company. Publications include *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (2007) and *Acting: the Basics* (2010). She is currently Professor of Acting at the University of California, Davis.

Key terms: text analysis, through-line, language systems, psycho-physicality, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, Tina Packer.

AS PROFESSOR OF ACTING at the University of California, Davis, I'm expected to maintain my professional acting career as part of my creative research. Certainly, each time I'm cast in a role, I'm reminded that as actors and teachers of acting we really are lifelong learners. The 'willing vulnerability' that I constantly encourage in my students becomes both the most necessary and the most daunting aspect of returning to the rehearsal room or film location, and surrendering to someone else's (i.e. the director's) vision of acting.

In Summer 2012 I was cast as Margaret in *Richard III* at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival (the second oldest Shakespeare festival in the USA after Ashland, Oregon), run by Producing Artistic Director Philip Sneed and his Associate, Timothy Orr. Here, I had the extraordinary opportunity to work with veteran actor-director-teacher Tina Packer (who founded Shakespeare and Company with Kristin Linklater in 1978) and her acting partner, Nigel Gore. I knew that Packer's familiarity with Shakespeare's canon was exponentially greater than mine. I also knew that her career as an actor-trainer, as much as a director, would inevitably turn the rehearsal room into a vibrant learning environment as well as a functional place of work. Little did I anticipate the full extent to which we would be provoked to assess our own acting

  doi: 10.1017/S0266464X13000031

instruments (including habits and shortcuts) in the process of mounting the production with sincerity, immediacy, and relevance.

My toolkit, as an actress, draws heavily upon Stanislavsky's 'system'. Yet, when it comes to acting Shakespeare, Stanislavsky often receives a bad press. In the opening chapter of his book, *Merely Players? Actors' Accounts of Performing Shakespeare*, Jonathan Holmes critiques those who seek 'interiority' in their portrayal of Shakespeare's roles. He cites W. B. Worthen's observation that many of the essays in the *Players of Shakespeare* series (which forms the kernel of Holmes's interrogation) are 'informed by notions of a coherent and internalized characterization fully consistent with Stanislavskian mimesis' (Holmes, 2007, p. 18). Holmes contends that 'this approach can be inappropriate and sometimes counter-productive to the performance of a Shakespearean drama'.

My intention here is to illustrate how Stanislavsky's toolkit need not be confined to 'inappropriate' usage and can be applied to Shakespearean roles without resorting to an 'introspective' perspective, obsessed with 'psychology' and 'inner life' in the manner described in *Merely Players?* Rather, Stanislavsky's emphasis on three specific strands of research – (1) on the text, (2) on the realm of the play and playwright, and (3) on one's own acting instrument – have equal impact in the creation of a role.

Furthermore, I believe that the idea of a through-line and a coherent, internalized character has shifted in its relevance in the twenty-first century. Contradiction is the key. Added to which, when you fully commit to the significance of breath in speaking Shakespeare, 'interiority' takes on a different definition.

For *Richard III*, my training with Packer's voice coach, Margaret Jansen, revealed that the very point of breath in text work is to stir oneself from the inside out, to make one's imagination available to the potency of Shakespeare's images. Speaking Shakespeare is thus all about inner life, but from a perspective that is physical, physiological, and imaginative, rather than introspective and overly psychological.

This article falls into two parts – each taking a different formal structure to reflect its content. In this first part I address the ways in which research on text and play can access images and appropriate psychological underpinnings without undue personal trawling. In Part II, written in journal form, I will chart the third strand of research – on the self – by plunging the reader right into the rehearsal process. The intention is twofold: (1) to demonstrate how, as actors, we're constantly experiencing the uncertainties faced by our students; and (2) to illustrate the two journeys involved in creating a character (the *actor's* journey towards the role and the arc of the *character* in the playwright's narrative).

I begin by asking some questions about the use of Stanislavsky with Shakespeare's dramas.

Shakespeare and Stanislavsky's Society

There's no question: I have what Holmes calls 'Stanislavskian dependency', and for very clear reasons. Citing Bakhtin, Holmes highlights how language only becomes 'one's own' when the speaker 'appropriates the word, adopting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment the word exists in other people's mouths' (Holmes, 2007, p. 31). I don't know how to 'make the words my own' (i.e. 'adopt them to my own semantic and expressive intention') until I've undertaken Stanislavsky's three avenues of research. The point of the research is simply to feed my imagination, rather than trawl my personal psychology, though as psychophysical beings our imaginations, bodies, emotions, and intellects inevitably arouse each other.

