



THE ACTOR AS AUTHOR OF THE TEXT HE ACTS

MARTA S. NOGUEIRA

Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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*Actor,
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ABSTRACT

*This article aims to demonstrate how the acting technique and skills of an actor may influence the intentions of a text's author, showing him new paths through the human and emotional factors. It also intends to access that what is usually considered a "text" may not always be a fixed entity produced by a single isolated individual. The analysis of the staging and film adaptation of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and the development of the character Stanley Kowalski by Marlon Brando, shows how he changed the written version of the play, shifting its core, interfering with the balance between the two main characters and helping to shape the cultural and historical attributes which rendered its particular place in art history. The text produced by the actor may, thus, assume an identical value to that of the dramatic script from which it developed, or even produce a higher impact.*

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Part I – Why the interpretation of an actor deserves to be an object of study

1. What function does the actor have?

One may claim that the first and main function of the actor is to transform the character imagined by the author into a real flesh and bone person, alive, breathing in front of an audience. The actor is, thus, the vehicle that transports us from the imaginary into the real, from fantasy to an induced pseudo-reality, in the direction of which we allow ourselves to be voluntarily led. He is, as Bert O. States claims in “Acting (Re)Considered - The Actor’s Presence – Three Phenomenal Modes”, a special kind of story-teller, for he is himself the story he is telling (States, 2002, 23). But that apparently simple task of carnal personification of the mute words is of such an intrinsic complexity that it does not exhaust itself in this short definition.

We say an actor interprets a text, not that he reads it or presents it. Interpreting carries within itself a whole range of references much deeper and complex than the mere task of reading or presenting, that depends not only on the text itself but also on who interprets it, his personality, his methodology, his experience, even his physical features and the moment of interpretation. If interpreting was but a recitation of the text, then there would be no distinction between actors and reciters. As William B. Worthen says, if interpreting was just a more enthusiastic way of reciting, many poets would not be displeased with the way some professional actors called to read their poems do it, changing the design of the text and submitting it to a new order of external signification, instead of their acting originating directly from it (Worthen, 2006, 5).

Travelling back to Ancient Greece, the period from which the notion of “actor” originates, we may observe that a clear distinction was already made between the term “hypocrites” – that which personifies a character and “rhapsodies” – that which recites poetry. “Hypocrites” derives in turn from the same source which originated the word “judge”, that is “Kritikos”. The literal meaning of “hypocrites” is “respondent”, which establishes

right away a dialogue relationship between the text – which questions, orders, decides – and its personifier – who answers, obeys or disobeys, judges, criticizes, interprets. Thus, the actor is not a mere vehicle of transmission of a text, he is much more than that, acting upon, interacting with and reacting to that same text. As Jay Malarcher says in “How is it played? The actor as literary critic”, the actor updates externally the potential implicit in a text (Malarcher, 1994, 3). Aristotle, a historic critic of actors, claims in his “Rhetoric” that “The power of tragedy is felt even in the absence of staging and actors.” This claim may be true in the cases where the text reaches the audience without having undergone any kind of staging, since if that weren’t the case, then any text would depend solely on its representation to be able to convey in the minds of its audience what the author intended. But what the reader feels when he reads something, especially a text destined to be staged, is the potential of something imagined, which is not really happening. When that happens through the actions of the actor, what occurs is the realization of the potential generated by the text into a real action that results in an interpretation set into practice, of what Aristotle called “praxis”, that is, the final step in a process that includes comprehension and a feeling of certainty on behalf of the subject (Malarcher, 1994, 3). From this it can be inferred that any act of comprehension and certainty is individual and depends on that same subject. If two common readers will never interpret the same text in a similar way, least of all will two professional actors, even if there is a conscious attempt to do so, by the simple fact that there are no two identical people. But a text can, in theory, be copied manually by two distinct people exactly in the same way, with no variants or errors.

