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editorial

THIS SPECIAL issue of *Teaching Shakespeare* is titled 'From School to University'. It brings different educators together to share their thoughts about Shakespeare's transitional potential, and his ability to establish connections across different stages of education. Perhaps he is uniquely positioned to do this; Shakespeare is the only writer who is a mandatory component of Key Stage 5 specifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is a perennial figure on almost any undergraduate English Literature degree programme. His ubiquity in cultural life is first fostered in the classroom. Students may study a play at GCSE, but they've been absorbing his linguistic imprint long before – anytime they have played 'leapfrog' (*Henry V*, 5.2.133) in the playground or felt a bit 'lonely' (*Coriolanus*, 4.1.30), to name just two of Shakespeare's many coinages. We carry him with us, in our voice; he shapes the words we speak. It therefore makes sense for teachers to use this knowledge to think about forms of progression, and consider how Shakespeare's work can be used as a pathway in the study of English Literature beyond any individual stage of education.

The overlap between school and university is a neglected area of pedagogy. Paying attention to its salient qualities – its role as period of consolidation, for instance, or an area in which the edges of A Level can be joined to the early experiences of undergraduate study – can revise how educators teach Shakespeare's work. An integrated ethos can establish 'strong links of iron' (*Julius Caesar*, 1.3.94) across levels and open out Shakespeare to other forms of exploration, such as extra-curricular activity, and even potential career paths. Conversely, an overly goal-oriented approach, tailored to the demands of specific assessment formats, can limit the interpretative work that Shakespeare's practice is capable of, or impose an artificial barrier on different stages of progression – a risky approach, given the recruitment issues affecting both A Level and Higher Education. Any form of teaching which is connective rather than restrictive will bring out the richness of the Bard's work, which is centred on what Emma Smith calls the 'gappiness' of his language and its ability to invite mental engagement (Smith, 2019, p. 5); and it will empower students to draw on previous elements of their practice, to stretch themselves in new directions and use existing skill-sets in productive ways.

Several of the pieces in this special issue consider how certain approaches at Key Stage 5 can anticipate the study of Shakespeare at university. Gary Snapper suggests that the 'transitional experience of the Bard' at A Level can be enhanced by active pedagogy, centred on student interest and personal investment in the work. This thread is picked up by James Hunt, who draws on his doctoral studies to outline how physical interpretations of the script can encourage pluralist modes of thinking. Jenny Stevens suggests that adaptations of Shakespeare can open up broader critical questions surrounding canonicity and the mechanics of adaptive practice, which are often central to seminar discussions at university; whereas Vicki Medina situates English Literature recruitment in the context of male learners, pre-empting some of the challenges they may face when approaching Shakespeare later in their studies. Patrick J. Murray thinks about transferability in a diagonal sense; not all A Level students will go study English Literature at university, so mathematical

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approaches to Shakespeare can prepare pupils for a STEM pathway, in quite ingenious ways.

Some of the pieces situate Shakespeare in the context of Widening Participation and Continuing Professional Development. Lyndsay Miller outlines her experience of teaching Shakespeare to students who are approaching Higher Education from the Scottish Higher ESOL track, some of whom have English as a second language. Michyln Caffrey describes the use of drama-based strategies to engage learners at The Globe, as part of a collaborative CPD series with English Mastery aimed at widening access to Shakespeare, and the study of English Literature more broadly. Chris Green offers a glimpse of knowledge exchange through his experiences of visiting Santiniketan, the school founded by Rabindranath Tagore. The exposure of teachers to different pedagogical systems and philosophies can anticipate how we might teach Shakespeare in the future, most notably in the context of emerging challenges such as Artificial Intelligence.

Practitioners in Higher Education are also engaged in cross-educational initiatives, with a sharpened focus on where learners are coming from when they enter university. Esther Bancroft outlines a number of strategies designed acclimatise first-year undergraduates to the challenges of close reading. Focussing on a single poem, her shrewdly observed insights show how the key skills of linguistic exploration at school can be harnessed right at the start of the English Literature degree. Harvey Wiltshire uses the concept of crisis as a method of student engagement, drawing on the history of *krinein* to illuminate the scenes of political and tension in *Richard III*, and therefore encourage real-world points of contact. Paul Frazer and Rosamund Paice talk us through the creation of a module at Northumbria University designed to act as a bridge between A Level and university. Focussing on *Hamlet*, to help align university pedagogy with the single-text focus of Key Stage 5 curricula, Frazer and Paice provide a blueprint for undergraduate course design which places student transition at the very centre of a major entry-level Shakespeare module.

