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Pedagogy and Performing Shakespeare's Text: A Comparative Study

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PEDAGOGY AND PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE’S TEXT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

By Sally Parrish Southall

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

Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes
Director of Graduate Studies
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Virginia Commonwealth University
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To Ralph Alan Cohen, Shakespeare guru, teacher, director, speaker, and more, I owe a particular thanks; when others advised him not to add one more item to his already overloaded schedule, he not only allowed me to be a part of his class, but he endured my countless messages and draws on his time for meetings and questions. Most significantly, though, he openly shared his remarkable passion for teaching, and his love
for the language and performance of Shakespeare, and, as a result, my teaching will never be the same. What a great gift.

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Preface

The Process

As a Master of Fine Arts student in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University with an undergraduate degree in English, I have consistently sought diverse ways of approaching Shakespeare’s language, as a teacher, director, and performer. The standard approaches to Shakespeare that I endured in high school and in college as an undergraduate student left me feeling more bewildered than enlightened. So, with some trepidation, I registered for Janet B. Rodgers’ single semester, twice-weekly class “Shakespeare and Text: The War of the Roses” at Virginia Commonwealth University. Ms. Rodgers, as Head of Voice and Speech, was respected and appreciated in the theatre department for her extensive work in voice and speech as well as her positive, creative teaching style. I had no formal training in voice and speech, so I was excited about working with Shakespeare’s text from the more physical, vocal standpoint. I was eagerly anticipating a new, unique approach to working with the text of Shakespeare.

In addition, for the past eight years, I had been actively attending Shakespeare performances in Staunton, Virginia at the American Shakespeare Center (formerly
Blackfriars, Shenandoah Shakespeare and Shenandoah Shakespeare Express), a group founded in 1988 and committed to performing Shakespeare in original practices of Renaissance Theatre – no sets, no lights, with the audience visible. At the repeated urging of a theatre friend, I had reluctantly agreed to see a production there, convinced that I would be more frustrated than impressed with any local, live performance of Shakespeare, given my history of seeing less than inspiring performances before. Admittedly, I wanted to believe that Shakespeare could be done well, because I loved the language. To my amazement, what I saw in Staunton was a genuine, full embodiment of the language and performances that were natural and relatable, and, most significantly, understandable. I began to question what this company was able to do that I had not seen done before, particularly with respect to the language. My search led to Dr. Ralph Alan Cohen, one of the co-founders and a mission director of this group, and a creator of the Master of Letters/Master of Fine Arts in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance at Mary Baldwin College, a private, liberal arts college in Staunton. He was teaching a graduate class, one day a week, called “The Language of Performance,” whose course description described explorations of Shakespeare’s text similar to that of Rodgers’ class at VCU. The fact that this class met on the only afternoon I was free from class at VCU was coincidental and random good fortune. Dr. Cohen and Dr. Paul Menzer, Director of the M.Litt/Master of Fine Arts program, graciously allowed me to sit in on the class, an experience which not only introduced me to the basic structures and possibilities in Shakespeare’s text for a performer, but also exposed me to some incredibly diverse and creative ways of approaching the text as a teacher.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgments</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter

1. Two Programs: Two Approaches ................................................................. 1
   - Starting Points ......................................................................................... 1
   - The Givens ................................................................................................ 2

2. Janet B. Rodgers ....................................................................................... 5
   - Grounding in Voice and Speech.............................................................. 5
   - “Shakespeare and the War of the Roses” ................................................. 10
     - Concept/Class Objectives ................................................................. 10
     - Methodology ..................................................................................... 11

3. Ralph Alan Cohen ...................................................................................... 17
   - Trust the Text ....................................................................................... 17
   - “Language of Performance” .................................................................. 23
     - Concept/Class Objectives ................................................................. 23
     - Methodology ..................................................................................... 24

4. The Practices ............................................................................................. 29
   - Voice and Physical Training for Performance ...................................... 31
Scansion, Rhetorical Devices, Language and Audience Awareness........33

Evaluation of the Work .................................................................50

5 Transforming the Work.................................................................53

References..........................................................................................56

Appendices.........................................................................................59

A 12 Explorations of Shakespeare’s Text - Rodgers.........................59

B First stage of work on text – Linklater’s Freeing the Natural Voice........62
ABSTRACT

PEDAGOGY AND PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE’S TEXT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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In the Master of Fine Arts program in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University, and in a second program, the Master of Letters/Master of Fine Arts in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance at Mary Baldwin College - two specific pedagogical approaches to accessing and performing Shakespeare’s text, both in the post-graduate setting - provide significant analysis tools and performance techniques, yet they use different points of departure and areas of focus. Chapter 1 will give the background, design, and focus of the graduate programs at Virginia Commonwealth University and at Mary Baldwin College. Chapter 2 will discuss and describe Janet B. Rodgers’ teaching orientation and her particular pedagogy in “Shakespeare and Text: The War of the Roses” class at
Virginia Commonwealth University. Chapter 3 will provide Dr. Ralph Alan Cohen’s professional background and the foundational structure and focus of the pedagogy in his class “Language and Performance” at Mary Baldwin College. Chapter 4 explores the parallel and overlapping methods demonstrated in these two classes as well as the contrasting specifics of their particular methodologies. Chapter 5 describes the value of the two approaches, both of which exemplify the individual strengths of the professors.
Chapter 1

TWO PROGRAMS: TWO APPROACHES

“Actors know that playing roles in Shakespeare is a particular pleasure because his characters have so many facets that every performance offers something new and fresh for the performer. At the same time, the actor needs to share those discoveries by making Shakespeare’s language accessible to an audience, and by making any notion that his words are inaccessible disappear.” – Judi Dench, Foreward, *ShakesFear and How to Cure it: A Handbook for Teaching Shakespeare*

Starting Points

A competent teacher is always acutely aware that no one way of teaching any subject is a certain key for unlocking material for every student. This is particularly true in the study of Shakespeare’s text, whether one is a student, teacher, or performer. In addition to dissolving the formidable preconceptions that Shakespeare’s works are long, boring, and beyond the understanding of the average person, anyone teaching, directing, or performing Shakespeare must deal with the language and its complex mixture of verse, prose, imagery, rhythms, rhymes, and rhetorical devices. On the graduate level, two classes, one at Virginia Commonwealth University, a large state-supported school, and another at Mary Baldwin College, a small liberal arts institution, focus on Shakespeare’s language and performance, and effectively represent two different, yet complementary pedagogical approaches to accessing Shakespeare’s text for performers. From an academic perspective, the objectives of both classes are the same; however, Janet B. Rodgers’ focus at Virginia Commonwealth University is a holistic approach combining
breath, movement, vocal articulation as well as text scansion and analysis. At Mary Baldwin College, Dr. Ralph Alan Cohen’s class examines, in depth, the mechanics of Shakespeare’s text through scansion, rhetoric, and stage directions as guides for the Shakespeare performer. Both classes reflect the common goal of providing the tools for students to access the text and activate the critical character elements and motivations necessary for performance. Even more striking is that the fusion of these two classes, content and method, as well as the teaching style of the professors, both creative and gifted educators who share their infectious passion for Shakespeare, creates an all-encompassing educational experience and provides a broad spectrum of methods for students to unlock and embody the text.

The Givens

Patsy Rodenburg entitles one of the chapters in Speaking Shakespeare “The Givens.” She writes, “We are about to trace two threads of work, both of which have to be in place to serve the text. The first thread I call ‘the givens’: the physical structures that shape the story and the sense and organise the chaos of passion” (Rodenburg 82). Similarly, the following “threads” of work – the classes and pedagogies being compared - emerge out of their particular settings and the unique needs of the institutions in which they are taught. Noting the parameters, characteristics, and qualities of both theatre programs is valuable in establishing the foundation of this study.
According to the “Guidelines for MFA Graduate Students,” The Master of Fine Arts program in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University “is individually tailored to prepare the student to enter the field of teaching at the university or college level” (“Guidelines”). The department requires that students take core curriculum classes in theatre pedagogy, theatre history and historiography, dramatic literature and theory, modern theatre: theory and practice, and special topics seminars. In addition, first year theatre pedagogy students make teaching observations of one course each semester, one of which is a class in which the student is not enrolled and is also outside the student’s area of specialty. To complete the requirements for graduation, the pedagogy student is required to take a minimum of nine hours in her area of specialty, six hours in a secondary area, and the remainder of the sixty credit hours in elective courses, internships, teacher training, and graduate courses in other departments. A creative project/thesis project and defense is also required for all theatre pedagogy candidates. Areas of specialty include directing, acting, voice, physical acting, dramatic literature/dramaturgy. Approximately forty-five students are in the program, with eighteen to twenty admitted each year. Janet Rodgers’ graduate level class, “Shakespeare and Text: The War of the Roses,” is a studio course that is strongly recommended for voice specialty students, but an elective for other pedagogy students.

