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TAILOR TEACHING TO ASD STUDENTS WITH SUSIE FLINTHAM AND CHARLOTTE ROBERTS
TALK BACK TO *OTHELLO* WITH AMY SMITH, HER STUDENTS AND JUVENILE OFFENDERS
TOUR THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY PROMPT BOOKS WITH ADAM MATTHEW

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SHARE YOUR VIEWS

With *Teaching Shakespeare* now firmly in double figures, we thought this would be a good time to check in with our readers and ask for your views on and experiences with us. A ten-question survey which should take no more than ten minutes of your time to answer, to help us serve the BSA community even better, can be found at: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/JRDLVHL

SHARED FUTURES

The BSA will front a day of panels at the Shared Futures conference organized by the English Association and University English, 5–7 July 2017, Newcastle, UK. On Thursday 6th July, our panels will include *Why Shakespeare Now?* and *Sharing Shakespeare's Language*. Additionally, Wednesday 5th July features a panel on *Shakespearean Futures 400+*. www.englishsharedfutures.uk

SHAKESPEARE AND CREATIVITY

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, in collaboration with the BSA, is organising a Teachers' Conference on Shakespeare and Creativity from Thursday 3rd August to Saturday 5th August 2017. Taking place at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford upon Avon, it is designed for teachers of English and Drama in primary and secondary schools. Delegates will immerse themselves in Shakespeare with expert lectures, directing workshops, activities to take back to the classroom, performances of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, post-show discussion and Q&A session, and a visit to Shakespeare's Birthplace. For full programme details and fees visit: www.shakespeare.org.uk www.britishshakespeare.ws

THE BSA CONFERENCE

The BSA is proud to announce the locations, institutional partners and themes of its next three conferences:

- **SHAKESPEARE STUDIES TODAY**
14–17 June 2018, Queen's University, Belfast
- **SHAKESPEARE: RACE AND NATION**
July 2019, Swansea University
- **SHAKESPEARE IN ACTION**
July 2020, University of Surrey

The BSA conference is the largest regular Shakespeare conference in the United Kingdom, bringing together researchers, teachers, and theatre practitioners from all over the world to share the latest work on Shakespeare and his contemporaries. From 2018, the BSA conference will become an annual event, having previously been held every two years. The BSA is delighted that high demand has enabled us to increase the frequency of this, our flagship event. BSA conferences include a wide range of sessions and events, including academic lectures by internationally renowned Shakespeare critics, talks by celebrated practitioners and practical workshops. The BSA welcomes contributions from scholars, students, teachers, theatre practitioners, community workers and others with a shared interest in Shakespeare. The call for papers for Belfast 2018 will be posted soon on www.britishshakespeare.ws

EUROPEAN THEATRICAL CULTURES

Shakespeare and European Theatrical Cultures: An Atomizing Text and Stage takes place 27–30 July 2017 in Gdańsk, Poland. This conference will convene Shakespeare scholars at a theatre dedicated to Shakespeare that proudly stands in the place where English players regularly performed 400 years ago. It ponders with renewed interest the relation between theatre and Shakespeare. His work has informed educational traditions, and, through forms of textual transmit has actively contributed to the process of building national distinctiveness. Papers and seminars will address the uses of Shakespeare in theatrical cultures across Europe and beyond, with a focus on textual/performative practices, the educational dimension of Shakespeare in theatre, the interface between text, film and stage productions, his impact on popular culture, Shakespearean traces in European collective and individual memory, and his broader cultural legacy. For further information, see: www.esra2017.eu



teaching shakespeare IN HANOI

WE'RE CELEBRATING our first summer issue, so let me take you to meet Shakespeare somewhere indisputably hot. In September 2016, I visited Hanoi to find out what Shakespeare is taught and experienced in the capital city of Vietnam, a metropolis whose contact with, sometimes occupation by, China, France and Japan is still tangible and where remnants of the 'American War' remain central to national heritage sites. Hanoi is the first city of a country whose government embraced foreign investment – and accepted the many other influences that would entail – in the free-market reforms (Đổi Mới) of the 1990s, after five decades of communist, nationalist rule. I talked to current university English literature students, such as CTP Oanh, TN Anh, as well as the journalist and translator LQ Minh, who majored in Chinese at university. I am hugely grateful for the time and care they took in answering my questions.

Minh told me that Shakespeare is famous in Vietnam, particularly his comedies and tragedies. Although the students I spoke to first recalled hearing of Shakespeare in the media, on film or stage around the ages of 13–15, Minh associated Shakespeare with middle-aged audiences who have leisure time, enjoy bookstores, and use him as a way to maintain brain function. However, theatre productions of Shakespeare were seen by these young people as increasingly under threat from cinema, which is 'easier to understand'. Films imported from Korea and the US are particularly popular and those I spoke to could recall popular films of *Romeo and Juliet* with Western celebrity actors. Another hurdle for Shakespeare's place in Vietnam, as perceived by these young people, was that English culture and news does not attract the same following as American. The Premier League was one possible exception.