BIOGRAPHY

The guest editor, Richard Stacey, is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Glasgow, with research specialisms in Shakespeare and early modern drama. He has taught extensively in Higher Education, and sits on several educational committees for both university and Key Stage 5. He has expertise in co-created curricula and staff-student partnerships in syllabus design, and has published several pieces on his practice, including an account of co-designing a major first-year module with three undergraduates, as part of the Staff-Student Partnership Scheme, and an exploration of transitional teaching strategies between Sixth Form and university for Shakespeare, co-written with Patrick J. Murray. His edited collection, *Teaching Poetry and Poetics*, part of the Teaching the New English series for Palgrave, will appear in 2026. He has also co-edited *Shakespeare and the Shape of Words* with Adrian Streete for Cambridge University Press, and written an introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of *Henry VI Part 3* for Oxford University Press.

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ACTIVE SHAKESPEARE FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

WHAT MAKES our students choose to study literature? What exactly *is* literature, and is our students' understanding of it different from ours as teachers? What do we – and our students – think they will *get* from the study of literature? How do our students feel about their experiences of studying literature? What are their *attitudes* to the study of literature? To what extent are *their* cultural values reflected in the values enshrined in the curriculum and pedagogy they encounter? What kind of engagement do we want from them – and how might we achieve it?

Whether we're teaching at Sixth Form or at HE, these are questions we may well find ourselves grappling with – and these are the kinds of questions I set out to explore when (a couple of decades ago) I paused my career as an 11–18 English teacher in a state comprehensive school in order to do doctoral study in English and Education. I was particularly interested in looking at students' experiences of transition between A Level and university English, reflecting on the substantially different paradigms for the study of English literature that are dominant in each phase, and the way these are processed by students. More broadly, too, I was interested in the formation of English students and, eventually, teachers – and the ways in which different versions of the English curriculum make sense – or not – to them.

It was a fascinating study. I followed a first-year English undergraduate class in a well-regarded 'new' university English department for one year, sitting in on their core lectures and seminars, and interviewing both students and lecturers about their attitudes to, and experiences of, the course, as well as what they had encountered at A Level. The main focus of my study was their core module on 'Ways of Reading' – which launched the largely unsuspecting students into some fairly hard-core study of literary theory, in conjunction with the reading of a series of set texts, including *Othello, Frankenstein* and *The Waste Land*.

I started with a hypothesis that aspects of literary theory might help students to clarify some of those questions mentioned earlier, to demystify aspects of the study of literature, and to enable them to make valuable connections between literature and contemporary social, cultural and political thinking. But what I largely found was that the study of theory – as constituted in the course – rather added *more* difficult-to-answer questions about exactly what they thought the study of literature was for and what it was made up of. As we know, students – even those who choose to study literature at A Level and university – are often ambivalent about Shakespeare, poetry and other elements of the curriculum; for some of the students I observed, literary theory could now be added to their list of alienating experiences in English (Snapper, 2013a).

In my discussion with, and observations of, students, it became clear that poetry could also be a sticking-point, for a range of reasons (Snapper 2013b). At the end of the head of department's introductory lecture during a Q+A, one student asked whether, having done the first 'introduction to poetry' module, they could 'get through the rest of the course without having to do any more poetry'. *The Waste Land,* the poetry text in the 'Ways of Reading' course, divided opinions: some students felt completely lost in it, but even those who approached it positively had some difficulty in grasping its purposes or socio-cultural contexts, let alone its meanings. Attitudes to Shakespeare were more varied – but still encompassed a great deal of ambivalence. On balance, students clearly felt much more comfortable with prose fiction and prose drama, with relatively modern texts written in broadly realist modes – and with a focus on aspects of narrative plot, character, theme and context – perhaps reflecting the dominant modes of A Level study.

