

Shakespeare 101 by Kati Schwaber

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Hi everybody. My name is Katie Schwaber, and I am a voice and text coach, and today we're going to be talking about how to select a Shakespeare monologue, and how to prep that monologue for an audition.

So, starting from the beginning; How do you pick a Shakespeare monologue? The first thing to think about is to think about your type; to think about whether you view yourself as one of the Lovers, or an Ingenue, or a Fighter, or a Clown, or a Prince, or...there's-there's just so many different options in Shakespeare, but there are a lot of types that you can experiment with. And traditionally there are some gender roles inside of those types, but as we move more progressive we're trying to step away from those things. So, you also want to think about; is this a newer company, or is this a more traditional company that's going to want to see me as a specific type. Or is this a company that's new and is going to want to see me - is going to be excited to see a woman trying The Bastard monologues. Something like that. So you think about your type and what type of company you're auditioning for.

And when you're auditioning for something like the Milwaukee Generals, when you're going to a general audition, you're auditioning for a season, rather than just one show at a time. So what you want to make sure you're doing is you are showing off your versatility in terms of "This is where I Can Slot Into Your Season". I can be the Lovers, I can be Lysander in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but then I can also play Sword Fighter in *Henry V*. Doesn't matter who I am, I'm going to be this "type" of person for you. I'm going to be the younger person in the cast. I'm going to be the clown in every show. I'm going to - whatever. You want to show them you, how you fit into their season as a whole. They're looking for the smallest number of people to cover a lot of things. So, if you are able to show them "This is Who I Am, and This is How I will be Helpful to You in Your Season", you're going to have a much easier time moving forward.

Another thing to think about is, are - is the monologue I'm doing overdone. Is this something that they're going to hear twenty times today? And you have a choice to make. the most important thing is, does your monologue speak to you? Does it affect you as a person? Do you really love this monologue? Because if you're a - if you're a young twenty-something woman, and you want to do the Viola "What Ring is This?" monologue, there's going to be a lot of people doing that monologue that day. But if you really believe that you have something to say about it, if you have something different that you can present, then absolutely. Go for it. If you think - if you come across it and you're like, "Well this is - this is the simplest monologue that I can find. It's on the internet. It's the first thing that I came across," that's not the monologue for you. Dig a little deeper. Find something - do a Joan of Arc monologue. Dig into *Henry VIII*, there's a bunch of monologues in there nobody does. So, that goes for - for masculine presenting people as well. If you're looking for a monologue that again - masculine presenting people all the time do *The Bastard* monologue, and they're going to hear that a lot over the course of the day, so do you have a

different take on it? Do you have something that you think makes you different when you are saying that monologue? And if not, dig a little deeper. Find something a little deeper in the cannon. And you're going to be way better off than doing something that's overdone the way that twenty other people are going to do it that day. So, gender bend something. Try something new. And give yourself an opportunity to try something; to do something a little different.

So, once you've selected your monologue, you've got to start prepping your monologue. You've got to - there's a lot of work involved in doing Shakespeare, because the language is difficult. Because we don't speak that way anymore. So, not only do we not speak the way that Shakespeare spoke at the time, the way that he wrote, but we also do not stray so far into poetry anymore. So there are specific rules and parameters inside of poetry that can be helpful, that when you use them properly they are tools that help you to become clearer in your speech. So, let's talk about them a little bit. We'll dive into Shakespeare 101 right now. So, if you know this information, fantastic; a chance to review. And, if you don't know this information, what an opportunity to learn something new about Shakespeare.

So, first thing, you've probably heard this anytime someone's talked about Shakespeare, most of the plays are written in iambic pentameter. That just means that there are ten beats in the line, and of those beats they are made up of two parts and the second part is stressed. So, an iamb is a two part beat with the stress on the second half so it sounds like a heartbeat: bum-BUM, bum-BUM, bum-BUM, bum-BUM. And pentameter just refers to there are five two-parts in the line, so there are ten beats total. And there are exceptions to that rule. There are regular lines where there's eleven beats. There are Alexandrian lines where there are twelve beats. There are lines that don't make it all to ten, because there's meant to be space inside of the line. There is the rhythm can change. It doesn't have to be iamb, it can be a trochee, which means that the stress would be on the first part of the two-part beat. So, rather than bum-BUM, bum-BUM, that makes it a BUM-bum, BUM-bum. So, there are opportunities like that inside of Shakespeare as well, but for the most part you're going to see iambic pentameter; you're going to see that heartbeat ten beats.