One of the perceived 'problems' in applying Stanislavsky's toolkit to Shakespeare's dramas would seem to lie in an overemphasis on through-line and consistency. Again, Holmes cites Worthen, who discusses actors seeking 'radix traits' that can be used 'to motivate a single spine of action, the actor/character's "journey" through the play' (Holmes, 2007, p. 20). There's some conflation here of two important and very

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X13000031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

different journeys – the character's 'journey' through the play and the actor's 'journey' through the rehearsal and performance process. Unhelpful 'interiority' is often the result of the *actor's* journey as s/he incarnates the role (which is a complicated, nuanced art), rather than a character's progression through the play. (As I illustrate in Part II, you have to be alert to this distinction as an actor.)

Part of the joy and the terror of acting is that that *neither* journey is linear, simple, predictable, or consistent. Indeed, Holmes quotes Greg Doran (actor-turned-director) saying, 'Even the attempt to discern a through-line can be deceptive. I don't really think Shakespeare thought in those terms. These characters work from moment to moment; there is little psychological progression discernible' (Holmes, 2007, p. 21). From my position of 'Stanislavskian dependency', I shout 'Hurrah!' As actors, we *try* to live onstage 'moment to moment'. As human beings, our psychological progression *is* often hard to discern. What could be closer to human 'truth' than the portrayal of inconsistent, complex beings, and what could be more creatively gratifying for actors? Furthermore, our character's *function* in a narrative is often as or even more important than psychological consistency.

We also have to remember that Stanislavsky's creation of the term 'through-line' arose during a very specific era, before the birth of true ensemble and in the context of the star system. The main purpose of the through-line (as I understand it and implement it) is to ensure that the actors commit to the script's overall story, unlocking how their piece of the puzzle fits into that story. The superobjective (as I understand and practise it) is to ensure that the playwright's overarching purpose (along with the director's galvanizing view) is the key, collective focus. This prevents individual strands pulling the garment out of shape, as inevitably happened in the star system.

The key for me in embodying the through-line is precision. Doran alludes to a 'Stanislavskian search for detail' (Holmes, 2007, p. 20), a search I thoroughly uphold. Generalization is the death of good theatre. Precision leads to its flourishing. Detail – drawn from forensic text-analysis, factual titbits, and personal observations – are all gifts to the actor. And these details can be accessed through Stanislavsky's three avenues of research.

Strand 1: Research on the Text

Stanislavsky's first research resource is naturally the text itself, as a 'subtle understanding of the literary texture of the play is one of the most important conditions for an actor to be able to render . . . feelings on the stage' (Stanislavsky, 1984, p. 126). For me, 'literary texture' comprises tempo-rhythm, structure, and language (Merlin, 2007, p. 59). Clearly, the literary texture of Shakespeare's writing is exceptionally rich and, certainly when it comes to Shakespeare I'm as keen a student as any of my undergraduates. My text coach is actor Miles Anderson, a veteran of the Royal Shakespeare Company (who has worked extensively with directors including John Barton, Trevor Nunn, and Adrian Noble). Guided by Anderson's pithy insights, I began text analysis on *Richard III* with five key tasks.

The obvious starting point was the 'literary texture' of *tempo-rhythm*, as it's impossible to work on Shakespeare's verse without paying attention to the iambic pentameter (effectively introduced into English drama by Christopher Marlowe in 1587 with *Tamburlaine*). The Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt invokes the 'unprecedented energy and commanding eloquence', the 'dynamic flow of the unrhymed five-stress, ten-syllable lines', whose appeal lies in its own 'wondrous architecture' (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 191). Even before you study the images and figures of speech in a text, the metre of the verse offers you insights into the character's state of mind.

