

Topic Exploration Pack

Practitioners: Cheek by Jowl Theatre Company

Foreword by Karen Latto – OCR Subject Specialist Drama

As part of our resources provision I was keen to ensure that the resources have been created by experts in Drama and in Education. For our practitioner requirement, this included resources which were made by working Theatre Makers about their own company's practice and working methods.

I would like to thank the team at Cheek by Jowl for creating this resource for OCR to support AS and A Level teachers. This resource has been created by Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod alongside Cheek by Jowl's Education Officer Dominic Kennedy and talks from their perspective as working practitioners in the field of Theatre.

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Cheek by Jowl

Cheek by Jowl is the home theatre company of Director Declan Donnellan and Designer Nick Ormerod. Since it was founded in 1981 the company has been invited to perform across the world and now produces work in three languages; English, French and Russian. The company is dedicated to producing fresh and vivid productions that fundamentally focus on the actor's art, avoiding directorial and design concepts. The company has performed in nearly 400 cities in more than 50 countries spanning six continents.

Repertoire

The core of the Cheek by Jowl's repertoire has always been Shakespeare; by the time of *The Winter's Tale* in 2015 Cheek by Jowl had presented no fewer than 13 of Shakespeare's plays, including different productions of *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale*, in both Russian and English. Another of the company's principles has been to present major works of European drama, both in translation and their original versions. To date, Cheek by Jowl has given the British premières of ten European classics including *The Cid* by Corneille and *Andromache* by Racine, over three hundred years since they were first presented in Paris.

Declan Donnellan on Cheek by Jowl

'There are some annoying things about the plays that we choose: they're incredibly old, many of them are written by dead people, and they're full of words. I am not particularly wedded to any of these things. It's just that they happen to be very great plays. One of the things about a great play is that you can work on it, on tour, for a long period of time, and they will always be different. And even though some of these plays have been written over four-hundred years ago they still give the actors an array of profoundly experienced parts that deal with apparently modern subjects – politics, sex, love, loss, the supernatural. All of those things seem to be explored well in the plays we present.

We do think in some ways that all great plays are political or contemporary or that they can be understood in such terms. However, before we worry about that, our first priority, whenever we start on a new piece of work, is to create something that is alive: that is what we are always searching for, whether it is in Jarry, in Racine, in Shakespeare or in Chekhov. All of our work is developed in the rehearsal room, with the actors, and our job is to try to discover what the essential experiences are that lie at the heart of a play, and give life to them.'

Working with actors

Cheek by Jowl believes that in a play the scene is what is created in the space between two actors. It does not seek to impose a directorial concept on the production, but instead allows the actors to try different approaches and see what works best for them. Donnellan sees his role as director as someone who is supervising the quality of acting in an ensemble, rather than interpreting and imposing his idea of the play on the actors. To this effect, some of the work Cheek by Jowl does in the rehearsal room and indeed what has been codified in *The Actor and the Target*, is to create ways that can free a blocked actor to realise their potential.

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This pack

This exploration pack will explore the methods that Cheek by Jowl have developed, outlining key stages of their rehearsal and production process. It will take the format of a condensed interview with Cheek by Jowl's Artistic Directors (Donnellan and Ormerod share the title) and intends to deliver answers to key questions about the theatre practitioners in an open conversational style. The exercises at the end of the pack are built on ideas discussed in the interviews, and should allow your students to demonstrate and put into practice aspects of Cheek by Jowl methodology.

The following is an interview with Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod about their theatre company Cheek by Jowl.

Choosing a play

Choosing the right play is very important. Generally we produce classics from the European canon and more often than not, Shakespeare, but we've found that this frame still gives us a huge range of plays that explore different themes relevant to human beings. One of the main reasons that classics have survived so long from the past is the simple fact that they are very good plays that are about human beings and can resonate in any time or culture.

We have three different acting companies, English, French, and Russian. Sometimes we produce a play that is native to that culture, however that is not a rule as such – we have done Racine in English, Shakespeare in Russian for a start. More important than the play having to have come from the native language of the actors, we must ask: is the play itself suited to the actors we want to work with? Do the characters fit? Will audiences want to see this play? Will we be able to tour and develop the play over two or three years? Also, does the play matter to us? Does it offer us a challenge? These are the things that matter to us.