English is compulsory from first grade at school into university. Shakespeare features in young people's lives as part of Literature classes, usually translated into – and with instruction in – Vietnamese. School Shakespeare involves

studying excerpts in textbooks such as the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* in eleventh grade as part of a unit of work named 'love and hatred' or 'love and revenge' (I'm not sure whether the difference depends on individuals' different recollections or translations). Many of those I spoke to felt that the play's love theme was important to motivating young adults to engage with the text. School students become familiar with the plot of the play and the feud between the families, but not so much the detail of the play. Shakespeare is likely to occupy just a couple of periods, perhaps three hours of class time at most, although it was suggested that this varies depending on the teacher's own interest in Western versus Vietnamese literature. Some high school students might be involved in staging productions of plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, but parents tend to emphasise the importance of succeeding in subjects such as mathematics, chemistry and English over dramatic endeavours (not so different from the treatment of the arts in the UK school system identified by Susie Flintham in this issue). Shakespeare is part of preparation for university entrance examinations. He is read as one among several world authors. For example, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* might represent the US contribution to literature and be read alongside works from India, Russia and China (five years ago the study of Chinese literature and language was outstripping the popularity of others with school and university students



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“Shakespeare is likely to occupy just a couple of periods – perhaps three hours of class time at most, although it was suggested that this varies depending on the teachers’ own interest in western versus Vietnamese literature.”

because of the country’s rising economic power globally, but Western, Japanese and Korean multinational graduate employers are the most desirable destinations). Teaching methods for Shakespeare involve giving a brief overview of Shakespeare’s life and the play, students reading printed materials from which to extract information about the play, sharing this in class discussion, and listening at length to the teacher’s analysis of the extract, taking copious notes on this. One anonymous student recalled the class being asked to give presentations on the play in small groups, adding that ‘the presentations were unsatisfactory so teacher had to go through each works and left some comments’. It was ambiguous as to whether the student wanted to highlight here the value of their teacher’s feedback or the dispiriting experience for the class of being deemed not up to scratch. Once at university, English literature majors engage with Shakespeare in more detail and in unmodernised English (students using modern English translations or adaptations was vehemently frowned upon by faculty in the university English department that I visited). There are also plenty of clubs and societies for students to get involved with although dancing, football and other sports are favoured

over drama, except in universities with an explicit arts focus. Facility in English is highly valued by the middle-class population in terms of its effect on employability: working in law or management, for example, was perceived to be dependent on having English. The popularity of Western masterpieces with Vietnamese teachers and scholars is also attributed by young people to the long legacy of the French colonial period and war with the United States.

Oanh’s view of the ideal scenario for Shakespeare in Vietnamese education was that although young people should be taught Shakespeare, plays and sonnets can be difficult for the students, so some consideration needs to be given as to which works are best suited for junior school, high school and undergraduate level (Charlotte Roberts and Amy L. Smith ask questions about the appropriateness of genres and plays, for different reasons, in this issue). Also, ‘the passive ways of teaching like my teacher’s need ameliorating. Young learners are active ones and they can’t stand a boring lesson full of listening and writing. Maybe the lecturers can enhance their pedagogy, like changing their ways of delivering knowledge to their students. For instance, students can role-play or prepare presentations

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“WHEN YOU LISTEN YOU HAVE TO WRITE SOMETHING DOWN IN ORDER TO NOT FORGET IT BUT WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING AND HAVE REAL INTERACTION WITH IT, IT BECOMES A PART OF YOUR MEMORY.”

to refresh their moods. Or even better . . . students should be involved in several field trips to explore more about the writer and his works’, something apparently not currently available to students of Shakespeare in school. Others seconded the idea of getting into characters and taking trips to the theatre: ‘students should experience his works outside of class instead of sitting in class watching slide[s]’. Anh posited an alternative if this wasn’t feasible: ‘we can make them learn in class like asking them to act and perform the play’. The value of experiential learning of Shakespeare was expressed by one student along Confucian lines (‘I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand’): ‘When you listen you have to write something down in order to not forget it but when you see something and have real interaction with it, it become[s] a part of your memory’. The same student described their ideal for Shakespeare in education in the region as ‘that young people can approach to any of Shakespeare’s plays, people can use his quotes as borrowed phrases just like how Vietnamese use words and phrases [from their] literature’. Fortunately, for this student, it seems the British Council agree. As part of their worldwide Shakespeare Lives! programme to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, an exhibition on Shakespeare’s words had just opened in the city’s historic and culture quarter and these students were invited. I had



Photograph © Sarah Olive

been involved as an academic consultant to the exhibition, getting the dream job of pitching my favourite quotations for inclusion. Artists then created posters, word sculptures and illustrations incorporating the lines and language instructors provided glosses to accompany them. Time will tell whether ‘action is eloquence’, ‘with mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come’, and ‘the world is broad and wide’ have entered everyday Hanoi conversation.

I am grateful to all the colleagues, students and organisations I have worked with in researching this editorial in Hanoi. LQ Minh, the People’s Artist Anh Tu and his colleagues at the Vietnam National Drama Theatre, the British Council in Hanoi, and the Vietnam National University deserve particular thanks. My research on Shakespeare in education in Vietnam was generously funded by the British Academy small grants scheme.



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CHOOSING THE RIGHT TEXT FOR ASC STUDENTS

CHARLOTTE ROBERTS wrote her dissertation on ‘Disabling Shakespeare: “Such as we are made of, such we be”’ as part of her MA Shakespeare in Education studies at the Shakespeare Institute in 2016. Her research is an exploration of ways in which the teaching of Shakespeare provides life-enabling skills for the Autistic student. She worked in mainstream and specialist schools with students of various abilities as an English and Drama teacher for six years, before spending more time teaching History. She is currently Head of Humanities at Slindon College in West Sussex, exploring Shakespeare. Charlotte is inspired by her students' fascination and creative potential.

