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HONORARY FELLOW 2018

JAMES HARRIMAN-SMITH, OUTGOING BSA WEBMASTER AND TRUSTEE, INTRODUCES THE BSA'S 2018 HONORARY FELLOW, ROGER HARCOURT AT THE BSA BELFAST CONFERENCE.

I came to Freman College in 2001, at the age of 13. The school Shakespeare play that year was *Macbeth.* This was, I think, Roger's twenty-eighth production of a Shakespeare play at Freman College: he directed student actors aged between fourteen and eighteen, while teaching twenty-one periods a week and fulfilling all the other duties of a headmaster. That summer, Roger would lead staff and students to the annual 'Stratford Camp', where they would join past pupils and friends in tents on the banks of the Avon, watching the RSC's summer offerings each evening and holding seminars on them every morning for two weeks.

Back in 2001, all these activities meant relatively little to me. Standing here at the BSA conference in 2018, I now realize two things: first that I am roughly the same age as Roger was when he began working at Freman College, and, second, that what Roger achieved as a headmaster was of extraordinary importance, both for me personally and for generations of Hertfordshire pupils. By way of introduction to Roger's speech, I'd like to talk a little about how important Roger was and is to me, and, through this, offer some sense of the immeasurable contribution he has made to the field of Shakespeare activities.

The first thing Roger taught me was not Shakespeare, but an obscure poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins. It begins 'Hark hearer, hear what I do; lend a thought now, make believe'. I'd never read anything like it, and, until Roger took us through this poem (from its shifting aspirated imperatives to its unfinished final lines), I had never read anything in such analytical detail. A few weeks later, my class learnt that Roger would be teaching GCSE English to us the following year. 2002's Shakespeare play was *King Lear*. I was the doctor. At 1.20pm on Friday 6th September, I had my first rehearsal, where I learnt to say 'madam, sleeps still' and not 'ma'am' or 'madame'. I still have that rehearsal schedule, which shows how Roger squeezed six hours of practice into the school week, thirty minutes every weekday lunchtime and one hour every weekday evening, managing a cast of twenty-five students with the help of four members of staff.

As well as rehearsal schedules, I also kept materials from Roger's GCSE lessons. He taught us Thomas Hardy's poetry, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* and, of course, quite a lot of Shakespeare. My classmates and I wrote on the question, 'Is Lear a bad man?' in December 2002. Roger's annotations on my essay are encouraging, balancing compliments with a warning that I could occasionally express myself with greater clarity. Looking back, I agree with Roger that my phrase: 'the final scene of Act 3 only involves the removal of Gloucester's eyes' requires a little polishing.

2003 was Roger's final year at Freman College. The school Shakespeare play that year was *Hamlet*. In our first class back from the summer holidays, Roger asked us to 'Analyse Shakespeare's Presentation of the Ghost'. The last of Roger's many annotations on my essay exclaims 'How much you have learnt from Stratford!' I'd attended the camp for the first time that year, watching (along with dozens of other pupils and friends) *Measure for Measure*, *Richard III*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Winter's Tale*. To judge from the reviews that I (like all the other students) wrote, it was – of all these plays that I was seeing for the very first time – *Measure for Measure* that marked me, especially Daniel Evans's Angelo and what I called his 'righteous stature'.

But let us return to Roger's *Hamlet*, which ran from 9th to 13th December 2003. To mark the occasion, a special programme was produced, with contributions from past and present students and staff, and a prologue by Rex Gibson. That prologue finishes as follows: This production of *Hamlet* sets the seal on a great tradition. Like all past productions, it is testimony to one man's love of, and dedication to, both Shakespeare and his students: Roger Harcourt. To conclude my own prologue, I would echo Rex Gibson fifteen years later, by telling you that Roger's great traditions, and his inspiring love and dedication, continue still, albeit in slightly different forms. My first lecture to our first-year students at Newcastle University asks them to analyse events on the battlements of Elsinore; the Stratford camps have become *ArielStratford* and, still under Roger's direction, bring together young and old each summer on the banks of the Avon; and there are hundreds and thousands of adults throughout Britain and the world who, thanks to Roger's productions and classes, come to Shakespeare with both knowledge and affection.

You can find Roger's full acceptance speech on the BSA Education Network blog: www.britishshakespeare.ws/education/education-network-blog/

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EDITORIAL: SARAH OLIVE & KAYLEIGH HUGHES

PEKING AND NANJING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' VOX POP

KAYLEIGH HUGHES is a graduate of the BA English in Education, University of York. In Autumn 2018, she is coming back for more as a postgraduate student on York's MA Social Justice and Education. Her co-authored Shakespeare resource pack for teachers, part of the second year module 'Teaching and Learning Literature' was previously published on the BSA Education Network blog).

In summer 2017, students from Peking and Nanjing Universities visited the University of York for a summer school, working with its Centre for Global Programmes. They took an Arts and Humanities Programme for two weeks, in which they have keynote talks from University of York lecturers and visit various museums and art galleries throughout the UK, including – in 2017 – Shakespeare's Globe, London. After a lecture from Sarah on Shakespeare, naturally, we asked them to contribute to a vox pop for this magazine – and fifteen students participated (note: not every contributor answered every question). If you're interested in the teaching of Shakespeare in China, you can find blog posts on the BSA Education Network and an article about performing Shakespeare with Chinese students by Reto Winckler in issue 10 of this magazine.