The humanity of the actor has always seemed enough of a condition to make his relationship with the text an organic one, no matter what function we expect of him. The text may be in theory, although it never really is, static. On the contrary, the actor is never static, not even in theory, because he is always a living being. Thus, the consideration of the role of the actor must take into account at least three distinct but fundamental aspects:

- a) The relationship the actor establishes with the text and which is always present, however limited or simple it might be;
- b) The filter the actor will inevitably constitute between the words of the author and his audience. Using terminology from Textual Criticism, the actor is a kind of particular medium, such as paper or parchment, but infinitely more complex than those, obviously. And if in certain circumstances, the reproduction of such a simple medium as paper may turn out to be a modifying instance (through temporal and physical conditions), how could the same not happen with as live and complex a medium such as a human being is?

In certain cases, there may be even another important factor to consider – the relationship established by the author and the actor, when they work together with the character written by the former and acted by the latter. This, as we shall see is, in fact, crucial to understand the pivotal role the actor may be able to play in the development of the text itself.

The Actor and the Text

Secondly, the relationship the actor establishes with his audience must be taken into consideration. It is a crucial part of this analysis since it is for the audience that both the author and the actor communicate. Thus, the function of the actor cannot be separated from its receptor, since it is the latter who validates and judges it.

As Jay Malarcher claims, most of the times the only way the audience gets in touch with a certain artwork is through the actors that interpret it (Malarcher, 1994, 1). So, far from being just a filter, the actor gains crucial importance in the interpretation of someone else's work. He is the face of the text, which the audience might not even read. If two actors interpret a character in two very different ways, each of their audiences will get two very different versions of the same play. These effects may be of a multiple order, ranging from cultural values, influence on ideas and points of view, the impulse for taking action on some particular issue, changing behaviours and attitudes,

emotional catharsis, politics, moral and ethical behaviour or even changes in a whole community.

On the other hand the actor gains freedom in front of an audience that allows him to control the text ultimately. No matter how many rehearsals, researches, discussions with the author or the stage director there were, in the end, when the curtain goes up, the actor is alone, holding the end of the rope and he may do as he pleases. This control allows the actor to dominate, cancel, change or shift any previous work over the text.

Finally, it is from the game established between the actor and the audience that sometimes the artwork is literally born, for the actor personifies the words and gives them a new, stronger sense and meaning, and is also influenced by the presence of the audience, contributing to shape the final identity of that work in the present and future.

The Actor and the Author

Lastly, we should also consider the occasions when the author is present and participates in the creation of his actor and is even influenced by it. There are many examples of this collaboration, such as those of Claudel exhilarated by the new perspectives the actress Edwige Feuillère showed him when acting *Partage de Midi*. He decided to change the play entirely because

La vie est la plus forte et ce n'est qu'au feu de la rampe qu'une œuvre dramatique commence vraiment à vivre. C'est à Marigny seulement que j'ai vu du dehors ce que la chose faisait, séparée de moi... (Grésillon, 1996, 13)

Or the case of Jean Genet who wrote to his publisher: "*Le Balcon* est corrigé. Ne portez la mention "édition définitive", car j'y retravaillerai jusqu'à ma mort. Mettez "seconde édition" si vous voulez" (letter of 26 October 1959) (Grésillon, 1996, 3).

There is also Tennessee Williams, watching with delight the way Marlon Brando constructed and developed the character Stanley Kowalski during the rehearsals of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and which will be analyzed more profoundly in this paper.

In these cases, the legitimacy of the value of the contribution of the actors is obvious, since it was sanctioned by the authors themselves. The actor is a crucial element to the author in these circumstances since it offers him the possibility of watching his own written work in action, serving as a test before he submits his words to the audience. The actor functions as a test tube for the author to experiment with various hypotheses. When they work it means they become an external contribution to the author's work, and thus a crucial part for the study of it.

2. What is the actor's methodology?

The appearance of internal techniques around the XVII century allowed the actor to explore his emotions and enable him to act "from the inside to the outside". Not disregarding all of the other external tools the actor has at his disposal, these internal techniques are the ones that concern us most for this paper, for they are responsible for the deeper degree of a relationship established with the text and the character he will interpret.