At Mary Baldwin College, a private liberal arts college, the Master of Letters (MLitt), two-year graduate degree, is offered and leads to the Master of Fine Arts in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance. The program provides “a
combination of stagecraft and scholarship, offering concentrations in acting, directing, 
 dramaticurgy, and teaching” ("Academic Catalog"). The curriculum focus of core courses 
as well as elective courses is rooted in Renaissance literature, and more particularly, 
 Shakespeare’s works and the theatre of his time. This program affords practical 
 performance experience at the American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars Playhouse, a 
 modern reconstruction of Shakespeare’s Blackfriars Playhouse. Degree requirements for 
 the Master of Letters include thirty six semester hours, and a thesis project. After 
 completing the Master of Letters degree, students may apply for the Master of Fine Arts 
 program, which requires an additional thirty hours of course work, an internship, and a 
 Areas of concentration for the Master of Letters are acting, directing, dramaticurgy or 
 teaching; the Master of Fine Arts requires a concentration in acting, directing or 
 dramaticurgy. Approximately twenty students are admitted into the two-year Master of 
 Letters program. Dr. Ralph Alan Cohen’s “The Language of Performance” class is a 
 required core course for all first-year Master of Letters students.
Chapter 2

Janet B. Rodgers

Grounding in Voice and Speech

As Head of Voice and Speech in the Theatre Program and a full professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, Janet Beecher Rodgers has thirty years experience teaching voice and speech as well as classes in Shakespeare, dialects, and archetypes. In addition to vocal coaching, taking students on study abroad programs in theatre, leading workshops at Southeastern Theatre Conferences (SETC) and many other venues, Rodgers directs for the theatre department as well, with productions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Twelfth Night* included with her other directing credits. Involved from the beginning of Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA), she remains an active member. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she supervises six graduate students who lead undergraduate voice and speech classes at VCU. She states, however, that she is “teacher first – that is what I’m here to do.”

Since beginning violin at age eight, and continuing as a serious violinist through her college years, Rodgers acknowledges that she has a good ear, a sense of rhythm. In fact, other than her family-staged plays when she was young, theatre was not part of her
early life. She attended Shakespeare productions at Stratford Shakespeare during the 1960s that she describes as “bloody awful – I couldn’t follow what most people were talking about. For my whole life I was always tuned in to the auditory reality of my world. My ear became highly tuned. A magnificent set was not enough for me.” It was not until she played the violin in the orchestra for a production of *The Boyfriend* at Mt. Holyoke College that she says really “hooked me into theatre.” Entering college as a pre-medical student, Rodgers admits that she was living too much in her left brain, so in turning her focus to theatre, she immersed herself in classes in art, theatre, and voice. Influenced at Mt. Holyoke by Nancy Enggass and Nadine Shephardson who were versed in voice and speech, Rodgers acknowledges that there were not many resources in the late 1960s. It was in 1968, however, that Joe Papp brought a rough and raw production of *Hamlet* to Mt. Holyoke, and Rodgers says, “all of a sudden, the words ‘to be or not to be’ resonated for me….something had been sparked.”

After completing her degree in Theatre Arts at Mt. Holyoke in 1969, Rodgers completed graduate work in Theatre Arts at Brandeis University and began classical acting. In between college and graduate school, Rodgers worked briefly as a respiratory therapist at Boston’s Beth Israel Hospital, experience that would later contribute to her work with breathing and speech. She also taught directing and acting at The American Center for the Performing Arts. At the Center and also at Brandeis, Rodgers recalls that, there was no honoring of the text (Shakespeare)…we didn’t learn anything about scansion, rhetorical devices. When I graduated from Brandeis, I realized there was a
huge gap in my education.” After receiving her Master of Fine Arts from Brandeis in 1975, Rodgers worked with the Lyric Stage Company, where she says her “real passion” was classical theatre (Rodgers, “Personal Interview”).

Although she loved classical theatre, Rodgers was hesitant to perform Shakespeare. She was cast in 1977 as Helena at the Weathervane Theatre in New Hampshire, and she distinctly remembers arriving and being greeted by the “fellow across the hall with, ‘Have you scanned your piece yet…your lines?’” (“Interview”). She realized that she did not know anything about scansion, but since the show was set to open in a week and a half, she knew she had to learn. It was later, in 1979, after she had finished a production in New York that an acting friend told her that Boston Shakespeare Company was still looking for leads for their repertory season. So, Rodgers prepared selections and auditioned for Bill Cain, who also needed an immediate replacement for the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet. Rodgers was offered the major roles in the season: The Taming of the Shrew, Comedy of Errors, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, and The Time of Your Life. She says, “I tried to find everything I could…one book by Bertram Joseph called Acting Shakespeare, but there wasn’t a lot about dealing with the text.” For the next two years, Rodgers was the Principal Resident Actress for Boston Shakespeare Company, performing one third of the Shakespeare’s plays. She was immersed in the language and learned more about the importance of scansion and making the text clear. She decided she wanted to start a school, teach people who wanted to learn about
Shakespeare, but she did not have a text, so she began to put her own experiences and methods together.

Rodgers began teaching at the Boston Conservatory of Music, Dance and Drama, and, in 1986, attended the National Educational Theatre Conference (NETC) in New York; this conference was significant for Rodgers personally and professionally. Rodgers began to make some contacts with others who were interested in sharing ideas and resources in voice and speech, and as a result of discussions there, a core group of people at the conference formed the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA), now an internationally active organization with which Rodgers continues to work. In addition to making voice and speech connections, Rodgers also learned of a workshop being conducted by a Canadian, Neil Freeman, who discovered “profound” clues to Shakespeare’s text in the First Folio. For Rodgers, this conference was a pivotal point, a time in which teaching Shakespeare and incorporating voice and speech became completely integrated.

The following year, 1987, was a watershed year for Rodgers: her love for classical theatre, her experience in voice and speech, and her desire to teach brought a job offer from Virginia Commonwealth University, and she made valuable connections with innovators in Shakespeare’s text, who were beginning to publish books and develop workshops for performers and teachers of Shakespeare. She signed a contract to teach Shakespeare, which she had never taught before, and she began searching for a text. VASTA had its first conference, with presenter Cicely Berry, of Guildhall School of
Music and Drama and later of the Royal Shakespeare Company, one of several followers of Iris Warren’s western tradition of using voice, who had just published *The Actor and His Text*. Rodgers recalls, “I really saw that there was method to this madness…Berry talked about sounding the text.” Rodgers says that she had actually done some similar exercises herself, but Berry had group exercises and Rodgers was glad to have a text to work with. She tried using Berry’s book in class, but students seemed overwhelmed, so Rodgers began to design twelve explorations that incorporated some of Berry’s ideas. Berry’s ideas were the first of many that Rodgers would store and adapt for her own teaching at VCU.

In years following, Rodgers, primarily through VASTA, organized and participated in workshops and conferences led by other trendsetters in the voice and speech field: Kristen Linklater, who, in the early seventies had worked briefly with Tina Packer and John Barton in New England with an eclectic group of theatre artists called Shakespeare and Company and had published *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice* in 1992; and Patsy Rodenburg, who had drawn recognition working with principals at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre and had established a strong following with the publication of several books -*The Need for Words: Voice and Text, The Actor Speaks: Voice and Performer; The Right to Speak: Working with the Voice*. In 1995, Rodgers was selected to study with Rodenburg in a three-week, international conference; Rodenburg’s workshops included movement and singing as well as working
with text; Rodgers says, “the most valuable part was working with sonnets, discovering how Rodenburg worked in a problem/solution form.” Rodgers also gravitated to Rodenburg’s philosophy that “everybody has the capability (to perform Shakespeare); you just have to work at it” (“Interview”).

Rodgers admits that in designing her classes, she has her own blend: “I have drawn from Rodenburg, Linklater, (Arthur)Lessac, and Berry; I am very eclectic, and I like to be creative.” Her goal is to find ways for students to make the text come alive, with clarity and the appropriate emotion. Her teaching of the graduate level course, “Shakespeare’s Text: The War of the Roses” is indicative of Rodgers’ creative combination of vocal teaching styles, physical breathing and strength exercises, and sensitive textual work that excavates the line and the emotion to help students “realize that Shakespeare is accessible” and “to help them approach Shakespeare with joy and confidence” (“Interview”).

“Shakespeare and the Text: The War of the Roses”

Concept/Class Objectives

“In order to do Shakespeare, you need to have the athleticism of an Olympian; the amount of strength, stamina, lung power, and abdominal strength have to be consistently trained” (“Interview”). This is Janet Rodgers’ mantra and the foundation of her class “Shakespeare and the Text: The War of the Roses.” In the 105-minute, twice weekly
studio class, students come prepared to work body, breath, and brain in the exploration of Shakespeare’s texts, more specifically *Henry V, Henry VI, parts I, II, III, and Richard III*. She designed the class based on these plays after she had researched and prepared a performance piece/lecture on Margaret: “I wanted to do plays that no one knew well; it’s not our history…and it would be more difficult, a challenge at the graduate level” (“Interview”). In addition to the primary texts, students’ required resources are Patsy Rodenburg’s *Speaking Shakespeare*, which Rodgers reviewed for *American Theatre Review* in 2003, and Rodgers’ own “Voice and Speech Pedagogy Handbook,” a valuable and thorough collection of daily practices and exercises called OxyRhythms that “combine breath, sound, rhythm and body movements to strengthen the body core, to stretch breath and voice capacity, to release excess body tension and to focus the mind while expanding the actor’s intuitive response to breath/voice needs” (“Voice and Speech Training Manual”). This graduate-level course of thirteen students meets in a refurbished church sanctuary-turned-recital space, complete with high ceilings, raised platform area, aisles, balconies, and congregation-style seating. The space lends itself well to performance, even though the acoustics are not ideal.

