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THE PEDAGOGY OF SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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## ABSTRACT

### THE PEDAGOGY OF SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

By Beverly Catherine Bryne, M.F.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2008

Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes  
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The Pedagogy of Shakespeare & Company examines in several ways the principles and practices of actor training at Shakespeare & Company of Lenox, Massachusetts. Chapter 1 is a narrative of my personal experience at the Month-long Intensive in Lenox, elaborating its multiple components. Chapter 2 recounts the genesis of the company and looks at the influences that shaped its identity. Chapter 3 is a more specific attempt to define the pedagogy developed by Tina Packer, Kristin Linklater and the other founders of Shakespeare & Company and to provide some contextual analysis. The remainder of this document explores my own pedagogical evolution and the opportunities afforded me thus far to apply my learning to my teaching.

## Chapter 1

### THE INTENSIVE

#### Introduction

It is tempting to speak of my personal creative narrative in terms of *a dream deferred* or *a dream derailed*, but that would not be quite accurate. A dream would have to be fully formed before it could be deferred, I think. My story is more about an embryonic dream, or aborted fragments of a dream. Suffice it to say that I entered adulthood aware that many people thought I was talented, but I was not one of them. Had I received any mentoring at all, I might have learned to trust my gifts, to take risks and set goals. I might have developed the courage to ask for the help I needed. Instead, I put my dream fragments away into the realm of untouchable, unreachable fantasies. It has taken me many years to work my tentative way back to them. It would be difficult to overstate what a triumph of desire over fear it has been to come to Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in my mid-50s. So many facets of the graduate school experience—the collegiality, the guidance, the intellectual stimulation—have felt like surprise presents. I was so consumed with being apprehensive that I never considered how much I might like being a student again. I certainly had not anticipated the sea of changes that had transformed the “academy” while I was away. *Historiography* sounded



like a funny mispronunciation. It was stunning to discover what feminism and semiotics had done to the modus operandi of scholarship. And I was exposed to the concept of voice training for the first time. Within a semester, I decided I had found my niche in the world of theatre pedagogy. Interestingly enough, a theatre director friend of mine had encouraged me a few years ago to attend the Month-Long Intensive at Shakespeare & Company. At that time, the idea seemed unimaginable. I was living in Mexico, for heaven's sake; I could not possibly afford it; I was much too old to participate; how could I manage to take a month out of my life? By the time Janet Rodgers, my voice teacher at VCU, suggested I investigate Shakespeare & Company, it no longer sounded quite so preposterous. In fact, the idea stirred feelings of curiosity and excitement, but I thought I might be able to glean what it had to offer by attending a couple of workshops.

Eventually, I committed myself to two back-to-back weekend workshops held in Lenox, Massachusetts during April of 2007. In retrospect, I see that each one focused on one of the aspects of actor training at Shakespeare & Company. The first was devoted to making emotional connections to the text and the second was titled, *The Music and Architecture of the Verse*. These weekends were sort of mini-intensives, beginning at 7:00 pm on Friday and ending at 4:00 pm on Sunday. I came away from them intoxicated with everything I had learned, but conscious that I had only had tastes of the whole meal that is the Intensive. I met several Intensive veterans who nodded sagely at me and said, "You'll be back in January, I can tell. The same thing happened to me." Sure enough, time strengthened rather than weakened my sense of needing a deeper experience than I had gotten in two weekends. I felt increasingly compelled to return for

the full month despite the obstacles impeding me: the expense, the inconvenience, the distance, my necessary absence from classes and work. Luckily, the faculty from whom I sought guidance offered unanimous support of my desire to pursue this particular grail. The wheels were set in motion.

### The Intensive

The Month-Long Intensive at Shakespeare & Company: 10 hours a day, 6 days a week for 4 weeks. The prospect was daunting as well as compelling. We were forewarned that we would be exhausted physically and emotionally. I worried that I might be too old to withstand the rigors demanded of me. But reading the “Statement of Vision” in my orientation packet strengthened my resolve to the sticking point:

To create a theatre of unprecedented excellence rooted in the classical ideals of inquiry, balance and harmony, a company that performs as the Elizabethans did—in love with poetry, physical prowess, and the mysteries of the universe. To establish a theatre company that, by its commitment to the creative impulse, is a revolutionary force in society, which connects the truth of the past to the challenges and possibilities of today.

Those words spoke directly to my educational ideals, my interest in Shakespeare and my passion for language. As I made the long drive to Lenox, I had the sense of embarking on a pilgrimage, of moving toward the source of knowledge and inspiration.

Shakespeare & Company occupies what was once a boys’ boarding school called Lenox Academy. Some of the older buildings are dilapidated and unused, waiting for the

eventual renovation that is slated to integrate them into an expanded physical plant. The company has constructed two of its own buildings on the property, an office and an appealing theatre. Students and visiting teachers are housed and fed in a dormitory that dates back to the 60s, a truly depressing monument to utilitarianism. Bedrooms are shabby but adequate. Some classes are held in the lounges and basement rooms of this dormitory. Others take place in the theatre itself, as well as its lobby and rehearsal studio. Occasionally, the whole group—45 students plus various teachers—would meet in the Lenox Town Hall or the Community Center.

Upon my arrival and after some initial dismay regarding the living quarters—sagging single bed, the pervasive smell of deodorizer, stained industrial carpet and antiquated shower—it lifted my spirits to meet my roommate, Sue, a woman my age from San Francisco with whom I had an immediate rapport. We explored Lenox together before attending the orientation in Town Hall. Dave Demke addressed the group first, advising us to honor the risk we have taken by coming here. “You will be exhausted, but don’t use that as an excuse to step back. Use it as an opportunity to explore what you can do with relaxation and economy,” he said. He urged us to stay open and not to judge the experience too soon, saying, “It is the nature of the artist to be searching for something not completely understood.” We were assured that we had arrived here with everything we would need. Dennis Krausnick spoke about what to expect in a more practical way and covered some of the ground rules: the confidentiality of what happens in class or rehearsal; the practice of “saying Yes” rather than resisting; the necessity of punctuality, attendance and staying in the room; the responsibility of owning one’s own training and

saying “Stop” if one does not want to continue a certain activity. We then were led in a group exercise called “Walk-About” (sometimes referred to as “Milling and Seething.”) We progressed from walking about individually at different tempos to having encounters with partners to explorations of being 5 years old and 9 years old and finally 13 years old. Afterwards, we gathered in a circle and each person (teachers and assistants included) made a statement about the landscape of their childhood, another about why they had come to this Intensive and a third that began with “Something you wouldn’t guess about me is \_\_\_\_\_.” The willingness of almost everyone to be truthful was apparent immediately. There were many refrains of “going deeper” and “my love of Shakespeare” and “this loving atmosphere.” Afterwards, I wrote in my journal, “My thought is that this process, this ‘progression’ that is the Month-Long Intensive draws to it the pilgrims who are ready for it and so a kind of powerful alchemy takes place. Many here have attended a shorter workshop and afterwards felt led to come for this month. Tina (Packer) et al. have witnessed this ‘blossoming’ to such an extent that they accurately predict the whole arc and have learned to choreograph it pretty precisely.” As I lay in bed that night, I recognized that I had come to a place where I would be continually pushed out of my comfort zones and I also recognized that while such a prospect would have absolutely terrified me in the past, I did not feel afraid at that moment. This realization filled me with wonder.

The next day we were treated to our first master class with Tina Packer, the formidable founder of Shakespeare & Company. How to do justice to Tina Packer on the page? She inspires awe, fear, intense admiration and loyalty. She is both larger-than-life

and eminently accessible, a person who does not suffer fools in silence and yet speaks the truth with compassion. She lectures almost extemporaneously, with a wonderfully mordant wit and razor-sharp intellect. She has immersed herself in Shakespeare's words and world for 30 years; her knowledge is encyclopedic. What follows are a few nuggets from her lecture. "Underneath Shakespeare's plays, three questions exist: What does it mean to alive/to be human? What must we do? [What is the collective action?] and What must *I* do?" (She explained that this concept of "I" has only emerged in the Elizabethan period.) "The art of rhetoric exists to ask these questions. You, the actor, are not reporting something; you are struggling with the questions. (To be or not to be...)." "You cannot find yourself or your truth outside of relationships or culture." "Your responsibility in this workshop is to experience this work deeply enough to communicate it with your whole instrument—body, voice and psyche. You are going to tap into yourself so as to connect with fellow actors and the audience. You are beginning the journey of unblocking all the barriers that have stopped your full expression." "Playing Shakespeare is about doing it with the whole of your body." "Shakespeare & Company tries to move the actor from here to there through a multiplicity of disciplines." "Inhibition is a blocked creative impulse." "This month is about owning the language, not talking any rubbish." (Tina exhibits a characteristic British intolerance for sentimentality and posturing. Her brusque dismissal of such behavior can be highly discomfiting to the unlucky perpetrator.)

Each day of the Intensive began with an hour of Physical Awareness, usually led by a movement or voice teacher. I believe the primary intent of this time was to

implement a regimen that would bring us into the moment and warm us up together. The content itself varied considerably depending on the teacher. We never knew whether we would begin the morning lying on our yoga mats or whether the mats would be banished in favor of upright movement through the space. Most of what we did was familiar to me from years of improv/movement/bodywork. One of the more interesting and novel sessions was led by Margaret Jansen, a Linklater-certified voice teacher. It involved becoming intimate with our feet (sequentially, not simultaneously) and paying attention to their anatomy, their capabilities and their weaknesses. As often as we did activities individually, we found ourselves in pairs or trios—touching, exploring, skipping, sculpting or massaging one another. Being reticent at Shakespeare & Company was almost impossible. Everyone was expected to engage wholeheartedly in every event. We were told that attendance was mandatory because “all the disciplines are inter-related and the work has a defined progression.” Tina and the other faculty spoke of the inter-connectedness of the areas of study and of how they support and contribute to one another. Physical Awareness, for example almost invariably involved activities related to the work taking place in other classes. We did status exercises, vocal warm-ups and every kind of movement-based activity imaginable.

