STAGING POWER:

Directing *Princess Ivona* by Witold Gombrowicz

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

THEATER ARTS

by

Lucas Skyler Medina

June 2016

The Thesis of Lucas Skyler Medina

is approved:

__________________________
Professor Patty Gallagher, Chair

__________________________
Professor Kimberly Jannarone

__________________________
Professor Danny Scheie

__________________________
Tyrus Miller

Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODELS OF POWER</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWER IN REHEARSAL</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHY <em>PRINCESS IVONA</em>?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN CONCEPT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASTING</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERPRETING MAJOR CHARACTERS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWER IN PATRIARCHY</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

STAGING POWER:

Directing *Princess Ivona* by Witold Gombrowicz

Lucas Skyler Medina

For my thesis project I chose and was approved to direct *Princess Ivona* in the University of California-Santa Cruz Second Stage¹. Published in 1938 and written by Polish novelist and playwright Witold Gombrowicz, *Princess Ivona* tells the story of how a society, hastily built upon fear-centric oppression, violently reacts when its crooked structure of power is put into question. In this thesis I will recount the production process as it unfolded while examining how power circulates in rehearsal between a director and their collaborators, power as it is represented in the script, and finally how we presented it on stage.

¹ The Second Stage is a two-hundred-seat proscenium theater in the Theater Arts complex of the University of California-Santa Cruz.
MODELS OF POWER

What is power? Merriam-Webster defines power as (1): “the ability to act or produce an effect,” and (2): “possession of control, authority or influence over others.” What the dictionary does not explain is how power is obtained, the manner in which it is used, or how it can flow in a system. Gandhi once claimed: “Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment,” (Gandhi 15). Of course, this is only one side of the spectrum. Alternatively, Niccolò Machiavelli argues: “It is much safer to be feared than loved because ...love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails,” (Machiavelli). Similarly in the theater, every rehearsal room has its own power structure.

In most cases the director is at the top, by the inherent right of their position. They come to the table with their unique vision for the play and relay that vision to the rest of the production team and finally to the actors. It is their responsibility to work with each member of the production and ensure the play maintains a cohesive vision. In some cases there is no director at all, with creative power shared between the actors, and in other cases the director might take total control and nitpick every last aspect of the production.

Edward Gordon Craig, a director of the most tyrannical model, wrote in his 1911 manifesto, On The Art Of Theatre, about a concept called the “Über-marionette.” This term refers to Craig’s ideal performer: “The Über-marionette is the actor plus fire, minus egoism: the fire of the gods and demons, without the smoke and steam of mortality,”
(Craig ix). The definition is unclear but you can infer from his writings that he intends for a living actor with the function of a marionette, to be completely under control of the director as a puppet is to a ventriloquist. Craig argued that since the realistic actor is inevitably at the mercy of their own emotions, their performance can never truly be perfect. Thus, Craig concludes, actors are not true artists and should be replaced by the ideal performer: the Über-marionette. This model represents an extreme of placing absolute power upon the director. Nearly a century later Anne Bogart, founder of the SITI Company would write her own opinions on directing and form an alternative model that borrows some of Craig’s ideas concerning intense specificity but contrarily focuses on empowering the actor.

Published in 2001, Bogart writes in her collection of essays titled, *A Director Prepares*, how art must be violently decisive:

> When an actor achieves a spontaneous, intuitive, or passionate moment in rehearsal, the director utters the fateful words ‘keep it’, eliminating all other potential solutions. These two cruel words, ‘keep it’, plunge a knife into the heart of the actor who knows that the next attempt to re-create that result will be false, affected and lifeless. (Bogart 45)

This model reflects Craig’s in recognizing the impossible task ahead of the actor who attempts to re-create an emotional moment in the false context of the stage. However, Bogart breaks away from Craig through her ultimate faith in the ability of the actor:

> The decisiveness, the cruelty, which has extinguished the spontaneity of the moment, demands that the actor begin an extraordinary work: to resurrect the dead. The actor must now find a new, deeper spontaneity within this set form.
And this, to me, is why actors are heroes. (Bogart 45).