It wasn't clear-cut, though: it also became apparent that they could be interested and engaged in almost anything as long as the *teaching* was engaging – as long as it started from where they *were* – from the kind of questions *they* wanted to ask – rather than from where lecturers thought they *should* be. When lecturers began with what the students *thought* about the texts they were reading, or how they r*esponded* to them, or how they *felt* about the study they were undertaking, avenues were opened up into the kind of theoretical thinking that the course aimed to foster, or into the demystification of texts and ideas that might have otherwise seemed alienating – and genuine dialogue and participation began to develop. Pedagogy matters.

"It also became apparent that they could be interested and engaged in almost anything as long as the teaching was engaging – as long as it started from where they were – from the kind of questions they wanted to ask – rather than from where lecturers thought they should be."

I did not see any teaching of Shakespeare, but it may be valuable to reflect on how these dynamics could play out in relation to students' transitional experience of the Bard. We might start by considering the barriers that Shakespeare presents, as well as the elements that might motivate and engage less confident students.

A central issue is what happens when a play is experienced as an apparently context-less printed text for critical discussion in the literary seminar room. Of course, discussion in such a setting might well be powerful and rewarding, depending on circumstances, but it might also risk making the text seem inert or dislocated from its real-world settings, particularly if students are not already committed to the project of critical exploration in the way that it is conceived by their lecturers, and if they have little experience of the plays in performance and have previously perceived the plays largely as examination hurdles to overcome. What to do if the 'magic' of Shakespeare – or at least of the *study* of Shakespeare – has failed to materialise? How to kick-start a more active, engaged mode?

In my study of the transition between school and university English, I encountered several accounts of university Shakespeare teaching that struck me as presenting powerful ways of engaging students by meeting them at their learning 'thresholds' (Meyer and Land, 2006), at the same time as driving their thinking forward by using innovative and motivating pedagogies. Ros King, at Queen Mary University of London, for instance, taught Shakespeare to her undergraduates by sending them into local (East End) primary schools to teach their set text to children (King, 2007). Her account of the ways in which this experience transformed her students' view of Shakespeare (drawing on their reflective journals) is enlightening, demonstrating how an active and participatory pedagogy might allow students to take ownership of their study in new ways – and perhaps mirroring the way in which we, as teachers and lecturers, sometimes feel that we have learnt at least as much about our subject from *teaching* it as from studying it. A similar approach was also used in one of the secondary schools I taught in: GCSE students were tasked with writing and illustrating a children's version of the play they were studying and going into a local primary school to read it to and discuss it with younger children there, thus giving them a strong sense of agency in their Shakespearean study, and some experience of thinking about Shakespeare pedagogically for themselves.

These kinds of approaches – which attempt to engage students physically and imaginatively in the worlds of the plays or to get them to consider the ways in which

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the plays might 'come alive' in the modern world, as a starting point for a broader commitment to Shakespeare – have been successfully used in schools over the years. 'Active Shakespeare' was first promoted by Rex Gibson at the Cambridge Institute of Education in the 1980s to build student engagement and motivation in the study of Shakespeare by helping them to experience the language and ideas of the plays through a range of embodied and creative approaches. Gibson (1998) insisted that we should see the plays as scripts and keep their dramatic context in the foreground; his ideas have been powerfully taken up by the Royal Shakespeare Company (Winston, 2015) and Shakespeare's Globe (Banks, 2013) in their influential work with schools over many decades. And, whilst mainly focused on 11-16 children, Gibson's ideas may be valuably adapted for older students, at A Level and in HE: indeed, the RSC and the Globe have done similar work with university students in Birmingham and London.

In my own sixth form teaching, I have, for instance, found it valuable to engage students in performance aspects which have led to profound considerations of the meanings and purposes of plays and of their role in the world. The easy availability of DVDs and streamed performances of excellent contemporary (and older) productions of the plays makes it possible to focus discussion as much on how actors and directors interpret and actualise the plays in the theatre as on how students and teachers do so in the classroom. With my sixth form students, I would intersperse classroom reading and discussion of a scene of the play with subsequent viewing of that scene in one or more performances, almost always leading to more impassioned discussion of the play itself, and greater awareness of the interpretational contexts of the play.