**Methodology**

Rodgers’ daily format is characteristically performance-oriented and focused on breath and body. Her use of the opening chime brings mental attention to the work for the day and the physical awareness of the release of breath. What follows is
approximately twenty minutes of Oxyrhythms, which Rodgers describes as physical movements “derived from…Feldenkrais, Yoga, physical therapy, Five Tibetan exercises” combined with her own experimental exercises (“Voice and Speech Training Manual”). She developed these exercises for herself over years, but she began using them with students when she was working as a Fulbright Scholar in Romania, to offset the harsher, Russian style of work. In 2006, she enlisted a core group of twelve VCU students, who met at the gym daily and performed the exercises, using peak flow meters for monitoring their breath capacity at the beginning and the end of class. The results were charted throughout the semester, with some students making dramatic growth of over 300% by the end of the semester; all students improved. Rodgers promoted her program to the theatre faculty, and, as a result, all first-year theatre undergraduate students are now required to take a class in Oxyrhythms before going to acting class. After completion of Oxyrhythms, the physical warm-up cycle moves to drum work, spinning, edge of balance/double direction, and circle work. Vocal warm-ups follow, depending on the focus for the day: these include articulation exercises as well as humming or singing exercises. This style of preparation closely follows Part I of Rodenburg’s work, “Foundation Craft.” Rodgers is adamant that this type of warm-up become a daily routine for any actor, but especially for performers of Shakespeare.

Throughout the semester, students are responsible for submitting responses to out of class readings from Rodenburg as well as providing feedback from spoken work, which Rodgers calls, “Hey, Listen to this.” Rodenburg’s Speaking Shakespeare is a
voice based, clearly written approach to working with Shakespeare’s text which she divides into five parts: “Foundation Craft,” which deals primarily with breath, body and voice; “Structure,” which pinpoints figures of speech and structuring of thoughts and scenes; “The Imaginative,” which focuses on the emotional connection with the text; “The Speeches,” in which Rodenburg provides sample speeches and strategies to use in approaching the performance of these speeches; and “Checklists,” an actor’s reminder of elements to consider in preparing to speak Shakespeare. In addition to readings, students prepare a scene or monologue for class performance. Each student is required to share this work with someone who is not necessarily familiar with the text and who will give feedback which can be related to articulation, pace, volume, and comprehension; this exercise, which Rodgers added five years ago, is called, “Hey, Listen to this,” and is completed seven times throughout the semester: four times by another person, and three times recorded and self-evaluated.

As a basic introduction for the class, especially for non-voice pedagogy students, Rodgers begins the semester with lecture, reading, demonstration, and discussion of Transatlantic Dialect and the value of learning and applying ten basic principles, taken from Robert Hobbs’ work, *Teach Yourself Transatlantic*. especially for Americans, whose regional speech patterns are so pronounced. She smoothly transitions to the history of the War of the Roses and the plays which encompassed that time period; she then discusses the importance of First Folio texts: scansion, language, verse speaking, and clues in directions. The first class assignment is a small-group exercise using the text
from the Prologue from *Henry V*. Each group paraphrases and scans the text, identifying meanings of words and then working on an agreed upon concept for a group presentation of the passage which includes specific vocal variety - change in pace, pitch, and tone - and clear articulation, projection, and movement that supports the meter and meaning of the text. The result, besides the benefit of collaborating on this first endeavor, is four diverse yet valid and supportable presentations of the passage: comic, dramatic, to melodramatic are several different ways to create and perform any given text of Shakespeare’s text.

Following the initial text exercise, each student chooses his own monologue from the given plays and begins the work of exploring and working with the text for several sessions before presenting the monologue in class. Rodgers’ handout, “12 Explorations of Shakespeare’s Text—Bring to the work what You are about,” provides a clear, progressive system of excavating, sounding, finding the argument, and exploring the energy of the text before memorizing (Appendix A). Rodgers cites Cecily Berry and Bill Cain (Boston Shakespeare Company) as resources for this system. Rodgers also provides a Kristen Linklater exercise from *Freeing the Natural Voice* as another way of approaching and working with the text (Appendix B). During the process of working the monologues during class, Rodgers moves silently through the space, watching, listening and providing individual feedback to students. She implements a three-step process over a week or more for students to prepare for the final class performance of the pieces. The first step is a reading of the text from the stage area, embodying the “givens”: relaxed,
open body; state of alertness to be in the moment of the character; free, powerful breath support that reflects the breath of the character; a free voice that stays rather than falls off the line; clearly articulated and formed words that work together to create the rhythm of the line and emotional arc of the character within the passage. Rodgers and members of the class sit scattered in the audience space and provide constructive comments for each reading. Rodgers’ keen hearing picks up pronunciations, breath support, emotional energy in the line as well as meter and flow of the line; she also notes physical tension in the body that may block the breath or voice. The second step is the performance of the selection, memorized, implementing comments from the first reading, and adding physical movement to the piece, and, in some cases, adding others as those being addressed in the scene. Again, everyone gives feedback, which, this time, perhaps focuses on consistent second circle energy. The final performance, the third step, is the monologue performed as the fully embodied character of Shakespeare’s play. Throughout the process, Rodgers and students can note consistency in support and release of breath, application of constructive comments, and growth from the first step. A second round of monologues and scenes is repeated in another full cycle with students choosing other monologues or scenes from the plays. By the end of the term, not only have most of the recognized speeches from these texts been performed (Henry V’s St. Crispin’s Day speech, Joan of Arc’s pleading with the spirits, Margaret’s capture and beheading of the Duke of York, Richard III’s “winter of our discontent” passage), but the
history and the notable people of the Wars of the Roses, according to Shakespeare, have been woven together.

Aside from the Shakespeare text, and as a method of examining the documented historical background of the fifteenth century, Rodgers assigns a research project which culminates in an oral/visual presentation to the class with an accompanying paper. Students choose topics such as weapons of the time, heraldry, witchcraft, court etiquette, women and the monarchy, and they share their findings in an oral/visual presentation. The end of the semester final evaluation consists of a performance featuring all monologues and scenes from the semester, in dramatically chronological order, with inserted narratives to tie the selections together.
Chapter 3

Ralph Alan Cohen

Trust the Text

“This man (Shakespeare) is already there….way before me,” recalls Ralph Alan Cohen, relating one of his first pivotal Shakespeare experiences while watching the 1943 film version of Henry V – the scene between Henry and Katherine; “There was a place in it where I guess I started noticing that I had no trouble understanding it”(Cohen, “Personal Interview”). As Professor of Renaissance Drama in Performance at Mary Baldwin College as well as one of the founding Directors of the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia, Cohen devotes his professional and personal energies to assuring that students, performers, and audiences alike not only understand Shakespeare’s text thoroughly, but enthusiastically embrace the experience of watching Shakespeare’s works performed. During his thirty-year teaching position of English at James Madison University, Cohen grew the Shakespeare classes from ten to one hundred students before coming to Mary Baldwin College in 2003, luring the president of the college with a
mission to create graduate programs concentrating on Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance. In 1988, Cohen, with former student Jim Warren, founded the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, a Shakespeare touring performing company whose success led to the construction of the Blackfriars Playhouse, a 300-seat re-creation of Shakespeare’s original London Blackfriars Playhouse, the indoor venue for Shakespeare’s performances. Now called the American Shakespeare Center, the company consists of a resident troupe, a touring troupe, as well as a staff to provide educational workshops for school-age students and training opportunities for educators. In addition to teaching, Cohen has conducted workshops, led seminars, published papers, directed, and in 2007, published his book *ShakesFear and How to Cure It: A Handbook for Teaching Shakespeare*.

Growing up in Montgomery, Alabama, Ralph Alan Cohen admits his passion for teaching and Shakespeare developed gradually over time, not in a single inciting moment, even though his first experience seeing Shakespeare came when he was four or five years old and his parents took him to see an outdoor performance of* A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It was years later, in 1965 at Dartmouth College, where he completed his undergraduate degree in English, that he saw the 1943 film of *Henry V*. Originally a pre-medical student, he was influenced by charismatic, unique professors, who affected his decision to pursue college teaching as a career. Shakespeare became his focus at Duke University, where Cohen received both a master’s degree and a doctorate. Originally intending to follow a track in American literature, Cohen noticed how many writers were
influenced by Shakespeare: “Why should I study someone who is always revering someone else? Why don’t I just study that person?” he recalls (Cohen, “Interview”). In a Shakespeare course taught by George Walton Williams, whom Cohen both admired and feared, and who, as a frequent director for Gilbert and Sullivan productions, had a good ear for music, Cohen learned about the text: “There was a rigorousness about his approach to the text that I did like…he did a little scansion, but only to check things out, and I don’t think he ever expected us to have to do that.” Although the class was not about performance, Cohen says that Williams “had an eye from his own directing for what performance moments were…a teacher who listened and who probably envisioned moments on the stage…that is how I got my Shakespeare – through someone not resisting those things but enlisting those things” (“Interview”).

Cohen began teaching English at James Madison University in 1973, but his first actual teaching of Shakespeare was in the spring of 1974. His predecessor’s course had covered six or seven plays a semester, but Cohen quickly wanted to complete twelve plays. The class grew enrollment grew, and the course was expanded to two semesters, twenty-four plays a year. The year 1974 marked the beginning of a slow, but accelerating change in his approach to teaching Shakespeare. When Cohen saw John Barton’s production of Richard II, he started thinking about teaching the plays from the point of view of performance. But, with large classes, Cohen was confined to being a lecturer: “Everything was about who was speaking, but I wasn’t able to get anyone on their feet,” he recalls. By 1979, Cohen had designed and directed the JMU Semester in
London program, in which students were attending concerts, ballet performances, and opera in addition to seeing three plays a week; by semester’s end, students attended at least twelve Shakespeare productions, some performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company. “When I was in England, I always taught a Shakespeare there; I was always running a program,” remarks Cohen about the Studies Abroad Program he continued to lead until 1990 (“Interview”).