There is ‘an apparent desire for all school students to benefit from access to a shared “cultural heritage”, where compulsory knowledge of Shakespeare and other canonical writers is in itself assumed to be a transformative and democratizing process’, but this can be a ‘disabling process for some students’ (Coles). Government specifications require the teaching of Shakespeare as part of the curriculum from Key Stage 3. Two texts should be taught between years 7 to 9, with a further text studied as part of the GCSE English Course. Yet there is flexibility from the examination boards as to which plays are taught, allowing individual institutions to select texts best suited to their students’ needs and interests. As with all children, Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) students’ needs vary between each individual. Nonetheless, the National Autistic Society identifies some similar characteristics: difficulty engaging with others, forming obsessions and ritualistic behaviour, and the inability to communicate effectively. My experience assisting students with ASC studying Shakespeare tallies with this: students struggled to empathize with characters and understand motivations, focus for long periods of time on topics of little interest to them, and translate their understanding into an assessable written format demanded by exam boards. Kristie Asaro-Saddler and Nicole Bak stress the importance of recording ideas in the written format for sharing opinions, demonstrating

“students struggled to empathize with characters and understand motivations, focus for long periods of time on topics of little interest to them, and translate their understanding into an assessable written format demanded by exam boards.”

critical thinking skills, and displaying content knowledge. However, they recognise that whilst written expression is an ‘important skill for school-aged children to learn, it is also a difficult one’ particularly for SEN students.

In selecting Key Stage 4 texts, the main factor for most teachers is choosing a play to engage their audience’s attention. Many opt for *Romeo and Juliet*, as the adolescent romance speaks to the extracurricular interests of their teenage students. However, *Romeo and Juliet* can be problematic. For a student with ASC, attempting to decode the complexities of love expressed by Romeo (for example in Act 1, Scene 1, ‘Love is a smoke’) is not formidable, as it might be for other students, but simply incomprehensible. The emotive descriptions of love as ‘grief’, ‘sighs’, ‘madness’, and ‘choking’ create a conglomeration of ideas that, from experience, causes anxiety and withdrawal from the student due to their difficulties in empathizing. For the student with ASC, having to examine this information and make decisions about its intended meaning is more likely to cause them to ‘freeze’ and give-up (see Luke, Clare, Ring, Redly, and Watson). A play such as *Romeo and Juliet* based on teenage emotions, rash actions, and melodramatic portrayals of a passionate, love-at-first-sight relationship, will often prove immobilising before they can even consider the words closely.

“the student with asc is more likely to recognize behaviour sets from a more introverted character, such as Hamlet, over the impetuous romantics of Romeo.”

Other tragedies, however, have demonstrated an arguably more accommodating set of emotive themes. The student with ASC is more likely to recognize behaviour sets from a more introverted character, such as Hamlet, over the impetuous romantics of Romeo. Hamlet spends almost the entirety of the play struggling with the central themes of dilemmas and uncertainties and the moral implications over his decision regarding Claudius’s fate. One could argue that with this turmoil he mirrors how decision-making is stressful for people with ASCs, thus making him a relatable character – particularly in the way both Hamlet and Autistic students develop fixations.

Furthermore, studying such a character and considering his reasons for and against his morbid decision, allows for the student with ASC to develop life skills in carefully considering a situation and making an informed choice

about the best course of action. One teacher noted that their students with ASC, in studying *Hamlet*, recognised the moral implications and explained right from wrong in terms of the character's actions, but also considered why Hamlet finds it difficult to make a decision:

They were fully aware that he shouldn't kill somebody, they understood that was wrong, but some joined in a sort of debate discussing why it was also fair (like an eye for an eye, or because he was only doing as he had been told to do by his dad). I was impressed by how they articulated themselves well and how they understood that Hamlet didn't have enough conclusive data to make a fair choice about what to do about his dilemma. They understood his predicament.

Studying *Hamlet* seemingly swapped the abstract decision-making complexities of *Romeo and Juliet* (questions, such as 'How does he feel?' and 'What is love like?', as well as tasks such as selecting words that best demonstrate this) with more generic life-based questions, such as 'why is it hard to make a decision?' or moral scenarios, such as 'why doesn't Hamlet want to kill his uncle?' This minimized stress and increased engagement, whilst also guiding students towards a stage where they might be able to consider the consequences of actions with some success. In further praise of using the tragedies, Kelly Hunter states that 'Children with autism experience varying degrees of difficulty with communication, all of which can be associated as a disassociation of body and mind'. Tragic characters such as Hamlet and King Lear battle with their own need to "command the mind/ to suffer with the body" (II.iv.101–102).

Ken Ludwig states that many 'children do best by starting with the comedies, specifically texts such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Twelfth Night*. With the vibrancy of the characters, particularly the supernaturals of *Dream* and the pandemonium caused by the twins of *Twelfth Night*, the plays are visually stimulating. They allow for creative activities and may be less formidable in terms of tone: one student with ASC commented that he 'liked the comedy stories because they aren't so serious sounding which helps with my anxiety'. *Dream* is described by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding in *The Essential Shakespeare Handbook* as 'a feast of magic, humour, music and spectacle'. They celebrate its 'revels of enchantment, witchcraft and even madness' creating a sensory, exhilarating and visually dynamic play (199). However, over 96% of children with ASC report hyper- and hypo-sensitivities in multiple domains: visual, auditory, tactile and so on (Marco et al). Sensory overload can cause discomfort and so needs to be monitored carefully if such vibrant texts are selected for teaching.

"WHILST ASC CAN PRESENT MANY CHALLENGES, I FIND IT CAN ALSO OFFER A REMARKABLE INSIGHT INTO HUMANITY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION – A NEW WAY OF UNDERSTANDING WHICH IN TURN MAKES REREADING THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE, WITH THEIR DEEP-ROOTED PORTRAYAL OF EMOTION, A REDISCOVERY."

The History plays received an ambivalent response from students with ASC, according to their teachers. The ability to research the characters and see them as real people participating in genuine events has been observed to prompt fascination. However, one teacher recounted how a student felt that they had been lied to by the play as a result of Shakespeare's fictionalization. This caused confusion and anxiety, and potentially impeded on the developing trust needed for a successful teacher-student learning relationship: a bond that is all the more fragile between students with ASC and their teachers (Ogburn).