A simple di-dum-di-dum-ing of Margaret's lines thus revealed the high number of feminine endings (eleven-syllable lines). Since feminine endings take the listener by surprise and throw both speaker and listener off balance, their accumulation by Margaret suggested febrile thought patterns. There-

after, I used the metre to direct me towards the colouring of images and the stressing of words. A thirteen-syllable line in Act I, Scene iii – 'That my husband Henry's death, my lovely Edward's death' (line 147) – guided me towards the stressing of 'lovely', giving Margaret a moment to hold (in her own mind and that of her listener) the quality of her son as 'lovely'. An eight-syllable line in Act IV, Scene iv – 'Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray' (line 46) – suggested that each of these potent images needed time to be fully conjured up in the imaginations of her listeners. With barely any consideration of the text beyond tempo-rhythm, I had already gained some insights into the words that Margaret might foreground in her delivery, as well as a sense of her inner tempo.

Turning next to the 'literary texture' of *structure* – and learning from Anderson's work with Noble – I sought out lines with which I could 'hang up' the ending. There are times when a line of verse doesn't end with a full stop, and yet the actor needn't elide straight into the next line; instead, a momentary pause hangs the listener in mid-air. The actor can then surprise the listener with where they might land. This was a great piece of advice for I, iii – the 'cursing scene' – where I want to keep the onstage listeners hanging on every word in case they're next to be cursed. For example, I realized that I could keep Elizabeth in suspense for a moment with:

> And after many lengthened hours of grief

before dropping onto the words:

> Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen. (162–3)

Of course, Elizabeth knows that I'm cursing her, but she doesn't know with what exactly.

Having looked at the tempo-rhythm and structure of both scenes, my third point of focus was the 'literary texture' of *language*, specifically the final words of each sentence. Here, I discovered that in I, iii, there is a preponderance of lines ending in 'me', while IV, iv, has numerous references to many people, both by name and social or familial role (e.g., brothers, son, widow, queen, wife, mother, husband, etc.). Therefore, I was able to glean a sense that the first scene is about Margaret establishing (post-banishment) her own identity and sense of self (albeit through cursing other people), while the second scene turns the spotlight on a broader world-view.

Remaining with language, I (fourthly) made lists of the powerful verbs, nouns, and adjectives. These gave me the atmosphere and tenor of the scenes for Margaret. The first scene included *verbs* such as hurl, begnaw, curse, wail, stabbed, and rankle; *nouns* such as worm, dog, spider, hog, kingdom, banishment, and allegiance; and *adjectives* such as wretched, bloody, loathed, grievous, and elvish-marked. Instantly my imagination was fuelled into fathoming what sort of person might use such vocabulary. The repetition of 'dead' and 'killed' in IV, iv, likewise provided rich pickings.

Finally, I returned to a more detailed examination of the structure, seeking out the appositions in the text. One of the quickest ways to learn a Shakespeare speech, I find, is to locate the appositions, and then the speech almost learns itself. As Noble points out:

> This rubbing together of words and ideas . . . gives energy to the language. . . . It is a feature that is both utilitarian, in so far as it helps the actor to communicate and the audience to understand, and artistic, giving rhythm, elegance and intelligence. (Noble, 2010, p. 17)

Given the brevity of the rehearsal period, I began well in advance to learn the scenes using as my main guides rhythm and apposition.

Strand 2: Research on Play and Playwright

My personal desire to research the realm of the play was endorsed by Tina Packer when, on Day 2 of rehearsals, she asked us all to go away and investigate four key areas:

(1) The Story of *Richard III*.

(2) The Personal Story (i.e. 'the backstory of each character: who's dead, who's alive, why is my character the person they are?').

(3) The Megastory (i.e., 'the context in which we now live, such as the assumptions that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X13000031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

women won't fight, the assumptions made about age, gender, race, parenthood, etc.').

(4) The Archetypes of Heaven and Hell ('the Christian world picture, the idea that God is writing your name in His Book. Where is the light in what your characters are doing?').

Packer stressed that we must take the audience on a journey that works through the darkness of the events. She clearly has a sense of theatre's responsibility to its audience and didn't want this production to be all murder and revenge.