Touring

Cheek by Jowl are a touring theatre company, this happened quite by accident when we first started in the early 1980s, however, very quickly it was clear that it suited us and still suits us well. Touring gives us a regular audience in a lot different places around the world; it's important to us to have regular audiences who appreciate our work in London, Madrid, Paris, Moscow, Milan, New York, and all around the world. The theatres we visit help finance the production and are sometimes our co-producers.

Touring also allows the work to change and develop. In having long tours that can last a couple of years, it's important to us to keep the play alive. It would be dreadful for the actors, and dreadful for the audience if the play was exactly the same at the end of its run as it was in the dress rehearsal. We see each theatrical performance as an individual artistic event – and individual to each specific audience in the theatre that evening. There can be no 'one size fits all'; theatre is not like a movie that is fixed, recorded and can never change. No matter what happens, you need to look after a play because over time it is going to change. It's not going to stay the same, because the only constant in life is change. As the play will inevitably change, it's important for us to make sure it's always a healthy change. So even after rehearsals, after the first night, while the play is on tour, we will continue to work on it, re-rehearse, give notes, and change things. On tour, we try to go to at least 1 in 10 performances after the play has been properly established, this helps keeps

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the play fresh for both the actors and the audience. It's a bit like if you leave a beautiful garden uncared for, the weeds may grow, and flowers that looked beautiful in the spring, naturally might look ugly and dead in the winter. You can't just finish the garden in March and expect it to stay the same forever; you need to give it attention and try different things for it to stay full of life all year round. This attention and urge to develop keeps the play alive.

The Company and intimacy

Even if we have a core group of actors in our three companies who we like to work with, we still often need to find additional actors to fill other roles in the play. However, with everyone that we work with, it's very important to build a sense of intimacy. Unfortunately, intimacy is best developed over time. We like to build a relationship with those we work with and the more you work with someone, generally, the healthier your relationship grows. You understand each other and you work together better. There's no doubt that an ensemble that has been together for a long period of time, can work better. For a start, you can work faster and cover more ground, which is incredibly important and useful.

We often work with the same people, because it's wonderful to be able to continue working with the same people - because your work together grows - and yes you are more and more intimate. We think it would be very scary to work with a whole new team for every production – it would be terrifying!

However, it is still important to have a blend. It's good to sometimes have a core and also views from the outside. But to us it seems to be meaningless to be always starting a theatre venture with a whole room full of new people. It could still be good work, but it's a good work that isn't necessarily very intimate, and in our eyes work that has no aspect of intimacy to it, usually isn't particularly good work.

You can create the delusion of intimacy with strangers but actual intimacy takes a bit more. In putting on plays we must remember that we are presenting intimate situations. You make an intimate world. You're sharing an intimacy with the audience. If everyone is a stranger: the audience, the director, the actors, the whole thing, you can still work together, but one of the things that suffers is that intimacy, and a sort of fake intimacy is usually sprayed on, which is much less conducive to good work.

A lot of different people say 'please can we come watch rehearsals, we won't say anything, we'll just be very quiet in the corner.' But we avoid having guests in the rehearsal space - it's really nothing to do with them being quiet, or even taking notes. One of the reasons we don't let people into the rehearsal room, is that everything in the room makes the situation 'un-intimate'. You've got to work hard in order for a situation of intimacy to arrive. The presence of a stranger just makes that a bit more difficult. It becomes like a public rehearsal, it becomes meaningless after a while. People don't really understand what you're trying to achieve. The danger is then, that you'll compensate for that and come up with a false intimacy. You have to be a bit careful of that.

The Woods

With our French and Russian companies, once we've chosen our cast, we assemble together in a remote place somewhere that we call 'The Woods'. Essentially, this means we take the actors away from Paris, away from Moscow where their theatres are and have two weeks together away from everything except each other. Here we begin to work on the play, but this isn't the start of 'rehearsals'. A lot of the work we do in The Woods is more about forming the company and looking at the actors' different ideas around the play. After The Woods, we'll have a gap where we let the ideas percolate and Nick will usually come up with the design of the show, based on what came out of our work in The Woods. Then we go back to the theatre and begin rehearsals.