HAVE YOU EVER STUDIED SHAKESPEARE?

The majority, 13 out of 15 participants, had studied Shakespeare. One added 'But [I] have never had a course exclusively about Shakespeare'.

AT WHAT LEVEL/S OF YOUR EDUCATION? E.G PRIMARY SCHOOL, UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE OR HOW OLD WERE YOU?

- High/secondary school – 5 students, within that one specified aged 15.
- Undergraduate study – 5 students, one specified at 'first year', one aged 18 and another aged 19.
- MA study – 1 student, they specified aged 20.
- Primary school – 1 student.

'In Chinese class in high school teacher gave us brief introduction of Shakespeare himself and his work. And we read some parts of the *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in Chinese. Then in the course of English Literature in college, I got access to Shakespeare sonnets and read a few of them in English'.

IN WHICH SUBJECTS OR CLASSES?

- Chinese – 9 students (editors' note: we find this fascinating in terms of writing on 'decentered' Shakespeare, Shakespeare beyond or without English, and Asianized Shakespeare in the last two decades).
- English – 6 students
- History – 3 students
- Literature – 2 students

Four students elaborated on their selections: 'Chinese in the middle school period', 'Chinese in high school. English in college', 'In high school mainly Chinese while in university mainly English', and 'A general public elective class called "Selective Plays of Shakespeare"'.

WHICH OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORK HAVE YOU STUDIED?

Most students had studied two or more of the plays, perhaps in excerpts (as the frequent use of textbooks, sometimes as students' only point of contact with the text, below suggests):

- *Hamlet* – 7 students
- *Merchant of Venice* – 6 students, aka 'Venetian Businessmen' (editors' note: we were interested to see *Hamlet* sneaking ahead given that *Merchant*

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is often written of as THE compulsory Shakespeare play in Chinese schools, and this transliteration of the title seems to reflect the idea that it is taught as an anti-capitalist play, see Andrew Dickson's *Worlds Elsewhere* for a very accessible discussion of this).
- *Romeo and Juliet* – 5 students
- *Macbeth* – 3 students
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – 2 students
- *Henry IV, Henry V, Twelfth Night, Othello, Richard III* and 'the four tragedies' – one student each (Editors' note: Issues 6 and 7 of this magazine flagged up the popularity of history plays among some teachers of Shakespeare in Japan, and this resonates with his teaching in classes of world or English history).

WHAT WAS THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION IN THE CLASSROOM?

- Chinese – 6 students
- Both Chinese and English – 4 students, one added 'Chinese in literature and English in English class'
- English – 4 students

IF YOU READ SHAKESPEARE AS STUDYING HIM, WHAT KIND OF READING MATERIAL HAVE YOU USED?

- Textbook – 11 students
- Website – 4 students
- Editions – 3 students
- Movie, storybook, thesis and e-book were mentioned by one student each

IF YOU READ SHAKESPEARE AS PART OF STUDYING HIM, WHAT LANGUAGE WAS THE TEXT IN?

- Both Chinese and English – 8 students (Editors' note: again, it's not clear whether these are bilingual texts or multiple texts in single languages, though one added 'Chinese and sometimes English', another added 'both original works and translations'. The fault lies in Sarah's survey question writing!).
- Chinese – 4 students
- English – 1 student

feminism not fairies is the key to 'dream'

VICTORIA ELLIOT is Associate Professor of English and Literacy Education at the University of Oxford. She researches in the field of policy, curriculum and assessment in secondary English, particularly in relation to literature. And especially Shakespeare.

It will surprise no one that in our recent national survey of Shakespeare Teaching (Olive and Elliott, 2018, presented at the 2018 British Shakespeare Association conference in Belfast this June) we found that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was by far the most commonly taught Shakespeare play for 11 year olds. Surprise, no. Despair – perhaps.

Fairies do not an age appropriate play make. I suspect the 'rude mechanicals' are also a contributing factor, but let's face it, the majority of the humour is either crude and unworthy – his name is Bottom! He has a donkey head! – or dependent on staging (the final play), which requires some finesse and time – not just reading around the class. It is also an unbelievably complicated plot which needs quite a lot of grasping, even if you can remember which one is which of Helena and Hermia.

Part of the problem is that by focusing on the superficial trappings of the play – magic, fairies, love triangles, a donkey's head, we omit the things that the play does offer the chance to explore, that are of deep and abiding interest, which are usually erased by a 'magic and fairies' approach to the play.

Here I suggest some of the things that teaching *Dream* in secondary schools offers the chance to explore – and that it might be more suitable to do so in an older year group. Most of these, I realised in hindsight, are feminist in their critical approach, with a light spray of Marxism in places. Feminism rather than fairies seems a far more appropriate focus for our contemporary schools.

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It's a play about forced marriage. The lovers head off into the woods because Hermia's father Egeus would rather see her dead than married to a man she has chosen for herself. 'As she is mine, I may dispose of her': an approach that veers dangerously close to honour killing, in ancient Greece supported by the law, according to the play. (At the time of writing I'm sitting in an English office in a school where I am about to observe a student teacher. They do teach *Dream* at Year 7 and do indeed discuss honour killings.) The death sentence is of course commuted by Duke Theseus, offering her the opportunity to live life as a nun instead, and in the end he relents after hearing of the rumpus in the woods.