Acting may be divided into two major groups - presentative and representative. The first group refers to a type of interpretation in which both actors and audience are aware of each other, which is the case of the Brechtian actor or the Shakespearean actor. The second group uses what is called the "fourth wall", that is, the actor pretends to be alone with no one watching him, behaving in the most realistic and natural way, such as is the case with the Stanislavskian actor. In this particular case, the actor practices to achieve a state where he can feel the emotions of his character, both physically and mentally, as if he was indeed the character himself. The magic "if" explained by Stanislavski allows the actor to trigger in himself the real feeling, using a number of techniques, instead of acting in a mechanical or faked way.

In any case, no matter what method the actor is using, there is always some kind of relationship established with the text, whether it be a complete immersion and thorough research to find what the author wrote in between the lines, or a detachment and critique of the text itself. Even the most dictatorial play writers such as Brecht, do not expect the actor to become something of a parrot, as he puts it: "Without

opinions and objectives one can represent nothing at all. Without knowledge one can show nothing; how could one know what would be worth knowing? Unless the actor is satisfied to be a parrot or a monkey he must master our period's knowledge of human social life by himself joining in the war of the classes." (Auslander, 2002, 56)

Secondly, the type of methodology does matter when it comes to the degree of the relationship the actor establishes with his character. The deeper the immersion, such as the one occurring with Method actors, the more he will "lose" himself into the interpretation and the more elements he will use to become that character. This allows him to use his own experiences as a human being, what he learned and the abilities and skills he masters to explore the text to a length that may allow him to develop the character in a much deeper way than the author himself might have done. Because the words are being lived and uttered out loud, because they are being accompanied by movement and gestures, by expressions, all conducted by the inner understanding and the research the actor did when reading the text, he may even find elements the author himself missed or did not develop enough during the writing stage of his work.

Aristotle, for example, recognized this legitimacy when he claimed in the "Rhetoric", referring to the actors that added their own mannerisms to the text of some lesser author: "Now the wonderful is pleasant, which may be inferred by the fact that every one tells a story adding something of himself, knowing that will please his audience." (Malarcher, 1994, 3) Stella Adler taught her students to always do something onstage and to search those actions in the text, finding for each one of them the corresponding human conflict so that each action has a reason.

The analysis of every factor affecting and/or constraining the activity of acting shows there is a significant difference between the dramatic text and its subsequent "acted text", that is, the activity of acting does not create an identical substitution of the written signs. The complexity of such an activity, the richness of elements with which the actor plays its task and the set of

constraints that function around him, signify he uses a different cluster of signs than those used by its written counterpart. As a consequence, the dramatic text is obviously modified into another kind of text which we may call “acted text”, in which the actor changes the written words into uttered words, actions, gestures, sounds and expressions. It originates from the interpretation of the dramatic text by its representative, it is not just an imagined but also an acted text, a text turned real before the audience. And if it may not alter or remove elements from the text-source from which it departs, it always adds others. This inevitable addition may, in certain cases, represent the initial author’s intentions in a different and even more faithful way.

Milhaus & Hume stress that a great part of the drama of the last two hundred years distorted the theatrical reality of dramatic texts, precisely because it has treated the words of the play as if they were the play themselves (apud Rocklin, 1988, 4). Hegel’s opinion about the dramatic text in opposition to its interpretation is particularly incisive:

[...] il n'est pas sans importance, pour le poète et sa composition, de penser à la représentation scénique qui exige impérieusement cette vivacité dramatique: j'irai jusqu'à dire qu'aucune pièce de théâtre ne devrait être imprimée, mais devrait être versée à l'état manuscrit dans le répertoire théâtral et ne pas être mise trop en circulation [...]. Nous aurons alors moins de drames savamment écrits, pleins de beaux sentiments auxquels manque justement ce qu'il faut dans un drame, à savoir l'action et sa mouvante vivacité. (apud Grésillon, 1996, 2)

Part II - Marlon Brando and A Streetcar Named Desire - A Relevant Case

Marlon Brando landmarked the turn of the first half of the XX century, changing codes of acting considered correct in the previous era. He was, in fact, responsible for the establishment of a paradigm, not just through the character he played in Tennessee Williams’s A Streetcar Named Desire (Williams, 2009) but also in what concerned the way he acted that character. His approach to Stanley Kowalski broadened the

range of possibilities presented in the text and made the author himself allow a shift in the balance of power between the two main characters of the play. Thanks to Brando, Kowalski won, in the words of Williams himself, humanity where before he was just a potential of something not quite defined (apud Burks, 1987, 32). It may be inferred that the actor allowed the author to explore in a much more incisive way the general themes he wished to approach, which if portrayed by any other actor using the traditional technique, would not have managed to be conveyed to the audience with the same impact.