The Bogartian model is a circulation of power. The director first empowers the actor with the freedom to explore spontaneous choices in rehearsal. With the words “keep it,” the director takes power back and limits the actor to that choice. Finally, through the director’s unwavering confidence in the actor’s abilities, the actor regains the power to attempt the impossible.

Since I began practicing theater I have always been attracted to a more inclusive model. When I graduated from Culver City High School, the friends I made in drama class became my company. Under the banner of SKITco we would come together to write, stage, and produce our own original plays. Officially the company name stands for nothing but secretly it breaks down to: “Straight Kickin’ It Theater,” a name that may come off to outsiders as childish and unprofessional but to us it was about how a supportive, friendly environment welcomes artistic risk, boosts creativity, and gives permission to challenge each other recklessly. When I discovered Bogart during my undergraduate years at the University of California-Santa Cruz, I was struck by the similarities to her own company: “I work with a company, the SITI Company, because it is a group of artists who have learned to disagree with one another with generosity. We developed a way to use violence with compassion and kindness,” (Bogart 59). She reaffirmed my beliefs as a director and inspired me to develop my own model further.

Staging *Princess Ivona*, in a sense, was its own laboratory on the circulation of power. Inspired by directors and theorists of the last century, I aimed to create a model closer to Bogart’s, one that champions collaboration, runs on a fair circulation of power,
and works toward bringing out the best in everyone’s potential for the ultimate success of
the production.

POWER IN REHEARSAL

“Fear is the primary enemy of creativity. When an actor approaches his role, it is always
with some degree of fear. One of the jobs of the director is to encourage the actor
to overcome his fear,” (Ball 44).

As a director I aimed to be a facilitator and a curator rather than a dictator. I began
every rehearsal the same way, with what I refer to as a “check-in.” A “check-in” simply
is the cast and director (and whoever else in the room wants to join in) sitting in a circle
(preferably on the floor) and one-by-one answering three questions: “What was the worst
part of your day?” “What was the best part of your day?” and “What are you looking
foreword to?” For the first few rehearsals I would command the cast to join me in the
circle but eventually I would simply sit down and wait for the cast to join me by their
own decision. In this moment there is no separation of power. Through everyday, ritual
repetition of this activity I hoped to establish a comfortable, inclusive environment free of
fear. With five weeks of rehearsal before the addition of technical elements, I divided our
time between script analysis, physicality and movement work, and finally blocking (the
specific choreography of actions on the stage). Not wanting to underestimate the
complexity of Gombrowicz’s text, I primarily dedicated the first week to analyzing and
breaking down the script.

Gombrowicz’s script is dense, to say the least. To fully understand the script and
then be able to communicate it to the audience with clarity requires reducing the play to
its most minute components before reconstructing it into a coherent production. With
such a demanding and difficult process of analysis, I would often find myself with the impulse to simply tell the actors what I think the particular scene is about. The problem with this method is it considerably reduces the actor’s power in the room. The director ends up having to take the actor’s hand, like you would a child, and spoon-feed the scene to them. Don Taylor offers an elegant solution to this predicament in his book Directing Plays with why questions:

By using this technique and carefully structuring his why questions, the director can lead the actor by a Socratic method of question and answer, to the interpretation of the scene he wants. The great advantage will be that the actor will feel that he has achieved the answer by his own creative efforts – as indeed in one sense he has. But you, as director, will have carefully eased him towards his desired destination. Something you have discovered for yourself always means more than something you have been told. If you lead your actors towards moments of self-discovery, their work will be much more convincing, to themselves, to you, and to the audience than if, like so many theatrical parrots, they are just acting what you have told them to act. (Taylor 135)

This simple method returns power to the actor, builds trust, and promotes a deeper understanding of the play. The next phase of rehearsal involved exploratory blocking and extensive work with physicality. Since my background in physical theater is almost entirely based in Anne Bogart and Tina Landau’s Viewpoints, that is what I primarily used.