Of course, selecting the most appropriate or accessible text for students with ASC is just one part of the planning process: whether and how to adapt the play texts and choosing teaching methods also requires consideration see Susie Flintham (in this issue), Kelly Hunter (issue 3) and Heather Edgren (issue 2). Whilst ASC can present many challenges, I find it can also offer a remarkable insight into humanity and social interaction – a new way of understanding which in turn makes rereading the works of Shakespeare, with their deep-rooted portrayal of emotion, a rediscovery.

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My nephew is autistic!

I don't say that for shock, surprise, or, heaven forfend, sympathy, because frankly, none of these responses are appropriate. I say it because it's actually the opposite of all those things, but, I am concerned. I'm concerned because he will have to encounter Shakespeare at least three times in his Secondary School career. Again, that should not encourage a shocked, surprised, or sympathetic response, but it should make ears prick up, eyes to widen, and quite possibly, hairs to stand up. It's not my nephew's diagnosis that worries me here, but the provision of obligatory Shakespeare in an Education system that is increasingly becoming STEM/EBacc-centric, meaning there's precious little room for the Arts.

There has long since been an argument that Shakespeare should be taught as he was originally intended to be viewed, through theatre, and theoretically, that argument is won. Except it isn't. You may argue a good teacher uses every appropriate resource to allow accessibility, but what if their hands are tied? Shakespeare is firmly implanted within the English syllabi, not Drama, Theatre Studies, or Performing Arts, at GCSE at least, and League Tables rely on English or English Language and Literature results. With that, comes an alarming amount of rubrics,

criteria, and restrictions which essentially mean that Shakespeare has to be taught with a view to essay writing. In most cases, this means 12 lessons to teach a play, how to write about it, and include those exam style conditions which Controlled Assessment dictate. Room for anything creative, theatrical, or Arts driven is therefore negated, as results, the new Progress 8 measure, and League Tables are the unfortunate driving force of schools, whether they like it or not. And so, I return to my nephew.

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He started Junior School this year, knowing his specialism (Thomas the Tank Engine, by the way). He can do simile, isn't great with metaphor, but gives it a go, can write a mean, if somewhat literal haiku, but they are all, in his Primary school, taught creatively. In 12 hours, perhaps more depending on the school, how much room is there for creativity regarding Shakespeare? Even I remember lessons where plays were read around the class, and that was A Level. I could read Stephen Hawking aloud, and be no further forward in understanding whether the history of time was brief or otherwise. So, how do we improve the Shakespeare experience for my nephew?

At this point, it may seem like I'm rehashing old arguments by insisting that Shakespeare is taught through theatre or drama, but I think it is vital. Two of these three Shakespearean encounters are to happen in Key Stage 3. The SATs have gone, so the next tests my nephew will sit after Key Stage 2 are his GCSEs. Surely promoting the joy of Shakespeare at KS3 will benefit any examined Shakespeare at KS4.

I know there is an argument that people with Autism like routine and therefore instilling GCSE skills in Year 7 and revisiting them until Year 11 is a legitimate strategy, but the danger there is that we a) turn my nephew off Shakespeare forever and b) create a carbon-copy of every other child, with no room to think for themselves, other than in a rigid template of what a GCSE student looks like. I do not want an identi-kit nephew. I want a nephew who can see into the heart of Shakespeare, not that Shakespeare equals PEE



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paragraphs and jumping through hoops. Besides, routines and patterns can be established in enjoyment, not simply in academic achievement.

Recently I worked with some young people with Autism who are supported by the National Autistic Society, in fact was specifically asked to teach them drama. There was no sense that drama couldn't be accessed by this group, rather that it would actually be an enriching experience for them, equipping them with skills they may hitherto have thought unavailable to them. We looked at *Hamlet*. There was a consensus for exploring ghost stories, so I took a punt.

I can almost hear an inward gasp at that, however, the most common defence against criticism of Shakespeare is that he is universal. If he is truly universal, then why should certain plays be restricted to certain groups. If you want a really juicy ghost story after all, *Hamlet* is a pretty good place to start. Moreover, having read Kelly Hunter's work as part of my MA studies, I began to realise exactly what universality means. She uses Shakespeare to fulfil Autism-specific objectives. If you want to teach reading facial expressions, who is a better vehicle than Puck? If you want to teach spatial awareness, then why not have Puck follow Bottom through the forest? And if I want to tell ghost stories to a group of young people who have asked for them, what is more gripping than *Hamlet*?

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To put my teacher-head on for a second, I need to talk about accessibility. My aim regarding the play was for these young people to enjoy it, and therefore want to know more, and more importantly, not to be put off by the idea that Shakespeare is elitist somehow. That meant, initially finding the point of engagement for these young people, and they had already given me that – the ghost story. At no point was there any academic objective of writing essays, PEE paragraphs, or having to explain in academic terms their understanding of the play. It was about allowing them access to one of the greatest writers of the English Canon, and enjoying it.

To open, I borrowed from Hunter, using “Throwing the face”. To quote her, “It is an excellent warm up for acting, providing the children with a transformative challenge, without demanding they stand up and ‘act’” (Hunter 19). Autistic young people are not the only students who may find the idea of acting terrifying, so easing them into the

concept is common sense, plus, there is the figurative aspect to the game. It is a commonly noted feature of Autism that metaphor cannot be understood, but not one of my young people thought that I was literally going to peel my face off and throw it across the room (Attwood, location 64, 111). In fact, we had great fun making scared, scary, shocked, worried faces, and ‘throwing’ them to other people in our circle for them to copy. And in case anyone is wondering what the merit of this activity is, it is Autism-centric, “using the fundamental themes of Shakespeare to combat the communicative blocks of autism” (Hunter 9–10).