This turn around sometimes obscures the fact that Hippolyta is hardly better off than Hermia, having been wooed with Theseus's 'sword' ("phnar phnar" as year 10 might say).

It's a play about date rape drugs. The juice of 'love-in-idleness' is as effective as Rohypnol in reducing the resistance of those who are exposed to it. While Puck makes a muck up of Hermia, Demetrius, Lysander and Helena, that does all at least end up happily. But it also quite clearly leads to Titania having sex with someone she would never consider in her right

mind, without her consent. Using this analogy does rather reduce the hilarity of that bower scene.

"It's a play about date rape drugs. The juice of 'Love-in-idleness' is as effective as rohypnol in reducing the resistance of those who are exposed to it."

It's a play about an abusive husband. Oberon and Titania's relationship is obviously not the most healthy. We could explore issues of fathers becoming jealous of their children when they feel their wives' attention is being taken away. But instead let's consider the fact that Oberon drugs his wife into having sex with someone else in order to manipulate her into doing as he says.

In a modern context we would almost certainly use the word 'gaslighting' to describe this behaviour of making his wife doubt her own sanity (she slept with a man with a donkey head!). Helena's experience also verges on gaslighting; although she attributes it to Demetrius and Lysander, really it's that good old Puck messing around with all their heads. In relation to productions of the play, it's quite common to have the same actors doubling as Oberon and Titania and Thesus and Hippolyta – which might highlight more the problematic nature of the play's final marriage.

"In a modern context we would almost certainly use the word 'gaslighting' to describe this behaviour of making his wife doubt her own sanity."

It's a play about class prejudice. The comical mechanicals – what a laugh! The feast at the end offers the perfect opportunity for the upper classes – the ones who were willing to contemplate the execution of a woman who wouldn't marry the man her father picked out for her – to mock and deride the theatrical ambitions of the lower classes. The trades people couldn't possibly understand the grand culture of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, or poetry or song. And as for metaphor – they are so unable to understand it they have someone actually playing the wall! What an interesting message to be conveying to the youth of today, given that social mobility and social inequality is such a major issue in many parts of the world today.

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Part of the problem – a large part of the problem – is that the majority of play focuses on sex. The forest is the place where rules don't apply, and 'what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas' approach operates. There is no problem talking about sex with eleven year olds – it's a positive thing to do – but the sex in this play isn't healthy. It's not consensual, it's not happy.

There is an underlying metaphor that relates the sex lives of the rulers of the country – their fertility effectively – via the King and Queen of the Fairies – to the health of the land. It's a lesson an Elizabethan audience would have seen as being very natural. But it's not one which eleven year olds today are likely to have the critical understanding to either perceive or to challenge without it being pointed out to them.

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And the lesson that if your parents don't like your boyfriend you should run off to the woods to have sex is possibly also not one we want to impart without critiquing it a little. Hermia realises very quickly the vulnerable position she is in, in asking Lysander to lie further off. He is honourable and loves her – he respects her. And here we have the potential valuable lesson for teaching sex and relationships to teens – if you love someone you respect what they say even if that is 'I'm not going to sleep with you right now.' Even if you thought they were planning to put out because they ran away to the woods with you. (The school I'm in play it rather cool on the sex aspects.)

It's one of the origins of that dreadful cliché 'it was all a dream'. Puck tells us 'If we shadows have offended, / Think but this, and all is mended,/ That you have but slumbered here.' Shakespeare might be able to get away with this, but it needs explicitly highlighting as a cliché and removing from teenagers' repertoires. There are many things they could learn from Shakespeare but that really shouldn't be one.

But having said that, if you teach *Dream* to eleven year olds and you think I'm banging on about a load of old rope, then just pretend it was a dream and I never wrote this article at all . . .

teaching shakespeare in oman

Photograph © Dr Christa Knellwolf King.

DR CHRISTA KNELLWOLF KING is an Associate Professor of English literature at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. She has published two monographs, five edited collections of essays, and many individual articles on topics ranging from Shakespeare to contemporary critical theory. Her current research explores ways of using theoretical studies of reading and reader identification as a framework for practical initiatives that promote intercultural understanding. Christa is committed to the idea that teaching literature is a perfect way of preparing our students for the challenges of their future lives.

Like many universities worldwide, the BA program of the Department of English at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), in Oman, includes a course on Shakespeare. It continues to be a compulsory part of the BA study plan, but the department is currently updating and revising its BA program. This means we are replacing courses which were designed to fulfil the traditional desire to cover the entire history of English literature with courses on contemporary literature and culture which teach the transferable skills required by the increasingly competitive job market of Oman.

Since the Shakespeare course at SQU covers material from a historical period, its place on the curriculum of our English department must be vindicated. This article argues that it is not difficult to justify teaching a Shakespeare course since a rigorous discussion of the plays teaches skills that are urgently needed for professional success as well as the personal well-being of graduates in Oman and elsewhere.

To begin with a comment on my own background: I have taught Shakespeare courses at universities in the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and Austria before coming to Oman, and have always found that the Shakespeare course satisfies the most important requirements of an under-graduate program in the humanities. At all universities, Shakespeare courses have similar aims:

1. To introduce students to the imaginative wealth of Shakespeare's language and world.
2. To illustrate the multiplicity of meanings emerging from almost every single scene of Shakespeare's plays
3. To relate the topics of the plays to the experience of the students, as a means of helping them imagine their own versions of the play.
4. To explain why Shakespeare frequently refers to the conventions of theatre and acting and by so doing reminds his readers and spectators that they are reading or watching a play.