---

2 A master director/playwright who previously ran the First Writes Theatre Company in London and directed their inaugural production of Retreat from Moscow, at The New End Theatre in Hampstead.
Viewpoints is a “philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage” (Bogart & Landau, 7). Viewpoints are categorized by time, which includes Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, and Space – Shape, Gesture, Architecture, Spatial Relationship, and Topography. Beyond their purposed value in creating movement, viewpoints additionally can be useful in empowering the actor to find further spontaneity in their characters and relationships without the constraint of the text: “Viewpoints relieves the pressure to have to invent by yourself, to generate all alone... It helps us trust in letting something occur onstage, rather than making it occur... It frees us from the statement: ‘My character would never do that’” (Bogart & Landau 19). Once the actors become familiar with the vocabulary they are able to engage in “open viewpoint sessions,” where the director takes a seat and gives the actors free space to experiment and make their own discoveries. In the first round of blocking I made sure to save the first hour of every rehearsal (after check-in) for viewpoint experimentation. The actual blocking of the play would be the most challenging aspect of the production.

When it comes to blocking I find my style closely inspired by the words of William Ball. Bill Ball, founder of the American Conservatory Theatre (A.C.T) in San Francisco, writes about the simple yet effective principle of “positation,” or saying yes to every creative idea, as a method of ensuring successful collaboration. While this method seems outrageous and impractical at first, Ball argues that it is actually the most creative:

We say yes because we understand that to do so is the practical way of sending a message to the intuition that every creative idea will be valued, respected, and used; and when the intuition gets that message often enough, it will send us its
most perfect and its most pure creative ideas. That is why, whether we like it or not, saying yes to everything is the most creative technique an artist can employ.

(Ball 19)

The greatest challenge in this method as a director is maintaining patience and creativity. As someone who is only a student of directing working with actors who are still students of their own craft, sometimes my patience was tested.

With the blocking finished, I found our next greatest challenge was getting the show up to a reasonable pace. The play is unarguably text-heavy and I found the actors were slowing down their performance in an attempt to bring more meaningful intention to the words. After various failed tactics and with only two days until the show premiered, I had the actors rehearse particularly sluggish scenes as fast as possible so they could find a middle ground between the different speeds. In a typical process, the final rehearsals usually go un-interrupted in order to create a situation as close to the actual performance as possible. As the director, as the one in power, I felt it was my responsibility to do whatever it took for the success of the production, even if it meant breaking from traditional sanctity. In our second to last rehearsal I attempted this speed exercise and immediately felt a sense of fear and distrust begin to emerge amongst the cast. When a particular actor still would not speed up, the stage manager yelled at them from across the theater to go faster. The actor stopped in the middle of the scene, dumbfounded that someone had interrupted them, turned to the stage manager and said, “What?” The structure of power we had built over the previous weeks seemed to wane in that moment and threaten to fall apart. The next day before our final rehearsal I gathered the cast together in the dressing room. Instead of pointing blame I apologized and took
ownership for the incident. I thanked them for their work and told them that my job was finished and I would no longer be offering direction, handing the actors complete power. They responded with understanding and appreciation, and the growth in that final rehearsal was remarkable.

**WHY PRINCESS IVONA?**

“The process begins with the selection of a play to direct... Whatever the reasons that influence the decision, the act of choice is crucial. If you get it wrong at this first stage, the chances of success shrink alarmingly, if they aren’t already negligible,” (Taylor 46).

The level of oppression embedded into the society of this play is so horrific that it begs the question of why someone would possibly want to write it. When I discovered *Princess Ivona* was first written in Warsaw, 1933, it began to make sense. In January of that same year Adolf Hitler would be appointed Chancellor of Germany and by the next year he would be the country’s President and absolute dictator. While the Nazis would not invade Poland until 1939 (one year after *Ivona* is first published) a culture of corruption and oppression had already begun to germinate. In this play we see a situation familiar to 1933 Poland: a fierce dictatorship ruling over a society rooted in conformity and façade. A kingdom obsessed with upholding image at all costs, even to monstrous ends.