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Then of course there is the Shakespeare-centric focus: what if your dead Dad came back to speak to you? How would you feel? The link between the activity and the opening to the play then becomes inherent. At this stage, the door is opened to explore the complexities of this occurrence. Firstly, we have a ghost – scary. Secondly, we have the father – sadness, but also love and feelings of loss. This activity, perhaps because of its simplicity, allowed us to explore the varying layers of emotions Hamlet may experience at this encounter. More fundamentally, by modelling the task to the young people, it allowed mimesis for those who could not necessarily articulate what emotions might be felt, and moved swiftly onto some taking the circle themselves and creating their own ideas. Returning to GCSE for a moment, every teacher knows what a Grade C, or 6 (under new guidelines) looks like, and that the responses to achieve that grade are formulaic (DfE). This activity removes formula in every aspect except how to play the game. There is no right or wrong answer, right or wrong facial expression here. Once Hamlet realises this ghost is his father, maybe he does smile.

Where to next? then, and what can we learn about the text from these lovely, but arguably not rigorous, academic exercises? Well, at this point is it not logical to wonder what Hamlet is going to do in encountering his father's ghost? In fact, the young people had their own questions, and answers, and we explored as many as we could, again through drama activities. Follow my leader, or “Shadow games” can be easily adapted here, especially with modelling at their centre (Hunter 23). You are the ghost, and as we all know, ghosts can walk through walls. Of course, I can't, so how to build up the tension of the scene, without making myself look ridiculous or injuring myself on confronting the



fabric of the building? We use freezes. The instruction is remarkably simple: “If I’m frozen/ still, you can’t see me.” This naturally leads to the young people looking around for the ghost, using facial expressions explored earlier, and even, in some cases, moving through the space as if hunting. If desired, lines could be added in, “’Tis here./ ’Tis here./ ’Tis gone” (1.i.141–2). In this way, the movement of the ghost can be controlled by the young people saying the lines, therefore affording them ownership of the activity. What may also follow is some young people wanting to play the ghost, and because you’ve modelled the activity, there is some adaptation into ‘ghostly’ movement, and the young people can almost run the activity themselves, making the activity learner-centred and allowing “a high level of autonomous activity”, meaning “their learning is taking place independently . . . owned and energised by the students themselves” (Stredder 15). Even though these lines are simple and given verbally, they allow access to the reactions and emotions of not simply our corporeal characters, but also those of the ghost, questioning why the ghost is so determined to speak to his son. In fact, there are several small lines in Act I which could be used for those young people who are happy to speak aloud.

This latter point is actually a crucial one. It is generally accepted that people with Autism don’t like change or being out of their comfort zones, however, as with any group of people, there will be some who want to be involved whole-heartedly, whereas others do not. At no point should the former be denied and the latter forced, rather, allow

the former group to become your teaching assistants. They want to play with the language whilst acting out the scene and this again models how language and acting are intrinsically bound together in Shakespeare. I once wrote a “Whoosh” for *Troilus and Cressida* for a Year 7 class which had a number of young people with Autism (RSC). It involved strategising for pupils who may not want to act, speak, or even stand up, but the outcome was worth it. Whilst some young people may not be involved in performing, they are benefitting from experiencing Shakespeare in performance, with lines, and therefore have a context for the language. When I think of my nephew, I think how he loves to put on little shows for his family, but shies away completely from performing for large groups, whether his peers or a more formal audience. I’d like to think that an activity of this kind would encourage him to take the risk to be involved, but even if he doesn’t, he would see Shakespeare and his language in action!

“INSTEAD, ALLOW HIM TO ACCESS SHAKESPEARE AS IT SHOULD BE, THROUGH PRACTICAL AND CREATIVE APPROACHES, ENCOURAGING EXPLORATION OF THEMES, EMOTIONS, LANGUAGE THAT IS NOT A GRADE C/6 FORMULAIC IDENTI-KIT RESPONSE.”

I would then, above all else, encourage anybody teaching Shakespeare to think about why he is universal, and what that means for a school environment, which is meant to be inclusive. My nephew would not respond to simply reading round the class and writing essays. Shakespeare would become a hated thing for him in this scenario. Instead, allow him to access Shakespeare as it should be, through practical and creative approaches, encouraging exploration of themes, emotions, language that is not a Grade C/6 formulaic identi-kit response.

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‘THINK OF ME AS I AM’

JUVENILE OFFENDERS TALK BACK TO SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO

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I teach a class on global Shakespeares at a small Midwestern liberal arts college in the United States. I first designed the class as a largely theoretical approach to what it means to adapt Shakespeare cross-culturally. We asked good and difficult questions about whether and how Shakespeare’s works could bridge cultures. What does it mean to think of Shakespeare as a colonizing force? Many cultures, including our own, have written back to Shakespeare, addressing race, sexuality, gender and religion from their own cultural perspectives. What does this ‘writing back’ accomplish? But it wasn’t until I brought those questions closer to home (that rich and complex word I use for the city our college sits within), that my students asked variations of those questions which made them see what was really at stake in ‘our’ culture as well. How do different communities in the United States receive and write back to Shakespeare? How do issues of race and class, especially, affect access to Shakespeare?

“WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THINK OF SHAKESPEARE AS A COLONIZING FORCE? MANY CULTURES, INCLUDING OUR OWN, HAVE WRITTEN BACK TO SHAKESPEARE, ADDRESSING RACE, SEXUALITY, GENDER AND RELIGION FROM THEIR OWN CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES. WHAT DOES THIS ‘WRITING BACK’ ACCOMPLISH?”