Cohen admits that he began looking more closely at the verse after he directed The Taming of the Shrew at JMU in 1983, a production that started with ideas he wanted to try as an experimental process for his English class, but ended up being a collaborative mainstage production with the theatre department. “The first few times, I was aware of the verse, but I wasn’t directing out of it; it must have been another five years before I was actually kind of directing out of verse…it was slow.” Over the next few years, Cohen directed his own productions in the JMU space, using JMU actors; it was during his production of Henry V that he worked with Jim Warren, then a sophomore, with whom he founded the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express in 1988. By his 1992 production of The Merchant of Venice, Cohen was hearing the lines and knowing if they sounded wrong or not: “I would say in my head, ‘This person said that in a way that doesn’t make sense to me and doesn’t have the meaning that it should have,’ and then I would notice…my understanding of the line fit the metrics, and finally, I began to say to my actors, ‘Take a look at the meter.’” From that production on, he notes, “there was never a
time when I wasn’t looking really closely at the text…it has grown and grown” (“Interview”).

Having expanded the Shakespeare course at James Madison University and started the thriving Shenandoah Shakespeare Express touring troupe, Cohen next set out to create a unique graduate program in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature. With the completion of the Blackfriars Playhouse in September 2001, Cohen approached Mary Baldwin College President Cynthia Tyson, proposing a design for a Master of Letters/Master of Fine Arts Program which would use the Blackfriars Playhouse as its laboratory space. She agreed, and with the help of a grant for the program, Cohen retired from James Madison University and was hired as Professor of Renaissance Drama in Performance at Mary Baldwin in 2003. The first year, seven students, mainly second career people from Virginia, were admitted into the program; the second year, thirteen students; and then in the third year, fifty, from all parts of the country. There was no other program like it. Today, the Master of Letters program accepts twenty first year students and allows for twenty second-year students; approximately ten continue to the Master of Fine Arts program.

In addition to his teaching and directing of Shakespeare, Cohen has contributed to and gleaned much from workshops, lectures, and festivals on Shakespeare. He has delivered over three dozen papers to various conferences nationally and internationally and has lectured at Ashland Shakespeare in Oregon and Shakespeare’s Globe in London. He served as a guest lecturer several times for a teaching institute at Shakespeare and

In his graduate class, “The Language of Performance,” a required core class for all Master of Letters students, Cohen concentrates on the study of Shakespeare’s textual elements, which involves complex analysis of line structure and word. His passion for the application of the text in performance is energizing, and he admits that he is not afraid to look enthusiastic: “There has to be a point where you don’t care about your vulnerability…about showing people that you love something, especially at the college level.” He combines textual analysis, critical reading, creative writing application, and vocal and physical acting exercises in his teaching to impress on students the importance of the language and how the language impacts the performance. As a result of his teaching, researching, writing, and directing Shakespeare, Ralph Alan Cohen’s unequivocal tenet for students and performers is to “trust it...trust Shakespeare, and then, trust that the text is going to give you some answers” (“Interview”).

22
“The Language of Performance”

Concept/Objectives

Ralph Alan Cohen’s objectives for his graduate students are clear: “I know exactly what I want; I want them, whether they are directing or acting or teaching, not ever to fear, that when they open the text and see a passage, that they don’t know a hundred things to do with it, even if they’ve never seen it before.” Cohen’s required course “The Language of Performance” meets one day a week for three hours as an intensive study of Shakespeare’s text and how to apply language tools such as meter, rhyme, caesura, and rhetorical devices to performance in creating Shakespeare’s characters authentically. The primary class texts are the *Norton Shakespeare*, used in each class for sample readings and analysis; George T. Wright’s *Shakespeare’s Metrical Art*, an out-of-class intensive guide to scansion; and Sister Miriam Joseph’s book *Shakespeare’s Use of the Arts of Language*, an in-depth reference of figures of speech and logical thought. Additional reading passages are taken from *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* by Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors. Two other valuable resources Cohen recommends are Arthur Quinn’s *Figures of Speech* and Scott Kaiser’s *Shakespeare’s Wordcraft*. The class of sixteen first-year Master of Letters (M.Litt) students meets in a classroom with moveable tables, which are necessary for book work and writing, and chairs that can be re-arranged for performance exercises and readings.
Methodology

In keeping with his language-centered focus for the course, Cohen begins his semester class with an introduction to rhyme and meter, particularly iambic pentameter, as a major cornerstone of Shakespeare’s works, and he is adamant that his students understand the meaning of the text, but also the myriad ways that, within context, any given passage can be performed clearly. During each three-hour class, he allocates time for lecture, discussion, written application and performance application. Allowing for flexibility in the syllabus, Cohen introduces basic principles of Shakespeare’s language using written and performed samples from Shakespeare’s texts as well as original writings. The *Norton Anthology* is the class standard in providing examples, while out of class readings on metrics from George T. Wright’s book reinforces the critical elements of meter and rhyme.

To emphasize the importance of meter and rhyme, Cohen begins with an iambic line exercise in which ten (or eleven, if necessary) students stand, literally, and speak the iambic rhythm, syllable by syllable, in a Shakespeare line. He then introduces the limerick and the sonnet, and uses selections from Shakespeare, other Renaissance poets, and some from actors and former graduate students in the program. By starting with these smaller, contained and structured poetic forms, the students identify and apply various meters and rhyme by writing their own limericks and sonnets. The written limerick and sonnet assignments expand into performance when students read and act out
their original verse; Cohen states that he has “them doing more and more to get them on their feet…getting it (the language) into their bodies, figuring out that they can actually use it” (“Interview”). As a follow-up exercise, each student chooses and writes a defense of his personal favorite limerick and sonnet by a classmate, basing the argument on meter, rhyme, sense, and creative use of the language. Within this discussion, Cohen highlights the importance and attention to punctuation, pronouns, prepositions, shared lines, and enjambed lines in the texts. Cohen comments that he talks about the language at the beginning of the semester, whereas one of his colleagues starts with performance; in adding the performance elements to his course, he has been “trying to make that bridge” into the acting of the text. He says, “I am trying to be more and more aggressively showing that it has to do with acting” (“Interview”).

Concurrent with this early verse work, Cohen begins performance work with text by having each student select and memorize six verse lines of Shakespeare in which at least two lines rhyme. Using these short passages, each student performs the text in class, observing meter, punctuation, and rhyme as well as conveying the sense of the passage. He encourages students to listen with eyes closed, to better hear the meter. He says of himself, “I am pretty good at hearing a line and knowing if it scans or not…and I can tell when it is prose, usually by just listening.” For Cohen, observing the meter is at the heart of his approach to performance of the text. After students perform the short passages, Cohen comments on each, but enlists questions and observations from listeners. The foremost objectives of the exercise are to introduce performing the language clearly and
to convey the sense of the passage in a way that engages and enlightens the audience. In his chapter “Directing at the Globe and the Blackfriars,” Cohen explains:

No audience can latch onto the words when they hear actors who are not themselves latched to the words or when they cannot hear at all because the actor has not spoken clearly or because the actor or director has made a choice that distracts from the words…Great acting is specific acting, and any system that forces an actor to make choices about the text as specific as a syllable or a punctuation mark raises the level of the acting and signals to the audience’s collective subconscious that those choices need their attention (Carson 213).

The importance of the audience remains at the forefront of discussions on language and acting throughout the semester.

Following the concentrated work with meter and rhyme, Cohen next introduces rhetorical devices in the texts, the significance and impact of these devices related to performing Shakespeare’s characters. In addition to the Corbett and Connors essays, students assimilate the readings from Sister Miriam Joseph’s thorough study of figures of speech in Shakespeare’s time. Several class sessions are devoted to identifying and analyzing passages for rhetorical devices as clues in determining character and performing the language of that particular character. Students work individually and in groups, integrating acting into the process. Cohen states that rhetoric has always been part of the class: “It is my favorite part of that class…if you do the rhetorical figures…you could do it this way or that way; they both work, but one means one thing and one
means the other, and you can choose, but there they are …it is the rhetorical device that
tells you something…I still think it (rhetoric) is the great undiscovered country”
(“Interview”).

After finishing the complicated topic of rhetoric, Cohen moves on to cover the
more entertaining, less technical, but equally important elements of performing
Shakespeare’s language: curses, cries, dirty jokes; audience contact; status and second
person; and authorial direction. These elements, too, are explored through performance.
In an improvised assignment, students recall, find, and read aloud passages that contain
double entendres or sexual connotation and then explore a range of ways to play these
lines. In an audience contact exercise, students perform text making intentional inclusion
of the audience, through direct eye contact, stance, or gesture. Further discussions and
practice through performances concentrate on demonstrating status among characters,
shifts in status, and the use of the personal pronoun as a performance tool to reveal
character relationships.