### **Voice**

Voice work, specifically Linklater voice work, is an inextricable component of Shakespeare & Company’s training. Tina Packer had sought out Kristin Linklater, the renowned Scottish voice teacher, when she first conceived of creating a

classically-trained company of American actors. The “Linklater Technique” dovetailed perfectly with Tina’s desire to work inside-out with actors. As Helen Epstein recounts in her book, *The Companies She Keeps: Tina Packer Builds a Theatre*, Tina convinced Linklater to join her in starting a company that would “marry young American actors with classical British training”(Epstein 8). Both women were themselves products of British training who had found that training to be technically impressive but emotionally empty. By the time they met one another, Linklater had become known internationally for her work “freeing the natural voice” in actors, but had often felt frustrated working with directors whose vision was at cross purposes with her own. In Tina Packer, she found a director committed to integrating her techniques into the actors’ basic training. It is worth noting the seeds of Linklater’s own artistic growth here. Born and reared in Scotland, she trained at London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and became the protégé of the voice teacher, Iris Warren. Warren, who had come to LAMDA in the 30s, was not interested in promulgating “empty forms of elocution and emphasis on correct diction and the pear-shaped vowel” (Epstein 20). Her quest to work more deeply with students was profoundly affected when she fell in love with an Austrian psychoanalyst who had studied with Freud. As Epstein tells it, “He asked Warren to help some of his patients talk about themselves more freely, and Warren discovered that, as they let their inhibitions drop and their emotions emerge, their voices changed. She began to apply what she had learned from the psychoanalytic patients to her acting students” (42). This strikes me as profoundly significant because it marks the beginning of the association between psychological openness and truthful acting, an idea embraced

and developed further by Kristin Linklater. Linklater's use of the term "unblocking the natural voice" has a distinctly psychological ring to it. As she states bluntly in the introduction to her seminal book, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, "In the psycho-therapeutic context the voice has been neglected, and apart from screaming primally and talking endlessly, little has been done to free it from its prison of environmental influence, unconscious psycho-physical conditioning and aesthetic standardization" (Linklater 4).

Half of each morning of the Intensive was devoted to Linklater voice work. Though Kristin left Shakespeare & Company in the mid-90s, there are many Linklater-certified teachers still associated with the company. One of ours, Ariel Bock, was an original member of the company. The other two were Anne Brady, an instructor at State University of New York-Binghamton, and Margaret Jansen, who was with the company for 8 years and now teaches in and around New York City. We were taken through the complete Linklater "progression" in the course of the month, rotating weekly among the three teachers. Because the basic principle of Linklater's teaching is that, "Blocked emotions are the fundamental obstacle to a free voice," the work was as psychological as it was physical. In our first class we made drawings of our voice, of the voice we would like to have, as well as the blocks we believe we have. The teachers were clearly experienced in recognizing blocked emotions and the ways they are manifested vocally. Margaret Jansen, in particular, was so uncannily accurate it felt as though she saw into one's very heart. We were encouraged, gently but firmly, to allow ourselves to feel the emotion that has been repressed and to express it on vibration. Breath awareness and breath support were central to everything we did. Sometimes just



the depth of the breathing itself released long-held emotional blocks. Almost all of us found ourselves weeping when we learned to let go of the tension in our jaw. We practiced “softening”—in the knees and belly, in the shoulders and neck and in the jaw and tongue. Many times a day we returned our attention to this practice. We learned to “let our lips be parted” and our tongue rest in the bottom of the mouth, tip of the tongue behind the lower teeth. We learned that we do not need to use our jaw to produce sound. We used imagery to breathe from the groin and the lower back. We used imagery to explore our resonators. We practiced expressing powerful feelings while staying soft and open. We learned to recognize our impulses—to breathe, to speak, to move, to release. We developed a relationship with our breathing center and the pool of feelings available to us. We practiced, again and again, releasing feelings on vibration. We used the sonnet we had memorized to connect Shakespeare’s text with our own emotions, accessing our personal truth and vulnerability. This was a powerful experience for me. When Anne Brady asked me why I had chosen Sonnet No. 73 (That time of year thou may’st in me behold), I had to acknowledge my sadness regarding my mortality, the sorrow I feel that Marc and I may not have many years together and my grief at the thought of leaving my children. Speaking the text from that emotional location was both very difficult and empowering. I heard the change in my voice; other students wept as they listened. Such a scenario was not unique to me. We witnessed this sort of breakthrough repeatedly and I became convinced of the tremendous potential of this pedagogical approach.

Both Tina and Kristin speak of “the word made flesh.” They are not trying to be poetical in the least; they are speaking literally about *embodying language* and it is the

heart of their work. They point out that Elizabethans had this ability. The role of spoken language and the primacy of rhetoric in education which characterized the Elizabethan world have been almost entirely lost in the intervening centuries. As Linklater states in *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, "Unfortunately, 'thinking' and 'feeling' have become largely separated in our culture" (Linklater 32). She claims that we regard the "word as symbol," using it to *describe* the inner content, whereas for the Elizabethans, the word *revealed* the inner content and was therefore the "word made flesh." The actor must be able to do the latter to communicate poetic language. "Treat the images as metaphors and you will end up spouting poetry; experience them emotionally and they will create an inner drama to be revealed directly and transparently through the medium of words," she exhorts (33). All of Linklater's "technique" has developed out of "the belief that voice and language belong to the whole body rather than the head alone and that the function of the voice is to reveal the self" (Linklater 4). For the classical actor, she feels it is imperative "to recondition both mind and body so that the voice can express the visceral and spiritual urgency that was its subject matter in Shakespeare's day." (4) Her "progression" is in fact a *re-patterning* of breathing and vocal habits. Staying mindful of that truth kept us Intensive students from getting too discouraged at our slow progress.

### **Movement**

Movement filled the other half of our mornings during the Intensive. Unlike the voice work, which is a defined progression associated with one method and teacher, the movement classes reflected a number of influences and styles. Even so, all the movement teachers have been part of the company for significant periods of time and

share the same principles and aesthetic. The movement sessions seemed to fall into three general categories. The first was a physical warm-up, which supported and/or expanded on the Linklater voice work. Some of these were set routines and others were more improvisational, but they invariably included stretching (especially of the spine and rib cage), releasing of tension in the neck and shoulders and loosening of the hip sockets. Breath work was always integral to these activities. Additionally, these sessions involved us exploring physical relationships in space. Once, we divided into pairs and each partner “sculpted” the other into a series of poses that expressed the sculptor’s identity (or perhaps character in their monologue or scene). Eventually we each “performed” the series of poses created by our sculptor, announcing to the audience who we were (name of our sculptor). I think we all experienced a heightened sense of responsibility about accurately representing our partner and quite a feeling of awe at seeing ourselves “performed.” My journal entry after that class notes a general response of wonder and delight. On another occasion, we divided into pairs and lined up facing one another across the stage. One person would enter the space, establishing some kind of mood or attitude, and when s/he felt ready, the partner would enter from the opposite side and an encounter would take place, ending in a parting. Before each of these “scenes,” our teacher, Tori Rhoades, put on a piece of music. I think we all had visceral emotional responses to the music that influenced the tenor and the outcome of each encounter.

The second kind of movement class introduced us to various Renaissance practices and dances and the ways social status was expressed through them. We learned different kinds of bows: men’s bows and women’s bows; bows before royalty and bows

before courtiers. We practiced walking with certain postures and gestures. We focused on moving/walking/dancing individually, in pairs and in groups. Susan Dibble taught us a number of Medieval and Renaissance dances. Dibble is a slight figure who casts a large shadow. She is the dance equivalent of an ethno-musicologist, someone who has done a great deal of historical research into the Elizabethan ethos, mores, culture and dances; people speak of her with reverence. She has choreographed dances for Shakespeare & Company productions for almost 30 years. She explained the symbolism of always leading with the left foot and left arm. She talked about the link between the upright Elizabethan carriage and the Elizabethan notion of the “Great Chain of Being.” We learned that Elizabeth I herself was a passionate dancer who introduced to her court dances both continental and provincial. (She is reputed to have danced in her undergarments every morning before breakfast.) We practiced several processional dances, including the pavanne, a dance which allowed titled aristocrats of the court to display their finery (*pavan* being the French word for peacock) and the allemande. We also danced galliards and corantos, which are considerably livelier than the sedate processional dances. We even rollicked through a couple of country dances. It was a revelation to discover the joy and exuberance, not only in the movements, but in the music itself. Our spirits always lifted when we discovered we would be having “Dibble Dance” later in the day. Many of us begged the teachers to provide us with the names of the recordings because we liked them so much.

## Alexander Technique

The third category of movement class cannot technically be called *movement*. The Alexander Technique might more appropriately be termed an approach to self-care or a reeducation of the body in order to ease pain and enable freer movement. Our Alexander teacher was Toddy Randolph, who had acted with the company for a number of years before leaving to get her Alexander training and certification. Like the majority of Shakespeare & Company teachers, she did not project any air of self-importance or special authority. She taught with a light touch and a playful sense of curiosity. Her first lesson found us gathered around a diminutive skeleton studying the parts and the mechanics of the spine. We spent quite a lot of time perusing her library of books on anatomy and the skeleto-muscular system. We paid attention to the pelvic girdle and to our “sit bones.” It seemed to me that Toddy’s main intention was to develop our body consciousness in order for us to let go of constricting habits. She asked us repeatedly to “feed in the thought that your neck is free” or “your head is light.” I found these suggestions surprisingly helpful, no doubt because I carry so much tension in my neck and shoulders. I have since made “your neck is free” a kind of mantra, a small gift I give myself during the day. Toddy spoke often about alignment and balance. She devoted one class to “working” on each of us individually; as one of the last recipients of her manual ministrations, I was taken aback by the heat of her hands and its calming effect. The actual movements or activities we performed seemed less significant than the idea of exploration, discovery and self-knowledge. The Alexander Technique does not exist to produce a specific product, yet has been used widely by performance artists as well as

athletes. I was fascinated to learn that F. Matthias Alexander, an Australian born in 1869, was originally a Shakespearean orator who regularly lost his voice and set out to understand and remedy his problem scientifically. He may have been the first person to recognize the relationship between musculature tension of the upper torso and voice production. He was ahead of his time in emphasizing the mind-body connection. Toddy told us that “thought is energy” and “action follows thought.” My own thought at the time was that Toddy was sowing seeds of awareness and encouraging us to fertilize them with our own conscious intention.