Witold Gombrowicz himself was born on August 4th, 1904 to a wealthy, land-owning noble family. Born into the upper echelon, Witold was able to recognize the outrageous class difference separating him from his less fortunate friends:
In theory I was the leader, the young master, a higher being born to command. In practice, all the attributes of my superiority—my shoes, my scarf, my governess, and, horror of horrors, my galoshes—thrust me into the depths of mortification; and it was with a surreptitious, carefully concealed admiration that I regarded the bare feet and coarse shirts of my subordinates. At about the age of ten, I had discovered something awful: that we ‘masters’ were an utterly grotesque and ludicrous phenomenon, something foolish, painfully comic, and even abhorrent.

(Gombrowicz, Johnston)

Living through the Bolshevik revolution and the dissolution of Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary’s rule over Poland causes a strong questioning of authority to brew within Witold from a young age; existential quandaries regarding superiority and inferiority became a staple of his work, which can be seen clearly in Ivona.

Understanding the history behind the play allows you to understand the crucial need for art that questioned the same authoritarian values prevalent of the Polish 1920’s and 30’s. In modern times Poland has regained a democratic system of government, Hitler is dead, but these same values continue to plague people across the planet. From the Syrian conflict, to ISIS attacks, to police brutality, to rape and sexual assault, and all the way down to school bullying, you can always find corruption of power and blind conformity in the roots of the problem. I chose to direct this play with the hopes of challenging people to question power when it is misused to instill fear and diminish free thought.

**DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT**

In directing this play I wanted to create an abstract world focused on using visual
symbolism to amplify the poetry of the script. Additionally, I felt that through a more abstract staging of this play the audience would be able to more safely view the violence embedded into the story. Anne Bogart, founder of the SITI Company says in her book *A Director Prepares*: “One cannot look directly at the truly big human issues anymore than one can look directly at the sun. In order to see the sun you look slightly to the side... In art and theatre we use metaphor as the thing to the side,” (Bogart 57). Violence in this play, particularly sexual violence, is an unavoidable subject. According to the National Sexual Violence Recourse Center, in the United States “one in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives.” Even more relevant to this production: “One in 5 women and one in 16 men are sexually assaulted while in college” but, “more than 90% of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report the assault.” Out of respect for the relevance of this issue, and every big issue in the play, I wanted to portray the violence realistically and yet also through an abstract, symbolic lens to cater to the audience’s sensitivities. Specifically in acting I accomplished this by applying viewpoints to create stylized physicality and movement.

For example the character of “Lord Chamberlain” is the metaphorical right hand of the King who constantly demands order and obedience. Through open viewpoint sessions I noticed the actor in that role finding a natural attraction to the viewpoint of topography (the floor pattern or design one makes when traveling through space). We decided the “Lord Chamberlain” would only move in straight lines and hard angles to reflect the rigidity in his character’s philosophy. Relating to power, this decision would also restrict this character’s movement while the more powerful “King Ignatius” can move in any direction at any time.
Another example is with the nature of “Ivona.” “Ivona” is described in the script as having a deficiency called “sluggishness of the blood.” We decided to apply this to her movement. “Ivona” would mostly stay stationary but when she absolutely had to move it would be with the slow lethargy of a slug. While this choice limits her even more extremely than “the Chamberlain,” it actually has an inverse effect on her power. By not being able to move unless out of necessity, “Ivona” began to act like much like a king would in a game of chess (not the “King Ignatius” of this play). In order to interact with her the other characters are forced to come to her or revolve around her.

Physical acting was also crucial in establishing the authority of the “King” and “Queen.” Whenever a character approached or exited from the monarchs they would bow or curtsey depending on their gender. If the character stood in their presence then their posture would stiffen with attention. When “Ivona” refuses to conform to this behavior it singles her out even further.

**DESIGN CONCEPT**

I always aimed at being as collaborative and open-minded as possible when it came to the design development. By encouraging freedom in the design team I hoped to simultaneously gain their trust and incite their most creative ideas. Don Taylor in *Directing Plays*: “The Director, like a spider at the centre of a web, reacts to the least touch on the silk, and has ultimate control of what all his collaborators do, so the overall vision is still his,” (Taylor 129). The director inspired by Edward Gordon Craig might advocate for stricter obedience from designers to ensure a cohesive vision but Taylor insists that since the director holds the final or “ultimate” say in all decisions, you can maintain unity of concept through the smallest thread of control.
Beyond further establishing this abstract world, design would also contribute to the presentation of power on stage.