(1) *The Story of 'Richard III'*

The plot of *Richard III* is complex. Understanding the fight for the throne – the Yorkists, the Lancastrians, the Woodvilles – is a basic necessity for clear storytelling. Realizing that the curses uttered by Margaret in I, iii, then come to pass as the play unfurls is another. Seeing where allegiances change, how Richard descends into paranoia, and France engages with England are equally important. For all its vastness as a play, there are few flabby or superfluous lines in *Richard III*. It requires extremely precise acting, preceded by a very careful reading and knowledge of the whole. Gaining that knowledge, however, is predominantly headwork and text analysis: more complicated is research into the Personal Story.

(2) *The Personal Story*

Holmes describes Richard McCabe's work on Autolycus in *A Winter's Tale* as 'an extremely Stanislavskian interpretation . . . complete with backstory tortuously worked out and presented to the audience' (Holmes, 2007, p. 28). Neither of these need be the inevitable outcome of using Stanislavsky: stimulating the imagination to unlock a backstory shouldn't be tortuous, and presenting one's homework to the audience isn't necessary. All the audience needs to see is the moment-by-moment revealing of a story. Of course, the task is a little different with the histories than the comedies, since there are real people's biographies to probe. That said, Holinshed's history is not Shakespeare's history, although extremely useful material was revealed by investigating both, material that took me further on the journey of 'making the words my own'.

MARGARET IN HISTORY

Trevor Royle's *The Wars of the Roses: England's First Civil Wars* is a bible for any actor undertaking Shakespeare's history plays, as he clearly differentiates the historical facts from Shakespeare's fictionalizing. While much here was of great interest, certain references proved particularly useful in creating an image of Margaret that would resonate for me in back-filling the journey towards 'foul, wrinkled hag' (as Richard calls her in I, iii, line 123).

Described by a contemporary chronicler as a great beauty, renowned for her 'wit and her lofty spirit of courage', Margaret of Anjou was a strong-willed sixteen-year-old versed in the ways of court life when she was shipped to England to become queen (Royle, 2009, p. 182).

Since Shakespeare's Margaret recalls her husband, Henry VI, so frequently in *Richard III*, it was important for me to have a sense of who he might be. Historically, the Henry whom Margaret married was earnest, religious, compassionate, and sensitive, sometimes to the point of simple-mindedness. In 1453 he suffered a complete mental breakdown, lapsing into a catatonic state that lasted for eighteen months. During this time, Margaret and her baby son Edward were removed to Windsor by the Duke of York and kept under what was essentially house arrest. Her husband was oblivious to all this: indeed, when he eventually came to his senses on Christmas Day 1454, he had no idea that he even had a son.

It's no wonder that Margaret had to work hard to retain the dignity of the Crown, with a two-year-old son to protect, the pressure of York upon the royal throne, and a husband who kept lapsing into madness. After one brutal and extensive battle, Henry VI 'was found sitting under an oak tree from where he had watched the battle and its outcome, laughing and singing all the while'! (Royle, 2009, p. 274). I was now getting a sense of why Suffolk might have been a better catch.

SHAKESPEARE'S MARGARET

Since the Margaret of *Richard III* is the final manifestation of a character earlier prominent throughout the *Henry VI* trilogy, I traced back Margaret's journey to render the references in *Richard III* more substantial to me than a shopping list of a dead family. I wasn't seeking a logical through-line across the plays so much as looking for clues to spark my imagination. From her first appearance at the end of *Henry VI, Part 1*, we glean that Margaret has beauty, humility, chastity, courage, and high resolve, and for a while in *Part 2* these qualities remain. Yet before long we see the differences between Holy Harry and his queen (a warrior by necessity). We witness her attacks on Gloucester, her passions with Suffolk, and the lamentations as she cradles his bodiless head. Due to her overwhelming bereavement, she morphs into a 'blood-bespotted Neapolitan' and 'England's bloody scourge'.

Furious at her husband's disinheritance of her son, she becomes the 'she-wolf of France' and 'tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide', whose tongue has 'more poisons than the adder's tooth'. Then, after the murder of her son at the Battle of Tewkesbury, we see her actually wanting to die. Looking at her given circumstances – the beheading of her lover; the disinheritance of her son by her weak, holy husband; the witnessing of her son's murder and her consequent banishment – it wouldn't be overly-Stanislavskian to say that there's motive enough here for a woman to curse the world and demand retribution. This research resulted in my desire to explore grief, since 'anger' and 'bargaining' (which is, arguably, 'retribution' in an eye-for-an-eye world-view) are included in the five stages of grief (outlined in the famed Kübler-Ross Model).