Our project took my students to the juvenile home school twice a week where they worked with 14–17 year olds on probation, teaching them *Othello* and helping them create their own responses to it. Perhaps even more transformative than the projects themselves, however, were the interactions fostered by the project between my educationally privileged college students and 9th graders whose educations and lives had been derailed by the juvenile justice system – a culture of its own. The proportion of white students in my class was about on par with the proportion of whites in the U.S., but African

“MY STUDENTS TRIED TO SEE THE ISSUES THEY ENCOUNTERED IN BLACK AND WHITE BUT, IN THE END, THE PLAY ITSELF AND THE REALITY OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC, RACIAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN MY CLASS HELPED US TO BLUR THE RACIAL AND INSIDER/OUTSIDER DICHOTOMY WE HAD ASSUMED EXISTED.”

American men were vastly over represented in the juvenile home population. Initially, due in part to this, and in part to the racial dynamics of the play itself, my students tried to see the issues they encountered in black and white but, in the end, the play itself and the reality of the socioeconomic, racial and cultural differences within my class helped us to blur the racial and insider/outsider dichotomy we had assumed existed. In the end, there was no ‘us’ to be bridged with ‘them.’ How and why it took Shakespeare to get us to this realization will be at the heart of this analysis.

The course begins with Bloom’s introduction to Shakespeare’s invention of the Human (an argument for the bard’s universalism) paired with Tsenay Serequeberhan’s ‘The Critique of Eurocentrism.’ Bloom, as perhaps only he can, argues no less than that ‘Shakespeare has taught us how to understand human nature’ (3). In Bloom’s mind, Shakespeare can teach us this because of what Bloom calls the ‘Shakespearean difference’ – a characteristic which allows his works to ‘overcome all demarcations between cultures or within cultures’ (11). Yet, read through Serequeberhan’s lens, Bloom’s ‘human nature’ is more accurately ‘European Civilization.’ (92). Many, perhaps even most, of my students are outraged by Bloom’s Eurocentrism, generally agree that nothing is universal other than very general concepts – and that even those are expressed differently in different cultures.

Yet because this course is now also a service learning class that takes them into the local juvenile home to work with teens on their own adaptations of *Othello*, this exercise can also leave them thinking about themselves as part of a colonizing force, using Shakespeare to make ‘them’ like ‘us.’ But there is nothing in Shakespeare that demands we treat it as a text that overcomes difference; in fact, *Othello* shows us a multitude of racial, religious, geographical and cultural differences. What my students and those from the juvenile home learn from each other isn’t always necessarily that they share backgrounds or experiences or racial categories (although many do) or even that they need to in order to have a relationship (a difficult lesson for many), rather they learn that they all have a complex relationship with the concepts Shakespeare brings to the table.

On their first day of teaching *Othello* with the juvenile home students, I suggested to my students that they do a version of what we had done in class: have the students call out everything Othello is called in Act one, scene one. The list is long: ‘thick lips,’ ‘a back ram tugging your white ewe,’ ‘devil,’ ‘the Moor,’ ‘Barbary horse,’ and on and on. In my class we go on to discuss the categories of insult – religious, animalistic, hyper-sexualization – and then begin to discuss whether and how these categories are still relevant in racist discourse today. Last year, for the first time, my students connected the hyper-sexualization of the insults hurled around *Othello* with the lecture they’d been given by juvenile home staff about protecting themselves from the young men they’d be working with – young men who wouldn’t (or couldn’t?) control their sexual urges. I believe that my students’ ability to look critically at the representation of juvenile offenders, especially young African American men, was critical to the success of their work there.

With the young teens they were addressing, I asked my class to list stereotypes they themselves had been subjected to and see if the kids would share some of their own. When we discussed what had happened in the juvenile home, my students shared stories about their own identities. One of my students said she’d listed ‘wetback’ as something she had been called and found she’d had to define it for the JH kids. The teacher, though, refused the specificity and the rancor included in her definition and insisted it was just a word for illegal immigrant. All of the women in my class had an example of misogyny they could share. Some of my students listed the same racial stereotypes as the JH kids. And some just really didn’t. One white young man in my class said he was embarrassed that the worst thing he could think of that he’d ever been called was a geek. This comment inevitably led to what had become the chorus of that class that term: ‘Who do we think we are walking into that juvenile home to teach Shakespeare of all things?? Most of us are white! We’re teaching a play about a black man written by a white man 400 years ago!!’ Yet when I brought them back to their conversations with the kids, my students began to see that they had something to offer. Could learning what a ‘wetback’ is make that student think about illegal immigration in a new way or expand his knowledge of people of color? Ok, so the worst you’ve ever been called is a geek – shouldn’t they know that white middle-class privilege exists – that there are kids who aren’t called names because of their race or socioeconomic status?

And as for Shakespeare, when we really listened, the play didn’t dwell on dichotomies, at least not simple ones. We talked about the word Moor and its multiple possible early modern meanings which encompassed geography, religion, and physiognomy (Neely, 303). We

talked about the layers of difference important to early moderns – not only, or even primarily, skin color, but difference in geography, religious beliefs, nationality, etc. Thanks to Carol Neely’s article, ‘Circumscription and Unhousedness: Othello in the Borderlands,’ we read Gloria Anzaldua’s work on mestizo identities and talked about the intersectionality of our own identities. On our best days, we backed away from ‘black’ and ‘white’/us and them because if we were honest, the lines were fuzzy; we worked on ‘a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity’ (Anzaldua, 101). One of my students had been in a juvenile home for a year. One of my students had uncles in prison – a fact she felt viscerally every time she entered the juvenile facility and felt the door lock behind her. One of my African American students told us that his grandfather was able to buy land in a nearby town because he passed as white. My student who had been called a wetback was indeed Mexican but she was also indigenous. All of my students were privileged in the fact that they were sitting in a college classroom.