With our English company however, because of the way actors' contracts work, we do not have the luxury of the gap in between The Woods period and the rehearsal period. So with our English company we usually spend the first two weeks of rehearsal time doing what we would do in The Woods, and then immediately begin rehearsals straight afterwards. This means Nick usually has a very frantic weekend getting together his ideas and designs of the show. We definitely prefer the Russian and French way, but it always usually comes together one way or the other.

In The Woods, we always ask the actors, 'where does the play come from?' The play must be a reaction to something, the play is not an action in itself; it must be a reaction. So with our French company we asked, what was the thing that made Jarry write *Ubu Roi*? Which is slightly different from asking why did he write it, instead it is asking what is the play reacting to? What is the play a counter to? What is it reacting against? It became very clear – *Ubu Roi* is an assault on all bourgeois values of decency and common sense. We were able to work back from there – how that moment of clarity arises, God only knows. That's the moment we're always searching for. If we knew how to, we would bottle it and sell it. In The Woods we usually hit upon this clarity, and it becomes to a key to the whole production. Sometimes it happens better or worse than other times, but you prepare yourself for it and it comes by grace – or luck.

Études

In *Measure for Measure* we approached it slightly differently, because in that play it's very clear that there's several different places to create, the government house, the prison, the monastery, etc. So we set the company the task or an 'étude' as we call it, to study what the world of *Measure for Measure* was like, and quite a lot of that went into the final play. We'd ask the actors to set up the government house that Angelo takes over, and so they rearranged all the furniture in the room and became secretaries, busy at work. There was a lot of what the brothel would look like, and then there was the police raiding the brothel – they loved that, with guns and putting people on the floor. And the cruelty towards prisoners: bizarrely the hotel where we were staying had a basement with white tiled floor and showers in it, and the actors brought us down there and we had to wait and they stripped one of the actors and hosed him down with water, and it was all very close and unbearable to watch and so sort of shaming, and it was brilliant and we tried to keep that in the production. It's important to understand that études aren't primarily ways of developing specific scenes, rather they are used to create the world of the play, they don't have to be strictly from the story of the play or with the same characters, they just help to come to understand the world in which the play's events happen and how its characters live.

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In *The Woods* then we try to unlock the 'key' to the production, themes and ideas, setting and staging, and we begin to build the company together.

Rehearsals

Beginning

It's extremely hard to know where to begin. We usually start with different types of exercises, because if there are new people in the group they need to be assimilated fully into the company – lots of movement exercises, we always start with anything other than the text. We never start with talking about the text, because that's the least of our problems at the beginning. First 'the company' must be made. The company will perform a play, so before we get to the play, we need to actually make a company. We do exercises on things that are deliberately not directly linked to the text to help people assimilate and get to know each other and not become anxious about the work ahead.

So for example – say we had an idea about a genre of music that might work in the production, then we'll do some work singing together and dancing together, always on our feet and not sat around a table. Even if we don't use the dances and songs in the production, they're not completely wasted.

When we first came to the rehearsal room to do *As You Like It*, we thought a tango might be useful because Declan thought of it as a dance that's about the sexual politics between men and women – which is in a sense the play in a nutshell. Our musical director, Paddy Cunneen, composed some music with a tango rhythm to one of the songs in the play, and that's how we started rehearsals – dancing a tango! Miraculously that tango we did in the first rehearsals was used throughout the show's run – even up to the last performance!

Years later, when we began rehearsals for Webster's play *The Changeling*, which is set in Spain, we thought we would use a type of flamenco dance, which we had used before in *Fuente Ovejuna* at the National Theatre. We started the rehearsals with this and then simply never used it again – but it was immensely useful at bringing the company together in those first few days.