So, what that means is that you have an opportunity to work within an existing pattern to help recognize important words and phrases, and important - and uh - give you a reference point for pronunciation, things like that.

So, if we're looking at - I've got Sonnet 116 here as an example. We're looking at - let's look right at the beginning for iambic pentameter reasons. We've all heard the very unfortunate readings that stick really closely to the iamb, so: Let ME not TO the MA-riage OF true MINDS ad-MIT im-PE-di-MENTS love IS not LOVE. That's - nobody needs that. Nooobody needs that. Ever. For your own reference, something that's useful is you'll see margins in scripts where people mark the flat beat with just a strike across, and they mark the stressed beat with a diagonal. So it's: Let ME not TO the MA-riage OF true MINDS, just so you know how many beats are in the measure and where those emphasis are going to fall. But again, we don't want to lean too hard into it because that's how you get the robotic

poetry reading. But, when you're looking at an iambic pentameter beat four and beat ten tend to be stressed. They tend to be important words. So, let's check that out here in these first two lines.

Let ME not TO - "To" is not the most important word, but let's check the rest - the MA-riage OF true MINDS - ten - minds - ad-MIT im-PE-di-MENTS. So, we've got stress on "minds" at the end of the line there - here. And we've got stress on "pe" which is the - where we would naturally stress the word "impediments" on the fourth beat. So, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds, admit impediments". And continuing on that line: "love is not love." The second "love" falls on beat ten, which helps you to understand that it is going to be more emphasized than the first love in that sentence. So, four and ten. Take that as you will. It's not always going to be true, but it is a rule that you can - it's a tool that you can use to check out what might be useful to you.

So again, continuing to look at this, you have the iambic, which is going to help you set up for success, but what you don't want to do is to lean so far into it that it just becomes a robotic gesture. You want to be able to actually speak these lines the way - like you are a person. Like you're a human being.

So, the next thing to think about is to think about line breaks and caesuras. So, at the end of each line you want to have just a little bit of a lift. I'm not saying take a giant pause. What I'm saying is that you want a subtle lift so that you can help your audience hear that you're at the end of a line, and are going to continue. It actually really helps for clarity, because the audience has a hard time following because it's poetry, and it's heightened language, and it's language that's four hundred years old, so there are a lot of things that are hard to process. So if you give them an opportunity at the end of every line to catch up with you, they're going to have an easier time.

So, looking at this first line here, it's an enjambed line, meaning that there's not a punctuation mark at the end of the line. It continues onto the next line, which, if you're looking at poetry - if you're just going to blow through the line - "Let me not to the marriage of true minds and impediments" - that would be the end of the thought. But because it's poetry and we're looking at the end of the line, give yourself an opportunity to lift. So - "Let me not to the marriage of true minds...admit impediments". You hear that a little better. You hear - you process that a little better when you're listening. So, doing that repeatedly gives you an opportunity to let your audience catch up to you.

The other place that you can pause in a Shakespeare monologue is in the caesura, which we have here in this second line of the sonnet. We have a period - a full stop - in the middle of the line. So, we take a line break here, and a caesura in the next line because there's a period that stops us. So, speaking for example: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds to admit impediments. Love is not love which alters when alterations finds." So, you have this opportunity to slow down, to take a breath, to pause in the middle of the line, so that when you take that caesura, again, the audience understands what you're saying. You have the opportunity for a thought, a change, somethings new to happen.

So. Just some quick review: look for the iambic pentameter, look for the places where you break the iambic pentameter, line breaks, and caesuras. Those are the things

we've talked about so far. So, once you've done those basic things, once you've had that basic poetry - look at your monologue, your sonnet, your scene, whatever you're working on - you can start to get really in-depth in the text.