For this paper, and since there is no recorded version of any of the staging of the play, it was also used the cinema adaptation of A Streetcar Named Desire (Kazan, 1993) for the purpose of illustrating certain examples, since according to some of the sources queried, the qualities of the acting were pretty much the same in both the play and the movie. If anything, as author Peter Manso describes in his biography of the actor: “The effect of Vivien Leigh’s more fragile and neurotic portrayal (of Blanche DuBois) was that Marlon Brando reached even more surprising levels, which nobody had seen in his portrayal on stage.” (Manso, 1994, 298) Elia Kazan, both the stage and movie director, also claimed he didn’t notice any difference between both versions (Schickel, 2006, 215).

Tennessee Williams developed the play over a period of several years (Staggs, 2005), keeping always in mind that it would be about a fading southern beauty, lonely and neurotic. Blanche DuBois had lost her family property and was forced to search refuge with her sister and her brutal brother-in-law, in New Orleans. The drama of her destruction was clearly Williams’ central vision, mirroring the defeat of the southern way of life under the brutality and vulgarity of the modern world (Manso, 1994, 219). Deborah Burks claims that from the beginning Williams had problems with the male character, not being sure how he would function in opposition to Blanche (Burks, 1987, 32). Williams was also hopeful for his collaboration with Kazan, showing doubts about his overall insecurities concerning his written version of the play.

The text, nonetheless, suffered very few changes, for Kazan claimed that it was “altogether too good to be touched” (Kazan, 1988, 380). Around mid-October 1947, at Williams’s insistence, the script was frozen. However, some major changes had already happened, namely, the choice of a much younger actor for the part of Stanley – Williams had written the character as a thirty-year-old rude man and Brando was just 23 when he auditioned for the part at the author’s home and had the face of a poet, as he was described by Williams. What made him decide for such a young version of Stanley was his remarkable talent, which left him “crushed” and excited with the possibilities (Murphy, 1992, 19).

As for Kazan, he had considered Burt Lancaster and John Garfield for the role of Stanley, but both actors were not available and the particularities of Brando, as well as the following letter from Williams about his intentions for the play, made him finally consider Brando for the part:

... I think its best quality is its authenticity or its fidelity to life. There are no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ people. Some are a little better or a little worse but all are activated more by misunderstanding than malice. A blindness to what is going on in each other’s hearts. Stanley sees Blanche not as a desperate, driven creature, backed into a last corner to make a last desperate stand – but as a calculating bitch with ‘round heels’ ... Nobody sees anybody truly but all through the flaws of their own egos. That is the way we all see each other in life. Vanity, fear, desire, competition – all such distortions within our own egos – condition our vision of those in relation to us. Add to those distortions in our own egos, the corresponding distortions in the egos of others, and you see how cloudy the glass must become through which we look at each other. That’s how it is in all living relationships except when there is that rare case of two people who love intensely enough to burn through all those layers of opacity and see each other’s naked hearts. Such cases seem purely theoretical to me. (Kazan, 1988, 330)

Kazan also gave Brando a high level of freedom to explore the character, noticing from the start that he shared certain personal features with Stanley, mainly his parents’ alcoholic past

and his own sexual promiscuity. Kazan was known to be ruthless in this respect, not hesitating to trigger personal elements in his actors so that they could give a better performance. He left Brando alone, though, because the actor wouldn’t allow him much space and because he noticed that he was already deep into a desperate inner fight with the role. He was working more intuitively than the other actors, and the director allowed him to proceed with just hummed pieces of his speech. In fact, Irene Selznick, the producer of the play, claimed she only heard Brando say the text in a perfectly clear and distinct way during the premiere in Philadelphia (Schickel, 2006, 168). And although this disturbed the rest of the cast, Kazan allowed him the freedom to do his thing, carefully advising the other actors about his special working method, intuitively sensing he was witnessing something innovative – as he puts it “a miracle of acting was happening.” (Manso, 1994, 230).