Once the play was studied, I would introduce students to the concept of setting a Shakespearean play in a modern context, show them extracts from such productions of other Shakespeare plays, and then ask them to consider how they might do something similar with the play they were reading. What aspects of the socio-cultural world

of the play might be interestingly represented through transposing the time setting? Where and when might they set the play in order to bring out parallels and/or differences and dissonances? Whether a stage version or a film version, how might this play out in relation to the characters, settings and scenes of the play – and what would the key moments be? In what ways might they focus on particular interpretations and representations? How might they use their version to point to ways in which society has changed as well as remained the same? Such activities have the potential to enrich students' experience and commitment when moving on to more conventional critical engagements through reading and writing literary criticism.

In Higher Education, Paul Prescott, too, has written about the way in which, at Warwick University, 'active' Shakespeare helped undergraduates to take ownership of their learning as well as to understand the social and cultural dynamics of the plays (Prescott, 2013). There, undergraduates were given the choice between 'traditional' Shakespeare seminars or a workshop approach called 'Shakespeare Without Chairs' (or a hybrid of the two). Grounded in the university's inter-disciplinary work on 'open-space learning', the approach uses drama exercises to guide students 'to think about the urban contexts in which the play was written and first performed, and the range of imaginary spaces . . . through which the characters move and exist'.

These examples of active approaches are illustrative of the ways in which thoughtful pedagogy of various kinds has the potential to draw students into Shakespeare, and to ease the transition between school and university study. Further accounts of a range of engaging pedagogical approaches for sixth form and HE students may be found in Pamela Bickey and Jenny Stevens' valuable book *Shakespeare, Education and Pedagogy*, which also reflects powerfully on the relationships between Shakespeare and education more broadly (Bickley and Stevens, 2023).

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ACTIVE PEDAGOGY AND THE CULTIVATION OF PLURALIST THINKING

As students progress in English studies, from A Level to university, they must learn to appreciate plurality, the idea that texts invite multiple interpretations rather than fixed meanings. This skill underpins critical debate, engagement with diverse perspectives, and intertextual connections. Yet cultivating plurality is challenging. Rhonda Blair warns that reliance on 'table work' can lead to a 'too-narrow range of possible outcomes', prematurely closing down exploration (Blair, 2010, p. 12). Conversely, active approaches open interpretive space, enabling students to co-construct meaning through embodied and creative engagement.

Active approaches involve physical and creative activities that bring Shakespeare off the page through reading aloud, embodying characters, experimenting with movement, and engaging rhythmically with language. These approaches are perhaps most famously associated with Gibson's Shakespeare in Schools Project (1998) and the Royal Shakespeare Company's rehearsal-room practices (2013).

Using observational, photographic and audio data from lessons and student focus groups during teaching of *Macbeth*, my own doctoral study into active learning evidenced how active approaches foster agentic and embodied interactions with texts. Across multiple lessons, pluralities emerged from the teacher's deliberate use of constraints, structures that both focus student choices and nurture the development of complex concepts. Furthermore, embodied student responses collaboratively emerged from shared classroom experiences as students took responsibility for negotiating interpretations with one another.

EXAMPLE 1: THE BANQUET SCENE (ACT 3, SCENE 4)

In the banquet scene, in which Macbeth, having orchestrated Banquo's murder, is haunted during a royal feast, the classroom became a low-tech, immersive space: a rope marked out a table on the floor; tankards and red fabric signified feast and blood respectively; the notion of a court was suggested by distributing playing cards to assign a hierarchy of where students should stand around the rope in relation to the king. These simple materials created portals into the historical world of a royal feast, one intruded upon by the supernatural. As Margaret A. Dulaney describes, props are 'a catalyst to unearth students' inherent and emotive knowledge' (Dulaney, 2012, p. 39).

The teacher asked a student to play the ghost and walk down the imagined table. She repeated this task three times, and each time the other students had different roles. First, they played banquet guests, ignoring the ghost, rehearsing the controlled etiquette of a court feast. Then, they observed a peer portraying Macbeth as he reacted physically and verbally to the ghost approaching him. Finally, each student took on the eponymous role, responding individually to the ghost.