Secondly, more often than not there will be verse in the play that we have chosen, so we will work a little together on verse, so the company begins to understand the music of the verse. And again, even with this, it's important to spend the first few days at least with the company on their feet, being active and trying lots of different ideas. If we all sat down and just read the play, there's always the possibility of fixed ideas getting stuck in the company's heads which is not helpful to a creative and open rehearsal. People are very nervous at the beginning of rehearsals, and want to know what is going to happen, and if we get anxious, we very often will go into ourselves. I think if you start by reading the play, or attack the text too soon, it can be a complete waste of time. A lot of the time actors might be too tense to receive it at first, so it actually saves time by making sure the company come together first. So technical exercises on singing, dancing, and verse are usually what we start rehearsals with – and this is largely what gels the company together.

Imagination

We believe you have to have a sense of playfulness in rehearsals and curiosity to try different things. After all, a play is called a play for a reason, and actors are sometimes called 'players'. It is very much to do with the verb 'to play', in the sense of being open. We like to think a play is like a

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game: Football for example, everyone knows the rules of the game but the outcome is different every time. Like a game of football, the end of the play isn't necessarily the outcome – we all know that Hamlet dies at the end, or that Oedipus blinds himself, but that isn't the outcome of the play. The outcome of the play is the experience of getting to the end. Like the outcome of a football match, the experience of playing has created the results of the game. The outcome of going to the theatre is how Oedipus has got to the point where he has to blind himself, and what happens within that can be different every night – that's why it's exciting to go to the theatre.

A sense of play implies something quite childlike too. This is about using your imagination – children are freest with their imagination, and can imagine anything, and they do all the time, as astronauts, doctors, playing mums and dads. This is obviously similar to what actors do, and indeed the audience who watches. The audience are watching something completely unreal, absurd even, but they use their imagination, and when the imagination becomes real for the audience – that's the play.

The actor's own imagination is absolutely key because that's what the audience is looking at – the actor imagining and that communicates itself to the audience and then they imagine with the actor, it's a magical thing,

What we as the director and designer imagine doesn't really matter, what really matters is what the actors are imagining in front of the audience in that moment – their impulse on the night.

Reacting to an impulse

After we've done a lot of movement exercises, we next hit the text, and one thing we always we do is make sure the actors always know the text before they start rehearsing, because it's nearly impossible for an actor to really get a connection with another actor if they've got a book in their hand and are forgetting lines. It saves so much time and you can get to the heart of things much quicker by everyone knowing their lines by the time we start looking at the text.

So next in rehearsals, Declan, as director, will ask the actors to present him with a scene, which he will then react to. In England people will often expect directors to have a grand plan and begin directing them straight away. It's not usual to say 'no, I want you to propose something to me that I can react to, but don't worry if it's not very good, we'll work together to make it better'. Of course, we do have some pointers, for example in *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* – we'd worked out that we would set the entire play in Annabella's bedroom – so it was helpful to tell the actors this, give them the frame of 'Annabella is a teenage girl, and her bedroom is an intimate place to her' prior to them acting out the scene. From parameters like that, we give the actors leave to use their imagination.

It's so much better to respond to their impulses, rather than them waiting for me to give them an impulse. It's quite difficult to explain that, but because the actors' impulse is so sacred I have to be reactive to that, not barging in with my own – 'she needs to do this, she needs to do that', it's very easy to steam roller an actor. I think that the impulse is quite fragile, so we talk about all sorts of things, we give them the set, we give them the costumes, and I'll stand back and see what they do - and only then will I invade, and I'll say 'let's try it more like this, let's have a look at that'. I'll start to mold it, I'll start to direct then, which is very different from 'making' something. When directing,

to me the implication is that something is presented to you and you need to redirect it – as opposed to just telling someone what to do.

Why is it important to react to the actors?

We find it's important to react to actors like this, because they have confidence in their own impulses and because the audience really wants to see their impulses and not mine, and so Declan, as director, creates situations where he hopes they will have impulses that are useful, and which will explain the scene. Essentially, Declan won't tell an actor how to do a scene, it's very important that I sit back and watch what they're doing - and then if it's a bit dead, I change the circumstances, look again, if it's still a bit dead, change the circumstance again, and then as soon as there's a spark of life I can work that life that has been given by the actors, but I can't actually pump them full of life. I can create circumstances within which they might find life, and then I wait like a magpie and jump on that bit of life when I find it and try to organise things around that and hold that thought, so it can all come out from that moment.