### **Sound and Movement**

Physical Awareness, Voice, and Movement filled our mornings. The afternoons were less predictable. Sound and Movement marathons took place three times during the month and each lasted all afternoon. They were grueling, exhausting sessions led by voice teachers that managed to trigger resistance in many participants, including me. Some of us snidely referred to them as the S & M sessions. The basic format consisted of closing our eyes and letting ourselves imagine, through a long sequence of prompts, having mouths all over our body and then beginning to release sound through those various mouths. Eventually we formed a circle around two people at time inside our perimeter. One of the voice teachers was also inside the circle, side-coaching all the while. The idea was to release sound on impulse, which would affect your partner physically and create a sound and movement dialogue between you. One had to let vibration out on breath through one of the “mouths” of the body and the partner had to receive that impulse and respond immediately with an impulse released on breath and

sound through a particular body part. The problem was that very few of us seemed capable of following these directions in a spontaneous way. I felt bombarded with instructions. It reminded me of learning to drive--the enormity of trying to keep all the rules in one's consciousness at the same time. "Release on your breath." "Stay on your voice." "Keep your lips parted!" "See if you can move him across the space on your impulse!" "Don't use consonants!" "Let the impulse release through your different body mouths." "Don't look in his eyes, look at his body!" "Stop thinking, just respond!" It is difficult to communicate what this exercise demanded of us in terms of commitment and stamina. Each of us was panting and pouring sweat by the time we were released from the engagement. I actually felt as if I had been beaten up when I finished. A number of Shakespeare & Company veterans said fervently that, much as they hated these exercises at the time, they appreciated the breakthroughs they provided later in their acting. For some, the exercises were pivotal to their maturation as actors of Shakespeare. I tried to acknowledge such a possibility as I limped away from the proceedings, exhausted at every level.

### **Basics Group**

The actual acting and text work at the Intensive began before we ever arrived, as we were required to come with a sonnet and a monologue prepared. During the first couple of days, the teachers observed us, took notes and presumably assessed our skills and experience. (We had been told they would take all their meals together in private for the express purpose of discussing us. "Please don't be offended," they said. "We do it to serve your artistic growth.") Rumor had it that we were to be grouped with others of a

similar skill level. By the end of the second day, each of us had been assigned to a “Basics” group with one of the master teachers. To my surprise and delight, I found myself in Tina Packer’s group. There were seven students, two teacher trainees and a teaching assistant named Kate Bouchard, who teaches theatre at Skidmore College. All teaching assistants and trainees have taken the Intensive themselves at least once. We began by doing our monologues. Tina did not ask us to identify them; she knew them all immediately. I think we were aware that this was the beginning of our actor training, a la Shakespeare & Company. For the next week, we spent every afternoon and several evenings in our Basics group, working on our monologues with Tina.

We worked one at a time in front of the group. It is not easy to describe the process. Clearly the goal is/was to get the actor to make a personal, emotional connection to the words being spoken, but Tina’s technique seems highly intuitive and varies considerably from actor to actor. It was apparent to me that she consciously works with men differently than she does with women. Her manner ranges from gentle to brutal and from sarcastic to humble. She harnesses all her own acting prowess to the task. A number of Intensive participants were terrified of her. I found it a privilege to watch her in action. One page of my journal is headed simply Tina Packer, followed by this list: Truth-teller; Holder of the Space; Mother Courage; Digger-Prober-Excavator; Bawdy Wench; Indomitable and Fearless Leader. The basic (or Basics) formula consisted of Tina standing close to the actor’s side, sometimes touching the jaw or solar plexus to remind him/her to stay relaxed and soft. Usually the actor spoke a few lines of his/her text before Tina stopped the recitation and began to probe. She was uncanny in her



guesses as to how the text might connect to something particular in the actor's life. Sometimes she spoke to the actor in a voice too low for the rest of the group to hear; sometimes she made the process deliberately public. It seemed to be about finding the "doorway" for each particular actor.

In my case, Tina went after my "ladylike behavior" and my "sense of propriety," both anathema to creativity. I am old enough to know this intellectually. *So what?* Intellectual understanding is rarely enough to effect behavioral changes. Knowing I am an actor who is too much in my head and not enough in my body has not been particularly helpful in altering that reality. Tina directed me to uncross my legs and unclasp my hands. She told me to shout a litany of all the swear words I could think of. My lexicon was pitifully small and unimaginative. She asked me to tell a dirty joke. I could not think of one. She made me use sexually explicit language until I was red with embarrassment.

My monologue was one of Tamara's from *Titus Andronicus* ("Have I not reason, think you, to look pale?") and I could not honestly say why I had chosen it. Days later, I heard a teacher say, "You don't choose the sonnet; the sonnet chooses you," and I strongly suspect Tina believes the same thing about our monologues. As she probed into my history, she began to connect the imagery in my text ("A barren detested vale you see it is. O'ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe. . .") to the interior landscape created by my parents' criticism. At her behest, I was soon shouting at my (internalized) mother, played by her assistant Kate, to "Fuck off," and "Stop thinking you know what's best for me," and "You don't know the damage you've done to my sister and me!" All the while,

Tina touched my jaw to soften it and massaged my stomach, reminding me to speak from the diaphragm and to keep my neck free. I had to speak through my tears. At Shakespeare & Company actors must speak “on the voice,” no matter what is happening emotionally. It did not matter that I was having an emotional epiphany and could barely articulate. I still had to send the words out into the world on my voice. This is what Tina means by “making the word flesh.” Then, without giving me time to recover from my breakdown and catharsis, she made me squat, sitting on her shoes, and speak my text “through my vagina.” I believe that at this point I really was in my body. I was certainly no longer watching or judging myself, as is my habit. Although I had no earthly idea how I looked or sounded during this last “performance,” members of my group reported how much more moving the monologue had become. I did feel that the words had become personal. If the underlying purpose of the Shakespeare & Company approach is to get actors to recognize and release their emotional blocks, I would say it succeeded with me in this case. And I was not alone, though my experience may have been a bit more dramatic than others.

There was Sarah, who had chosen Hamlet’s speech to Horatio, in which he confides his inability to enjoy living: “I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, etc.” The speech is a perfect description of depression. As Tina began mining Sarah’s psyche, we learned that her father had died when she was very young and that because her mother was so distraught over his death, Sarah herself had never had a chance to experience her own grief. The more she connected to her great sadness, the more meaningful her monologue became and the more we were moved by it. I felt

honored and humbled to bear witness to these transformations. They were not, of course, ever discussed outside the group; in fact, we did not refer to anyone else's "work" after it was over.

The two men in our group were the last to go, either out of some misplaced chivalry or plain reluctance. I found their stories especially poignant because both reflected the damage done to men by the patriarchy. Tina seemed very responsive to their masculine energy and cognizant of their emotional armor. She did not punish the former, nor did she excuse the latter. Interestingly, both men were about 50 years old and both had experienced some form of child abuse. But Joe had been acting and directing for years and appeared to have worked through a lot of his issues, whereas Bob was a newcomer to the theatre who still had his mask and armor firmly in place. Joe had been Linklater-certified by Kristin herself; he claimed she made Tina Packer look tame. He had also done the Intensive once before, so he was ready for the work. He came across as open and undefended. But, *what about Bob?* I do not think any of us had known somebody—in theatre, at least—so utterly divorced from his own feelings. He could describe a horrendous personal experience with complete detachment. The disconnection was so profound I think we all felt anxious when his turn finally came. He delivered his monologue like a caricature of a dramatic actor. Watching it made us squirm with discomfort. Tina was relentless. She spent a very long time with him and tried several approaches, to no avail. Her final assault was physical. She had him speak his text with his eyes shut, while she pounded on his chest with her fists. He took the beating without flinching and without surrendering to a shred of emotion. The rest of us felt immensely

frustrated and rather sorry for him. He was a kind of an object lesson. In the end, we were probably all sighing with relief that we were not the Bob of this Intensive.

### **Scene/Text Work**

A sense of tension and anticipation pervaded our proceedings toward the end of the Basics week. Our dramatic fates were being determined. In reality, the teachers were deciding how to pair us up as scene partners and choosing the scenes that would best spur our artistic growth. We were told that a tremendous amount of care and consideration went into these decisions, the subtext of this message being: Do not question our choices; we know what is in your best interest. Veterans told us not to harbor a specific fantasy. “If you’re hoping to be paired with someone of the opposite sex, you’ll get a partner of the same sex.” “If you’re hoping to play a character of the opposite/same sex, you won’t.” “If you want a comedic role, you’ll get a dramatic role and vice versa.” All the same, none of these warnings kept us from wishing with all our hearts for the thing we wanted most dearly. When the moment came, I found myself slightly taken aback and yet not surprised. I was to play the Nurse to Juliet—the scene in which she returns from town with news of Romeo and the imminent marriage. I knew the scene and felt deflated. Intuitively, I understood the assignment; it would stretch me as an actor to inhabit such an earthy, sly, bawdy creature. But still—I could not help feeling slighted. Wasn’t this really Juliet’s scene? Doesn’t the Nurse exist for the sole purpose of comic relief? My disappointment was slightly ameliorated by the fact that my Juliet was a very passionate and committed young Russian actor named Marina. If I saw myself as being constricted by perfectionism and over-intellectualizing, I saw Marina in the opposite

light: spontaneous and physically free. I also found her non-American perspective refreshing. So I tried to let go of my disappointment and keep an open mind. I remembered hearing a teacher refer to the Buddhist phrase, “Keeping a beginner’s mind.” *So be it*, I decided.