Photographic data revealed that the students embodied Macbeth's psychological turmoil in diverse ways, with varied gestures; some leaned back in fear, others reached out defensively, whilst one or two froze in shock. While assimilation occurred at times (shared angular arm positions, wide eyes), subtle differences suggested interpretive plurality: fear, guilt, madness, and vulnerability could be interpreted as physically represented in the space.

These strategies led to a range of critical interpretations of the scene. Some students unpicked layers in the language connected to Macbeth's guilt, with others noticing different details, including the semantic field of 'death and violence', words suggesting 'questioning and uncertainty', and 'connotations to the bible', such as the words 'serpent' and 'venom'. Each contribution was acknowledged and extended through teacher questioning, building a shared cumulative understanding of the plurality within the presentation of Macbeth's turmoil, where death, uncertainty and moral judgement intersected within Shakespeare's language.

Later, during the focus group reflections, students' depth of understanding was confirmed as they recalled multiple words to describe the presentation of Macbeth in this moment, including 'crazy', 'descent', 'unstable', 'filthy' and 'guilt'. These layered understandings emerged in response to the complexity of the characterisation – students recognised not only the shock of a royal banquet disrupted by murder, but also the deeper tragedy that Macbeth had killed his own king, intensifying his guilt.

A cognitive ecology is in evidence here; the collective

effort of the group was essential to each individual's understanding. Creating the embodied scene of a banquet to layer understanding required co-construction, preparing students for pedagogical strategies they are likely to encounter later in their studies at undergraduate level.

EXAMPLE 2: THE SLAUGHTER OF MACDUFF'S HOUSEHOLD (ACT 4, SCENE 2)

In another lesson, students explored the slaughter of Macduff's family. To embody the female characters in this scene, students wore simple dresses and learned Shakespearean curtseys, imagining they were in the Globe Theatre, exaggerating their moves for the whole audience. Reactions to the slaughter of Macduff's family ranged from head-in-hands despair to crouching over imagined bodies, and later led to the demonstration of plurality through verbalising emotive understanding: 'distress', 'shock', 'startled', and 'surprise'.