COSTUMES:

In an early discussion with the costume designer (Ashley Neto-Mannina) we decided on a grayscale color scheme to accentuate the kingdom’s repressive culture with splashes of red on Ivona to symbolize the violence done to her and her lasting defiance against it. The red in her costume hid underneath the black in sections that had to be physically ripped away to reveal them.

The clothing itself would consist of sharp, clean, corporate attire resembling the ruthless and corrupt businessmen of Wall Street.

SET

Set design (Tony Parker) furthered the motif with black and white checkered platforms creating an image of the characters as pieces on a board. The platforms varied in height, allowing for actors to gain status by literally standing above others. Stained-glass windows hung over the platforms with figures of judgment gazing downward on the cast and audience alike. On the sides of the stage we decided on façade trees for characters to hide behind or spy from to parallel the social facades they use in similar ways.

PROPS

Props would be minimal and symbolic when used. For example, we decided to endow the King’s crown with supernatural power as a symbol of ultimate authority. Whenever the King wore the crown it would be proceeded by the chamberlain ritually kneeling before him as a dramatic soundscape played. I chose to add cellphones to the
play to show how technology and particularly portable technology has an undeniable stranglehold on modern, first-world culture. I also decided to give King Ignatius an "easy button." A silly enough prop to fit the script's tone while elegantly summing up the King's philosophy regarding politics and life in general: always the easiest solution first. Furthermore, the button gave the king the ability to trigger his own sound cues such as laugh tracks or a thunderstorm, giving him additional power over the rest of the characters.

LIGHTING & SOUND

Lighting and sound accentuate tone and mood over practicality. With every entrance of the royal court, a horn flourish would play to both alert the audience of their entrance and signal the characters already on stage to adjust their physicality or bow in preparation. In Ivona’s final entrance we used the distorted sound of clock tower ringing to draw attention to her. Throughout the entire play a dim spotlight followed Ivona to further establish her otherness.

CASTING

This script calls for approximately 27 characters, plus or minus a few ladies, courtiers, and dignitaries, and I chose to use 12 actors to represent them. Besides the obvious practicalities of casting 27 actors, I think dual-casting actors is necessary for handling the humor and absurdity of this script. Each of the ensemble actors played a minimum of three roles with a few of them playing even four or five. Although in the script these characters are entirely different people I had the actors handle them as if they were the same person. For example the actor playing the Beggar in the first act also played the servant Checkers, Supreme Judge, and a Guest in the final banquet scene. I
worked with the actors to create a story that allowed them to make sense of that character’s journey through their different roles. I figured having one developed character rather than various shallow ones would be more interesting to perform and to observe. I also made the choice to keep the characters as their implied gender.

The theatre, on the other hand, is one of the few professions in which talent really does matter more than gender. Real talent is always in such short supply, that when it appears, no one cares whether x or y chromosomes are dominant. (Taylor VI)

In most cases I would agree with Taylor in that it is best to cast the most skilled actor for the part regardless of gender but in this play sexual violence and misogyny are such unavoidable themes that I felt it was to our advantage to keeps roles gender specific to effectively tackle the gender issues.

**INTERPRETING MAJOR CHARACTERS**

**IVONA**

In directing this play, the interpretation of Ivona (the character) has to be treated carefully and with clear intention because she is at the center of every action and thus often the most powerful character on stage. As the other, Ivona finds her own power in rejecting the rules of her society. The first major decision of this production came in interpreting her debatable appearance.