The importance of themes

So throughout this period, we're doing movement exercises, études, and starting to work on the play, looking at different scenes. We never really have a formal read through or sit down discussion about the play itself, however I often interrupt to discuss the themes of the play. A play's themes are incredibly important in our eyes; I usually tell stories or will respond to different questions with anecdotes around the themes of the play. When you start a play there's a multiplicity of possible worlds and different things it could be, and if there's too much, there's really nothing concrete to work on. Sometimes with such a wide choice of how to play a scene you can't actually do anything. Bit by bit we start to see what comes out of the actors' études and scenes, what their impulses are and then I can begin to be able to talk around the themes as they present themselves. For example in rehearsals for *The Winter's Tale* we talked a lot about the fear of abandonment, the fear of separation, and how it connected to Leontes' madness, how that's explained by the fact that the worst punishment he can think of is to abandon his daughter at the play's beginning. We talked thematically about emotions like this, and discussed families, personal stories and relevant anecdotes.

After a discussion like this, we will then set up the scene or étude again and see what comes up – and usually that works quite well, and the scene comes to life a bit more. It's like we put water in the soil and then something grows, which is very different from simply telling someone 'this is a plant', or an actor 'just do it like this'.

Being alive

There is some kind of connection between the play being alive, letting the actor use their own impulse, and openly discussing the themes or the story. The play is one story and when you approach things for the first time or even for the twentieth. It's easy to not necessarily generate life from it. It's easy to believe you understand something, but not be able to fully translate that into a scene that is alive. Using different stories and considering the broader theme can make things easier to understand – we understand things more when we can relate them to other things we already know.

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What's important to remember however, is 'how does life happen?' – The big rule is you can't actually make life, and the more you push to create, the more lifeless it will become. Instead, we must create the circumstances in which something can happen, in which an impulse can be born. For example, going back to *Measure for Measure*, in rehearsals I talked about how the state interferes with people's sexuality, we discussed how it could affect us, we discussed prisons and incarceration, and what it means to lock somebody up, why human beings feel we need to do things like that to one another.

Discussing together like this always brings something to life, eventually. As soon as we get that impulse we can hold onto it, develop it, expand on it, and find more impulses. Little bits of life come together into the scenes, and this begins to inform the whole play. Finding life in the play is the main focus of our rehearsals.

Design

Set

The design of our productions are inevitably shaped by the requirements of touring. The set needs to be relatively mobile, and over the years we've developed this to be able to send the set to a theatre, build it in a day, and then perform the next. This obviously effects even the quantity and amount of set and props we can have, and is evident throughout our work – however, these limitations become something quite creative. These limitations mean you have to reject and sweep away what isn't necessary, and only keep what is absolutely necessary. Our design process is discovering what the actor can do without the help of designer, and also what has to be done by the designer. We focus on these points and strip away everything that's unnecessary. Cheek by Jowl design is based on absolute need – that's the sort of discipline we work to.

For example in *Measure for Measure*, Nick felt that a lot of the scenes depended on quite a realistic space, but also we couldn't invest too much in one setting. It would be unfeasible and completely alien to us to have big set changes between the brothel, the government house, and the prison. In the end, we came to see that the dominant image of *Measure for Measure* was the prison, but that we would have to use a device to create the other areas and design the space in a way that these other areas could be imagined by the actors and the audience. To this end, we worked out that all that was necessary to create Angelo's office was a single desk. When the Provost sits behind that same desk, we are now instantly in the prison – a completely different space in Vienna. Similarly, for the scene where the Duke returns as himself to the city and addresses the public, the idea of city gates and this grand entrance was created by using just one long flowing red carpet. The little alterations to the space make a huge difference and are all an actor needs to create specific different scenes. To set up these different scenes we worked out we could use all the characters as a kind of chorus, as people of Vienna, and they would move together around the space and deposit different sets of characters onto the stage, whose scene would then begin in the different locations of *Measure for Measure*.