These and similar aims will be familiar to anyone who is teaching Shakespeare. In the context of Oman, the last two points on this list deserve special comment.

Shakespeare's plays are enveloped in problematical cultural politics. They were used for colonialist purposes in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when his plays were staged as a means of demonstrating the superiority of English culture (Loomba and Orkin 1998). It is true that critical responses to *The Tempest* and *Othello* have more recently concentrated on exposing the injustice of colonial usurpation and exploitation. But since certain pseudo-colonialist mentalities continue to linger in places like the Middle East, it is frequently difficult to differentiate

between critiquing colonializing representations and unwittingly reproducing the colonialist mentality that is inseparable from characters like Prospero.

When I reflect that I am the only non-Arab in the classroom, I become intensely self-conscious about the task of enabling my students to imagine their own versions of the plays. However, there is an important difference between myself and Prospero: while his aim was to orchestrate life-changing experiences in the other characters of the play, my effort concentrates on the attempt to make my students understand in what ways Shakespeare is interrogating the potential uses of theatre and make-believe.

A lot of improvisation is required to enable my students to imagine interpretations of the plays that are relevant to their experience. When I introduce my students to a new play, I sketch the historical circumstances of Shakespeare's time and familiarise them with some influential adaptations for the stage or the cinema. But I also invite them to find parallels of certain scenes in their own lives. For example, I ask them to describe how a young Omani male would approach a wealthy lady whom he has never met before, in order to make them grasp the witty rudeness of Viola, when she, dressed as a young man, barges in on Olivia in *Twelfth Night*.

At first sight Shakespeare's world may appear starkly at odds with the conventions of a country like Oman. But some cultural details in Oman are perhaps more similar to Shakespeare's time than they are to students in the UK, and this is what makes studying Shakespeare so urgent and appropriate in today's Omani cultural context. For example, young Omanis are not supposed to meet a member of the opposite sex without the presence of a family member, or some other chaperone. Hence, classroom discussions of feminist interpretations of Shakespeare plays have to be sensitive to the cultural conventions of Oman.

It is important to tease out the relevance of arguments about gender for a society that is less permissive than the West, but in which educated women can rise to leadership positions as ministers and CEOs. Engaging with Shakespeare's way of interrogating gender roles offers valuable opportunities for young Omani men and women to think about the cultural construction and public perception of gender roles. All well-presented literature courses have the aim to teach students to think critically: to formulate their own responses to a particular scene, or play, and to reflect on the shortcomings of critical models that try to reduce the plurality of possible interpretations. While students all over the world demonstrate the deeply human desire for clearly defined, unambiguous

Photograph © Maryam Al Rasbi.

interpretations, the task of formulating a critical response to Shakespeare's plays helps students come to terms with the fact that life is full of conflicts, contradictions and ambiguities. This is illustrated, for example, when Hamlet's famous assertion in a dialogue with his mother "I know not 'seems'" (1.2.76) is itself exposed as an act of dishonesty when we hear him muse in the ensuing soliloquy "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.159).

Most of my Omani students warm to Shakespeare's way of representing his characters and their experiences, even though they struggle with antiquated words and phrases. For some students, Shakespeare's theatre in fact opens up a new way of thinking about themselves and their place in society in the twenty-first century.

The sheer number of issues and arguments raised by Shakespeare's immensely complex language challenges any attempt to reduce a protagonist like Hamlet to a realistic portrayal of a historical personage. Shakespeare's tireless exploration of every nuance of meaning in fact challenges any interpretation that covers all aspects of any one of his plays (Gibbons 2006). This means that Shakespeare's work lends itself superbly well to illustrating the limitations of critical and theoretical models, which in turn familiarises young people with the necessity to recognise the limitations of critical models. The self-conscious preoccupation with theatre and the conventions of acting is clearly a prominent feature of Shakespeare plays. Of course, this is not simply the quirk of a playwright with a narcissistic fixation on theatre, but instead is a means to challenge us to think about the role of acting in ordinary human life. Shakespeare's plays challenge us to think about the fuzzy boundaries between acting, conforming to the expectations associated with our social roles, and using pretences and downright deceit, either as a way of lying to ourselves or as a way of deceiving others.

When Shakespeare has his characters refer to the topic of acting, he disrupts any smooth identification between his audiences and the characters. The ability to recognise incongruities and contradictions in character and plot provides the impetus for important classroom discussions, which enable students to recognise that theatrical make-believe comments on the conventions that inform the performance of social roles (Oatley 2016). Discussion of the plays' self-conscious preoccupation with acting is closely linked to the topic of what makes literature special. My attempt to elucidate what Derek Attridge (2004) calls the singularity of literature requires me to spell out to my students that a serious engagement with Shakespeare's plays generates a whole raft of transferable skills for the modern world, such as the ability to think, awareness of cultural differences, understanding of the point of view of others, etc.