While Gombrowicz does describe her in the A Kind of Testament interview as “charmless” and “unattractive,” she is never actually described in the script, or at least objectively. While almost all the characters berate her for her physical repulsiveness it is difficult to trust their opinions, as they each have their own agenda and often insult her to
distract others from noticing their own insecurities. In the second act, Prince Philip, the heir to the kingdom and protagonist of the play, even rebukes the general opinion by comparing her to other girls of the court:

“PHILIP: You are right. I beg your forgiveness. Look, Simon, isn’t it amazing? Her nose is well proportioned, and she is not brainless. In fact, she is not a bit worse than many of the girls we know. But nobody would dream of teasing others as they tease you, would they? Why are you the scapegoat? Has it become a habit?”

“Philip” hits the nail on the head with the word “scapegoat,” in that Ivona being outcast probably has little to do with her physical beauty. Since Gombrowicz does not offer a certain answer in the text, and since her appearance seems irrelevant to her situation anyway, I decided to present “Ivona” as neither distinctly “ugly” nor “beautiful,” but just different. From this decision, Ashley Neto-Mannina (costumes/make-up designer) and myself came up with the solution to exclude Ivona from the grey make-up of the court. This design choice was successful because it clearly presents Ivona as the other in her society while articulating the dystopian nature of the court.

After appearance, the next thing to understand about “Ivona” is how her power comes from her relationship to the other characters of the play. This relationship is a complicated one but we can begin to understand it through this quote from Carl Jung:

Whoever looks into the mirror of the water will see first of all his own face.
Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show
to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the
mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face. (Jung)

“Ivona” essentially does nothing throughout the play; so like a mirror, the key to
portraying her power is in how others react to her. In order to show this visually, I
focused on the viewpoint of special-relationship.

In Act One the “Prince” and his friends sit at a distance laughing and making fun
of her but once they approach they immediately are at a loss of what to say. In Act Three
the “King” is forced to spend time alone with “Ivona” after avoiding her for most of the
story. The close contact between them sparks memories of when the “King” raped and
murdered a similar looking girl in his youth and written in the stage directions is "Ivona
backs away forcefully." When characters are closest to “Ivona” they face their deepest
fears and insecurities; thus, the more distance allowed from “Ivona,” the more intense
that relationship can become once they approach her. To maximize this effect, I blocked
“Ivona” near the center of the stage as much as possible.

PRINCE PHILIP

I would argue “Prince Philip” is the protagonist of the play. While the play’s
action revolves around Ivona, it is “Philip’s” decision to propose to her that sets the plot
in motion. Additionally, “Philip” seems to be the only one who experiences any change
in character over the course of the play. “Philip’s” power comes unearned as being born
the prince but Gombrowicz made the interesting decision to make “Philip” aware of that.
This causes “Philip” to question himself existentially throughout the play and seek out
something that will give him deserved power. “Philip” exclaims in Act Two after
proposing to “Ivona:"
“Philip: Apparently it is necessary to find someone truly inferior to appreciate one’s own excellence. To be a prince in name is nothing – to be a prince in essence, it’s heaven, its pure joy.”

While “Ivona” finds power in her singularity, the other major characters are able to find strength in the people beneath them. For “Philip” that person is primarily his friend “Simon.” “Simon” acts almost as a conscience for “Philip” or a board for him which to bounce his ideas off of. To show this on stage I often blocked “Simon” to follow behind “Philip” or mirror his movements.

QUEEN MARGARET

“Margaret” represents insecurity within the play. As the Queen, she seems to hold considerable power but within a moment is reduced to a mindless puppet by her husband “Ignatius” and forced to serve the patriarchy. Like her son “Philip”, “Margaret” initially has doubts regarding “Ivona’s” murder but ultimately surrenders under the pressure of “Ignatius’s” authority mixed with her own fears and anxieties.

As “Simon” is to “Philip,” “Isobel” is to “Margaret.” “Isobel” is the lady in waiting to the “Queen” and generally when she is on stage it is usually to serve her mistress. While “Simon” and “Philip” can get away with more friendly interactions, the relationship between “Isobel” and “Margaret” is much more professional. The only moment this relationship changes is in the third act when “Margaret” interrogates “Isobel” about the “Queen’s” poetry:

“Queen: Look, tell me frankly as if I weren’t the Queen. I am releasing you temporarily, of course, from all the deference due to me. Tell me the truth.”
In this example I had blocked the Queen on a higher platform until descending down on her line “I am releasing you...” to use the height difference as a visual metaphor of their power dynamic.