In addition to the practice and use of text through performance, Cohen provides
other ways of reinforcing the language: required attendance at two staged readings at the
Blackfriars Playhouse; written tests on scansion and rhetoric, a six to ten-page paper
comparing Shakespeare’s use of verse and rhetoric in one play written before 1595 with a
second play, written after 1605; and a final, seven-minute directed presentation. By
implementing diverse methods of evaluation and practice, Cohen allows for students who
are specializing in directing, teaching, dramaturgy, as well as acting. His strong
conviction in the importance of the language suffuses the work: “even if the narrative is not something you can count on…and if character is something that is totally the responsibility of the audience to assemble: then what do you have left? Language.” By the end of the course, students have an arsenal of tools in approaching the text; Cohen’s goal to for his students to feel confident with the language: “It’s knowing…just show it to me and I can figure something out, and they look at it and without ever knowing the passage before…it’s that feeling that you always have a net. He’s so good…there are just so many things you can think about with every word” (“Interview”).

Throughout the semester, Cohen blends keen analysis, fierce debate, witty and pertinent stories, and a passionate vigor that continues the full three-hour class. His love of the language is infectious, and his improvised acting exercises enliven what might ordinarily become a mind-numbing, tiresome course in language analysis.
Chapter 4

The Practices

In educational circles, Shakespeare’s language often ranks at the top of the list of areas that create fear, frustration, and confusion for many teachers and directors, and, as a result, for their students and performers, most of whom respond to Shakespeare with a yawn, a scowl, or complete shut-down. The importance, therefore, of providing graduate students – whether their focus is voice, acting, directing, dramaturgy, or teaching - with clear-cut, effective tools in illuminating Shakespeare’s texts is fundamental in several significant ways: students of voice learn the mechanics of efficient breathing,
articulation, and vocal support necessary for projecting the various lengths of line and thought; actors become more confident about approaching the text for performance by studying how the language influences the character and provides a range of choices in performing that character for an audience; directors glean textual clues in meter, line, and implied stage directions that can determine blocking moments and stage pictures; dramaturgy students rely on the text as the foundation for supporting the narrative and character choices with integrity; teachers discover ways to unlock difficult passages, share the beauty of the verse, and provide modern relevance for students who consider Shakespeare outdated and unnecessary.

The methodology that Janet Rodgers and Ralph Alan Cohen use in leading their Shakespeare and performance classes differs vastly in style, but their course objective is firmly consistent: to alleviate the anxieties surrounding Shakespeare’s texts and provide as many ways as possible to break down the barriers of the language in Shakespeare while instilling training in textual awareness and authenticity that creates performances that are grounded in valid study of the text and its clues. In addition, both professors advocate the necessity for performers to have strong training in voice and encourage actors to “be confident in voice and know how to find it,” says Cohen. “My strong belief is that you need a good system and a consistent approach. It doesn’t have to be the same as somebody else’s” (“Interview”). While Cohen’s class does not address voice methods specifically, Rodgers’ synthesis of voice methods in her teaching supports this idea.
Voice and Physical Training for Performance

As Rodgers’ class is based primarily on voice and speech, vocal and physical training are implemented daily in her class exercises. She stresses that exercising as a group with synchronizing breathing and rhythmic tapping “helps students to practice creating and listening for group rhythm” (Rodgers, “Interview”). The following exercises and activities form the foundation of Rodgers’ methodology in this course.

*Oxyrhythms: Rodgers leads this twenty-minute preparation which combines breathing exercises with floor stretches and core strengthening of the abdominal muscles with intentional relaxation of the occipital areas at the base of the skull, of the spine and lower back areas. The sequenced warm-up consists of twenty-two exercises. Rodgers monitors throughout, assisting students to expand deep diaphragmatic breathing, stretching in double direction, and adjusting body alignment. Breath and sound are added to many of the exercises.

*Vocal Preparatory Exercises: Rodgers chooses from a variety of vocal exercises, depending on the work for the day. She uses the Joshua Steele exercises, jazz square with body and voice, singing, and her original exercises, one of which she calls The Peking Opera which explores all the consonants in the English language combined with movement. These are a sampling of the complete list of fourteen exercises which Rodgers integrates into the daily group work.
*Exercises with the Drum: Taken from Rodenburg’s concept of circles of energy, Rodgers beats different rhythms on the drum as students walk in the space. First circle is an introverted emotional and physical state of denial; Second circle is an engaged, alert, interactive state; and Third circle is heightened, self-absorbed state of bluff. She calls out different circles of energy, so that students adjust psychologically, as well as physically, while continuing to walk to her changing tempos. These exercises increase participants’ awareness of body energy and concentration as well as rhythm. This exercise is often combined with Edge of Balance/Double Direction work in which students stop in mid-motion when the drum stops, hold the balance until the drum beat starts again, at which time, the students change direction. Rodgers uses this exercise to have students engage in “sats,” a Eugenia Barba concept in which there is a moment - “a dynamic in stillness” between the actions (“Voice and Speech Training Manual”). Within this time, the students feel energy going in opposite directions – between the times of active movement. These exercises are designed to enforce the state of alert awareness and being in the moment.

* Meter with the Drum: To physically embed the rhythm of Shakespeare’s meter, Rodgers beats the drum in iambs, trochees, spondees, using a poem provided by Rob Clare, as students walk to the different rhythms.

_/ _/ _/ _/ _/ _/

Iambic **first a firm** and **steady pace**;

_/ _/ _/ _/ _/ _/

Trochees **offer simple variation**
Dactyls have energy, jumping and flickering;
The amphibrach also might bristle or quicken;
And the last and not least is the swift anapest.
‘Me too!’ ‘Who’s he?’ ‘Spondee!’

Scansion, Rhetorical Devices, Language, and Audience Awareness in Performance

Both Rodgers and Cohen study, discuss, and practice the textual elements in Shakespeare’s works. Rodgers begins with the class working together on the same passage, and then she moves to individual monologues and small scenes from the “War of the Roses” plays.

* Working with the Text – Opening Group Exercise: To begin working with the text, Rodgers provides a First Folio copy of the Prologue from Henry V. Students first work individually to mark the meter. Outside of class, students paraphrase the text and look up meanings of words (using the Oxford English Dictionary, C.T. Onions Shakespeare glossary or Alexander Schmidt’s lexicon). Returning to class, students divide the lines of the Prologue to read aloud, stressing the metrics and giving attention to significant words within each line that are capitalized (in the Folio copy). Students discuss stress, meter, breathing relating to length of line, rhyming elements, and
pronunciation. Next, several groups (of four or five students) are formed, with each group creating a performance scene from the Prologue that combines vocal variety, adherence to meter, physical movement, using individual and choral delivery of the text in a coherent, imaginative form. Rodgers impresses on students to “know what you are saying.” Groups spend parts of two class sessions creating and rehearsing the passage; then, all groups present their final scenes in class.

* Individual Monologues and Scenes: The next text assignment is an individual monologue chosen from the Wars of the Roses plays. Monologues are set at twenty lines or more, and students may not replicate a monologue. Each student marks meter, paraphrases, and begins work on the monologue. (Students are required to read all plays, but each student is responsible for explaining and conveying the context of each monologue.) After two to three class sessions of practice in the space and observation by Rodgers, each student begins the three-step process of honing the various elements of the monologue. The first step, which is vocal, involves reading the text in the space, making sure to observe meter and line. Listeners and Rodgers give feedback. In the second step, each student performs the passage fully memorized (having implemented comments from Step 1). For the third and final step, each performer delivers the fully-embodied monologue by adding blocking, silent characters in the scene, and emotional elements that convey the intent of the monologue. No costumes or props are used.

* Structuring of Thoughts: In between steps of working the monologues, Rodgers suggests various strategies, one of which Patsy Rodenburg addresses in her
chapter “The Thought and Structuring of Thoughts.” Dr. Cohen also uses this method when having students examine a particular passage or speech. The exercise is a kinesthetic response to the text, in that the performer either physically changes direction, if he is walking the journey of the speech, as Rodenburg states, or moves from one chair to another, if he is sitting, to mark each change in thought. Hamlet’s monologue in Act III, scene i provides an example of where movements occur when thoughts shift:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performer position</th>
<th>Corresponding text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sitting in chair #1</td>
<td>“To be, or not to be; that is the question: Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and, by opposing them, end them…” (l. 58-62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move to chair #2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit in chair #2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move to chair #1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit in chair #1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This exercise also allows performers to create movement patterns, based on a change in character thought, action, or motivation.

* Second Set: Monologues and/or Scenes: Following the performance of the first monologue, students are given the choice of choosing a monologue or a scene with others, again, using the text of the War of the Roses plays. The process of working this assignment is similar, although more vocal and blocking work is completed outside of class time. For the final step, simple costume pieces or props are allowed.

* “Dropping In” Exercise: As students work on scenes, Rodgers adds another approach to vocally exploring the text – “dropping in.” This exercise, used in the early
stages of rehearsals and originally associated with John Barton and Shakespeare and Company, is also used by Cohen as a method for changing intent and delivery of a passage. Rodgers has scene partners face each other, while two others, not involved in the scene, stand beside each of the scene partners to serve as “reader/director.” The reader/director speaks a line or phrase of the text, quietly suggesting various images to his performer, and the performer begins to speak the text. The reader/director reads the same line or phrase and may then change the image, which changes the delivery of the words and the choices of the character in relation to his scene partner. The pairs take turns suggesting images and thoughts for the performers to explore. During the speaking of the text, the scene partners are facing each other, maintaining eye contact to remain connected to the scene. This process allows for outside direction in approaching the speaking of the text; the performer may discern nuances or other interpretations of the character based on the “dropping in” from the director, and maintain a connection with the scene partner in the work.

* Culminating Performance: To complete the semester, a performance of all monologues and scenes is given, with selections presented in chronological order of the plays and with connecting narration read between selections to thread the storyline more completely. Students may use simple costume elements and props for this production.