GRIEF

So far the research had been predominantly intellectual. So with some historical and textual pointers in place, I turned my attention to a more consciously psychophysical angle. The writings of C. S. Lewis and H. Norman Wright proved extremely useful, as the comparison of images in Margaret's speeches with descriptions of grief were astonishing. Her advice to Elizabeth in IV, iv – 'Forbear to sleep the night and fast the day' (line 73) – tells us about her physical state: she doesn't sleep or eat. In *Experiencing Grief*, Wright describes how, in profound grief:

> You lie in bed at night, staring at the ceiling. . . . Time seems to stand still, especially at night. . . . Food doesn't taste the same. . . . Eating and sleeping patterns won't be the same. . . . Dreams and nightmares occur. (Wright, 2004, p. 7, 15, 21)

He goes on to describe how the profoundly grief-stricken experience feelings of going crazy ('mad Margaret' is the character's epithet); being misunderstood or ignored (no one listens to Margaret at the beginning of I, iii); being ambushed by the grief (Margaret begins IV, iv, calmly declaring that she will go to France and then releases a tide of feelings on Elizabeth and the Duchess); and feeling anger towards God for not responding the way we had wanted. Margaret's response to Elizabeth's cry to God, 'When didst Thou sleep when such a deed was done?' is 'When Holy Harry died and my sweet son' (lines 13–14). In performance, I delivered this line as an accusation to the heavens.

However, Wright also suggests that being in certain places brings comfort to the bereaved: certainly, Margaret is prepared to risk death by breaking her banishment to be close to the home where the body of her husband still lies and where she has memories of her son. (Is this avenue of enquiry an overemphasis on 'interiority', or a desire to ignite one's body and imagination in order to connect with the character's words?)

Wright's book also gave me some significant ideas for the physicality of the character, describing how, for the grief-stricken, contact with the ground

> feels more like a floorboard tilting or soft pliable mud with each step you take. . . . You're on a crooked sidewalk, just being pushed along without being able to stop, look around, get your bearings and decide whether this is the direction you want to go. Grief brings you into the world of the unknown. (Wright, 2004, p. 3, 4)

All these descriptions resonated with Michael Chekhov's work on centres, qualities, and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X13000031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

atmospheres, tools to which I also frequently turn as an actor. My imagination, grounded in research, was taking me into the realms of actor training and the psychophysical.

(3) *The Megastory*

I was particularly intrigued by Packer's provocation with regard to Megastory, and in fact this avenue of research lasted throughout the rehearsal process. The presence of women and children in *Richard III* was extremely important to Packer for affecting the audience with the meaninglessness of violence and the ongoing tragedy of war – from age to age, and country to country. To this end, she encouraged myself (Margaret), Mare Trevathan (Elizabeth), and Anne Sandoe (Duchess of York) to be compassionate towards each other. She saw IV, iv, as a scene in which the women's empathy for each other overcomes their hatred, and that Margaret's grief has propelled her from a place of anger or denial into one of strength.

Packer referenced the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, who protest on behalf of their abducted children in their signatory white headscarves: their loss has given them strength to engage in acts of profound courage. Packer wanted us to touch the Colorado audience with the litany of the dead in IV, iv, reminding us of what war means in terms of death after death after death.

In many respects, this was where my imagination needed most exercising – to connect with the violence in the play and its relevance to a contemporary audience. The challenge to owning the words would be filling the gap between my own pacifism and Margaret's brutality, and connecting with the direct, everyday exposure to violence, which clearly coloured Shakespeare's imagination. My research on the Megastory, therefore, took me back to Shakespeare's world before addressing a contemporary realm.

SHAKESPEARE'S WORLD

The world in which Shakespeare lived was no more violent than now; however, the average English person's contact with that violence was different. Britain had suffered brutal civil wars in its recent history; these battles had been bloodthirsty and unsophisticated, lasting several hours as men 'stabbed and hacked their opponents to death with swords, axes, halberds and assorted blades' (Royle, 2009, p. 281). My research led me to believe that visual prompts from Syria in 2012 would be more useful to a contemporary actor than green and pleasant lands.