I tried to suggest that it was what we did with that privilege that mattered, and I resisted their insistence of thinking of it as always or only white privilege. After all, they weren’t all white, and privilege comes in many guises. I remember one conversation in particular that left the class thinking about privilege in terms of trust, in terms of family and of friends. My student had been talking to a young man about the issue of trust in *Othello*. The juvenile home student understood Othello’s loss of faith in Desdemona completely – why should he trust her? Why should he trust anyone? Well, replied my student, who do you trust? No one, he answered. My student told this story and the class greeted it with shock and silence as if they could barely imagine such a world. No one who did what they said they would. No one who you could be sure would be there when you needed them. No one.

“I TRIED TO SUGGEST THAT IT WAS WHAT WE DID WITH THAT PRIVILEGE THAT MATTERED, AND I RESISTED THEIR INSISTENCE OF THINKING OF IT AS ALWAYS OR ONLY WHITE PRIVILEGE. AFTER ALL, THEY WEREN’T ALL WHITE, AND PRIVILEGE COMES IN MANY GUISES.”

It is in part because Othello will never know trust or, perhaps even more painfully, will always trust Iago rather than Desdemona that I created a project that not only encourages the juvenile home kids to read *Othello* but also to rewrite it – to talk back to it. While this project is perhaps in many ways too complex for the 6–8 weeks we have for it, I couldn’t do it any other way after the first time I introduced it. A juvenile home student heard the word Othello and immediately replied, ‘I’ll play Othello

but I ain't gonna kill no female.' And, I thought to myself later, I can't imagine even asking you to see yourself as that Othello. I'd rather ask: What Othello, given his intelligence (and yours), could you create? How else could this story end? The juvenile home students are largely what some sociologists call 'naïve risk takers' – unable to fully understand the consequences of their actions on their victims or themselves (217). They know they have made mistakes and, in large part, they don't want it to be too late to live a different life – to tell a different story. One of the activities I have my students do with them is write 'I am poems' – both about a character in the play and about themselves. The heartbreaking juxtapositions tell a complex story: 'I am from Jordans . . . I am from the cute baby family . . . I am from the family who tells me I am a bad kid.' One juvenile home student began his poem with 'I am good,' and I couldn't help being reminded of Othello's 'think of me as I am' – language struggling to encompass who we can be within who we are or who they think we are.

Sometimes their changes speak to larger changes in our world. One student had Shakespeare himself show up to make things right; the student's character notations describe Shakespeare as 'Othello's servant who ends up saving his marriage.' With Shakespeare's help, Othello is able to see that Desdemona is faithful, 'I am sorry for accusing you of cheating, I should have just asked you instead of believing Iago.' Bianca, Othello, and Desdemona all move to the United States, and the student leaves us with this:

Othello currently lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan with his loving wife Desdemona. They have one son named Barack Obama. He inherits his mother's wealth and becomes president of the United States . . . An image flashes – the Obama family with Michelle wearing the handkerchief that Desdemona gave her.

Perhaps the student was just going for a neat ending, but it tells new histories – of a black president with a white mother and a black father, of a good black man in power, of a new start in Kalamazoo. That this was the same student who said he'd play Othello but not kill Desdemona highlights his story's distance from the story he didn't want to enact.

The class ends at a community event where my students and the juvenile home students present their work. The attendance of the juvenile home students varies widely for many complicated reasons. For those who are not there, I can only guess whether the project had much of an impact. For those who are, sometimes I see something I didn't see in them when I met them weeks earlier . . . and sometimes I don't. Of course my favorite stories are about students who did change. One juvenile home student who

hadn't read aloud since fourth grade when he was publically humiliated, read his own work and that of his peers into a microphone. One kid invited his guitar playing brother and they serenaded the audience with several renditions of the *Othello* song he had written and composed.

"I BRING SHAKESPEARE BECAUSE IT IS WHAT I KNOW, AND BECAUSE I BELIEVE IT HAS THE CAPACITY TO PUSH US INTO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES RATHER THAN REMOVE US FROM THEM."

But most likely all of this (even more?) could happen without Shakespeare too. I bring Shakespeare because it is what I know, and because I believe it has the capacity to push us into cultural differences rather than remove us from them. In some ways it may be Shakespeare's reputation – the greatest playwright of all time, the inventor of humans – that makes my students work so hard not to be 'little Blooms' – to question their motivations, rework their lesson plans, think about what it means to mean walk in (and out) of the juvenile home and back to class, to consider reading as an act of privilege, and to see racism in all its complexity inside and then outside of the play. Perhaps if they took an author into the class – one that they thought had all the right multicultural credentials and did all the social justice work for them – they wouldn't try so hard. And perhaps Shakespeare's reputation works with the juvenile home kids too in a different way. Most of them know that Shakespeare is something you have to read in school and that it is hard to read, but they have not been taught that he is a god. So they read *Othello* (or skim it or hear summaries from the days they missed) like they're supposed to, and they talk about the tough issues it raises – about being an outsider, an insider, the effects of racism and how they in turn impact the ways trust and love and jealousy and power work. Then we tell them it's ok to tell a different story.

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PROMPT BOOKS FROM THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

ADAM MATTHEW DIGITAL is a publisher of digital primary source collections within the humanities and social sciences. The company collaborates with leading libraries and academics all over the world to produce powerful research and dynamic teaching resources for universities, colleges and libraries. Harriet Brunson, Project Editor, tells us more.