It's important to remember however, that Cheek by Jowl do not have a specific certain method of doing things. The one standard way we work, especially regarding design is that the approach can be different every time. When we did *The Tempest* with our Russian company, during The Woods stage of production we were lucky enough to be staying next to a lake, and the actors would do études in and out of the lake and imagine this sinking ship, this desert island world of the play. It

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was completely clear right from that initial day at the lake that we had to get some kind of water to work in the set – that was quite ambitious for us as a touring company, but it worked!

Costume

The plays we do are about us – they are about human beings. A lot of the time we find that it's irrelevant or unhelpful to dress the actors in period costume; it can distance the audience from the story. Our starting point with costume is always that we need a good reason not to dress them as we do now, or something quite close to us now.

There is a difference between hard modern dress, and something I call 'transitory 20th century' dress, which probably more accurately describes the costume of many of our shows. Normally it takes the shape of using elements of the modern with slightly evocative, slightly period dress. For example, in *As You Like It*, the men in the country were dressed in modern, but rustic and 'old' clothing. In *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*, while the main character Annabella was dressed a teenage girl might do today, and all around her room were posters and objects of contemporary relevance and pop culture, we still chose to dress the Friar in a Dominican monk's habit, and the Cardinal in full vestment regalia. I suppose we leave ourselves free to stylize certain aspects of the production how we desire. This might be slightly less 'realistic' at times, but we've found it usually creates a heightened reality, and is easier to make sense of.

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Additional teacher preparation

Additional resources

- **Donnellan, D. (2000) *The Actor and the Target*. London. Nick Hern Books. ISBN: 978-1-85459-838-7.**
Some of the principles which guide the company's work were correlated in Donnellan's *The Actor and the Target*, first published in Russian in 2000 and subsequently published in more than fifteen languages around the world. The book is available to buy online.
 - **Cheek by Jowl Measure for Measure Education Pack and Livestream Recording.**
This free package consists of the full recorded play (filmed professionally with four cameras) accessible via a private link from our YouTube channel — with subtitles in English, as well as a dedicated 27 page education pack featuring essays, interviews and classroom or homework exercises. The pack (in PDF format) is integrated with the recording of the production, so students have instant access to relevant scenes and moments in the play at the click of a mouse. A brief guidance summary is also included for teachers. Visit http://www.cheekbyjowl.com/education_livestream_recording.php for more details.
 - **Cheek by Jowl Archive Website.**
The Sophie Hamilton Archive is Cheek by Jowl's online archive. Celebrating 35 years of Cheek by Jowl's work, the archive hosts all sorts of interesting materials on our past productions such as photographs, videos, designs, prompt books, and rehearsal notes. www.archive.cheekbyjowl.com
 - **YouTube channel.**
Subscribe to Cheek by Jowl's channel to be the first to hear about our new video content, including trailers, educational videos and interviews. Click here: https://www.youtube.com/user/CheekbyJowl?sub_confirmation=1
- Reade, S. (1991) *Cheek by Jowl: Ten Years of Celebration*. London. Oberon Books. ISBN: 978-0948230493.**
- Written in 1991, Simon Reade discusses the company up to 1991 with reviews, interviews and photographs.
- **Get in touch!**
Contact our office for more information about the company: <http://www.cheekbyjowl.com/company.php>

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Activity 1: Études exercise

Here we will look at études as a way for your students to explore the world of the play they are performing. The études are not intended to be ever performed before an audience, or in fact used directly in the play, but they may throw interesting ideas and stimulus that help with character, staging and the imagination.

- Break into groups of two.
- Pick two characters from the play.
- Consider their relationship within the framework of the play. Sometimes, it's good to explore two characters who do have or have had a direct relationship, but one that isn't especially explored in the text.
- Devise a relevant five minute scene around these characters that is not in the play. Usually, this exercise is most helpful when the chosen scene is either before or during the events of the play.