Our first session of scene work (referred to as text sessions at Shakespeare & Company) consisted of “dropping in.” This is a technique Tina and Kristin Linklater developed together in the early 1970s to create a spontaneous, emotional connection to words. “Dropping in” is integral to actor training at Shakespeare & Company. According to Tina, it is “a way to start living the word, of using the word to create the experience of the thing the word represents.” She told us that “in playing Shakespeare, we’re both trying to be naturalistic in the sense of being truthful, but also trying to move outward toward archetypes and universality. We want to reveal the multiplicity of meanings and the complexities of relationship.” For the Intensive, “dropping in” became a matter of “all hands on deck,” since it requires an experienced practitioner of technique for each Intensive participant. Suddenly there were a number of new faces on campus. Every available space had to be used. Marina and I met in a dank little basement room with Kate Bouchard and another woman who had formerly acted with the company. Kate served as my “dropper-in.” Marina and I were seated facing one another with our knees sort of interlaced, so our bodies could be as close as possible. The teachers sat very close by our sides. We were asked to maintain eye contact with our partner all the time. Each teacher made sure her actor’s spine was aligned, jaw soft and breathing free. Taking turns, each teacher spoke a word from the text into the ear of her charge and we

repeated the word. Then a kind of interrogation ensued, in which the teacher would ask questions related to that word's possible meanings and associations, always ending by repeating the word. Our only response was to say the word again with whatever feeling the question had elicited. In *The Companies She Keeps*, Helen Epstein gives an example of Linklater "dropping in" an actor, using Sonnet 29. Kristin advises, "Let the word *fall* into you: let your mouth feel it, let your middle feel it. Let it play on you. What is the word saying to you?" "*Disgrace*. When were you last in disgrace? *Disgrace*. With whom? *Disgrace*. Where does it sit in your body? *Disgrace*" (Linklater 110). At some point, the teacher moves on to another word in the text. The process gives each word depth and dimension and allows it to come into the body. It can also release strong emotions. Kate tapped into my maternal feelings and the tears flowed. It seemed natural to regard Marina/Juliet as a daughter and want to protect and care for her. It is difficult to communicate on paper the power and benefits of this technique. I can understand Linklater's reluctance to publish her "method" in a book, which she said was a "poor substitute for a class." The physical, kinetic, emotional and interactive aspects of this kind of work are almost impossible to translate onto the page. "Dropping in" is not an intellectual exercise. I do not believe that sitting at a table with Marina discussing our scene could have produced the emotional bond we felt after our "dropping in" experience.

The subsequent two text sessions involved more "dropping in," but of whole phrases and lines rather than single words. I began to have a sense of really *owning* my text. After our "dropping in" work, we were assigned to one master teacher after another

for our text sessions. This turned out to be exhilarating as well as confusing. Apparently, the teachers felt no obligation to give consistent coaching; my guess is that they deliberately pushed us in different directions. One teacher, for example, had Marina throwing tantrums as Juliet; the very next text teacher excoriated her for yelling so much. Most of the teachers encouraged me to play the Nurse as broadly and bawdily as I could, but several urged me to explore the poignancy of the scene. Tina wanted me to expand my body and presence as the Nurse. She told me to consider myself the star of the scene and ordered me—as an exercise—to do the scene with my hands on my body the whole time. She had me rubbing, stroking and scratching myself everywhere. The results seemed to please her. She worked with Marina to bring her extravagant energy into focus and to be more specific. Dave Demke wanted us to play the scene as a tender farewell. Kevin Coleman made me wear huge padding; he called it a body mask. Wearing it was instantly transformative; it changed my physicality completely. Dennis Krausnik suggested I use Kristin Linklater’s trick of imagining I had an eggplant in my vagina and liking it! Michael Burnet, the fight teacher, made us play the scene in an intensely physical way. Claire Reedy had me hold Marina and sing her a lullaby. One journal entry during this period declares, “I’m in a total state of disequilibrium and trying to be OK with it.” I held on to Dennis’ reassurance that we will make our own acting choices in the end, but for now we can make valuable discoveries if we go with the explorations.

### **Master Class 1**

Master classes comprised another aspect of actor training at the Intensive. Tina’s New Year’s Eve lecture, or master class, was titled “The Functions of Theatre.” She took

us back to primitive times and the Drama of the Woolly Mammoth Hunt, demonstrating how it served as an experiential teaching tool, as ritual, rite of passage and celebration. We traveled with her to Ancient Greece and Rome, through the Dark Ages, citing the *Quem Queritis?* trope, the first biblical enactment in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. We briefly visited the troubadours, who acted as priests by singing their songs of proper knightly behavior and courtly love. After skimming through the Reformation and the printing press, we finally arrived at the Renaissance. Here Tina was in her element. She illuminated that world, mentioning the concept of Before and Aft and the beginning of perspective in art; the establishment of guild schools, promoted by Erasmus; the rediscovery of the Greek philosophers, playwrights and scientists, especially Aristotle, Socrates and Plato. Among the myriad fascinating things she said, these particular ones have stuck:

- Shakespeare lived between the oral and the literate culture and was grounded in both.
- The questions being posed during the Renaissance found their perfect venue in the playhouses.
- Elizabethans went to *hear* plays. Language was the major tool used to explore the questions.
- Plays are one of the few ways we have of accessing the psychology of a people long gone.
- Spirituality is very evident in Shakespeare's plays, but his gods were not always Christian gods. (Early plays, yes; later plays, no.)



- Theatre is about trying to bring to consciousness that which is unconscious (i.e., *Medea*). Theatre is about this illumination.
- Theatre exists to speak the things which are difficult to be spoken and to say the dangerous, heretical things so beautifully that people can hear them.
- Theatre exists to penetrate the heart, which takes an open heart on the part of the actor.

The magic, the transformational power of theatre can only happen *with the audience*. Elizabethan theatre had no fourth wall. That convention is one of the worst things ever to happen to theatre. (This last sentence was spoken with great vehemence.)

### **Actor/Audience**

Another element of the Intensive was called Actor/Audience. We were alerted to the first one before lunch one day. This was unusual, as we were rarely warned about what was coming next. We were to be divided into three groups, two of which would comprise the audience, while the third group would sit “in the wings.” From the latter group, two actors at a time would come stand before the audience. We were told we would complete the sentences, “What I want you to know about me is \_\_\_\_\_.” and “What I don’t want you to know about me is \_\_\_\_\_.” Then we would point to a body part and say, “This is my \_\_\_\_\_.” After that, we would state our name, and finally we would recite two lines of Shakespeare. We all trooped off to lunch full of curiosity and some trepidation, especially regarding the second sentence. Assembling in the theatre after lunch, we discovered that the faculty had gathered to participate with us. The event was conducted in a very formal, ritualized way and lasted all afternoon. I was in the

group that would be performing first. We were not actually seated out of sight; our chairs were upstage and faced upstage. We were called up in pairs, where we faced the audience, each with a teacher at our side. We stood looking at the audience and receiving their regard. We spoke only when prompted by the teacher, who sometimes asked a person to repeat their statement or piece of text. Silence filled the space between statements. The atmosphere was respectful and empathetic. It might have been a church service. We had a short, silent break when each group finished and then rearranged ourselves anew. Four and a half hours of revelation. It was a powerful, heart-opening experience, a sharing of our common humanity. A few people avoided exposing themselves (including Bob), but the majority allowed themselves to be really vulnerable. In case someone had not said the thing they needed to say, an opportunity to do so was provided at the end. I appreciated whoever contributed that idea, because a couple of participants had screwed their courage to the sticking point by then and were able to speak something of their truth. To say that afternoon united us as a community might sound trite or simplistic, but I know it happened. And I believe these shared communal experiences (and the reverent spirit in which they are conducted) are the reason participants speak of the Intensive using the language of transformation.

Our second Actor/Audience event took place when we had been working on our scenes for at least a week and were off book. Again we were divided into three groups: the “performers,” the “audience,” and the “critics.” Everyone had the chance to be in each group. The critics had to take notes on each scene; those notes were collected and presented to the actors afterwards. The occasion was considerably less solemn than its

predecessor. We felt genuine excitement about performing for the whole group for the first time and getting to see each other's work. I had been given permission to use a Peter in my scene and his presence and my interaction with him added enormously to the comedy. By this time, I was positively relishing my bawdiness; the audience apparently did too.

Actor/Audience III was the grand finale of the Intensive: the performance of several dances and our scenes before a small invited audience on the last day. We had been encouraged to dress in at least a semblance of a costume, but given no help in procuring one. Since Fridays were our only time off and most of us were unfamiliar with the area, costumes were highly improvisational and creative. I believe Shakespeare & Company did supply weapons to those who required them, but that was it. My favorite visual memory will always be of Miriam. Miriam is a hugely gifted young black equity actor from Philadelphia who exudes power and confidence. Her Paulina monologue from *The Winter's Tale* riveted everyone to their seats in our Basics group. She is almost certainly gay and never wore anything except a sweat suit. In predictable fashion, Shakespeare & Company cast her against type for her scene: she was Cressida in the love scene with Troilus. She arrived at the theatre in her usual garb, so when she stepped out onstage in bare feet and a beautiful green silk dress, there was a collective gasp of wonder and delight. The thrill continued as we watched Miriam transformed into a Cressida of fragile innocence and vulnerability. Her Troilus, a heavy guy unlikely to be cast as a romantic lead, became the archetypal lover before our brimming eyes; their scene melted our hearts.

Marina and I were happy with our work, which seemed very well received. I had finally achieved a balance between humor and tenderness that felt right for the Nurse and synthesized the disparate directions into a believable whole. The gales of laughter I elicited never ceased to surprise me, however. I suppose sight gags are only funny from *out there*. Or perhaps the audience was reacting to the contrast between the Catherine they thought they knew and the earthy character in front of them, much like Miriam's case. At any rate, the third Actor/Audience was a celebratory event, hosted with appropriate Elizabethan fanfare by Dave Demke, the head of Shakespeare & Company training.