In an academic context where students are not yet familiar with questions of aesthetics, it is necessary to lead up gradually to abstract questions. Thus, I might begin with a classroom discussion of why we read and watch plays, and why we study literature. The most widely accepted response to this question, especially in an environment where English is taught as a foreign language, is that literature is a language-learning tool. While I agree that literature courses make an important contribution to language learning programs, I claim that studying literature engenders a large number of benefits that go far beyond that of illustrating language use (Knellwolf King 2017). The most important argument, perhaps, comes from Richard Gerrig (1993), who demonstrated that reading *always* in some (however minute) ways changes the reader.

An important aim of teaching Shakespeare's plays is to draw attention to his genius in portraying conflicts and dilemmas. Students acquire important life-skills, when they come to understand that many characters must make life-changing decisions on the basis of insufficient knowledge. This is illustrated most memorably by Hamlet's uncertainty about whether he can trust a message that has been delivered by a ghost (Khan 2015). The task of commenting on a fictional character's way of dealing with uncertainty is a powerful means of helping students deal with uncertainty in their own lives.

Shakespeare offers a large number of opportunities that challenge students to think for themselves. For example, they are required to figure out the influence of circumstances on the formation of identity. Frequently, the plays go even one step further and invite their audiences to reflect on the principles of communication and thinking.

It is only a small step from commenting on the almost infinite number of possible interpretations of a play to explaining that the text frequently permits radically divergent interpretations about the personality and motivations of a particular character. Mellow and Patterson illustrate this cogently when they show that the text of *Hamlet* allows us to interpret Ophelia both as a naïve and obedient girl and as a young woman who possesses sexual knowledge.

Enabling students to bring the plays alive for themselves means helping them to arrive at their own perception of a concrete character with a concrete voice, which can only be achieved if there is a bridge between the text that was written over 400 years ago and the students' own experience. In the course evaluation, one Omani student wrote: "the course showed that Shakespeare's characters are people like you and me." Such a response shows that it is possible to bridge the cultural-historical divide between the text and the readers of the play. But it is also important to resist the temptation to adjust the text of the plays to the needs of a particular community of readers. The frustrations about our inability to reduce the contradictory messages of the text of the plays to any singular interpretation should remain an integral part of a serious engagement with Shakespeare's plays, which is indeed a major reason for studying literature.

To conclude, courses on Shakespeare's plays make an absolutely seminal contribution to programs in English, because they help students come to terms with human psychology and social expectations. They enable them to understand that social roles and conventions shape our identities and prevent us from being ruthlessly honest. Furthermore, when Shakespeare's plays draw attention to the conventions of theatre and acting, they also enable us (students, teachers and general audiences) to get a better grasp of when and how we can choose to diverge from conventional expectations.

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Using Blues Music to Teach Shakespeare

MICHAEL J. BERNTSEN is an Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. His greatest accomplishments include completing the Boston Marathon, serving as the faculty advisor for UNCP's paintball team, and lecturing about jazz on French radio.

Blues is a theory of life as much as it is a genre of music. It is also a great teaching tool. James Baldwin, in "The Uses of the Blues," asserts how the blues "refer[s] to the experience of life, or the state of being, out of which blues come" (58). Baldwin's notion of the blues articulates how the blues, as an art form and a cultural experience, is born from real suffering and through that process transcends a finite definition and genre (58). The aesthetic Baldwin applies to the blues enhances its meaning and its pedagogical uses for courses steeped in literary criticism since the blues functions as an archive of communal consciousness. One main goal of blues songs is to create catharsis for the singer and empathy within the listener. I find this dynamic useful for students who are reluctant to read and analyze Shakespeare, and there are many, because empathy is at the epicenter of all his plays.

"Blues is a theory of life as much as it is a genre of music. It is also a great teaching tool . . . one main goal of blues songs is to create catharsis for the singer and empathy within the listener. I find this dynamic useful for students who are reluctant to read and analyze Shakespeare, and there are many, because empathy is at the epicenter of all his plays."

Incorporating the blues into discussions and close readings of Shakespeare can work with any of his plays, yet I tend to reteach my favorites: *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*. *The Tempest*. For brevity's sake, I'll focus on how I use the blues to complement the teaching of *Othello*, yet I use the same approach and only a slight retooling of projects for other plays and for his sonnets. I have experimented with these exercises and assignments in British Literature, Introduction to Drama, and Creative Writing courses in attempts to benefit English majors and non-majors with student-centered activities that promote critical thinking and conversations.

Before we conduct individual or group analyses of the text, but after the all-important reading quiz, I briefly introduce the blues as a musical genre in a 25 minute lecture-based discussion. Most American students under 35 years of age have a vague sense of the blues genre, let alone the works of Shakespeare, so I find it crucial to provide a quick tutorial concerning common themes, such as the dangers of alcohol or how jealousy will lead to disaster, and tropes, such as tricksters and charm symbols, to establish their critical vocabulary. Students will often recognize these elements within the plays or, at least, in other more familiar works, fairly quickly given their universal qualities, so we never veer far from the text. These connections provide them the initial confidence to conduct successful compare and contrast analyses of Shakespeare's plays then prepare them for more in-depth examinations of the texts.

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After this stage, students form groups, and I assign each one a song and character pair. For *Othello*, we focus on sexual and racial politics first since these issues are the most relevant to the students. One group will receive Ma Rainey's "Sweet, Rough Man," while another group will be given Lead Belly's "Where Did You Sleep Last Night," and their tasks are to analyze how these songs reflect the relationship between Othello and Desdemona.