So the first thing that I always do that is so, so, so helpful, is I check The Folio text; I check the punctuation that's in the original draft. You can find The First Folio online - you can find pdf's of it, you can find transcriptions of it - there's all sorts of versions of it that you can look up to find the original punctuation. And the original punctuation is so helpful because it's often very different from the modern editions. Editors over the last four hundred years have thrown in different punctuation, have thrown in different intentions into these speeches, and by going back to the original you find something new every time. I mean, for example, looking at this Sonnet 116 a modern editor was really insistent that there be an exclamation point after "Oh no" here, rather than the comma that's here in The Folio. So, that completely changes the intention of what is - what this moment is. If you have a comma here it's an extension of the line, right? It's an extension of like, "Oh no, it is an ever-fixed mark". But if you have an exclamation point it is a full stop. You have a - you have a reason to stop and exclaim something. So like, "oh no! It is an ever-fixed mark", right? Those are two very different readings based solely on punctuation, and one of them, punctuation that a modern editor inserted, rather than punctuation from the original Shakespeare. So, it's very, very important to go into The Folio and to check what the original punctuation was supposed to be. And once you mark that in your script you'll have an opportunity to discover new things.

So once you have that punctuation, the next step is to look up any words you don't know. And like, there is no shame in having to look those things up. I have a Shakespeare glossary and a dictionary; there's all sorts of resources online for- in terms of definitions and - and translations, and things like that. If you feel like you don't understand what you're reading don't be afraid to go to Sparknotes and look up their No Fear Shakespeare. They've got a really great - like - simplified side-by-side translations. So that you can really be sure you know what's going on. And that type of specificity can be really helpful. Looking at something like here in Sonnet 116, we've got: "It is the star to every wand'ring bark". In modern times we think of "bark" as the sound that the dog makes, or a seal makes, or a - just some sort of loud explosion. But, here it is referenced as - we're looking at it as a ship; a boat. So that what we have in the sentence is that "it is a star to every wandering bark", it is for any boat that tis lost, love is like the start that guides you home. So, that changes a whole lot of things. Being able to understand what that word means is really, really helpful.

So again, let's go through this: We're looking for the iambic pentameter, we're looking for irregular lines, we're looking for the line breaks and caesuras, and we're looking to put in the original punctuation, and look up the words we don't know.

So then next, I always recommend that people go through and circle adjectives; descriptive words, because what often happens in Shakespeare is that you have these really beautiful descriptive words that tell you exactly what the intention is. So right here in the first line of Sonnet 116 we've got, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds". The descriptive words are "true minds"; "true" describing "minds". And often people like to

emphasize the noun; they like to emphasize the - the object itself. But when you put a little sparkle on the descriptor, you tend to hear the noun that follows it a little better. So here because “minds” is that tenth beat, and true is a descriptor, we would probably have two stresses in a row: “Let me not to the marriage of TRUE MINDS admit impediments”.

So, what you think about when you’re going through this is, “Is this a descriptive word; how do I make that descriptive word sparkle? What’s the opposite of that descriptive word?”. So, the opposite of true minds is false minds. Gives a little - a little illumination to the actual - what “true minds” would mean is thinking about the opposite.

So, after you have gone through and done your descriptive words like “true”, and “ever-fixed”, and “wand’ring”, and - I don’t know - “love is not Time’s fool”, “rosy lips”; there’s all sorts of descriptive words. Once you’ve gone through and circled your adjectives, you want to go through and circle repetition. Repetition is used a lot in Shakespeare, and it’s really useful. And - some - one of those basic rules of life in the theater world is you can never say anything the same way twice. So, in this particular sonnet we’ve got “Love is not love” - there are two loves in a row - “Which alters when attrition finds” - some repetition. “Or bends with the remover to remove”. More repetition. So you’re looking for moments like that. With the description and the repetition you’re finding things to add a little sparkle; to add a little definition to the edges of your particular interpretation.

Once you have gone through and looked at the adjectives and the repetition, there’s some exercises you can do to help you find some other things inside of the monologue, or the sonnet, or the - the - I don’t know - the scene, or whatever you’re working on. But before we move on to the exercises, just one more time for everybody’s brains sake: When you’re looking at a Shakespeare monologue, you’re looking at the iambic pentameter, the places that it breaks from that iambic pentameter - the - where it turns irregular, the places where there are line breaks or caesuras that break in the middle, what the original Portfolio punctuation was, any words you don’t know, circle your adjectives, circle your repetition.