**KING IGNATIUS**

“Ignatius” is a two-faced, Machiavellian tyrant who wields unchecked power through deception and fear. Often masquerading as silly and benevolent, he shows his true colors in Acts Three and Four as a ruthless murderer and misogynist. In sculpting his character I worked with the actor playing him to flush out his two personalities and be able to switch between them on a dime.

“Ignatius’” supporting character is the “Lord Chamberlain.” The “Chamberlain” serves to bolster the “King’s” power when they are on stage together or to enforce the “King’s” authority when the “King” is not present. Within the spatial viewpoint of gesture there are behavioral and expressive gestures. Repeating expressive gestures such as a raised fist or a pointed finger between the two of them was very useful to show visually how the “Chamberlain” relays the “King’s” power.

**POWER THROUGH PATRIARCHY**

To understand Princess Ivona you need to understand the model of power that runs its society. In the world of this play, power is almost exclusively obtained through social hierarchy, in this case a patriarchy. Men literally rule this kingdom while women are secondary at best. Until “Ivona”, the most powerful woman in the play is “Queen Margaret,” who has only found power through her marriage to the “King.”

In the first act we see primarily how the misogynistic culture broods within the younger generation:
“CYPRIAN: Action, action! Gloriously, deliriously. We are young, we are men. We are young men. Let us be young men and give work to the clergy so that they can be clergy. That’s what I call a proper division of labour.

SIMON: Look at that elegant and seductive siren. Look at those legs!

PHILIP: Oh no. Not again? Not the same old thing?

CYPRIAN: No? But why not? Of course, again and again. What would she think if we just let her pass?”

“Cyprian” argues from a perspective of male-privilege, that as it is the duty of the clergy to administer religious rites such as marriages then as men it is their duty to catcall and harass the passing women. In her famous opinion essay White Privilege and Male Privilege Peggy McIntosh, associate director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, describes how “Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is, in fact, permission to escape or to dominate.” This behavior of domination becomes an escalating trend throughout the rest of the play.

In the second act “Philip” and “Simon” lead “Ivona” inside the castle and “Philip” determines she loves him simply because she doesn’t say she does not love him. It should be noted that consent for any romantic or sexual act is never given by any female character throughout the entire play. In the third act we witness a particularly sadistic exchange between “Prince Philip” and “Isobel:”

“ISOBEL: Let me go.

PHILIP: Oh, with her one can do just as one pleases. (Kisses her on the lips) Ah, delightful.

ISOBEL (Struggling): I will scream.
PHILIP: But I am telling you, you can do as you like with her. I am sorry, I did not mean you, didn’t want to, really. It just happened…I am sorry. What have I done? I have behaved like a fool again.

ISOBEL: The impertinence.

PHILIP: I beg you not to tell anyone. If my fiancée were to hear of it she would be hurt. Hurt, hurt, hurt, hurt.

ISOBEL: But let me go, Your Highness.

PHILIP (Still holding her): In a moment…hurt. (Kisses her) What a nose, what a lovely mouth you have. Don’t go. I believe I am being unfaithful. It’s terrible…It’s glorious. It’s so easy.”

What was fun and games in the first act escalates to full on sexual abuse by the third. In staging this particular scene I kept it exactly as it’s written, with the prince physically holding on to “Isobel” for the entire scene and actually kissing her against her will. I wanted to portray this moment the way it would happen in real life to convey how serious sexual violence actually is. In the next act I took a slightly more abstract approach with a very similar scene between the “King” and “Queen:”

“QUEEN: I am not going to serve pike. Don’t drive me out of my mind, I am not going to serve anything of the sort. Why pike? It’s unheard of, the whole thing. Why should I serve pike?

KING: What! Temper! (To CHAMBERLAIN) Give me the crown. (Puts it on)


KING: Margaret, if I tell you to serve pike you will serve pike. Don’t bicker or I will crown you. I can crown you. I can crown you for I am a sinner. I can do anything and you tremble before me for I am a sinner. I am the king of sin, get that, I am the king of rot and sin, of rape and groan.