Photograph © Saeko Machi

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These songs, with their mix of abuse and sentiment, attraction and contempt, jealousy and adoration, help contextualize the complex nature of these characters' relationship in clear ways for the students. Other groups must connect Louis Armstrong's "Black and Blue" to Othello and his speech to the Venetians (which is a cheat since it's technically a jazz song) and parallel "Forgiveness" by Phil Wiggins with Othello's anger. I provide songs that are easily accessible via apps and sites, so they can listen to the songs as a group. Each student also has a hardcopy of the lyrics, which they use to make notes to help with their explications. I have had hearing impaired students who felt the vibrations from the speakers while reading the lyrics, which inspired interesting discussions on feeling tone, so any accommodations ought to stimulate student experiences rather than detract from the lesson plan.

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This exercise grounds the students in familiar territory since song lyrics are usually unthreatening while they close read works they once found unapproachable or overwhelming, making the experience more enjoyable than a strict reading of the text. Each group presents its interpretations to the class, citing at least three specific points of textual evidence from *Othello*, with the other groups asking questions or adding to the presentations. Many students will focus on Othello's alienation, feelings of inadequacy, and complicated status among the Venetians, while others emphasize Desdemona's love for Othello's words and her complicated status as a woman among men.

I then assign short section from Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* in which she performs a blues reading of Othello in conjunction with her idea of "mastery of form" (37). Her analysis of Othello adopting the language of the European oppressor then surpassing the rhetorical abilities of most Venetians echoes the class' close reading of Othello's speech (37).

This passage functions as a template for future close reading analyses and can be switched with her brief blues interpretation of the master/servant dynamic within *The Tempest*. As they read, they have to answer four questions in 200–300 word responses: How does Baker use the Toulmin model to create her argument? How is Baker's character analysis similar to the steps we took to dissect Othello and Desdemona? How much textual evidence does she provide, and is it enough, or should there be more? How successful or unsuccessful is her argument? This assignment gives me the opportunity to see how well they can read criticism and understand someone's interpretation of a character. It also shows them that these applications of the blues are not simply based on my whim, but a serious examination of the intertextuality of art.

When we return to class, I have them write individual mini-essays, ranging from 2 to 3 paragraphs, on other aspects of *Othello*. One essay concerns how Blind Blake Johnson's "Bootleg Rum Dum Blues" is similar to Cassio's thoughts and habits concerning alcohol. Another has students apply Louis Jordan's "Somebody Done Hoodooed the Hoodoo Man" to Iago's scheming and trickery. The other asks students to consider how Merline Johnson's "Black Gypsy Blues" informs the handkerchief as a charm symbol of love, ancestry, and superstition for Othello. This exercise allows students to explore the text on their own, using the blues as a critical guide. After 25 minutes, students volunteer or are called upon to share their work, which aids in class discussion as we explore the similarities and differences of each student's interpretation. We conclude the session with larger discussions of the themes bringing together the ideas brought up by the previous day and the current session.

One major benefit to this approach is that it invites diversity into a course that may contain predominantly white, European authors. Mehrunissa Shah reminds us in "Canonical Texts in Multicultural Classrooms" that a hegemonic reading list can create issues with relevancy, especially for diverse campuses (194). Showing that African American artists invented a genre of music that addressed the same issues that Shakespeare profoundly expanded upon when adapting Giovanni Battista Giraldi's "Venetian Moor" emphasizes the common experiences all humans share. It acknowledges contributions from nonwhite artists and places them on equal grounds with a writer who is considered to be Britain's best. It also reinforces how relevant and universal Shakespeare is as well as introduces them to the intertextuality of art. Authors repeat stories in unique ways that are more relevant to their time or their ethnicity, yet ethnicity does not entirely dictate the human condition, which is why *Othello* is a good play to use in conjunction with the blues.

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Having the blues songs act as companion pieces also prevents the students from simply relying on their personal experiences to contextualize Shakespeare's plays. As Solomon O. Iyasere urges in "Teaching Shakespeare's *Othello* to a Group of Multi-Racial Students," instructors should limit the exchange of personal narratives when discussing *Othello*'s racial tensions in order for students to appreciate how Shakespeare crafts those dynamics (60). While self-reflection is an important critical exercise, it can prompt students to bypass essential literary analyses because sharing personal histories rarely leads to textual explications. Since the discussion is built upon art informing art, students have been less likely to revert to revealing personal backgrounds in order to frame an interpretation during these exercises and classroom discussions.

Every Shakespeare character has the blues or knows the blues. Using blues to help students analyze Shakespeare allows for entertaining and didactic learning opportunities, which can be extended into digital classrooms and enhanced with multimodal tools.

While I guide students to conduct traditional group and individual textual analyses and composition-based assignments, you could easily modify these exercises to be compatible with numerous online technologies and assessment applications. In "Teaching Shakespeare the 21st Century Way," Benjamin Herold suggests that technology will only increase Shakespeare's relevancy and accessibility (20). I believe that we can inspire students' interest in pre-Modern texts by experimenting with interdisciplinary approaches and presenting artistic connections that bolster comprehension and, hopefully, appreciation for pre-conceived intimidating literature.

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AUTHORIZING STUDENTS IN SHAKESPEARE IN SAVANNAH

HELEN BORRELLO is a Professor of English at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). Her civic activities include her past service as president of the Flannery O'Connor Childhood Home. She received her undergraduate degree from Harvard and a law degree and Ph.D in English Literature from New York University.