It wasn’t just Brando’s absorption in his role that surprised the director, but his realization that the actor was tearing the conventional line of dialogue, “finding a way in which the written word expressed a tension in an inarticulate man, between what flies from his mouth and that for which he can’t find words to express himself.” Acting a subtext that contradicted the written word was nothing new, but Brando was now taking it to a whole new level than what he had done in the previous play *Truckline*, for instance, weighing his gestures and silences to the point that they began to eclipse the very words of Williams text (Manso, 1994, 225-228).

Also, as shown before, the method used by the actor had some specificities endorsed by the author himself, who claimed that the Method was very suitable for his plays in general (Williams, 1975, 212). Brando was taught by Stella Adler, who studied directly with Constantin Stanislavski and brought back to the States a different approach to the method that her fellow actor Lee Strasberg had introduced into the country a few years before. The Russian play writer had abandoned his previous use of the actor’s personal experiences and had simplified his method, offering more supremacy to the “given circumstances” of the text, apparently a

heresy in Strasberg's Actor's Studio. This is important to understand since it refers directly to the fact that Williams had frozen the text during rehearsals but it seemed that Brando was still developing his character until the very premiere. What was he developing, if the text was closed by the author and no more changes were allowed? As we shall see, the actor was developing "acted text", adding, transforming and developing a set of elements designed to enrich the text, but that were not the words themselves. As Adler had taught him, he was finding a way to never act without "a reason", to not act in a shallow and superficial way. In that respect, Brando's immersion in the character was described by Manso as similar to a professional car racer, slowly heating the engine on an unfamiliar track, giving himself an edge to find what he was looking for. He would plunge suddenly and refined as he progressed. Kazan himself claimed that "no one directed Brando" (Kazan, 1988, 428) and that he was like a good car with a defective start, who needed others to help him put the engine in motion (Schickel, 2006, 64). Adler herself described him this way:

(...) He is the most alert, most empathic human being ... He is alert and he 'knows', he just 'knows'. If we have a scar, physical or mental, he goes straight into it. He doesn't want to, but can't be fooled. If you walked out the room, he could 'be' you. (Manso, 1994, 110)

He also researched for the character, not just by reading the text but looking for experiences in life that could help him better understand a man he disliked enormously. In his own words Stanley was: "aggressive, unpremeditated, overt, and completely without doubt about himself ... intolerant and selfish";

a man without any sensitivity, without any kind of morality, except his own mewling, whimpering insistence on his own way. Kowalski was always right, and never afraid. He never wondered, he never doubted. And he had the kind of brutal aggressiveness I hate. I'm afraid of him. I detest the man ... one of those guys who work hard and have lots of flesh with nothing supple about them. They never open their fists, really. They grip a cup like an animal would wrap a paw around it. They're so muscle-bound they can hardly talk. You see,

Stanley Kowalski wasn't interested in how he said anything. He didn't give a damn how he said it. His purpose was to convey his idea. He had no awareness of himself at all ... (Manso, 1994, 224 & Schickel, 2006, 171).

He worked out to get the physical shape of a working man, starved while looking at big plates of food so he could understand the carnivorous Stanley, smoked and drank profusely, suggested changes on the wardrobe and even, at the request of Kazan, decided the placing of objects around Stanley's home.