QUEEN (Terrified): Ignatius.

KING: Oh well…now, now…serve pike. Invite all the elderly statesmen, all those old experienced intimidators, you know, the old boys who would paralyze the devil himself with fright. (In a lower voice) Margaret, enough of all this
shyness, fear, shame, do you understand? Enough poetry, flexibility, pliability. You are not a chicken, you are a lady, the Queen. You should not flop. The others have to bend, not you, remember. Now go and wash yourself, you are looking like nothing on earth, you slattern. Put on your damask dress – show what you can do, old girl. Get a move on. Pull yourself together – a gracious bearing and tact and a royal manner – a general refinement is what you are for, after all. Tell your wenches to put on their best front too. Now, get along – you understand? You have to put up a first class performance, you and your women – they are to be ladies and not sluts. Get the guests and the food and don’t bother about the rest, I will deal with that. And remember – grandly, grandly, royally. One, two, three – majesty. Now go, you slavey. (Exit the QUEEN, covering her face) Lord Chamberlain… (Nudges him)

In this scene we see “King Ignatius” completely reduce “Margaret’s” power to nil while reinstating his patriarchal rule. I saw this scene as an opportunity to draw a parallel between the father and son and how they abuse their power to mistreat and dominate women. In this scene I used a small amount of stage combat (choreographed violence) to heighten “Ignatius’” power and diminish “Margaret’s.” In the beginning of the “King’s” speech we decided to have him slap “Margaret” (no actual contact), bringing her to her knees from both emotional and physical recoil. Over the rest of the speech “Ignatius” would stand behind “Margaret” (as “Philip” stood behind Isobel in the previous scene) and use each line to bring her back up, program, and reshape her for his own purposes. Literally, the actor playing “Ignatius” would position her body while the actress playing “Margaret” would respond as a stiff doll and hold the position he placed her into. Finally, with her mouth positioned into a Barbie-like smile, “Margaret” would exit to dutifully carry out her husband’s orders.

The first scene of act four is the only time we get to glimpse how the government is actually run. In the script the scene unfolds with the “King” entering followed by the “Chancellor,” “Marshal,” and “Supreme Judge,” who take turns raising issues particular
to their division of government. One by one, Ignatius responds with his decision to which the dignitaries reply: “This is just the decision we had expected your Majesty would take in your superior wisdom.” Finally the “Supreme Judge” submits a signed petition begging mercy on behalf of a wrongfully convicted man. “The King” has him hang anyway and declares, “the prerogative of mercy is mine to use just as I like; I make use of it by not using it,” to which the dignitaries respond with their same, obedient line. Using “Ignatius’” established patriarchal philosophy, I chose to cast the dignitaries as women and dress them in short-cut dresses rather than professional attire to motivate his lack of respect for their positions. Additionally I felt this scene was a perfect opportunity to highlight political misogyny.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this year I was able to experience power from different perspectives. In this production of Princess Ivona, we used a blend of naturalistic and non-naturalistic elements to best depict the story and show how power can be abused to harm and control others.

Off stage, a director’s power comes inherent with the position but instead of holding onto that power as the Machiavellian “King Ignatius” might, I strove to share it with the actors and production team out of hope to create better results through positive means. Although, I learned that giving an actor or designer too much freedom can be potentially paralyzing in the face of such an intricate and perplexing script, and sometimes it is necessary to provide limitations in order to kick-start creativity. As an assistant director for ShakesToGo and as a directing intern with the Jewel Theatre
Company, I found opportunities to make significant contributions despite my subordinate position because of similar empowerment strategies employed by my directors.

Whether you are ruling a kingdom or directing a play, power is never something to take lightly. *Princess Ivona* begs us to question where power comes from in our society, to reconsider how it is then used, and finally double-check how we fit in and contribute to that system. When someone is being oppressed we are reminded to look in the mirror and see if we are actually the oppressor.
Bibliography