Shakespeare's London regularly bore witness to public displays of accepted violence, with bear-baiting, bullfights, and dog-fights, wherein animals were tied, whipped and blinded. And animals weren't the only victims of physical maiming: London was a 'non-stop theatre of punishment' (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 179). No Diamond Jubilee or Olympic Games: heads on spikes at the foot of London Bridge were a visitor's welcome to the capital.

Reading that Elizabeth I's own physician, Roderigo Lopez, was arrested in 1594 for high treason for conspiring to poison the Queen provided me with imaginative content for Margaret's lines to Richard: 'Thy friends suspect for traitors whilst thou liv'st, /And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends' (I, iii, lines 77–8). I could begin to understand the dark and brutal corridors of suspicion walked by all.

CONTEMPORARY VIOLENCE

While the images of Shakespeare's world shocked me, my ability to make Margaret's words my own, to 'adopt them to my own semantic and expressive intention', was not easy. I felt at a remove from the violence – until Miles Anderson, a Zimbabwean passionate about the state of his homeland, found YouTube footage that filled any gaps I might have had.

The first film that I watched showed the humiliation and torture of the former Libyan leader, Samuel Doe, who was captured by the rebel leader Prince Yormie Johnson, in 1990. Johnson sipped beer while Doe was tortured, his ear sliced off before being executed and photographed naked. There were also online images of men posing and grinning with a decapitated head. (Suddenly Hastings's decapitation by Richard of Gloucester weighed more on my conscience than the prop head

in the rehearsal room had weighed until now.) I was sickened and distressed by the shouting and machismo.

My second viewing was of the documentary made by Ami Horowitz and Matthew Groff in 2009, *U.N.Me* – a film intended, in Horowitz's words to 'expose elements of corruption and ineptitide' in the United Nations. Partway through the film, there were images of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which an estimated 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis, were killed over a period of three months by the Hutus. The UN proved useless. There was one incident involving a school turned into a UN safe house, into which Tutsi refugees flocked. When the Hutu rebels congregated around the fences with machetes and AK47s, the UN soldiers didn't know what to do.

In the end, they were given the order to leave the school. In other words, they were in effect instructed to leave the refugees at the mercy of the rebels. As the troops left the haven, refugees were begging UN soldiers to shoot them, so that they wouldn't be hacked to bits by Hutu machetes. There followed an image of many dead bodies lying on the earth – of men, women, children – and a dog roving among them, sniffing the blood-soaked ground. Following that was an image of a room completely filled with line upon line of victims' skulls.

I felt sick to the pit of my stomach at UN soldiers with our implicit support turning these innocent victims over to genocidal butchery. No more research was necessary: I now had all the connection to violence that I needed. And then – suddenly – my imagination responded. I had an image of Margaret carrying a sack as she wanders the castle in her banishment. We don't know what's in the sack until IV, iv, when she declares to Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, 'If sorrow can admit society' (line 24). She then opens the sack to reveal two skulls: those of Edward her son, and Henry her husband. These are her only possessions, her only society.

Talking to Packer about the UN documentary and the image of a roomful of skulls, she was very enthusiastic about my idea of the sack and the skulls. She suggested I added a third – that of Suffolk, Margaret's lover, whose head was indeed sent to Margaret after his execution. These props added a whole new dimension to the scene, for myself, Trevathan, and Sandoe. Rhetorical, past-tense allusions to the litany of vanished dead were replaced by tangible, haunting evidence of their presence and our loss.

(4) *The Archetypes of Heaven and Hell*

The work for me here was on understanding Renaissance retribution and the potency of Margaret's curses, in a world where, as Packer suggested, 'God might write your name in His book'.

RETRIBUTION

Margaret in *Richard III* is often likened to the allegorical figure of Revenge in the late-medieval morality plays; indeed, in Noble's 1988 production Penny Downie played Margaret as two hundred years old. My personal understanding of 'Revenge' is probably the search for justice. To which end, I investigated the circumstances surrounding Margaret's son's death, as this event would certainly seem to be the motivating force for her retribution in *Richard III*.