So now we’re going to get into some exercises that can be helpful. The first one I want to take about is “Walking the Text”. So there’s two versions of this particular exercise. The first version: You turn and change direction while you’re walking on any punctuation. So if I’m looking at - let’s go to a place that has a bunch of punctuation in it - let’s start here: “That looks on tempest” here - oh let’s start here: “Oh no” - so if we’re doing this first exercise, walking around the room, walking around the space, “Oh no” - change direction - “it is an ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken” - change direction - “it is the star to every wand’ring bark” - change direction - “whose worth’s unknown” - change direction - “although his height be taken” - change direction. So, you’re walking around the room and every time you come across - you can hold the paper in your hand, you can hold your phone, whatever you’re using - and every time you come across a comma, a period, a semi-colon, a colon, any sort of punctuation - an exclamation point - you’re going to change direction while you’re walking around the room. And this can help you find some momentum inside of your piece.

The second step of this exercise is to do something similar. So, you’re still walking around the room, but when you come across a comma - you are - a comma or a semicolon,

or colon, you are going to change direction. So anytime it's not - anytime it's a continuation of a sentence or a thought you're going to change direction. But anytime you come across a period, an exclamation point, a question mark, you're going to come to a stop then change direction. So what that would mean, if we are starting in the same place, oh no: "Oh no," - change direction - "it is an ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken" - change direction - "it is the star to every wand'ring bark" - change direction - "whose worth's unknown" - change direction - "although his height be taken" - stop, change direction - breathe - begin the next part.

So, the point is to come to a stop when you have a full stop, and this can be really helpful to produce - to give yourself permission to try stuff; to give yourself permission to really let the thought come to an end before you have the next thought. So - so that's the "Walking the Text" exercise.

The next thing to think of - that you can try is - there's an exercise where you just think about the specificity of an image. So, anytime inside of these sonnets or monologues there's some really specific imagery. So something like when we were talking about - "It is the star to every wand'ring bark whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken" - there's a really clear image there of a ship on the water there, it's foggy, it's lost, but that the fog opens and the North Star appears. So give yourself permission to create that image; to really sink into the imagery that's inside of the text, and give yourself a picture to think about. "The rosy lips and cheeks" - somebody thinking about either literally roses instead of lips and cheeks, or - or just how pink those lips and cheeks are; giving yourself a really clear image for everything that is suggested in the text.

And once you have the imagery, we can move onto the next exercise, which is called "Kick the Bucket". And what that means is just that you can have - you put something on the ground - either you flip a chair over so that the seat is facing you, or you can put a pillow on the ground, or a laundry basket, or - a - something soft, something you can kick lightly. And the point of this exercise is that once you get to the end of the line, once you say the tenth beat, you kick whatever is in front of you, which can help you to - excuse me - which can help you to find momentum in your phrasing, bring everything all the way truly to the end of the line, but also give you permission to stop at the end of the line. And, with this exercise what you would do is you - I often use a chair - you just turn the chair on its side and stand in front of it, and you kick at the end. So, "let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments. Love is not love which alters when alteration finds or bends with the remover to remove" - you kick right on the tenth beat every time. And it's harder than you think. Often we want to kick after the beat, but make sure you kick right on beat ten. And again what this does is it encourages you to go - to take your phrasing all the way to the end of the line rather than dropping it in the middle. "Love is not - let me not to the marriage of the minds admit impediment. Love is not love which alters" - right? We have a tendency to start a phrase and then drop to the end. So this encourages us to actually flow all the way to the end of the phrase. And that is the last exercise I'm going to give you.

I gave you so much information, and I know it's a lot, but quickly before we wrap up I'm going to go over it one more time for everybody's brains.

When you're picking a monologue think about your type; think about who you're auditioning for. When you start prepping your monologue look at the iambic pentameter; look where it breaks the iambic pentameter. Look at the line breaks and the caesuras; decide for yourself, am I going to take this line break or am I going to take the caesura. Check your Folio punctuation. Look up any words you don't know. Circle your adjectives. Circle your repetition. And then we get into exercises: walk through the text, change direction on the punctuation, look for clear images in the text, and make sure you have a really clear picture in your mind - give yourself something to think about - and then the last one is "Kick the Bucket".

So, I hope this is really helpful. I hope it doesn't overwhelm you, and if it does just watch it again; get something new from it this time. And I hope everyone has a really wonderful audition, and I hope to see you soon. If you have any questions, reach out to me. My email is katieschwaber1@gmail.com. And if you don't know how to get in touch with me after that, just go and get in touch with Adam Qutaishat and he will pass anything on to me, and we can go from there. So again, good luck at your auditions, and I hope you all have fun more than anything else. Bye.