Here's a summarised example:

Two characters

Lord Montague

Romeo

Relationship

Father and son

Example scene

Lord Montague explaining to Romeo the reason behind the Montague-Capulet Feud. Why Capulets can't be trusted. How Romeo must be prepared to defend his family against the Capulets. How the two families can now ever only be enemies. Romeo vows to kill anyone who would insult his family.

What do you get out of this étude?

Now it is apparent that during the play, Romeo is consciously going back on his word to his father, or perhaps even that Romeo throughout the play is still delirious with hate for the Capulets from his father's words, and the fact that he has fallen in love with Juliet is the worst thing that would ever happen to him, he is conflicted, confused and at war with himself.

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Activity 2: Imaginary and pre-text exercise

This exercise should be a good tool to help students approach and understand the text. It is also a useful exercise for devising and developing the imagination. Students should split into pairs.

Like everything else we do, all that we say happens because of something else. Similarly, all the text in a script is a reaction to what precedes it. All text must be a reaction to some originating action that the 'target' is doing already.

We can even create a dialogue within text that invites your partner to imagine what they would need to say to provide your text as a reaction from you. So for every fragment of text, try to imagine some preceding, perhaps imaginary words to which the text is a reaction. An example should make this clearer:

JULIET:

'O be some other name. What's in a name?

'That which we call a rose By any other name would smell as sweet;

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,

Retain that dear perfection which he owes

Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,

And for thy name, which is no part of thee,

Take all myself.'

The actor playing Juliet needs to imagine what Romeo must have been saying that would force her to contradict him. She imagines the words that she would need to reverse. She gives him an imaginary script.

For example, what could make her say: 'O be some other name . . .'?

Maybe if he had said something like: 'I am helpless, I have a famous name, Juliet, I am stuck with this name . . .'

Then she would have to argue back to him with: 'O be some other name . . .'

Her words then would be a reaction to this piece of imaginary text. So the actor must work backwards. She invents what he has been saying. The imaginary pre-text happens before the line she says, and not after.

As for example:

ROMEO But names matter, Juliet . . .

JULIET What's in a name . . .

ROMEO A name is everything, Juliet . . .

JULIET That which we call a rose . . .

ROMEO But . . .

JULIET By any other name would smell as sweet; . . .

DRAMA AND THEATRE

Teacher Instructions

ROMEO I don't agree . . . !

JULIET So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd . . .

ROMEO No Juliet! In time . . .

JULIET Retain that dear perfection which he owes . . .

ROMEO But Juliet, I need . . .

JULIET Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name . . .

ROMEO Without my name, what would I have left?

JULIET And for thy name, which is no part of thee, . . .

ROMEO Juliet, I would have nothing at all . . .

JULIET Take all myself.

The dots at the end of the line refer to the quality of interruption that is an essential characteristic of thought. All of these pieces of imaginary pre-text give Juliet something that she must change. Of course they are provisional, and students can be encouraged to come up with their own 'pre-text'.

Activity 3: All text says 'No!' exercise

In the previous exercise all of Juliet's text is a reaction to Romeo's text. But what happens when it seems there is perfect agreement between Juliet and Romeo? As we have seen, it is vital for Juliet to have something to change, vital for her to have to convince Romeo of something, vital for her to be reacting to Romeo, no matter if they appear to be in agreement.

ROMEO I would I were thy bird.

JULIET Sweet, so would I.

Here we can see Juliet seems to be agreeing with Romeo. There seems to be no conflict whatsoever. However, there must be conflict, otherwise there can be no life.

Perhaps 'Sweet, so would I' means: 'No, Romeo! You think you are alone in your feelings, but you are not: I feel the same.'

Or: 'No, Romeo! You think you are the only one who feels metamorphosed by love, you are not.'

Or: 'No, Romeo! You may love me, but you do not understand that I love you too.'

In other words, everything that Juliet says to Romeo must have a form similar to the following: 'No! Do not believe that, believe this!'

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For this exercise, again it helps to split into pairs. Students should aim to interpret all their text as 'No! Do not believe that, believe this!' each line designed to change their partner's point of view. Students should experiment with using different samples of text.

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