As the pages of this publication reflect, teachers of Shakespeare experience a paradox: We treasure the "infinite variety" in the works, including the multiple paths of engagement they offer; yet we continually struggle to make the plays and the poetry accessible to students. My own experience negotiating this paradox comes from my role as professor at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). For a humanities elective, students may choose an introductory Shakespeare course. Not surprisingly, the course is popular with our entertainment arts majors who have acted the part of Portia or, like Bottom, labored on sets for *Midsummer's Night Dream*. Even more students come in hauling storyboards or laser cut lampshades, pursuing dreams of creative careers in one of SCAD's dozens of other fields of study. They are variously curious, tired, visually-oriented, passionate, fretful about a literature class, and technologically savvy. They consistently challenge me to integrate my more traditional academic background with dynamic possibilities that inform teaching today.

"we treasure the "infinite variety" in the works, including the multiple paths of engagement they offer; yet we continually struggle to make the plays and the poetry accessible to students."

Although the paradox will persist, my students over the last four quarters have achieved moments of insight that I am moved to share. Many of these moments arose from group assignments, which require substantial initiative and responsibility on the part of students. Working in groups of four or five, students prepare and present reflections that range from conventional close readings or debates to less traditional short treatments for film adaptations of the plays.

For one of the most successful type of group assignments, I took a cue from *The New York Times'* publication in 2016 of whimsically imagined "deleted scenes" in Shakespeare. For each play we explore, one group of students in the class collaborates to write a scene that might have been. I offer rather specific guiding questions: What might Bolingbroke and Northumberland have openly discussed or tacitly acknowledged between Bolingbroke's return to England in Act 2, Scene 3 of *Richard II* and their meeting with Richard at Flint Castle in Act 3, Scene 3, and how might they have done so? Or (as *New York Times* writer Heidi Schreck pondered) what might transpire between Isabella and the Duke after the final scene of *Measure for Measure*?

Most often, the results underscore students' creativity and offer fresh approaches to time-honored objects of study: Students show an attunement to meters and diction that they could not classify. They point both toward major themes and ironic readings with effective subtlety that discussion questions might evade. And their scenes bring the class back to Shakespeare's language, inspiring close readings of other passages that, at least in my experience, students initially resist.

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"Ah, betrayed by my betrothed," sighs Hero of *Much Ado About Nothing*, in a scene written by students. In the added scene, Beatrice and Hero talk on the eve of the second wedding. By the time of the imagined conversation, Claudio has learned of his error in accusing Hero of infidelity but thinks that the trauma of his public denunciation has killed her. On one level, the group that wrote this scene credibly casts Claudio's accusation as an unconscious projection of his own struggle to commit to a relation of mutual dependence that marriage ideally represents. Expressing anger, not only at Claudio, but at a friar and father who would "suffocate" her "fragile autonomy," their Hero further evinces a degree of self-awareness that she may seem otherwise to lack. And, in a surprising turn, the group's Beatrice counsels Hero that Claudio might sincerely repent and mature in the aftermath of his cruel accusation: "As strange as the thing, I will swear by it. Claudio is changed by your loss, and seeks penance for his wrongs against you."

When questioned, the writers suggested that Beatrice's leniency here results from the evolution of her own

relationship with Benedick. Their language closely echoes, and so draws our attention to, the guarded terms in which Beatrice first admits to Benedick her love for him ("As strange as the thing I know not" (4.1.269)). As a class, we are led back and deeper into Shakespeare's play by the students' precise extrapolation from it.

Last quarter, I added creative summaries to the mix of group work. I challenged them to compete creatively with the plethora of internet resources, including popular attractions like shmoop.com and Thug Shakespeare. They did not disappoint. Summarizing the plot of *Richard II,* a student assumed the character of herald to emphasize the role of ceremony in the play. For *The Merchant of Venice,* students created a storyboard with boldly rendered figures grouped and regrouped to emphasize the play's representation of continually shifting alliances. Perhaps with a nod to the Joss Whedon film version of the play, students recapped *Much Ado* in the appropriate guise of affluent millennials engaged in pool party gossip. My only regret is that I did not require the presentations to be filmed.

Through group work and the discussions and writings that ensue, I strive to have students lay claim to their own interpretations of the plays, and especially the characters that most interest them. SCAD's insistence on the interactive classroom assists in this effort. So too does the independence that seems a hallmark of many of our students. (I especially remember one who refused to share in advance an idea for a paper because she feared I would tweak it.)

Students' engagement occasionally results in exchanges of the sort that many of us count among the greatest rewards of teaching. In one such pursuit, I was struggling with a student I'll call Dee over a string of sentence fragments that made it difficult for me to follow his essay on Shylock. He met with me after receiving another discouraging grade that conveyed my overriding concern: His exceptional interpretations, which I had gleaned from his measured comments in class, were regularly obscured by significant constrictions in his writing. Despite the limits of a ten-week quarter, I was dutifully attempting to emphasize these important grammatical matters. Struck even more by his earlier – and surely related – concern that he had felt for a while that he just "couldn't think," I wanted better to understand the nature of his efforts.