However, the director also sensed something wrong was happening. A shift in the play itself was beginning to occur, also sensed by Jessica Tandy's husband, Hume Cronyn, who expressed his concerns to the director by telling Kazan she could improve her acting. Kazan wrote:

Maybe what Hume meant was that by contrast with Marlon, in whom every word sounded like not something memorized but a spontaneous expression of an intense inner experience - which is the level of work every actor ambitions - Jessie was what? A specialist? Professional? Was that enough for the play? Not to Hume. Hers looked like a performance. Marlon was living on stage. Jessie had every moment carved carefully, with sensibility and intelligence, and everything was coming together, as Williams and I had expected and wanted. Marlon, working "from the inside" led his emotion wherever it took him; his performance was full of surprises and exceeded what Williams and I expected. (Manso, 1994, 230)

Furthermore, Kazan deliberately didn't share with Hume his general intention concerning the play: he wanted Blanche to be a difficult heroin, meaning he wanted the audience to start on Stanley's side and slowly be driven towards Blanche through the staging options, so that they would realize that, as in life, they had been partial and insensible (Kazan, 1988, 343). The problem was that was not what was happening and the tryouts certainly reinforced this - Brando seemed to be the only actor the audience took real notice of. Kazan didn't know what to do: "What do I tell Brando? Be less good? Or Jessie? Get better?" The fact that Williams, an inveterate worried man, seemed happy, surprised him. In

fact, Williams had an astonishing reaction, considering the traditional notion of an author always very protective of his “text”, advising Kazan not to take sides and not to try to reorganize the action in order to highlight a thematic point or fidelity to life would be at stake. He considered Marlon a genius, claiming that Tandy would improve (Manso, 1994, 231). Cinema historian Richard Schickel goes as far as claiming that Williams probably knew his play would be a play not just for that era but for all seasons, and he knew an American play had to be a hit from the start if it aspired to last. His confidence in the play was so strong he believed it didn’t matter if its core was wrong or arguable because there would be many other opportunities in the future to correct that (Schickel, 2006, 178 & Bouzereau, 2006). The premiere confirmed Williams’ decision and can be summed by Arthur Miller’s review of it:

Along with Williams the other great revelation of the performance was, of course, Brando, a tiger on the loose, a sexual terrorist. Nobody had seen anything like him before because that kind of freedom on the stage had not existed before. He roared out Williams’ celebratory terror of sex, its awful truthfulness and its inexorable judgments, and did so with an authority that swept everything before it. Brando was a brute and he bore the truth. (Miller, 2009, x)

The play was an instant success and Brando was singled out by both audience and critics as its major force, proving that the shift in the balanced core continued to happen. Jessica Tandy shared her distress by admitting: “Night after night I had to fight that audience. I had to try to make them be with me, to sit and listen and understand.” She also complained about the way Marlon Brando would play the role in different nights, showing how the actor reacted viscerally to her and the audience he was playing for: “He didn’t have the discipline. When he was tired, as he often was, he played the role tired. When he was bored, and he was often bored, he played the role bored.” (Manso, 1994, 251) Brando’s acting was also far more violent during the shooting of the movie, this time playing against the very different Vivien Leigh, whom he

enjoyed better than Tandy. Manso describes this way his performance in the movie:

Technically he was acting against Leigh’s “Britishness”, but at the same time he capitalized the close-ups, feeling his own flesh, spitting out swearwords in Leigh’s face, wandering across the set like a caged animal, tearing apart her respectability in a way that seemed to turn his rage against himself. It also helped that he thought Leigh was much more sexy than Tandy and that he felt attracted to her. New York Times reviewer Bosley Crowther claimed that Brando’s performance was much more violent in the movie than on the stage. (Manso, 1994, 298)

Harold Clurman, the director of the play on tour, put it in very clear terms when he said Brando had given the character inner suffering beneath his layers of “muscle, slow sensuality and rough energy”. For almost two-thirds of the play, “the audience identifies itself with [him] ... The play becomes the triumph of Stanley Kowalski with the collusion of the audience, which is no longer on the side of the angels. Brando is tough without being irremediably coarse.” (Manso, 1994, 250) Referring specifically to the stairs scene, when Brando calls for Stella after hitting her, Clurman said that Brando’s innate quality and what he believed to be something not quite solved in the stage director’s concept make it moving in a way that is thematically disruptive, that is, it is not weaved into the attribute of the dramatic text that requires Kowalski to always be somewhat vile (Kazan, 1988, 351).