Where Rodgers approaches the text from a voice starting point, Cohen combines analysis of text with writing original samples that apply rules of meter and rhyme; he builds on the simple structures of limericks, sonnets, and various short Shakespeare
selections, using these as a point of departure for studying and performing longer passages. Students are responsible for completing readings in Wright’s book, which reinforces the class discussions and practice of the metrics, in both written and performed assignments.

*Iambic Line Exercise: Comparable to Rodgers’ “Meter with the Drum” exercise, Cohen reinforces the strong iambic meter not with the physical marking of rhythm, but with a vocal group exercise which he explains in greater detail in his book *ShakeFear and How to Cure it*. Ten (or eleven, if needed) students line up in front of the class, and count off numbers: “odd” numbered students are the unaccented syllables of the iambic meter and “even” numbered students are the accented syllables – combined, the students represent the iambic pentameter line. Choosing a line from Shakespeare’s text, Cohen assigns each student a syllable; the students speak the syllables in order, with students in the even-numbered places strongly accenting their syllables, and students in the odd-numbered places delivering their syllables with less force or volume. With repeated speaking of the line, students are able to hear the accented and unaccented syllables and the rhythm created. To further impress the importance of meaning derived from the stressed and unstressed syllables, Cohen has the odd-numbered students speak their syllables alone, and then the even-numbered students do the same. By isolating the unstressed syllables from the stressed syllables, students are able to discern that the substance and meaning of the line lives within the stressed syllables. Hamlet’s line in Act
III, scene i illustrates the accents as well as the importance of the accented syllables when read in isolation:

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_ / _ / _ / _ / _ / _
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“To be, or not to be; that is the question:” (l. 58)

The accented syllables of “be, not, be, is, quest-” offer the foundation to Hamlet’s confused state of mind, whereas the unaccented syllables of “to, or, to, that, the, -ion” provide no meaning at all when considered alone, but are necessary syllables to fill out the iambic pentameter line.

* Limerick assignment: Before giving the limerick assignment, Cohen reads many original samples for students to hear the metrical form and how it supports the language which can be witty and skillfully manipulated for effect. Students then discuss meter, rhyme, and choice of words in these examples to assimilate fundamental rules of the verse structure and how to layer meaning by deliberate word choice. Then, adhering as closely as possible to the standard limerick format of five lines, with the first, second, and fifth lines containing nine syllables and the same rhyme, and then with the third and fourth lines containing five or six syllables with a different rhyme, students craft an original limerick, based on a fellow classmate, using approximate iamb-anapest meter. Writers are also encouraged to use the language in comic or clever ways. The students then perform the limericks aloud as classmates listen for meter, rhyme, and overall effect. The following student sample illustrates the skillful adherence to meter and rhyme, but also a clever, humorous twist at the end:
“Sarah Gusky” by Shannon Schultz

A dashing young man won Miss Gusky.
She sighed and she swooned, so by dusk he
Laid down with said Sarah
But stopped within ne’er a
Short minute, for Gusky was husky.

*Sonnet assignment: Expanding into the more complex meter and rhyme scheme, Cohen introduces the sonnet by reading aloud Elizabethan samples, not only Shakespeare sonnets. He reviews the Shakespearian rhyme scheme (abab cdcd, efef, gg) that students will follow in creating original sonnets, and he leads discussion comparing the limerick, with its metrical rules and brainwork, to the more emotional sonnet. Then, students write their original sonnets outside of class, bringing in a draft to be performed aloud. Because these sonnets are more personal in subject and tone, Cohen adjusts the class from the table structure to an open circle of chairs and reminds students of the personal connection writers have to these sonnets. Drafts are shared by the original writers, then Cohen allows a class break while he changes the form of the room into a performance space by darkening lights, placing a podium in the front of the room, and having chairs moved into an audience configuration. Students return, and, this time, they hear their sonnets read by an outside reader, someone who has not written a sonnet; this forces the students to hear their own work carefully and determine how the sonnet works or does not work. Draft copies are returned, and students make adjustments before turning the sonnet in for a final critique by Professor Cohen. Again, as seen the samples
below, students are expected to follow sonnet form, but they are encouraged to use inventive wording and humor, if appropriate:

“My Imaginary Boyfriend”
By Glenn Schudel

The things I love: his wicked smile, his eyes that look as black as midnight looks, the hair that falls so darkly’round his face, his thighs—If only he would be my snuggle-bear.

He chants and throws his rosary down. He saves Sebastian’s bacon. Richard gives this man a crown, and Lear’s two daughters win their graves before they win his love. I’m such a fan.

And even from the lofty mezzanine
I think my heart would do a little dance
if only Ralph would make him play a scene without his shirt—just tights or pumpkin pants.

I like the Keegans, Harrell, Chaney, Sasha.
I like Rene and Greg. I love some Pasha.

Sonnet
By Shannon Schultz

What will you do when all your lights go out?
O will your stage, your house be dead and bare,
And will your actors rage and scream and shout?
Yet dim the lights. Come do it, if you dare.

You’ll see, for one, your scene is eas’ly set.
All focus then right to the actor goes
And rowdy butts-in-seats catch in his net.
If you’re still skeptic I’ll subdue your woes.
Fear not that darkness will give o’er the play,
The play’s the thing and always sure to be.
One change of light will give the dog his day
And “in the light” it’s therefore not to be.

List’ to my voice, for verse starts sounding quite
Remarkable when you turn out the light.

* Performance cues in the text: In between the limerick and sonnet exercises, Cohen asks each student to select and memorize six lines of text from Shakespeare, two lines of which rhyme. This exercise is the first of many opportunities for students to perform text -- noting the basic meter and rhyme, and also beginning to discover other clues embedded in the text. As each student performs, Cohen invites comment on various ways the text might be performed and what, if any, changes in character or objective might be affected by alterations in delivery. He also suggests some general guidelines and performance cues:

1. When scanning the text, circle any metrically irregular lines, and then determine why these lines are irregular. For example, Angelo’s lines in *Measure for Measure*: Act II, scene ii contain a combination of lines – some with ten syllables, and others with eight syllables:

   “…Never could the strumpet,
   With all her double vigour—art and nature—**(10)**
   Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid **(10)**
   Subdues me quite. Ever till now **(8)**
   When men were fond, I smiled and wondered how.”**(10)** (l. 187-191)

This use of irregular line may indicate an emotional shift or a
sudden thought at that moment. These irregularities are signals that performers need to recognize. Note that some words which scan as two or more syllables may be “squeezed” to better suit the meter; so, in some passages of Romeo and Juliet, “Romeo” which scans as three syllables may arguably suit the sound of the line as “Rom-yo,” two syllables, just as some other words ending in –ed such as “poisoned,” which scans as three syllables) but may be pronounced as two – “poison’d” - to more closely fit the meter.

2. When performing the passage, follow the punctuation (or lack of punctuation) when the punctuation is helpful, but actors need to also consider the sense and rhythm of the line as a guide when punctuation does not aid in the meaning or flow of the passage. For example, in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act II, scene I, Helena describes her attraction to Demetrius; line 196 has no end punctuation, so must be carried over in performance to complete the thought.

   “You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant,
   But yet you draw not iron; for my heart
   Is true as steel; Leave you your power to draw,
   And I shall have no power to follow you.”(1. 195-198)

3. Trochees and spondees at beginnings or within the line of a passage often suggests interesting energy as the regular meter is broken, particularly when an imperative or commanding verb begins a line. The trochee construction of stressed-unstressed meter intensifies the line.
Juliet’s opening trochee in her impulsive and emotional speech in *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, scene ii launches what continues on as a passionate revelation about her feelings for Romeo:

/ - /
“Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds…”(l. 1)

4. The word “and” can serve not only as a simple conjunction, but as a method for getting from one thought to another, or showing a character’s state of mind as seen in Macbeth’s speech in Act V, scene v of *Macbeth*, a passage in which a performer can emphasize Macbeth’s weariness by elongating or adjusting the pace of the line, making use of the conjunction:

“Tomorrow, **and** tomorrow, **and** tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,”(l. 18-20)

5. Stresses on prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and neologisms often serve as effective textual tools to further a character’s intent: Bianca’s plea to her sister in Act II, scene i of *The Taming of the Shrew* includes the preposition “for” in a stressed position, which emphasizes Bianca’s argument to Katherine:

“Good sister, wrong me not, nor wrong yourself
To make a bondmaid and a slave of me.
That I disdain, but **for** these other goods,
Unbind my hands…”(l. 1-4)

6. Couplets in the text are going to be strong because of their
close proximity, and strong end rhyme. Cohen suggests that couplets may be performed using the ending of the first couplet line as a set-up line (similar to tossing up a baseball) and then performing the end line of the couplet as the baseball hit away. This method keeps the end rhyme from sounding so pat, and it adds more interest in the line, rather than in the end rhyme. For example, in Act II, scene i of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Helena continues pursuing Demetrius in, and when the performer uses this “toss/hit” method of performing the couplet, her determination is clear, but the couplet is not predictably ordinary to the ear:

“I’ll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell, (“toss”) 
To die upon the hand I love so well.” (l. 243-244) (“hit away”)

7. Changes in pace and volume are necessary to create variety. Cohen adds: “That will make the character more interesting and make us listen more…if an actor uses the same approach all the time – no matter how beautifully they speak the language, after a while you stop listening” (“Interview”).