As we both leaned over his paper about 20 minutes into the conference, Dee looked up with the question, "You know what this is?" He was ostensibly referring to his quotation of a large portion of Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" appeal. Still stumbling over grammar, I squinted in confusion. "Sojourner Truth," he said quietly. "Her 'Ain't I a Woman' speech?", I asked. "Yes, it's the same," he responded patiently, indicating that the connection for him was obvious.

"That's good," I said, and quickly continued by asking, "Why don't you write about that?" Given his characteristic reticence, I summarized a conceptual similarity in keeping with the rhythmic resonance of the two: Both the fictional Shylock and the historical Truth posed rhetorical questions to prod their listeners to move from apparently

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straightforward points of agreement to acknowledge injustices based upon constructions of religion, race, or sex.

Wanting Dee to expand and deepen this comparison, I then improvised by modifying my initial proposal. If I asked for another essay, as revision or extra credit, I doubted he would complete it. Late into the quarter, he was consumed by the group dynamics for a project in his interactive game design major. Besides, Dee knew I thought his previous writing lacked the sustained and lucid analysis I emphasized in grading: Why should he now expect a different response? From his perspective, an extra paper would exact excessive costs, both practical and psychic in nature.

Imagining these types of concerns, I suggested that he e-mail his main points to me in outline form. Before the next class, he did. He discussed his findings and further reflections, some with me at break and then some with the class: Historians now doubt that Truth spoke the question for which she remains most famous. Although she had delivered some version of the speech at a woman's rights convention in 1851, a later chronicler likely supplied the rhetorical structure, along with the southern dialect. (Dee was discouraged by this fiction, while I was intrigued that the chronicler might have conjured Shakespeare in the name of Truth.) Dee poignantly reflected that Truth's reported speech could be labeled by elements of our wary culture as the utterance of an "angry black woman." It could be thus aligned with Shylock's desire for vengeance. But Dee ultimately rejects this alignment. Instead, he discerns in Truth's remarks an aspiration to tap into a common humanity. In contrast, he views Shylock, hardened by mistreatment, as devolving into the monster others believe him to be.

"He discerns in Truth's remarks an aspiration to tap into a common humanity. In contrast, he views Shylock, hardened by mistreatment, as devolving into the monster others believe him to be."

Had I demanded a more traditional essay, I doubt that I would have received it. Instead, Dee's classmates and I got to learn from his insight. I gather that other professors have also recognized an unusual talent in Dee. I hope that our enthusiastic feedback has strengthened Dee's confidence and determination. Yes, his sentence fragments matter, but he may most effectively address them by being motivated and engaged in the process of developing his ideas.

My colleague, Mary Doll, emphasizes the etymological root of our term "curriculum" in the Latin *currerere,* which means "to run." For me, the emphasis is liberating: Curriculum, as object rather than activity, can isolate teacher from student and situate both as passive and transparent processers. Instead, in her writing and in her presence, Mary invites us to approach teaching as a series of personal journeys we take to encourage students to imagine journeys of their own. Mary's reminder suggests to me an image of teacher as supportive pacer in a long course race: she maintains a steady speed to provide a gauge so that other runners may ultimately surpass her. The pacer's movement stirs energy in others, her steadiness represents contexts recognized and traditions extended, and her restraint welcomes generational change.

After Dee's informal presentation, a Saudi Arabian student, mostly quiet in class, approached Dee near the door. "I like the way you think," he said. For the moment at least, I could answer the query, "What need's thou run so many miles about /. . .?" (*Richard III* 4.4.460– 461).

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BRITISH SHAKESPEARE ASSOCIATION: SHAKESPEARE, RACE, AND NATION

Swansea University, 17–20 July 2019

Shella Atim as Viola in Shanty Productions 2018 film *Twelfth Night*. Photograph © Shanty Productions.

SATURDAY 20 JULY FREE ENTRY FOR SCHOOL TEACHERS

PLENARY SPEAKERS INCLUDE:
Prof. Kim F Hall (Barnard College), Prof. Nandini Das (University of Liverpool) and Dr. Preti Taneja (University of Warwick)

BSA 2019 ALSO FEATURES A SCREENING OF *TWELFTH NIGHT* (Shanty Productions, 2018), including a Q&A with the company founders Rakie Ayola and Adam Smethhurst

SWANSEA UNIVERSITY is proud to host the 2019 British Shakespeare Association conference on the theme of "Shakespeare, Race, and Nation".

The conference aims to bring together academics, teachers, and theatre practitioners to tackle some of the most pressing issues affecting Shakespeare studies today. Teachers are welcome to attend the entire conference but may be especially interested in the final day (Saturday 20 July) when attendance for school teachers will be free.

The conference will feature a range of events, including panel sessions, workshops, and film screenings. Several sessions will be aimed specifically at school teachers. We also welcome proposals from teachers who may wish to speak or run workshops.

Please send an email to **bsa2019@swansea.ac.uk** if you have any suggestions or inquiries.

The conference will also feature an optional Teaching Shakespeare seminar, led by Helen Mears and Karen Eckersall of the BSA Education Committee. The seminar format involves circulating a short paper (2–3 pages) before the conference and then meeting to discuss all of the papers in Swansea. The seminar will take place on Saturday 20 July. To register interest, please send an email to **bsa2019@swansea.ac.uk**.

Further information about the conference, including additional events, will be posted on the conference twitter feed **@BSA2019** and on the British Shakespeare Association website: **www.britishshakespeare.ws/conference/**