### **Sonnets**

Sonnets comprised another piece of the Intensive puzzle. We worked on our sonnets in our voice classes and finally with Claire Reedy, the Grand High Poohbah of Shakespeare's sonnets at Shakespeare & Company. She also held a master class she called Sonnet 101. From her, I learned about the five wits: memory, imagination, fantasy, estimation (judgment) and common sense. She defined the various literary devices—simile, metaphor, antithesis and chiasmus—that are commonly used in the sonnets. In my text session with her, she illuminated my favorite phrase from my sonnet 73: “bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.” During the Reformation, Henry VIII ordered all the Catholic churches destroyed. The “choir” was the physical part of the church where the singers stood, so Shakespeare's line has a double meaning, referring both to winter trees and to the empty, abandoned churches of a past era. (January in Lenox, MA provided me with many bare ruined choirs to contemplate.) As always, the

goal of the work was to embody the language and connect to it personally. I have already spoken of my emotional relationship to Sonnet 73 and its ruminations on mortality.

Under Claire's gentle guidance, I was able to heighten the feeling contained in the images. "In me thou seest the glowing of such fire," became a paean to the passions of my youthful self. And the final couplet, "This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong, To love that well which thou must leave ere long," has turned into my own private mantra. For me, there was such deep satisfaction in making these words mine. Then again, I have felt the same way about every Shakespeare speech I've learned intimately. Such is the power of the Bard.

Rumors wafted about during Week 3 that we would be performing our sonnets. One day after lunch, we were dispersed around the campus in small groups and given a half an hour or so of quiet time to practice our sonnets and write in our journals, after which we were summoned to the theatre. An air of solemnity pervaded the place. Three teachers stood at the door of the theatre to ensure that we filed in singly and to stamp each of us with a star, a moon or a sun. (We knew which we were.) Entering the theatre was like crossing into an enchanted world. The space had been utterly transformed from its usual utilitarian simplicity. Tea lights in glass holders created a huge star on the floor. Flowers were scattered about randomly. The lighting was low, glowing warmly. And then there were the books. Books everywhere: among the tea lights on the floor, on the theatre seats, on the balconies. Hundreds of books, all open to illustrations. Art books, travel books, theatre books, architecture, anthropology, and history books. The faculty was all there, spread out around the space, leafing through books or drifting quietly from

one place to another. We, of course, followed suit as we oriented ourselves to this magical microcosm. I wanted to look at every book, but I also just wanted to sit in one place and take in the beauty of the scene. Every few minutes, a teacher spoke from wherever she/he sat or stood. Some recited sonnets, some recited prose or poetry by other Elizabethan writers, some recited commentaries regarding the Renaissance. When that was over, Claire asked us to begin saying our sonnets, in no particular order. Only once did two people begin to speak simultaneously. They spontaneously alternated their lines, which worked surprisingly well. The sonnets we had chosen came from a list given to us before we came to the Intensive. I now think we were limited to those 168 sonnets because they are the ones that struggle with the big questions. Listening to them throughout the afternoon was a spiritual experience, as I am sure the faculty intended it to be. Tina Packer believes that the etymology of the word “theatre,” meaning, “where God is found (or seen or heard)” speaks to the spiritual function of theatre. This was like making theatre and going to church at the same time. It was profoundly moving.

### **Elizabethan World Picture Day**

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, instead of the usual list of classes on the blackboard at breakfast, there were just the words, “Elizabethan World Picture Day. Founders Theatre.” After a warm-up, we began as a whole group, an exercise in which we started off (individually, in our own spaces) as single-celled creatures in the ocean. Slowly, over the course of 20-30 minutes, we evolved into more complex organisms, developing gills and tails, etc. and eventually moving from water onto land. From there we continued to evolve until we were primitive humans. We began to socialize and finally to form tribes. At one

point, I persuaded a lone outsider, a female, to join our tribe. Two tribes faced off after a while and the alpha males from each tribe fought. One killed the other, creating the threat of war. My clan witnessed this violence, but was not a part of it. Ultimately, the victorious alpha male had a vision that he shared with everyone and thus managed to achieve peace.

This exercise, which had the quality of an odyssey, lasted most of the morning. Afterwards, we were instructed to sort ourselves into a line, according to the status of our scene characters. There was a good deal of debate over where to put Friar Laurence and the nuns from *Measure for Measure* and whether or not the Capulets and Montagues were nobles. Richard III stood at one end and Caliban at the other. I was rather surprised to find myself almost at the bottom of *the great chain of being*.

After lunch, we regrouped into our clans from an earlier exercise (a different day) and rehearsed the stories we had created so we could perform them. Each story had to end with a line from Shakespeare; ours was “O, for a muse of fire.” On festival day, we traveled in our clans to the castle, where we spent the night (about 10 minutes in real time) around fires, sharing food and songs. The next day, we presented our stories to the court (faculty members on the balcony), which received them with varying degrees of enthusiasm and doled out gifts to each group. Dances and celebration and mixing of the tribes ensued.

## **Master Class 2**

Soon after the assignment of scenes and scene partners, Tina gave a master class called “Ways to Rehearse.” Shakespeare & Company uses the Six P approach to

rehearsal: personal, physical, psychological, poetic, philosophical and political. After covering the essentials of the six Ps, she went on to talk about the *first moment* of the scene. What has happened just before it? What are the physical circumstances—the Where—of the first moment? Tina likes to say, “Creativity doesn’t live in abstract talk.” Much of this lecture focused on *specifics*. “Know about the family relationships of your character.” “Know who is alive and who is dead. Shakespeare’s family relationships and structure are not arbitrary.” “Decide what the stakes are. Play the stakes!” “Understand what you are saying.” She made several scene pairs go onstage and play their first few lines, establishing the physical circumstances—the *where*—and then the *first moment*. She called Marina and me up and asked me to choose a Peter to enter with. I had not done the scene with the character named Peter before. What a difference! Within 5 minutes, Tina had helped us create a hilariously rich opening. She finished the evening by reviewing the Rules for Rehearsing: Define the task clearly. Take turns with requests and demands. Do not direct your partner. Try to say YES; stay open to possibilities. Thank your partner. Do your homework before the next rehearsal.

One of my favorite master classes was titled “Structure of the Verse.” It is tempting to want to record everything Tina said, but I know the readers of this document are already familiar with much of it. She explained the history of rhetoric and the part it played in Shakespeare’s education. She expounded on iambic pentameter, from its origins in Italy around 1530 to the Elizabethan love affair with it. I had not known that prose was the new literary form in Shakespeare’s day.



The principles of playing Shakespeare at Shakespeare & Company are grounded in the work of two people whom Tina calls her mentors: Neil Freeman, the First Folio scholar and editor and John Barton, Shakespeare scholar and director at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) for many years. Some of their tenets regarding the playing of Shakespeare have come into the mainstream during the last 20 years or so, while others remain controversial. Fundamental to their approach is the idea that Shakespeare's stage directions, which seem to be almost nonexistent, are actually embedded in the text itself. Shakespeare & Company subscribes wholeheartedly to this principle. Tina touched on some of the more common examples as she continued her lecture. One of the most basic, though still hotly debated in theatre schools, is the idea of breathing at the end of the lines rather than at commas or periods. The Freeman/Barton/S&C/Linklater school maintains that Shakespeare wrote his plays (and sonnets; sonnet is Italian for "little sound") to be spoken, not read. His plays were not even published in his lifetime. He often handed off the parts directly to the actors. If one considers how much breath is required to speak Shakespeare—and keeping in mind the rowdy nature of Elizabethan audiences—surely the directive to breathe at the end of the line would be welcome and necessary. There's more to it than that, of course, such as the notion that a breath signals a shift in thought. Since the character is speaking as s/he is thinking, it is not unnatural to take a breath in the middle of a sentence. We do it all the time! Our rules about breathing with punctuation are based in grammar, but Shakespeare wrote rhetorically, not grammatically. In fact English grammar barely existed as such in Shakespeare's day; it was a very young language that had yet to be codified. I will not go on marshalling my

rhetoric here to persuade the reader of the merits of this method, but I found the arguments compelling. At the very least, an actor is bound to make some interesting discoveries by exploring the text this way.

Another example of a clue embedded in the text is the last word in a line of verse. Tina said, “Your character can be found in the line endings.” It is a revelatory experiment to go through a speech and just read the last word of each line—like finding the thread that holds it together. There are dozens more of these structural devices that tell the actor how to speak Shakespeare’s words. Shakespeare & Company regards them as tools rather than rules, but encourages the actor to try adhering to the form at first, and then discard what does not work. Whether one buys the idea that a semicolon indicates an emotional transition while a colon suggests more of an intellectual one, one must be grateful to these scholars for illuminating the significance of the “thou” and “you” forms of address, if nothing else. My mother, a contemporary of Lawrence Olivier, grew up in England and studied acting in London. She studied Shakespeare extensively and has seen, acted and directed numerous Shakespeare plays. No one had *ever* talked to her about the difference between “thou” and “you.” This is someone who played Gertrude but never understood that when Hamlet switches from “you” to “thou” in addressing her, he is advertising his disdain and lack of respect. What actor would not find it useful to know that when a character switches from verse to prose (or vice versa), it *means something*? Viola begins speaking to Olivia in verse when she speaks with her real voice. This sort of revelation makes me want to jump for joy!

## **Fight and Clown**

Fight and Clown were occasional classes held at Lenox Town Hall, an elegant old building with lovely arched windows. They were usually taught together by the two Michaels. Michael Toomey had been a member of the company for some years before he went to London and Paris (Le Coq) to study clowning, and Michael Burnet was the resident fight choreographer. They used a funny sort of Odd Couple schtick in their teaching that endeared them to all. Their touch was so light that we sometimes forgot how seriously they take their craft.