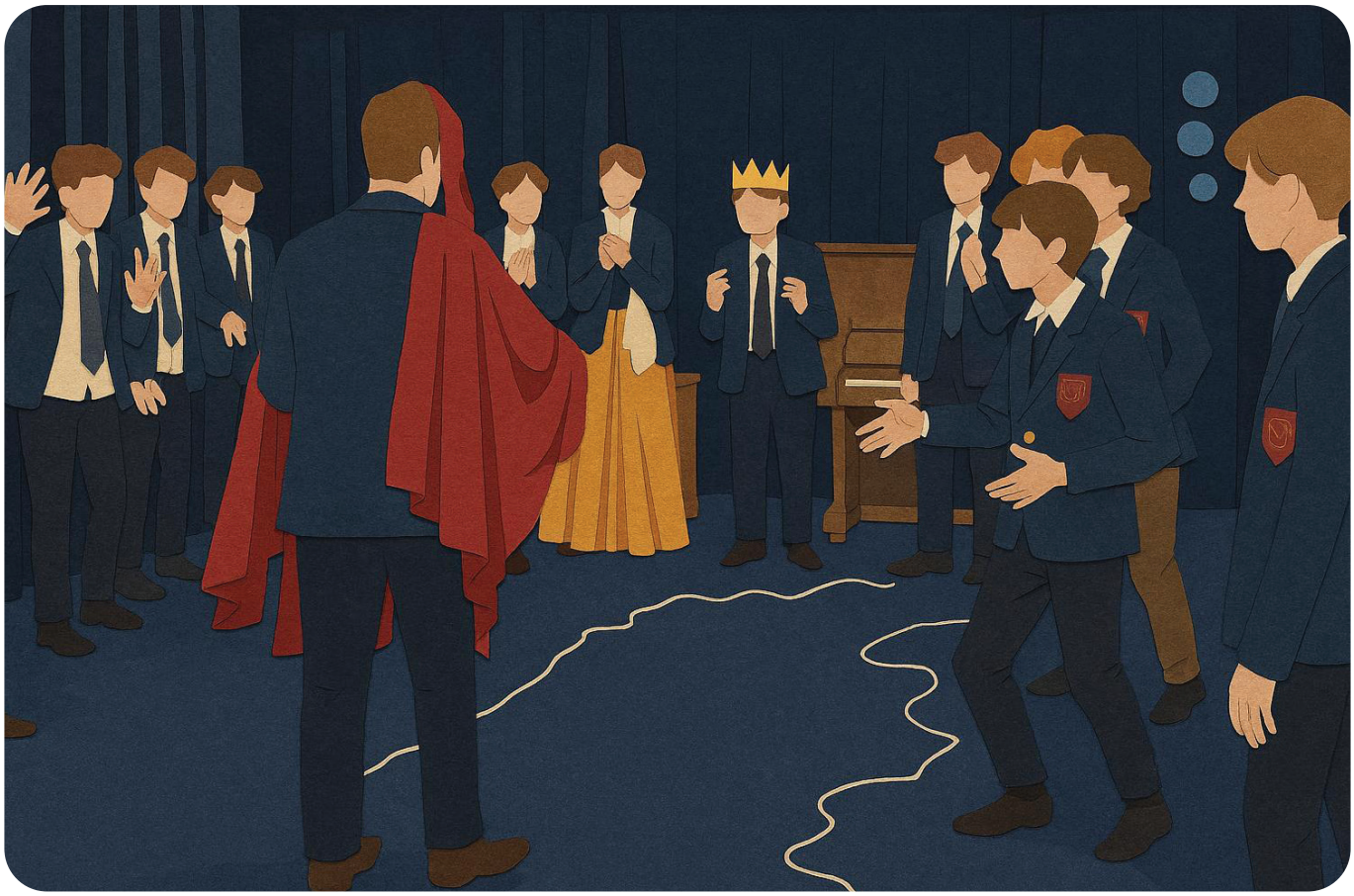
However, the main activity in this lesson involved reading the scene multiple times in pairs. Each time, the teacher gave a different physical gesture to accompany the reading aloud: firstly, ducking down to indicate fear, then pointing when specific pronouns are mentioned, and finally, gesticulating to the bird references within the text.

When the class emphasised pronouns, discussions turned toward who bears blame and who is addressed; when the focus was bird imagery, the gestures supported talk about vulnerability or the protective instincts of motherhood. The teacher employed structured repetitions to scaffold the students' interpretation and performance. Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara argue that such constraints enable 'co-participation, co-emergence, and co-implication' , aligning with dialogic pedagogy (Davis and Sumara, 2010, p. 859).

The repeated enactments built a repertoire of physical responses from which students could draw as they composed a final performance. As they gained confidence, they began to manipulate and personalise their interpretations. This creative agency came from gestures which articulated emerging feminist perspectives, for example. As one student in the focus group stated, 'By actually reading it again and again and looking for a specific detail each time, you notice all of it, then you can bring it all together'.

EXAMPLE 3: WHOLE PLAY TABLEAUX

Later in the unit, students worked in groups to prepare presentations on themes such as the natural order, masculinity, and the supernatural. They selected lines to represent in tableaux sequences. This task required recall and synthesis of prior learning. For instance, in exploring



the natural order, students revisited ideas of hierarchy, status and disturbance first encountered during the banquet scene.

Cohen Ambrose introduces the concept of assemblages, how learners organise knowledge: in this lesson, students were actively assembling and applying prior knowledge to construct meaning through reflecting on photographs taken during the activity (Ambrose, 2019). Students cited the rope and tankards as memorable; perhaps this is because these props broke from classroom routines.

As this lesson was later in the teaching, students had more freedom to draw on their repertoires. One emerging example involved a group dramatising Macbeth's arrest for regicide, a moment absent from the play, but which was used to demonstrate guilt and justice. In the focus group reflection, one student justified this choice: 'It's what Macbeth might have been privately thinking when he was feeling guilty and panicking'. Here, creative play became a vehicle for critical inference, linking textual clues ('he knows the consequences', one student remarked) to an original representation achieved through possibility thinking.