8. Embedded or implied stage directions are often valuable clues to character intention as well as entrances and exits. In *As You Like It*, Act IV, scene iii, Oliver has been mooning over Celia to the point that Rosalind cannot keep his or Celia’s attention. At the end of the scene, Rosalind is preparing her own plan, and she says,
“I shall devise something. But I pray you commend
My counterfeiting to him (Orlando). Will you go?” (l. 179-180)

Cohen points out that Rosalind’s question is not a rhetorical question but rather an embedded clue that Rosalind has already begun to exit and, because Oliver and Celia are still distracted with each other, she has to call back (or physically go back) to get them to leave.

* Rhetoric and rhetorical devices in the text: After reinforcing the verse structure, Cohen next addresses rhetoric, the art and tools of persuasion that Shakespeare studied, as did all grammar school students in Shakespeare’s time. Cohen adds that Elizabethans were more of an aural society than are people of the twenty-first century, and that Elizabethans thought persuasion through the ear was the most honest. He stresses that analysis of rhetorical devices within the text provides a wealth of acting clues for the performer of Shakespeare. In addition to Sister Miriam Joseph’s book, Shakespeare’s Use of the Arts of Language, which serves as the primary resource for rhetoric, Cohen provides additional excerpts from Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student by Corbett and Connors, and an online source, silvarhetorica.com, which is a user-friendly, scholarly electronic resource for definitions and examples of rhetorical devices. For purposes of his class, Cohen produces a worksheet of approximately forty tropes and schemes for students to define, analyze, and apply to Shakespeare’s text and his characters. For several weeks, Cohen deftly balances the complex examination of these ostensibly archaic and irrelevant figures of speech with more relatable contemporary
examples ranging from jokes to political speeches to everyday dialogue, while also exploring the performance clues that emerge from investigating how Shakespeare’s language directly relates to and reveals character.

Tropes and Schemes: Using the print or online resources, students define and find examples for the list of devices – tropes, which are connected to the content of the language, and schemes, which are tied to the form and structure of the language. The tediousness of identifying and differentiating among many devices, some of which are close in form, is offset by a simple in-class opening exercise in application. Cohen instructs each student to write a sentence, of no more than ten words, about something that the student has most talked or thought about over the last twenty four hours and then to modify the sentence to fit various figures of speech. For example:

- original sentence: “Bare feet are never appropriate on public floors.”

- into anastrophe (change of word order for emphasis) “On public floors, bare feet are never appropriate.”

- using ellipsis (omission of words) “Bare feet…never appropriate on public floors.”

- into litote (a deliberate understatement) “Bare feet on public floors are unconventional.”

After sharing several sentences and changes, Cohen encourages students to consider the types of people – smart, creative, thoughtful, passive-
aggressive, low or high status, left or right brain - who speak using certain language patterns or figures of speech, and what a performer can learn about a character, based on how this character expresses his thoughts in a particular scene. To follow up the sentence exercise, the class as a group looks at Mark Antony’s speech from *Julius Caesar*, Act III, scene ii, and discovers numerous and varied rhetorical devices (asyndeton, auxesis, ellipsis, antithesis, isocolon, epizeuxis, alliteration) that assist the actor in determining that Antony is adept at the art of rhetoric and uses the language to persuade the crowd of distraught Romans to his point of view. The complexity of finding the various devices in Shakespeare’s texts is easily forgotten by the exhilaration of discovering these sometimes intriguing, always interesting character clues that become even more apparent when students perform a passage aloud.

*Language – dirty jokes, personal pronouns, and status:  Cohen spends several class sessions discussing the significance of specific vocabulary in Shakespeare’s texts, and how the words affect not only the vocal delivery of a line, but may suggest physical posture or movement in a scene. Curses and dirty jokes, both implied and obvious, generate much discussion, in that Shakespeare’s audiences delighted in and were accustomed to the bawdy humor in the language. Shakespeare’s humor emerges in the dirty jokes and puns, whether a character inadvertently or deliberately means to be
subversive or suggestive. Performers need to be conscious of the scene; in *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio, Benvolio, and Romeo are clearly having a guys’ locker room chat about sex in Act I, scene iv when Mercutio says to Romeo,

“If love be rough with you, be rough with love. Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down. Give me a case to put my visage in, A visor for a visor.” (l. 27-30)

Performers must understand the intent of the sexual reference to make the passage clear for modern audiences. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio deliberately provokes Katherine by talking of his tongue in her tail—another important acting clue from the text. The same is true in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, when the performers must understand the low status of the Mechanicals, and adjust their acting to show that these characters unknowingly create the dirty jokes. Cohen is clear that the jokes stand on their own, so the actor does not need to “underline” the humor by vocal or physical exaggeration.

Shakespeare’s use and shifting of the personal pronouns “you” and “thee” in the text has sparked ideas about character relationships, based on which pronouns a character is using at a particular moment. Cohen relates that Patrick Tucker’s view of the second person pronoun “you” indicates a more formal, polite relationship between characters, whereas the use of “thee” or “thou” signals a more personal, intimate form of conversation between characters. One text example which may support this idea is the scene between Petruchio and Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Act II, scene i, lines
235-270, in which Petruchio, attempting to coax Katherine, uses the familiar “thou/thee” form over twice as many times as he uses the more proper “you/your” form. The resistant Katherine, on the other hand, uses the “you” form twice and “thou” only once. This may or may not be a consistent indicator, but the use and change of pronouns from polite to familiar can certainly be a tool for vocal delivery as well as physical proximity or blocking between characters in a scene.

Gesture and body posture also play a major part in demonstrating the status of a character in a scene. Cohen stresses that performers need to be aware of “markers” of high status: embellished or elaborate clothing, number of attendants on stage, entrance order, not having to move (others move to person of higher status), not having to look directly at others, turning away from others, and the powerful position of being seated versus those who have to stand or kneel. Therefore, in addition to attending to the language, a performer needs to determine the status of the character he is playing, relative to others on stage, and suit the blocking and stance to the standing of that character.

*Audience Direction: Cohen is particularly interested in the various ways a performer relates or reacts to the audience. His strong belief in performing Shakespeare with the audience visible is a major factor, but he is also conscious of places in the text in which a character is naturally able to address the audience directly. He is quick to point out, however, that a performer can overuse audience contact by directing too many lines
or speeches away from the action on the stage. To test this idea in class, Cohen has several students perform speeches and make eye contact with the audience of students on specific words or lines; the resulting discussion indicates that specifically addressing the audience or a person in the audience is effective if done judiciously, on appropriate words or lines which could engage the audience (letting them in on a joke, asking for advice, or looking for affirmation). For example, a logical passage to involve the audience is in either or both speeches made by Brutus and, later, Mark Antony in Julius Caesar, Act III, scene ii, when both speakers are addressing and attempting to sway the Roman crowd after the assassination of Caesar. By allowing the audience to be involved, and Shakespeare’s audiences certainly would have been, the actor gains another performance tool to keep the audience directly engaged in the narrative and the language.

Evaluation of the work

Both courses focus on performance, and much application of technique and concept is demonstrated in putting the text into practice; however, other methods of evaluation are used by both Rodgers and Cohen. As previously mentioned, Rodgers requires outside feedback through the “Hey, Listen to This!” exercises. She evaluates the monologues and scenes, noting growth and continued application of vocal support and variety. Each student researches, writes a paper, and delivers an oral/visual presentation on a particular element during the time period, its relevance to the War of the Roses plays and Shakespeare. The final culmination of the semester’s work is seen when all the
monologues and scenes are performed at the end of the semester. Cohen’s applications through class performance of passages are similar, in that students provide feedback on each of the selections performed. This process continues throughout the semester as a regular part of reinforcing a concept, whether in meter or rhetoric. One significant difference is that Cohen assigns written tests as another method of assessing student understanding of concepts. The two tests, one on scansion and one on rhetoric, are application-driven evaluations. The structure of both tests is the same; first, Cohen provides two Shakespeare passages of approximately twenty to thirty lines, and students use those texts to either mark meter (scansion) or identify rhetorical devices in the texts. The second part of both tests is specific to performance; students choose ten lines from the passages, and for each line, they write specific directions, based solely on the language of the line, for performing that particular line. Directions include notes on pacing, meter, and vocal variety for the scansion text, and additional notes on figures of speech for the rhetoric test. Cohen’s final assessments are a combination of writing, directing, and performing. The required six to ten-page research paper compares the language and rhetoric of two of Shakespeare’s plays, one written before 1595 and a second written after 1605; this assignment gives students a sense of Shakespeare’s evolving style. The last assignment, called a “directed presentation,” is a seven-minute demonstration which combines each student directing one-minute of text, followed by the student’s explanation of the intentionality of the directing choices, based on the language
in the text. This assignment also includes each student participating in at least one of their classmate’s directed presentations. As a culminating assessment, the directed presentation includes textual analysis, conceptualizing and directing a performance based on language, and written support of the performance choices made for that passage of text.
Chapter 5
Transforming the Work

Specifically, an extraordinary Shakespeare performance class would combine the regular hands-on physical training in breathing, vocalizing, and strengthening the body core along with the textual analysis, study of language and rhetoric. From the vocal and physical training, students learn individual discipline and develop their own personal routines for maintaining optimal voice strength, control, and technique in addition to practicing group rhythm and awareness, all of which are fundamental traits for any proficient performer. From the comprehensive study of meter, rhyme and rhetoric, students gain the indispensable tools to excavate the language, develop the skill to make choices relating to character, and understand the contextual elements present in Shakespeare’s works. The most significant component, the central objective of these courses, is for students to use these tools, practice the skills, and, ultimately, become confident in performing the text of Shakespeare with integrity. In addition, performers of Shakespeare must trust that the language is the starting point in creating strong, characters—those whose lives are filled with charged moments and events, who are not wholly good or bad, who live in the moment, and who have relevance to contemporary life.
As evidenced in the previous chapters, Janet B. Rodgers and Ralph Alan Cohen have their own distinctive approaches and methodologies in teaching performance of Shakespeare’s text to graduate students. Of course, both professors would agree that there is no definitive method to teach the language of Shakespeare to actors; however, both Rodgers and Cohen, despite their differences in background – Rodgers’ in theatre and Cohen’s in English – are unmistakably concurrent in several areas: their emphasis on scansion and observation of meter, rhyme and line; the intent of the line within the context of the passage, the character speaking, and the overall sense of the play; and the importance of vocal training for any performers of Shakespeare. They also agree that the optimal, ideal Shakespeare performance course consist of immersion in both the voice and physical application of the text as well as the complex analysis of the structure and form of the language.