Working with our scene partners, Michael B. taught us basic punches and how to fall, how to keep your partner safe, etc. We practiced collapsing to the knees. We tried various slaps. He kept encouraging us to think about the *story being told* by the action. He talked about how viewers' responses differ depending on the couple. A man who slaps a man is generally perceived as gay. A man slapping a man is often the beginning of a bigger fight, whereas a slap between women is the end of the fight. A man slapping a woman is usually viewed as a domestic conflict. In later sessions, we learned the hair pull, the elbow jab, the shoulder chop and finally the strangulation. Most of us had great fun playing both aggressor and victim, but my partner Marina did not. She complained several times that I was frightening her when I was the aggressor. Even though I reassured her I was just acting, she continued to seem mistrustful, which negatively affected our scene work. I made a point of being affectionate towards her, but it was not until the day Claire had me hold Marina and sing her a lullaby that the tide turned. Marina loved it and asked me to hold her like that before every rehearsal. By then, I was

convinced she had suffered some kind of abuse at her mother's hands and went out of my way to stroke and pet on her whenever we were together. It worked; our relationship as Nurse and Juliet developed a wonderful intimacy.

Clown class introduced us to the very basics. Michael Toomey said more than once, "A clown is always doing his or her very best." He spoke of clown energy as being 100% committed and made us practice working ourselves up to clown energy before we began any exercise. Several times, he gave us tasks that turned out to be impossible to accomplish, so that the attempt became the whole point. Clowning is about the journey, not the destination. My favorite Michael T. lesson addressed simplicity. The temptation in clowning is to try to be funny and Michael gave us opportunities to let go of that notion. Two screens were placed onstage with a 4-foot space between them. One at a time, we were to stand behind one screen, turn on the clown energy and walk out between the screens. Once we were told simply to stop in the middle of the opening, turn our head to look at the audience and then proceed until we were behind the second screen. Another time, we were instructed to step into the opening, see the audience, take a bow and exit. There were several variations on this theme and invariably, we failed to do exactly what we were told. Everyone wanted to *do something*, to *perform* something, to be *funny*. It became perfectly apparent that the funniest participants were the ones who could just stand there and regard the audience, period. What an invaluable acting lesson in *being* rather than *doing*. I developed a huge appreciation for the lessons inherent in clowning and their applicability to theatre and to life as a whole. To have a sense of humor is to have perspective, which makes the hard realities so much easier to bear.

Relationship, struggle, failure, hope, joy: all are fundamental to clowning and to the human condition.

### **Master Class 3**

Our final master class, called “Theatre, Therapy and Theology,” was given by Tina and Michael Hammond, the associate artistic director of Shakespeare & Company. They have been colleagues for many years and could probably finish each other’s sentences, but know better. The impetus for this class seemed to be the need to differentiate in particular between theatre and therapy. As many theatre practitioners experience first-hand, the line between the two can be fuzzy. Certainly at Shakespeare & Company, participants have been asked to plumb their psychic depths, sometimes precipitating a crisis. Tina reiterated what had been expressed by many teachers in varying ways. The actor and the therapy client are both digging into the psyche; the difference is the intention. For actors, the work is done to serve the craft. Therapy is a private, individual process, whereas the psychic work in theatre is done so it can be given away. That said, the faculty at Shakespeare & Company strongly support individual therapy for actors, since they believe emotional blocks inhibit the creative impulse. Kristen Linklater demanded that her teacher trainees be in therapy. The original company members all received individual therapy as well as dream therapy with a Jungian therapist. Their orientation is still very Jungian. Tina spoke of the connection between dreams and myth and how they both allow us to see our own psyches. She said Myth is the big stories told in every culture; they reveal the nature of the human psyche. Theatre came into being to tell those large stories. Shakespeare’s plays still compel our

interest because they contain the myths. In their Greek origins, theology meant “the study of God,” therapy meant “the healing of God” and theatre meant “where God is found.” I think Tina’s point is that all three concern themselves with the state of the soul.

### **Journal Work**

I have now described most of the elements of the Intensive. A couple of others bear mentioning. Several afternoons a week, our classes ended at 5:00 p.m. so we could gather in the theatre for half an hour of journaling. I had imagined using this time to summarize the day’s activities, but I should have known better, because we were rarely left to our own devices. Claire presided over the time, which began and ended with a chime. Typically, Claire gave us a writing prompt. The first was, “The journey from there to here \_\_\_\_.” Another day, she told us to make a list of words that distilled our Basics experience. We had to complete the sentence, “What I would like to explore in my life as an actor \_\_\_\_.” Once we made a list of the last word in each line of our monologue and wrote a little story using them all. Another time we did the same thing with our sonnet. Each week we described an Aha! moment of the previous week and a desire for the coming week. One day we had to finish the statement, “What I would like to let go of in service to myself as an actor \_\_\_\_.” Besides our journal writing, another opportunity for reflection was provided at the end of each week, which for us meant Thursday afternoons. Participants and faculty sat in a large circle in the theatre (a space I always found welcoming) and each person spoke briefly, usually encapsulating the most important insight or epiphany of the last 6 days. Those communal experiences were especially appreciated since the faculty did not eat or really socialize with us at all.

On New Year's Eve, the dry-erase board in the cafeteria announced an evening with Dennis Krausnick with the enigmatic title, "Fish Tales." "Bring your yoga mat and your journal," it said. Sprawled around the floor of the theatre, we opened our journals and used two facing pages to draw a big river that flowed from the top of the left-hand page diagonally down to the bottom of the right-hand page. At the top left, we wrote our birth date and place; at the bottom right, we wrote "Founders' Theatre, Shakespeare & Company, Lenox, MA., December 31, 2007. For the next hour or so, we drew stepping-stones in the river and named them. The first category was simply all the places we had lived. The next set was made up of all the significant milestones we had experienced. Then we had to put in all the important people in our life. Finally, we added the events or people that had affected our life negatively or positively. We were creating a Life Map, no less. I wanted to protest that I was too old to be able to remember or include everything! But when our time was up, I was amazed I had remembered so much, though I'm sure there were omissions. I was exhausted and assumed the day's work was done, but No. The next activity was a writing prompt that began, "That was a time when \_\_\_\_\_." That early childhood recollection segued into writing a dialogue from childhood, real or imagined, between two people other than oneself. Then Dennis asked us to make a poem out of five words that we associated with our teenage years. Task No. 5 was to copy down a song from that same period. The last assignment was to create a poem addressed to our future self. Being middle-aged and a veteran of several stints of therapy, this journey of self- scrutiny was perhaps not as

cathartic for me as for other participants, but I think the heightened self-awareness is bound to move me toward more truthful acting.



## Chapter 2

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF SHAKESPEARE & COMPANY

The road that led Tina Packer from Wolverhampton, England to Lenox, Massachusetts was indeed a long and winding one, but in retrospect, every twist and turn would seem to have been necessary for the eventual creation of Shakespeare & Company. The daughter of liberal parents who “encouraged their children’s eccentricities,” (Epstein 13) she never felt bound by convention. By the age of 17, she had escaped England to live in France with an older man, mingle with artists, and live a bohemian existence. When that affair ended, she moved to London and auditioned for theatre schools. The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) accepted her on full scholarship and within 6 months of graduating, had obtained a 3-year contract with the RSC. “On her opening night, she replaced Julie Christie as Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors* and over the next year and a half, worked with such directors as John Schlesinger, Peter Hall, Trevor Nunn and John Barton” (23). These snippets of her story already show her to be a risk-taker and a prodigious talent. By the time she was 30, a seasoned actress and divorced mother of a son, she knew she wanted to work on Shakespeare in a new way. She talked herself into a job directing Shakespeare at LAMDA, which had a reputation at the time for being more open to new ideas than the other London drama schools. There she had the

opportunity to work with several American students and found, “they have a vigor and directness that English students do not seem to possess, and, in fact, are better able to express the depth and breadth of emotion felt by Shakespeare’s characters” (Epstein 36). She began applying for American grant money to fund a 6-month experimental program of Shakespeare training and within a year had received money from the Ford Foundation and CBS.

What Tina set out to do with a small group of teachers and students in 1973 in a small village near Stratford-upon-Avon is essentially what is being done today in Lenox, MA. She wanted to work on Shakespeare, “through the emotion contained within the sound of the word itself” (Epstein 33). She wanted to restore the function of the clowns and to include the audience as an integral part of the play. “What characterized Shakespeare & Company from its inception,” says Helen Epstein, “was its highly eclectic curriculum, the dove-tailing of its parts, and the cohesion of its teachers who have all remained associated with it since 1973” (38). She invited John Barton, her mentor from RSC, to come work on textual analysis, and John Broome, her movement teacher from RADA, to teach movement. She asked Kristin Linklater to be her director of training and B. H Barry to teach tumbling and combat. After 4 months of rigorous training and a well-reviewed production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the company transplanted themselves to Connecticut as planned. At which point, they completely fell apart. The problems ran the gamut from financial to personal. Tina had wanted the company to function as a democracy and was unwilling or unable to step into the role of leader. The funding ran out, the company disintegrated and Tina returned disillusioned to England.

After several years of soul-searching and experimental therapies, she decided to try again. She rekindled and cemented her relationships with the original master teachers. By 1978, with private support from Mitch Berenson and another grant from the Ford Foundation, the second Shakespeare & Company moved into Edith Wharton's former estate in the Berkshires called The Mount. This time around, an older and wiser Tina Packer held her vision together despite enormous obstacles. The company's first production, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was ready by early summer and was so popular it had to extend its run into August. One reviewer called it, "Down to earth and yet very, very classy" (Epstein 76)

In the next few years, Tina became an expert fundraiser, she and Dennis Krausnick oversaw the renovation of The Mount and the company initiated programs in the local schools. The company, which lived communally at The Mount in those early years, brought in a therapist to help them work through conflicts. A board of directors increased their financial stability. The Winter Workshop (now the Month-long Intensive) was conceived to train actors from outside Shakespeare & Company and as a way of generating some cash during the long New England winters. Master teachers like Kristin Linklater and Susan Dibble drew students to Lenox who disseminated their methods when they left.

