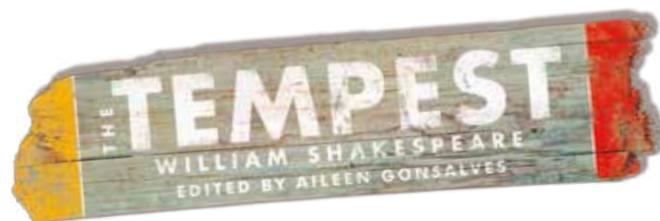


POWER AND DUTY

Playmaking Pack - Resources - Director Notes



Director's Notes

AILEEN GONSALVES

Aileen is not only directing the First Encounters production of *The Tempest*, but she is also Associate Director for Greg Doran's production in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Here she gives an insight into her own process when approaching the play.

I think *The Tempest* is still relevant today because it looks at how different people respond to having power. We all potentially have power over people in our lives, even when we feel powerless.

Young people, I think, can often feel like they don't have enough power. A child might think their parent has all the power but they themselves may have power over a younger sibling and we all have power over a fly! What we do with our power is important. How will we use or abuse it? Will we throw it away? Or will we throw our weight around? We all have the power to choose how to use it. And I think the play explores this on many levels. Prospero's power over Ariel and his daughter, Stephano's power over Caliban. Also it looks at the power of love and how that is very important in the play.

I am Associate Director on the RST production of *The Tempest* directed by Greg Doran and Director of the First Encounter *The Tempest*. There could not be two more different productions. The first is using cutting edge, new, computer technology. Using motion capture and projections we are creating an avatar for Ariel so he can become all the mysterious creatures he describes, a nymph, a harpy and he can do many tricks like turning into fire and flying. All these for the first time will be possible with this technology actually live on the stage. The design of the set will also be partly projections to create the magical island. In contrast, The First Encounters *Tempest* will be much simpler "rough magic" using theatrical devices such as singing and using the bodies in the space to create the magic of the island. Using all the senses the actors will use "what is at their disposal": their voices, bodies and the text to create the story.

Before rehearsals I have had to make some key decisions about how the set will be because the designer Kate McStraw and her team need to create it and need time to make it. I decided early on I wanted the characters only to use things that they had brought with them in the boat or they had found on the island in the twelve years they have been there. This gave us a lot of restrictions, for example we wanted Miranda to have some wind chimes but they needed to be made from shells, not metal. I also decided as my starting point "the isle is full of noises" – this was my central thought about what is magical about this island. I wanted to get the audience to make the noises of the island and I wanted Prospero to have control over that music like a conductor. When Caliban complains "Ohhh" Prospero abuses his power by conducting him so the sound is less like a cry and more musical. Can you imagine if you had that kind of control!

Before rehearsing the play I make a list of FACTS starting with everything the character knows BEFORE each scene starts. (The audience may learn these facts at the end of the play but the character knows them from the start.) I put everything down because at this stage I don't know what facts are important and which are not. Then a list of everything each character DOES during each scene (as simply as possible without interpretation, e.g. He asks a question, he stands up, he leaves, she answers the question with a question etc...) From these two lists a possible range of OBJECTIVES will emerge for each character. These are my starting point objectives and just give me a place to start rehearsing. I ask actors to vocalise their objectives in the following way... "Get them to..." e.g. Get them to take me seriously, get them to trust me, get them to forgive me, get them to feel small and so on.



I will also ask myself the “W” questions for each scene – you can get the answers firstly from the text clues and then from your interpretation using your own imagination.

- 1. Where are we?** A hot or cold place, known or unknown, private or public? Etc...
- 2. When is it?** Night or Day? The season? Day of the week? (is it relevant?)
- 3. Who is there?** And what is their relationship to each other. and relative status?
- 4. What are they doing?** Actually? Physically? And what is their objective?
- 5. Why are they here/in this situation?** What has just happened?

Taking Act 1 Scene 1 from *The Tempest*, here is an example of what I might answer to these questions.

- 1. Where are we?** – Desert island, hot, the character own home for many years, private.
- 2. When is it?** – I choose daytime, dawn breaking (gives me a whole day for the play!)
- 3. Who is there?** - Miranda and Prospero (a father and daughter)
- 4. What are they doing?** – she wants him to stop the storm and he wants her to pay attention to him not the storm.
- 5. Why?** – Miranda has just seen the ship wreck and Prospero knows these people from his past are about to land and he needs to fill in Miranda before they arrive!

I never decide HOW any actor will perform anything because I think an actor cannot truly speak the lines until they are in connection with the other people in the scene. When Prospero is with Miranda he knows his objective but he must constantly assess if she is convinced or not and so must respond to her moment to moment.

Another example from our everyday lives might be when a child is trying to get a parent to give them money for sweets or trying to get more time on their computer game. They read and respond to the parent’s reactions - are they in a good mood or bad mood? I believe it is the same with characters. They read and respond to each other in each moment using the words, and how they express them, to get their objective. If it’s going badly they need to change “tactic” or strategy. If it’s going well you keep on going. Watch younger siblings – they are the best at achieving their objectives!!

When I direct, I encourage the actors to not play the scene knowing what will happen. Every so often we ask what would happen now if they actually got away, or they left the stage, or they decided to do the opposite thing. It keeps you and the actors awake to the fact that anything is possible until a particular choice is made. Therefore, even if the audience know the play they don’t know exactly how the character is going to respond in that moment.

Pivotal moments in *The Tempest* revolve around Prospero and his power to control so much of the action. For example, he decides to put Ferdinand in front of Miranda but he doesn’t know if she will fall for him (there are limits to his power of course). Perhaps the most pivotal moment is when he has the lords under his control and must decide whether he should punish or forgive them.

I have various exercises to get actors in true connection with each other. I would encourage teachers to have students make eye contact and get someone else to feed them the lines so they can really connect and see if their objective is working on the other actor. Rather than read the page – why not first read the other actor. We also do scenes back to back to help us really LISTEN to how well or badly we are doing at getting our objective. And also to restrict movement of the body and have the words as our only weapon to encourage actors to really use the whole word, it’s sound and meaning to get their objective.

As we began to rehearse and ask questions of the text. I became clearer about a question that has been growing for a while. Is Prospero stranded on the island or could he get back at any time - either through his own or Ariel's magic...? What if he's **choosing** to stay...? Why? He can keep Miranda safe and can control totally what she learns and who she mixes with. He is never lonely as he has the world's most magical creature to play with and study – Ariel. He has another half magical creature to control - Caliban and a whole island of spirits in which he can practice his magic in peace. All of us at times create islands that are our safety zone. We stay home rather than face the world especially when the world hurts us. We lock ourselves in our bedrooms rather than face things and we plot little revenges to make ourselves feel better. He knows he wants revenge and he knows he needs to get Miranda married to Ferdinand; an action which would be both part of that revenge and also an opportunity to keep her safe from Caliban. Part of his journey is to realise that he has to get her off the island as keeping her there is holding her back from growing, and as ever love is stronger than revenge. So he grabs the chance, takes a risk and creates a storm which all his "enemies brought to this shore". However, the love that flourishes between Ferdinand and Miranda is the greatest power of all and one he can't control. This love unexpectedly breaks down his defenses and makes his heart open and it is forgiveness, not revenge, that flows out.