The most indispensable component in the process of successfully teaching the performance of Shakespeare’s language is the personal, human element; Shakespeare is intimately tied to the human condition: unrequited love, requited love, inexpressible grief and despair, justice and injustice, loss of fortune and gaining of fortune, betrayal and restitution. The language is, of course, how performers and audiences access these intense conditions of survival in which Shakespeare’s characters live, but without those guides, those particularly gifted people who inspire excitement and belief in the work, these characters and texts would not have survived the almost four hundred years since Shakespeare’s time. Janet Rodgers’ enthusiastic approach to voicing Shakespeare
permnes the receptive and creative space she shapes in her class. Her attention to the human elements of Shakespeare’s characters and the conditions in which they live is foremost. Additionally, her primary objective for the performer of Shakespeare’s works is not only for students to honor the text and understand what they are saying, but to be able to excavate the intricacies of the text and have a keen awareness of how to voice the text clearly, and with joy. Similarly, Ralph Alan Cohen generates palpable excitement even for the most tedious work of textual analysis; his fervent belief is that Shakespeare’s language offers the conscientious and thoughtful student innumerable possibilities for performing, directing, or teaching any of his characters and works with confidence, so that Shakespeare’s text is accessible to all students and audiences.
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List of References


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APPENDIX A

Professor Janet Rodgers
Virginia Commonwealth University

12 Explorations of Shakespeare's Texts—Bring to the work what you are about

1. Read text—look at first folio, if possible

2. Look up any unfamiliar words

3. Scansion—Discover the heartbeat of the piece. Walk while you scan.
   - Let scansion be about rhythm. Feel it with your body.
   - Star * the lines that break the heartbeat (Tambic Pantameter).
   - Ask why??? the heartbeat is broken; something dramatic, conflicting or unsettling is going on in your character.

4. Punctuation—HONOR!
   - Set up two chairs or terminal points
   - Move from chair to chair on each punctuation
   - Move on the punctuation, not on the line

5. Sounding—Exploration of sounds in the text
   - Prop up text (a music stand is great)
   - Whisper text—By whispering, we really hear the words
     - Honor each word before moving on to the next
   - Speak the text aloud. Cup hands in front of mouth
     - Feel sounds with your hands
     - Hear sounds with your ears
     - Experience sounds with your whole being
   - 1st—give weight to vowels and diphthongs
   - 2nd time through—give weight to consonants
   - Listen and feel while doing the above
   - Is there any predominance of a particular kind of sound?
     Open, frontal vowels? Of the dropped jaw variety?
     Tight, closed vowels?
     Diphthongs?
     Long consonants—m, n, l, z, s?
     Short, hard consonants—p, b, t, d, k, g?
   - How do particular passages make you feel?
   - Go back to intriguing passages or phrases and continue this exploration—forever and ever
   - Speak entire passage aloud, affirming discoveries
   - Be courageous with the language

IMAGE: THE ABOVE EXERCISE IS NOT UNLIKE THE REPLAY OF A SPORTS ACTION.

SLOW REPLAY
6. Dropping in--2 sets of partners
   - Person "one" feeds word or phrases to person "A"
   - Person "A" explores the word or phrase while keeping focus on partner "B"
   - After satisfactory exploration, person "Two" feeds word or phrase to person "B".
   - Person "B" explores the word or phrase (led by "Two") until exploration is satisfactory. "B" keeps focus on "A"
   - Go back to "One" feeding word or phrase to "A," then "Two" feeding word or phrase to "B."
   - Continue alternating until passage is thoroughly explored
   - At completion of exploration for "A" and "B," take a break and then reverse so "A" feeds "Two" and "B" feeds "One"

7. Group exploration of the argument of the piece.
   - One person reads text and group bangs floor to clarify argument
   - I.e., when Yorke uses a word to belittle Margaret, group bangs floor (Henry VI part three, Act I, scene IV)
   - I.e., when Margaret uses a word to make Yorke feel low, group bangs floor (Henry VI part three, Act I, scene IV)

8. IMAGE - ING (Webster’s Dictionary does not include this word)
   - In a relaxed state, let pictures of words and phrases lead you in your exploration of language. This exercise is very personally yours.
   - After exploration, speak entire piece very slowly, letting the images lead language

9. Exploration of energy--our modern mode of speaking is to go down at the ends of lines and undercut our thoughts. In doing Shakespeare, we cannot do this. We must be inspired from lofty places. We must serve our thoughts to our audience. Remember: your characters are inspired to act and speak in the manner in which they do. Inspire comes from the Latin "inspiro" which means "to breathe into."

I. - All in a circle--round robin--each person speak a phrase up to the punctuation
   - Move out to a wall--round robin--speak the phrase to phrase very quietly
   - Still at wall, sing each phrase--round robin
   - Now speak the whole text. Be courageous in your speech

II. Speak the text. At the end of each phrase, kick something around the room
   Now speak the text and try to maintain the forward thrust energy
NOW MEMORIZE. THE PROCESS SHOULD BE VERY EASY. GO BACK AND REPEAT A STEP WHEN NECESSARY.

Note: Somewhere along this journey, you must hook into your big objective... In terms of the other person/s in your scene. This will release your energy. Let the energy come from below the chest. The breath must be well supported.

10. Pitch/range
- Work through the piece technically
- Sing it
- Play with a piano and arbitrarily go through a wide range of notes
- Come back to speaking the piece. Let yourself be courageous.
- This will feel outrageous at first. That’s all right.
- Soon, variety in pitch will become second nature in your work and life. A wider variety of pitch will infuse your work. And you may find an expanded emotional range.

11. Listening
- In partners--back to back
- One person speaks the text. The other person repeats one word from each line.

12. Clarity--projection--enlargement--breath
- Work in a large theatre space
- Serve your voice and speech to the deaf old lady in the last row
- But, ultimately, do it for the fat lady*

Please have a good time in your explorations!

J.B.R.

In all of these explorations, I am indebted to the work of Cicily Berry (Royal Shakespeare Company). I also need to express my thanks to Bill Cain, who gave me the opportunity to spend two years as a principal actress at the Boston Shakespeare Company.

* Franny and Zooey by J. D. Salinger
From Kirsten Linklater’s *Freeing the Natural Voice*
First stage of work on text. Slow, meditative, sensory, un-intellectual.

Go thru a relaxation exercise. Then, “lying on the floor with the text beside you, explore, phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence, sometimes word by word, the images and ideas that are contained in the text. The steps might be”.

1. Look at the page and find a phrase (not necessarily the first).
2. Close your eyes.
3. Without speaking, allow the phrase to swim behind your eyes and then drop it down to your breathing center.
4. Let pictures attach themselves to the words.
5. Free associate.
6. Let feelings generate around the pictures and associations.
7. Sigh out what you feel.
8. Whisper the words with the feelings they have aroused.
9. Let the words and the feelings find your voice.

Randomly explore a whole speech in this manner, trying not to make sense.

“In this process words are given a solid physical home, become sensorily familiar and create their own harmonic reservoir of association, memory, music and rhythm. This reservoir serves to give life, character and independence to the words which make up the overall sense.”

The final sense will, of course, depend on the interplay with other characters and circumstances.

“As soon as you speak the thoughts and feelings that have accumulated internally out loud, you hear how the thought sounds and the temptation is to repeat how it sounded, instead of recreating what was thought. This is why rehearsing and playing a scene over and over makes it easy to be mechanical, to get in a rut. One way to break the pattern of mechanical inflection is to remove the sound of the voice while playing the scene or speech for long enough to become reliant once more on real thought and feeling.”

When you feel stuck in a rut, whisper the text.
Currently living in Richmond, Virginia, Sally Parrish Southall was born in Richmond in 1956. She graduated from Lynchburg College, Magna Cum Laude, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature/Writing and secondary teaching certification in English, Drama, and Journalism. She has taught secondary English and drama in Virginia public schools as well as organized and conducted workshops in theatre for local community theatre organizations. She also served six years on the board of the Lynchburg Fine Arts Center as Chair of the Performing Arts Committee and also as a member of the Play Selection Committee. For seven years, she worked as the costumer and costume studio supervisor for the Lynchburg College Theatre Department. Sally is an active member of Endstation Theatre Company - performing and costuming for the Blue Ridge Summer Theatre Festival in Sweet Briar, Virginia.