Today, Shakespeare & Company is internationally recognized. It has moved from The Mount to the former Lenox Academy a few miles away and embarked on an ambitious \$10 million capital campaign to renovate existing facilities and create new performance spaces. Training has expanded to include a conservatory program, a

summer internship for young actors, workshops offered throughout the U.S. and plans are now underway for an MFA program. The accolades keep coming, but so do the bills; money is a perennial problem. Through all the trials and triumphs, Tina's seemingly inexhaustible supply of optimism and energy keeps the lights burnings.

## Chapter 3

### THE PEDAGOGY

I have already mentioned a few of the influences that shaped Tina's ethos. She came from what she calls, "the risen working class" (Epstein 13). Her liberal family rejected organized religion, embraced vegetarianism and believed wholeheartedly in education. Tina was sent to a Quaker boarding school not far from Stratford-upon-Avon, where she was taken to see several Shakespeare plays. At that age, she anticipated becoming a "bohemian" and a writer. Her politics, fueled by idealism, were always left of center. Even as an enthusiastic young student at RADA, she began to have her own ideas about how to play Shakespeare. Her stint at the RSC strengthened her own artistic aesthetic as well as her opinions about operating an organization. Many of the actors at the RSC during Tina's tenure there expressed frustration and anger toward the management. In *The Companies She Keeps*, she is quoted as saying, "I couldn't understand then why the greatest theatre company in the world shouldn't also be the happiest" (26). The group of theatre practitioners she brought together in 1973 for her experiment in playing Shakespeare says a great deal about her artistic and political ideals. Kristin Linklater had developed a reputation herself as a pioneer voice teacher, more interested in "unlocking the natural voice" than in promulgating proper elocution. John

Broome and Trish Arnold had similarly progressive ideas regarding movement, derived from German choreographer, Kurt Joos' desire to explore "the harmony of the body," instead of conventional dance forms (Epstein 40). John Barton supported the idea that Shakespeare wrote for actors, not intellectuals. B. H. Barry came to teach actors the physical vocabulary of the Elizabethan stage. They all wanted their work to interconnect with and support the rest; traditional models of the day separated the areas of study so there was little cross-fertilization. As Helen Epstein recounts of the first Shakespeare & Company, "actors and teachers embarked on a regimen of dawn to dusk training, designed to, in Packer's words, 'find a way of doing Shakespeare that was both true to him and true to us'"(38). The pursuit of that dream demanded an intimate knowledge of Elizabethan culture, mores and sensibility. Perhaps even more to the point, it required a true passion, as Shakespeare & Company literature puts it, "for the Elizabethan ideals of inquiry, balance and harmony, performed in Elizabethan tradition—in love with poetry, physical prowess, and the mysteries of the universe." That passion pervades the atmosphere of Shakespeare & Company and shapes its pedagogy.

In one of Tina's earliest grant proposals, she spoke of her enthusiasm for working with Americans, whom she regarded as more emotionally open and direct than their British counterparts. She went on to wonder, in parentheses, "I don't know whether this is because America is at this moment more closely in tune with Elizabethan England..." (Epstein 36). That conjecture barely hints at the seismic cultural shifts that were rocking this country in the 60s and early 70s, but it does provide a clue to the cultural influences that would come to affect her and her pedagogy. Kristin Linklater described Tina's

orientation around that time as coming “from a typical British left-wing humanist Marxist viewpoint” (Linklater 46). She may not have understood then why she was drawn to American ways, but by the time she came face to face with Jungian psychology, *est*, Rolfing, Feldenkreis and Alexander technique and talk therapy, she was ready to jump in with both feet. She even made a pilgrimage to India to visit a guru named Muktananda. She was particularly transported by her experience with *est*, introduced to her by Linklater. “I understood for the first time that you are not what you *think*. I had never before really understood that there was a difference between the voice in your head and your actual state of being” (54). It is telling that Tina “refers to the various American therapies as ‘enlightenment’ and some of the evangelical flavor of *est* and its brusque way of developing intimate group dynamics can be felt in Packer’s training methods today” (54).

I can attest to that observation, although I did not experience its forcefulness as a bad thing. I have to digress into my own story for a minute. My mother was born in 1925; Tina Packer was born in 1938. They were brought up in essentially the same culture: post-Victorian, WWII-deprived, stiff-upper-lip England. Besides their red hair, they shared a tremendous spirit of adventure and determination. Both studied acting in London and longed to escape the constraints and deprivations of a post-war economy. Both left the country. My mother, however, took her essential Englishness with her wherever she went, maintaining (unconsciously, I am sure) the sense of cultural and moral superiority that characterized the British mandate of Empire. Tina was just enough younger that she did not nurse illusions of Empire. *And* she had enough reservations

about English repression that when she encountered various models of psychology, she allowed them to transform her thinking permanently. I came of age in the 60s and psychology became the closest thing I had to religion—a way to understand (and accept) myself and others. This psychological perspective is the great divide between my mother and me, who are close in so many other ways. She hails from the “pick yourself up by your bootstraps and stop whingeing” school of survival. So it was unexpectedly affirming to work with an Englishwoman so like my mother in her gutsiness and verve, but who also gets the psychological perspective completely. Tina might bark at you to stop whingeing, but she also believes in acknowledging the wounds you carry before moving on. The first Actor/Audience event of the Intensive testifies to Tina’s belief in the necessity to do battle with one’s demons within the loving embrace of community. My mother’s ingrained sense of privacy would never allow for such personal revelation. Tina’s conversion to a psychological way of interpreting the world would have to have had a profound affect on her methodology. How could it not? From its inception, the second Shakespeare & Company operated with a psychological sophistication that would probably have been unimaginable in England at the time. The concept of “allowing things to happen,” for example, represents a paradigm shift that is nothing short of revolutionary to the Victorian sensibility. Consciously or not, the pedagogy of Shakespeare and Company became inextricably intertwined with the psychological concept of “self-actualization.” In many ways, it makes perfect sense for a theatre company. Actors must be braver than most people willing—no obliged—to bare their souls for their art. That is a lot to ask of mere mortals.



When I interviewed Tina, I asked if she had started Shakespeare & Company with a strong sense of *how* she wanted the company to function. She described herself as being “full of Illyrian socialism” in the early days. She knew she wanted a collaborative enterprise in which everyone would have an equal voice. She had chafed at the authoritarian structure of the theatres where she had worked and had no desire to recreate that patriarchal model. She believed actors should be responsible on stage as well as in life. “By 1978,” she said, “we had decided on the forms.” Each person performed a particular job in the company as well as having an “area of consciousness,” which meant taking responsibility for certain domestic tasks. Living communally necessitated constant negotiation and group processing. Tina gave one of her characteristic chuckles as she recalled the inordinate amount of time spent in meetings. (Reaching consensus can be enormously time-consuming.) Since that fledgling period, she has reconciled herself to her position of leadership and developed a more pragmatic perspective. The fundamental principles, however, remain the same. She is emphatic in her insistence that, “How we organize ourselves will inform how we develop as human beings.” This idea, that the form itself will inform, and sometimes determine, the content, hews to post-modern “liberation” constructs.

I am struck by how closely Tina’s thinking parallels that of bell hooks, who writes about “engaged pedagogy.” Tina endeavors to do in theatre what hooks practices in the classroom. Both strive to build a community of reciprocity, respect, hard work and joy. Both actively work to dismantle traditional forms of domination and entitlement. Both are willing to expose their own vulnerabilities and share their personal narratives with

students (actors). Both insist that students/actors be active participants, responsible and “engaged” in the creative/learning process. And perhaps most significantly, both share a holistic approach to their work that emphasizes spiritual well-being. “That means,” says hooks in *Teaching to Transgress*, “that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (hooks 15). hooks credits her belief in “a union of mind, body, and spirit” to Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (14). Though Tina did not say so specifically, it was probably her *est* training that led her to the same conviction. Both women are interested in asking the big questions—this is one of Tina’s attractions to Shakespeare—and both want to change the world. Their methods evince an intrinsic optimism and love of humanity.

I ask myself how much of Shakespeare & Company’s pedagogy has been shaped by the fact that Tina is a woman (and/or a woman who is also a feminist, and/or a woman who is also a mother). Perhaps Tina herself is the only person who could tease those threads apart, but certainly the environment she and her colleagues have created at Shakespeare & Company is far more nurturing—and deliberately so—than the male-run theatre companies I have known. Tina has mentioned an early interest in the way French director Ariane Mnouchkine works with her company at Théâtre du Soleil. No wonder. Their philosophies and artistic aesthetics bear a remarkable resemblance. *Collaboration* and *relationship* are words they use repeatedly. Tina told me, “Theatre is a collaborative art.” Speaking of working collectively in *In Contact with the Gods: Directors Talk Theatre*,” Mnouchkine says, “It’s the way to do it. It’s the only way I can work. And the

day I feel I'm not strong enough to do it like that anymore, I will stop" (Delgado and Heritage 186). She even refers to herself as a midwife. "I help to give birth. The midwife doesn't create the baby. She doesn't create the woman, and she's not the husband. But still, if she's not there, the baby is in great danger and might not come out. I think a really good director is that" (187). And here is Tina quoted in *The Companies She Keeps*: "The reason Shakespeare & Company has worked so well in the past is because we're a team effort. I'm not devaluing my own pivotal role in that effort—it could not have happened without me—but there have been a hell of a lot of people pushing in the same direction here and it wouldn't have happened without them either. It's the collective spirit that has allowed us to survive" (Epstein 104). Both of these directors treat their actors as fellow artists and both speak of learning from them continually. Both have cultivated a core of actors and invested in them emotionally and financially, giving them time to develop as artists. This strikes me as the feminine principle in action, one that I have experienced in my own life under the guidance of women mentors, especially at VCU.