Since its inception in 1990, Adam Matthew Digital has made it its mission to inspire students and aid teaching and scholarly research by making important primary sources available to a global audience. We are delighted to have had the opportunity recently to work with the Folger Shakespeare Library on one of the highlights of our 2016 portfolio – *Shakespeare in Performance: Prompt Books from the Folger Shakespeare Library*.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE

The *Shakespeare in Performance* resource, published during the year of the 400th anniversary celebrations, has been three years in the making, involving multiple visits to the famous Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC to explore and evaluate their unparalleled collection of prompt books (the main copy of a production script). The library has been collecting prompt books of Shakespeare's plays for over eighty years, along with other material related to performance, including radio and film scripts, playbills, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, account books of theatres, photographs, sketches, cue sheets, lighting plots, musical scores, and the correspondence of Shakespearean actors and managers throughout the centuries. We have

the staff of the Folger Library to thank, not to mention an editorial board of highly knowledgeable specialist academics, for helping us to pull together and assess this fascinating material. With their assistance and expertise, we have been able to create an exciting resource that makes these precious documents accessible to a wide range of users, from undergraduates to senior researchers.

Universities, colleges and other educational institutions all over the world have already subscribed to *Shakespeare in Performance*. Without leaving the comfort of their libraries and classrooms, scholars and teachers alike have the facility to explore full-colour, text-searchable digital images of the Folger Library's Shakespearean prompt book collection. This amounts to over a thousand documents, collectively representing thirty-four of Shakespeare's plays. It is an extraordinary amount of data, ripe for study and analysis.

THE MATERIAL

The prompt books range in date from seventeenth-century Second and Third Folios to more contemporary retellings from the 1970s. That's over three hundred years of theatrical performance, and a unique insight into hundreds of different productions as they were staged in theatres across Britain, the United States and beyond. Prompt books contain all the essential details about the performance. They come in all shapes and sizes, designed for slightly different purposes or for use by people in different roles within the theatre. But essentially they have one function in common: to help the actors, stage managers, prompters and directors piece together a theatrical production from the ground up.

The prompt book is the production's bible, containing a wealth of instructions and information alongside the basic text of the play. As well as the actors' lines, you will often see cues for music, movement, light, and many other aspects of stage business. Cuts and annotations are sometimes scribbled beside or on top of the text or in the margins. You will even occasionally see doodles or sketches of how a piece of staging is supposed to look, or which costume a character should wear in a scene. Some prompt books are extremely detailed, while others have hardly any notes at all. The breadth and depth of information contained within these annotations is absolutely extraordinary. All the documents have been meticulously indexed by play, country of performance, theatre, associated names, and other key search terms, to offer students and scholars as straightforward and productive an experience as possible.



The homepage of the Shakespeare in Performance resource



TEACHING AND STUDY USING THE RESOURCE

The beauty of having all these prompt books located in one place at the click of a button is the ability to easily cross-reference and compare, thereby drawing conclusions that might otherwise not have been so discernible. Our aim in creating the *Shakespeare in Performance* resource was not only to provide access to the prompt books for those unable to visit the Folger Shakespeare Library in person, but also to offer scholars new ways to explore the primary sources, and to more easily analyse the different ways in which Shakespeare's plays have been interpreted and performed since they were written. Through the interactive tools and detailed metadata, students can follow how each individual production unfolded, see what amendments were made to the text and stage management over the years as audiences and social culture changed, and explore the influences and connections between different productions of the same play.

For example, there are ninety-five *Hamlet* prompt books in the collection, each one created for a different production. The earliest one dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and the latest from the 1964 Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival. One can imagine how many different theatrical styles, rearrangements, cuts, edits and additions were made during that span of 250 years, as different directors took Shakespeare's words and represented them in their own personal ways to suit the mood and audience of their time. In addition, by literally reading 'between

the lines', it is possible to unearth a whole new level of significances and personal stories hitherto unexplored – for instance, the complexities of the relationships between directors and their actors, or between older actor-managers and a new generation of up-and-coming directors being influenced by the prompt books of their predecessors. To enable students to more easily identify these kinds of links, it is possible to view two prompt books side by side on screen and jump both documents simultaneously to the same act or scene in order to review the differences and similarities between them.

HELPFUL FEATURES IN THE RESOURCE

To further aid teaching and study, *Shakespeare in Performance* contains contextual support in the form of an interactive chronology, charting several hundred years of history from Shakespeare's lifetime right up to the late twentieth century; a visual gallery featuring some spectacular illustrations from the prompt books such as scenery drawings and costume designs; and academic contributions from leading scholars including Michael Dobson (Director of the Shakespeare Institute, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK), Denise Walen (Professor of Drama at Vassar College, Arlington NY, USA), Heather Wolfe (Curator of Manuscripts and Archivist at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, USA), and Jeffrey Kahan (Professor of English at the University of La Verne, Los Angeles, USA). Michael Dobson's extremely valuable contribution is an interactive video guide explaining what the purpose of prompt books is and how we can read them. This, along with a useful glossary of commonly used terms, is designed for students who are approaching the study of prompt books for the first time and may not be familiar with the terminology or construction.

To provide a springboard from which students can begin exploring the documents for themselves, seventeen performances of particular cultural importance have been selected as case studies. These case studies include David Garrick's revised 1772 production of *Hamlet*, Henry Irving's famous 1879 production of *The Merchant of Venice*, and Laurence Olivier's Academy Award-winning cinema release of *Hamlet* in 1948. As well as the prompt books for these performances, supporting material in the form of cast photographs, costume designs, playbills, music scores and so on has been compiled and evaluated by editorial board member Denise Walen. Denise's insights into these performances are intended to helpfully guide students towards ways of looking at and analysing the primary sources which may not have occurred to them before. Additional background information has been written by the editorial team in the form of short introductions to select prompt books, and biographies of key actors, theatre managers and directors.