In fact, one of the reasons that made Kazan accept to do the film adaptation (contrary to his usual aversion for repeating things) was precisely his wish to give back the story to Blanche, so to speak, considering that in the movie he would be able to better control things to adjust his vision.

If we read the play’s published text and watch the movie, we get a very different Stanley (and also a somewhat different Blanche) in both cases. As we saw, Williams had problems developing his written version and Brando helped him find the true essence of the character. Brando’s approach was directly related both to his own past and life experience, as well as his unique method of acting, which allowed him to explore

the character in much deeper ways than were usual for the time. That experience, talent, and particular methodology allowed him to be given certain freedoms by the director and the play writer to explore and change the essence of the character, because as Williams described, what was at stake was fidelity to life. All of these are important to understand how he was able to produce “text” in the way he did. Both his training and his sensibility allowed him to search the original text for its hidden messages, dividing it into layers of meaning and intention, just as complex as any human being is. Stanley is not a demon, as Williams didn’t intend him to be. He is a grey human being, full of contradictions, capable of hitting his wife and then crying like a baby for her forgiveness. This is what attracts the audience. They are not watching a coarse, plain mean man, but someone who is filled with layers of different sometimes even opposed feelings. A good example of this is the way he acts the birthday scene, for instance (and we know Williams had a great time watching him rehearse it [Kazan, 1988, 350]), throwing dishes at the wall, giving his “Every man is a king” speech and at the same time looking at both sisters in silence as if he regrets what he just uttered, or maybe thinks they are the ones to blame for his behaviour, or maybe he is not quite sure of what he really means. All of these possibilities are there in his performance, leaving us completely baffled by this man whom we don’t really like but cannot also hate. This rich palette is far more intricate than the reading version and we get a much more subtle and emotional character.

The presence of the author during rehearsals is, in fact, a very important proof of his endorsement of the direction the play was taking, as well as, as shown previously, his reaction to Kazan’s fear of the supposed imbalance in the play. As is Kazan’s claim that you didn’t direct Brando but trusted him with his own choices.

Research suggests that both the stage director and the author admitted a lack of substantiation of their initial intentions. There was a clear disparity between the journey both Williams and Kazan wanted the audience to go through and what really happened – they started by being on

Stanley’s side but instead of abandoning him, would remain with the character until the end.

Another important element to take into consideration is the differences in the acting relationship that occurred with both actresses who played Blanche. As we are told by testimonies, Brando’s characterization of Stanley was much more violent and effective in the movie, which proves again the freedom he was given to work the text, as well as showing how the same text can be influenced by different combinations of elements.

Conclusion

What constitutes a text may be a much broader term than the one traditionally bestowed. A text can assume other formats other than the written version and be produced by others besides the canonical author. And even when it reaches us in a written form, that form may not be its most faithful transcription of the author’s intention.

The consideration of the importance of a text cannot rely solely on it having a written version since there are many examples of texts which were not inscribed in a written format and had nonetheless huge social, cultural and historical impact. Amongst them are the dramatic texts and their counterpart, what in this paper was called “acted texts”. These present interesting particularities, for they are open texts, in constant movement and dealt with by many players. The actor is one of those players, capable of producing “acted text”, a successor of the dramatic text from which it originates and characterized by substantial differences relative to its preceding form.

The activity of acting is a very complex one. As was shown with the case study here presented, the text read and interpreted by the actor is not the same text the actor plays and performs onstage. To the first one, he adds a series of non-written, immaterial elements, such as emotions, gestures, movement or voice, which transform it into a new step, one that can become more faithful to its author’s final intention. The text (the written and uttered words) seems almost the same, but the “text” (the idea, the suggestion, the life inflated into it) is not the same anymore.

The contributions developed by the actor, as seen in the example explored, may have a major

influence on the artwork. A Streetcar Named Desire occupies a certain place in culture and history also because Marlon Brando participated in it. The actor helped shape its identity and created a paradigm of interpretation sometimes even still copied by other actors.

Thus, the text created by the actor, the “acted text”, in certain instances, deserves full attention and in other instances, it may even deserve more attention than the text-source from which it originated.

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