Tina listed her artistic tenets to me in our interview. "Our emphasis is on voice and movement training." "The text reigns supreme." "The money goes to the actors." This list speaks to the pedagogy of Shakespeare & Company because it lays out the priorities. Commitment to the development and well-being of the actor and devotion to Shakespeare's text are the core values of this organization. Several other important ones are mentioned in the Shakespeare & Company orientation packet and deserve to be included here:

- We believe the arts and the creative impulse are essential to human life.
- We believe in a multi-ethnic society (with added explication).
- We are good neighbors.
- We believe mentoring is integral to a healthy society.
- We ask questions, and we value mistakes.
- We pursue open and honest communication, even when it is difficult or unpleasant.
- We endeavor to pay employees competitive wages and offer secure benefits.
- The symbiosis of performance, training, and education creates a clarity and deepening of experience critical to a healthy company, and enhances the creative impulse.
- We perceive the Company as an organism that is continually re-creating itself.
- We believe the pursuit of art leads inevitably to a system of values that is compassionate and humane.
- We pursue excellence in all our endeavors; as Nature is to God, so Art is humankind, therefore our Company is a symbiotic organization designed to generate creativity and enlightenment.
- The dynamic and energy that results from these commonly-held values create a whole that is far greater than the sum of its parts. All these facets are closely connected to classical principles present in the experience of performing
- Shakespeare's plays, and the classical principles are the cornerstone from which all programs are generated.

What I find so enormously compelling about this company is its synthesis of classical ideals, progressive pedagogy and 20<sup>th</sup> (21<sup>st</sup>) century consciousness, all employed in service of making art.

One of the Aha! moments I recorded in my journal was the realization that Shakespeare & Company encompasses three of the universes that drive my interest and passion: the language of Shakespeare, the realm of psychology and the application of progressive principles of education. I had thought I was coming to Lenox to learn more about playing Shakespeare; instead I found myself being enriched on a myriad of levels.

## Chapter 4

### MY TURN

A classmate of mine confided recently that he believes he lost a potential university teaching position by not associating himself with one of the known acting schools. I find this distressing but hardly surprising. A pioneer breaks with tradition and experiments with new forms and methods, only to have those experiments codified and absorbed into the new mainstream. Surely one of the lessons to be gleaned from Stanislavski's story is that a true artist never stops developing his art. Stanislavski continued to refine and rework his ideas long after his disciples insisted on disseminating his "method" as a sort of received truth. When I contemplate the teachers and artists who have influenced me, I must acknowledge my debt to those who have no final answers, but who continue to struggle with the questions and who find joy in the engagement. Tina Packer and her colleagues are the most recent members of that assembly, whose founder was the educational reformer John Holt. (Holt remained open to new ideas to the end of his life, evolving from public school reformer to enthusiastic advocate of home-schooling.) From the time I read his first book, *How Children Fail*, as a teenager, I have had an avid interest in progressive education. Listening to Tina articulate her ethos, I had a sense of the continuum of my own thought and beliefs through the years. Shakespeare & Company demonstrated how progressive practices can be applied to theatre and actor

training. At Shakespeare & Company I found an enduring marriage of progressive pedagogy and artistic aesthetic. It is a model I would like to recreate as much as possible in my own work. The Month-long Intensive convinced me that actors must be trained holistically, that is, they must study movement and voice as well as “acting” and they must be encouraged to develop into emotionally healthy and self-aware human beings if they are to realize their full potential as artists. I believe this is best achieved in a community of trust and mutual respect. Shakespeare & Company is proof that such a community can encompass a whole organization, but it can also be as small as a classroom or the cast of a play. Whatever the size of the sphere, I’m interested in freeing and nurturing the creative impulse in my students. I want them to fall in love with words and imagery and metaphor and I want them to be able to express language with their whole instrument—breath, voice, body and heart.

Our undergraduate students have grown up in a visual culture. They (we) are verbally inarticulate to an appalling degree. I recently asked a class to list the adjectives they use to qualify something in positive or negative terms. The list was short and the words, most of which were slang, were so general as to be meaningless—*awesome, cool, rad*, etc. How can we expect actors with such limited vocabularies of their own to handle the language of Shakespeare with any facility or true understanding? Until they themselves can be moved by words, they will not be able to move an audience with words. This is a serious challenge of theatre training and one I want to address. It goes hand-in-hand with the issue of “being cool” which Patsy Rodenburg and others have pointed out. Our students have been conditioned to think it’s distinctly “uncool” to show

their feelings. Many of them tend to play very passionate or tender scenes with a heavy layer of irony, not trusting themselves with the raw emotion. Just as Kristin Linklater sees her work to be “unblocking the natural voice,” I see my task to be freeing students from the cultural restraints that limit their expressive power. If I can create an atmosphere where students feel safe connecting with their whole emotional range AND if I can sensitize their ears to thrill to good writing, it may just be possible. After doing the Month-long Intensive, I now see playing Shakespeare as the ideal means to that end. Shakespeare’s emotional scope provides actors with the opportunity to practice fully committing to their character’s feelings and needs. And the incredible richness of the language is a whole education in itself, spanning the most rustic prose to the most mellifluous verse. Shakespeare cannot be played half-heartedly. I want to use his texts to get actors working viscerally, connected to their breath and their deepest feelings. My methods may be tentative as of yet, but I am sure my passion is communicable. I intend to use every trick I can think of to open their minds and ears to this magnificent body of work.

#### Practical Application

Since returning to VCU from Lenox, I have had a few opportunities to try out my newfound knowledge with students. The first occurred while vocal coaching *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, although my late arrival in the rehearsal process meant I did not have as much time with the actors as I would have liked. Shange’s script is obviously not Shakespeare, but it is poetry and requires the same sensibility and skill of any heightened text. It is not naturalistic, which made the



language difficult for some of the actors initially. It has great musicality and vivid imagery, which must be communicated vocally by the actors. The coaching I did ranged from helping actors with breath support and even planning where breaths could be taken, to strengthening articulation, to recognizing operative words in order to clarify meaning, to connecting emotionally with the character. By the time I worked with actors individually, they had done extensive movement work and developed their characters physically. I think this made my work easier because they were already in their bodies. Thinking back on that experience, I am much more aware of my failures than my successes. Two cases haunt me. In one instance, the actor was very tense in her face and upper body and her voice seemed to stick in her throat, almost as though it were being strangled, which limited her pitch range and gave her voice a tight, brittle quality. As much as I tried to help her soften her breathing center and speak from there with support, she did not make much progress toward a freer voice. The other student was constricted emotionally and could not access her vulnerability and sadness, which were essential to her monologue. She knew very well, having worked with Dr. Pettiford-Wates, that this was an ongoing issue for her. I was not able to achieve any real breakthrough with her, either. Perhaps my work with these two students was necessarily humbling. There is no magic bullet and just because I attended this Intensive does not ensure that I am suddenly qualified to work miracles with all actors.

Dr. Pettiford-Wates' Junior Acting Studio, for which I am the teaching assistant, has been the most accessible arena for practicing my newest pedagogy. The students have learned a Shakespeare monologue as well as pairing with a partner to do a

Shakespeare scene. I am called upon to coach students on their monologues and scenes outside of class—which I love to do. Ironically, both my “failure” cases from *colored girls* are in this class, so my work with them has continued. As have their particular “habits.” I am grateful for a second chance with these young women, who both want so badly to do work they are proud of. But I am not sure I have found the “doorway” through for either of them. I can not help thinking that therapy would probably be useful for both of them, since lack of technique is not the underlying issue.

Because our time is so limited, I find myself focusing almost solely on the basics in my coaching sessions with the juniors. I help them understand what they are saying and connect personally to it. Most of them feel very awkward with the language, which is hardly surprising considering their lack of exposure to Shakespeare. The one or two who have some experience really stand out from the rest. I remind them of the acting lessons they practiced last semester and reassure them that their process needs to be the same with this work. All have to be encouraged to play the stakes fully. All need lots of practice giving the words their full value; the American tendency to drop down at the end of a line and to throw away words and phrases is rampant with these young actors and does a horrible disservice to Shakespeare’s text. I’m vigilant in trying to break the slouching/mumbling/ironic habit most of them have. I keep pointing out Shakespeare’s use of rhetorical devices and ways they can be played. They often need to be made aware that they are building an argument or telling a story in a given speech. Few understand, in a concrete way, how often Shakespeare’s characters are dueling with words. I am still

experimenting, trying to find the most effective methods to *educare, to lead (them) out*, without overwhelming them with information or correctives.

In my Voice and Speech class for second-year students, we have not touched on Shakespeare at all, but we are beginning to work on the art of storytelling for children. Again, I find myself spending time trying to train the students' ears to the music and nuance of language. Toward that end and to help them prepare for the cold reading component of their sophomore assessment, I have been bringing in many different samples of poetry and prose. They desperately need the practice of reading aloud and love the opportunity to do so. It has been heartening to discover how responsive they are, especially to the poems. In fact, a couple of them have chosen to learn a story-poem for their children's story assignment, such as Ogden Nash's "Adventures of Isabelle." I hope their work this semester will help pave the way for their introduction to Shakespeare next year.

Here concludes the story of my education at Shakespeare & Company. I'm grateful for having to write about it, because I think the writing has allowed the experience to really *mulch* in me, so to speak. It might otherwise have dissipated too quickly upon reentry into real life, which exerted its urgent demands almost immediately. I hope to integrate my learning at Shakespeare & Co. into my pedagogy in as organic a way as possible. My dream is that a year from now, I will have a seamless way of working with students that integrates my theoretical principles with the practical particulars I have absorbed from my month in Lenox as well as my time at VCU.

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## VITA

Catherine Bryne was born April 8, 1950 in San Tome, Venezuela to an Anglo-Irish mother and an American father. She obtained a B.A. in Theatre from Eckerd College. She has extensive acting and teaching experience. In 1992, she developed a one-woman show portraying Virginia Woolf, which she has performed in many venues, including Edinburgh, Scotland and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Catherine is an active member of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association and most recently served as vocal coach for the VCU production of *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*. She is the proud mother of a son, Alexander, and daughter, Anna, both grown. She lives in Richmond with her husband, Marc Taylor.