My historical research revealed that the real Prince Edward had been handed over to Edward IV at Tewkesbury on the promise that he wouldn't be harmed. However, according to Holinshed, King Edward didn't honour that proclamation. On receiving the Prince:

> King Edward said nothing, but with his hand thrust him from him, or (as some saie) stroke him with his gantlet; whom incontinentlie, George duke of Clarence, Richard duke of Glocester, Thomas Greie, marquesse Dorcet, and William lord Hastings, that stood by, suddenlie murthered; for the which cruel act, the more part of the dooers in their latter daies dranke of the like cup, by the righteous iustice and due punishment of God.
> (Holinshed, cited in Armstrong, 1972, p. 125)

This bite of history filled in valuable gaps for me. A promise was broken. More than one person stabbed a young man. Others stood around and watched like spectators – and *that* is the unforgivable part for Margaret. This is revealed by the fact that she directs

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X13000031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a significant chunk of her curses in I, iii, at Rivers, Grey, Dorset, and Hastings – whom she later calls 'the beholders of this frantic play' (IV, iv, line 41). For orthodox Tudor England, Margaret's retributive curses would be understandable: having thrice in my own life leapt unhesitatingly to the physical defence of people under significant threat, my own imagination was sufficiently activated.

CURSES

Early in rehearsals, Packer noted that my curses sounded too twenty-first-century. They weren't landing on the listeners as if I truly meant them. Again, I turned to research to help me own the words. Neither Packer nor I had sought to accentuate any witchcraft in Margaret: I considered her threat to be predominantly in the eyes of others, whose fear she then exploits. Indeed, Greenblatt quotes the famous witchcraft manual, *Malleus Maleficarum*, in which the authors Kramer and Sprenger describe how demonic spirits can incite 'local motion' in the minds of those awake as well as asleep. This 'local motion' means that any thoughts or ideas that may be lurking there are drawn out and given such vigour in their imaginations that they then believe these things to be true (Greenblatt, 2004, p. 352).

Having lived in the US for four years, I've seen the fear-grip that media and government can hold on society, and to my mind this was one of the ways in which Margaret could carry contemporary resonance. Richard sets the ball rolling by calling her a 'foul wrinkled witch'. She then puts the idea of her witchcraft into local motion in the court's minds, leading them to believe that her curses can have power. She plays upon this and strikes into the hearts of her listeners a fear of the events that will come to pass if they carry on along their path of destruction.

This interpretation need not diminish Margaret's own God-fear and belief in divine retribution. It simply means that discoveries can be made in the moment as she watches the court's responses. She can look into the heavens (and with an outdoor theatre this is doubly powerful); she can see the (real) 'dull clouds' (line 151) that she calls upon to give way to her quick curses, channelling God's power into her own body in front of her onstage audience.

For Greenblatt, there is something eerie and disturbing about curses, as if they magically touch the hidden order of things. Certainly, the repetitive order of the murders in *Richard III* from one generation to another, from one related family to another, draws out the tension in the story between free will and destiny: to some extent, Margaret is determining – in the very moment of cursing – the court's fate. They give her power – which is useful, because my research also revealed that curses were issued by people who were without significant military, political, or social power. Margaret once had all these things. Now she has none of them, but she does have a captive audience – and one, furthermore, that has just told her that they believe in curses. In the Renaissance, witchcraft was thought not only to be a frightening danger, but also a wonderful show – and as an actor I was excited by the pleasure that Margaret might gain in at last getting the court to listen to her via her divine cursing-show.

While my research had me poring over a pile of books, Anderson's online search unearthed some historical gestures for curses. One showed a hand making a two-horned devil sign by extending the little finger and the index finger. Anderson also suggested that I use a willow-stick wand. Indeed, in rehearsals, the devil sign proved particularly useful with Elizabeth and her children, while the wand enabled me to point very specifically at those upon whom my curses are falling. I could choose when to send the energy to other characters through the wand. I could use it as a divining rod to bring the powers of Heaven down to earth. I could carry it in my scabbard as the only weapon that a banished person might get away with carrying. I could threaten Richard with it, like a dog that I might beat.

