

Sid Homan Spotlight Transcription

Q: What keeps you in the moment as a teacher?

Sid

I was lecturing one day, of course on Shakespeare's Othello. And the question was "What does Iago the villain do what he does, why this insane case against Desdemona? What's his motivation? And I had fifty minutes to lecture, I had five points to make. So I allocated exactly 10 minutes for each point. And as the first ten minutes was "Iago does what he does for the reasons he gives." he's frustrated he hasn't been promoted to the position of lieutenant, and he thinks that Othello is having relations with his middle-aged wife Amelia.

(00:49) And since Iago says, "I am not what I am" anything that Iago says you might want to discount. In other words, I was spending the first ten minutes on the most obvious motives for Iago. And then once we get onto one, two, three, or number five. But I was just about to finish up when this kid gets up from the back of the lecture and says "Just a second Sid!" He comes down and joins me in the front of the lecturer. He says "I want to spend some more time on this first one that you seem willing to dismiss. Iago does what he does for the reasons that he gives." So what do you mean? The kid responds: "Well, he thinks that Othello is having relations with Amelia. Why would he want to have relations with a middle aged woman when he has a brand new bride?" And the kid starts arguing with me and as he's arguing, I get fascinated by his mind and I find myself starting to support him. Now we're like musicians playing a duet. We're both pulling evidence from the play.

(1:55) Now we're saying when Othello...When Iago says to Othello: "Beware of Jealousy!" Iago is really talking about himself, and the kid says "Iago's lonely, it's not that his wife is having relations with Othello, Iago THINKS he is." In other words, Iago is a victim of the same suspicions that he is trying to plant in Othello. And Iago needs a buddy. So now the fifty minutes are up. I don't get to 2-5 and two wonderful things happened from that. Well, three. One was that kid, Duwan was thrilled that someone would sort of Jam with him on stage. Two, boy, when I think of Othello now-a-days I think in terms of that conversation we had. He literally shaped my thinking. The third one is great. Duwan is an African American Actor and I was about to cast for Hamlet, So I cast him as Hamlet. He says: "Why did you cast me as Hamlet, Sid?" And I said: "Well I just like the idea of a black guy playing Hamlet who is wearing black on the outfit and everyone else is white." he responds: "Is that the only reason!?" So I say "No that's not the ultimate reason Duwan, the ultimate reason is that you're a very good actor and you have a fantastic mind. I know you're the only person who has ever come up to me in the middle of lecture and changed it." I mean, I love moments like that.

Q: How do you portray your passion in teaching?

Sid:

(3:40) I just find everything fascinating. And that's a hell of a way to answer a good question. Part of me, and this might seem a little *Fakey*. But I like to instill life with maybe more than what is really there. I like to enhance it. And sometimes I'm just very conscious that I am doing it.

(4:38) That's where the theatre, working with theatre, work with language, work with language enhances something. Makes it finer than it is. And to some degree it's false, it's fake, the reason we're conscious of it. But there's a degree to it where I am unconscious of it. I find myself trying everything I can to make this profession of mine, the theatre, language, words, as useful as possible. As useful as possible. And that means it's political in the largest sense of that word. If I thought for a second the theatre was just entertainment, something you do at the end of a busy day, oh, I would be back installing telephones in south philadelphia.

Q: Describe a magical moment you had as a professor.

Sid:

(5:38) I did an evening, a show that I often done a lot called "An evening with Shakespeare" where we have high points in these plays. And I had a bunch of graduate students as my actors. And one of the graduate students was blind. She had been blind from birth. She had a wonderful name: Francesca Marinara. Beautiful, very Italian, we used to kid her endlessly about that. I asked her to play Cleopatra in that great speech as the end of Antony and Cleopatra. Anthony is dead at her feet, Caesar has made her an offer. If she comes to rome as his mistress, he won't kill her, he'll set her up in a nice mansion for the rest of her life. So she's now caught between her life here and the life in Rome. Of course the actor for Cleopatra in Shakespeare's day was a young boy, Not made to look particularly feminine just a dress hanging. And the clowns just brought in a basket of Asps, poisonous snakes, and she is thinking about taking her own life.

(6:56) She decides not to go to Rome because she says after a while will tire of her and start making playing about me and comedies and she says "Some squeaky cleopatra will blind my greatness." Of course it's a boy playing cleopatra and his voice hasn't changed. My favorite moment is when she takes first asp, which in shakespeare's day was probably a piece of rope. Takes the asp and puts it to her left breast. And you speak about language framing something? She says: "It's as a lover's pinch which hurts and is desired." And then she turns to the second asp and she picks it up. "Nay Antony I will have thee too." My god she's translated the two instruments of death into a baby and her husband and she stands there like this and I remember Francesca did this. She looks out at the audience, Of course she is just looking straight ahead, but not seeing the audience. She's holding the two asps, baby and husband, a nuclear family, and her final line before she dies is: "Why should I stay?" And I asked Francesca "What does that mean to you?" She replied "Sid, I am in some blissful period. I have everything I

could want. My child, my husband, and my question is in fact. I have everything I want out of life, why do I need to be here any longer?" It was so great, why should I stay?

(8:57) Francesca's interpretation of that moment, it came entirely from her. Wow! It affects my thinking about that. Forever and ever and ever.

Q: If you could give one tip or Golden Nugget, what would it be?

Sid:

(9:15) There's this wonderful girl, she never participated in class, but every once in awhile she would just get up from her seat, stand very firm and she did it whenever I was just getting too fond of myself. Too much enraptured with my own voice. Which you saw a perfect example this afternoon. Where I was very much the graduate student, leading these tiny little undergrads. When ever I got too vain or proud, she'd get up hands on hips and look at me and say: "Aw, go on!" Then she'd sit down. You never knew when that was coming. But it always came at just the right moment. SHe always sort of jerked me back to reality, you know? I never knew what happened to her, but i'll always imagine when I am teaching, I imagine there's her ghost there. And boy when I forget myself, when I make myself more important than what's happening in the class. When I find myself trying to beat down a student's opinion that disagrees with me. When I find myself getting stupidly frustrated with a student because she isn't responding to the intricasy of the players art. Whenever that happens and it happens sometimes, I always imagine that girl's ghost speaking to me: "Awwww, go on!" She'd say. Keeps me honest.