A transcription of another group's talk included terms from different speakers, such as 'king', 'slaves', 'tier', 'best', 'up', and 'crouching'. Some signified rank ('king', 'slaves'), others described spatial positioning ('up', 'crouching'), and a few conveyed judgment ('best'). Such layering illustrates how embodied activity catalysed a deepened understanding of the social, spatial and evaluative dimensions of hierarchy which was being responded to by the students.

Following this lesson, the focus group articulated meta-awareness about interpretive openness: 'I don't think there is really a right answer [. . .] as a group you've got to decide [. . .] what you think is important'. Such comments indicate a shift from seeking teacher-given certainties to embracing ambiguity as a productive stance in the exploration of *Macbeth*, which is also a feature of close reading at university and other post-school educational pathways.

CONCLUSIONS

There are three takeaways from my practice in active learning. First, plurality can be enabled through constraints that focus attention while legitimising variation. Second, action and perception are a recurring loop which builds complexity of interpretation: embodied and linguistic interpretation is co-dependent, supporting physical action and verbal reflection. Thirdly, learners exist in a cognitive ecology, where a teacher acts as a 'meddler in the middle' (McWilliam, 2009), maintaining the equilibrium of openness by actively stepping in and out of learning. In doing so, students will consider alternatives, try something a different way, or create links to prior knowledge.

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The examples here suggest that active approaches play a significant role in developing pluralist thinking, evident in the range of responses and the layered complexity of ideas. This is foundational for the transition to higher levels of study, where learners must move beyond reproducing accepted readings to engaging critically with texts and contributing original insights, often to a larger seminar discussion. Shakespeare's canonical status positions his work as elite and fixed (Coles, 2013; Evans, 2017; Winston, 2015), yet active approaches challenge this assumption by opening up forms of democratic, student-centred engagement and facilitating accessible plurality through embodied, playful experimentation. As students progress toward university-level English, developing agency in meaning-making, by recognising interpretive openness, interrogating perspectives, and realising their capacity to generate new knowledge, is not only desirable but essential.

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EASING THE TRANSITION FROM POST-16 TO UNDERGRADUATE SHAKESPEARE

ON DISCOVERING that I'm an English teacher, new acquaintances will often speak fondly of the Shakespeare play they studied for A level. Some might even treat me to a near-perfect rendition of several verse lines – a textual intimacy that partly derives from the relatively leisurely pace of post-16 Shakespeare study. It is unsurprising, then, that those who continue the subject at university are somewhat taken aback by the content, scope and approach of Shakespeare-related modules.

Back in 2006, a survey investigating undergraduate Shakespeare teaching revealed that 89% of the 51 institutions who responded considered students to be 'at best adequately and often poorly prepared for their studies' (Thew, 2006, p. 3). It also evidenced that the teaching approach and organization of undergraduate Shakespeare courses was worryingly out-of-step with students' prior experiences. Nearly twenty years on, the gap between the education phases has narrowed, but it remains the case that the transition to university Shakespeare is not always an easy one.

Moving forward to 2014, Emma Smith spoke to a group of teachers in a twilight session at the English Media Centre about current trends in Shakespeare studies in the academy and the implications of these for A level teaching and learning. Smith underlined that the close reading of a single play that typifies secondary Shakespeare study was not mirrored in the broader theoretical approaches of degree-level English, a difference she exemplified in a related blog post:

> *Lots of university courses are interested in Shakespeare translated into other media – perhaps most prominently, film, but also in novels, graphic fiction, paintings and other visual arts, music, and poetry. (Smith, 2014, 2nd para)*

In the past decade or so, school and university have moved a little closer in their embracing of Shakespearean adaptation. Where examiner's reports once cautioned against replacing the play-text with a popular film adaptation, they are now more likely to commend, even encourage, candidates to incorporate them into their responses. After all, introducing students to the work of *auteur* directors

"where examiner's reports once cautioned against replacing the play-text with a popular film adaptation, they are now more likely to commend, even encourage, candidates to incorporate them into their responses."

such as Akira Kurosawa, Vishal Bhardwaj and Julie Taymor is an ideal means of meeting one of English Literature A level's five assessment objectives: 'Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations' (AO5).