At Packer's suggestion on seeing the prop, I used it as a sceptre, wielding it like the queen I used to be. The prop and gestures enabled me to own the curses, by generating a very specific score of physical actions

executed through what Stanislavsky calls the logic and sequence of *the line of thought* and *the line of action.*

THE LIGHT IN THE STORY

Indeed, the tools in Stanislavsky's kit that I find immeasurably useful (along with the three strands of research) are *logic and sequence*, and the *lines of thought and action*. These two tools are intricately interwoven, and are not to be confused with evening out a character or clutching for a consistent through-line (although well constructed lines of thought and action do weave together to create a naturally coherent through-line).

The *line of thought* is revealed predominantly through detailed attention to the text. The *line of action* arises predominantly by being very open to following impulses and truly listening to the possibilities of partner and space. The purpose of these two lines (for me) is to create a *physical score* that can serve as a launch pad in rehearsals and from which inspiration can fly in performance. A physical score is created by simple means, allowing one moment to lead to the next, *logically and sequentially*, taking information from visual clues, linguistic cues, images, breath, body impulses, partners, props, and set. Little things will change every time you play the scene, as actors add nuances and make new discoveries – and that too is the result of logical and sequential listening. As an actor, I find that a clear score of physical actions renders a scene extremely present-tense and active, rather than past-tense and reported.

The principles of following impulses and dynamic listening are both at the heart of Tina Packer's vibrant rehearsal method, and it was finding the physical score with the skulls that helped me answer her call to locate the character's light. Initially I'd been perplexed by the question. Where could the light possibly be in Margaret? She has lost everything – domestic, familial, material, professional. She is left with nothing but curses and truth-telling, disempowered in everything but language. For a while my own journey into the character created an unhelpful 'interiority' as I was left pondering this issue, feeling at various points insecure vocally, physically, and imaginatively (as will be detailed in Part II).

Confidence was regained, however, when I understood how the physical score with the skulls could send a clear message to the audience – via the other two women in the scene. Having first produced the skulls from the sack on Margaret's line, 'If sorrow can admit society', I followed Packer's direction to thrust the skulls at the Duchess, with:

> I had an Edward and a Richard killed him.
> I had a husband and a Richard killed him.
> (25–6)

Thus, the mother of this 'guilty homicide' is left holding the vivid skulls of my lost loved ones. Packer suggested that I then carry one of the skulls (the child's) over to Elizabeth when I 'decline' (like a Latin verb) the list of all the things that she has lost (lines 60–4). Allowing one moment logically to sequence into the next, I found that I was then in a position to hold the child's skull above Elizabeth's head as if to crown her with it on the line, 'I slip my weary head / And leave the burden of it all on thee' (lines 69– 70).

The line of thought (coming from the text) interwove with the line of action (standing behind a bereft, almost supine Elizabeth, with a skull raised above her head). I then dropped the skull into her lap, so that she had to have direct contact with a child's skull (like those of her lost princes in the Tower). I ensured that I retrieved both skulls from the women before I left the scene, so the Duchess had to hand me Henry's skull and Elizabeth to hand me Edward's skull, thereby each having personally to finger death. On my line, 'These English woes will make me smile in France', I clutched a skull to either side of my head so that, with my own smiling face, a line of three grinning visages appeared before the bewildered Elizabeth. This was my private reference to the lines of skulls in the images from Rwanda. The moment was quirky, macabre, irreverent, and felt appropriately muscular for Margaret at this point in her evolution.

A physical score really can help to keep an actor 'in the moment' by virtue of the fact

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X13000031 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that it proceeds step by step by step, from one impulse to the next, visually and textually. This particular score with the skulls was immense fun, each moment being born of the one preceding and leading to the next. Its specific intention was to illuminate the message to the audience that these wars can't go on or we will all end up as faceless, nameless skulls in a room in Rwanda or Syria or Egypt.

This, for me, is Margaret's light: to awaken the women – through her words – to their ability to change the situation through *their* words (as indeed they attempt to do with Richard in their ensuing dialogues in IV, iv).

Thus, we have addressed two of the three strands of research – on text and on the realm of the play. Part II will explore research on the self.

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All quotations from *Richard III* are taken from CSF's choice of performance text, to be found online at: http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccernew2?id=ShaR3F.sgmandimages=images/modenganddata=/texts/english/modeng/parsedandtag=publicandpart=all

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