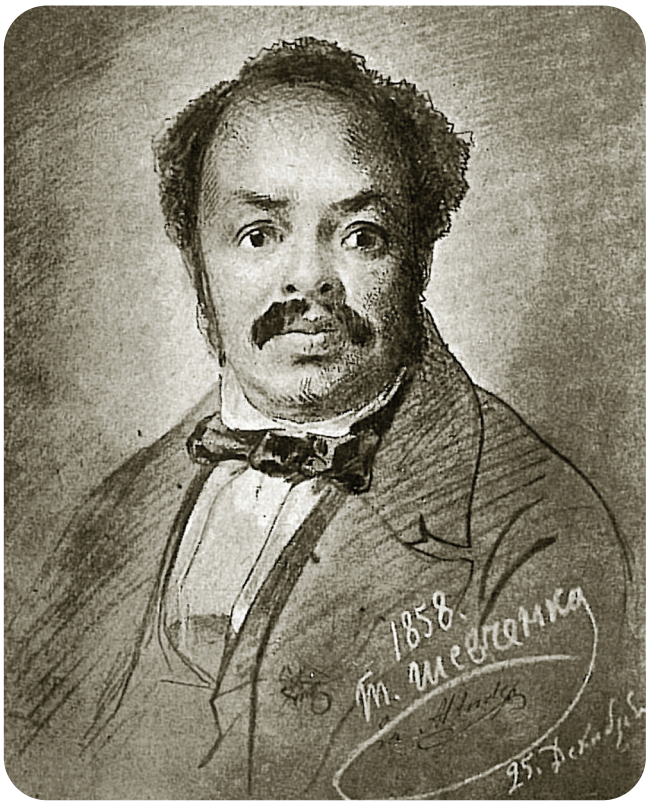
If Shakespeare on screen now enjoys a secure place in the A-level English classroom, other forms of inter-medial re-imaginings are less evident, despite offering a multiplicity of learning benefits. For example, examining the composition of a painting such as William Holman Hunt's *Claudio and Isabella* (1850) helps students get to grips with the central dilemma of *Measure for Measure*, while dipping into Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1850–52) underscores the popularity of adapting Shakespeare, even at a time of high reverence for the national poet. Indeed, encountering works from a former era prompts learners to think about how literary texts have been interpreted 'over time', a requirement of the Subject Content that tends to be overlooked (Subject Content, 2014, p. 2 – see item 16). Contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare also provide stimulating material for class debate, ranging from professional remediations such as *Hamlet Hail to the Thief* (2025), a fusion of *Hamlet* and the music of Radiohead, to user-generated materials hosted by fandom platforms.

Engaging students with Shakespearean afterlives can be done equally effectively through intra-medial adaptations – the moderns in creative dialogue with the early moderns. The rest of this article focuses on how A level students might benefit from these transhistorical conversations. A useful starting point for considering such benefits is the challenging shift from GCSE to A Level. In some cases, students come to their sixth-form English studies keen to leave behind their GCSE Shakespeare play, not least because assessment-focused teaching at this level can result in the type of familiarity that breeds contempt. Setting aside a lesson at the start of the A-level course to read an extract from a modern dramatic adaptation of the class's GCSE play (or plays) can revivify interest, at the same time as introducing the academic field of adaptation studies.

The two most popular play choices at GCSE, *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*, have both inspired inventive and critically admired contemporary dramas. Zinnie Harris's *Macbeth (an undoing)* (2023) addresses the tragedy's textual lacunae, most especially around the female characters – a creative strategy that can be explored through a well-selected extract. David Greig employs a more extra-textual approach in *Dunsinane* (2010), a drama defined by Graham Saunders as 'a speculative continuation of *Macbeth*' (Saunders, 2017, pp. 119–120). Opening where *Macbeth* leaves off, Greig's play is an imaginative sequel, centring on English attempts to secure Malcolm's place on the Scottish throne – efforts persistently thwarted by local resistance and the late Macbeth's widow Gruach, a figure more securely fixed in the historical record than Shakespeare's Lady. Quick-witted and sassy, Gruach contests the misogynistic stereotypes that can be seen to inform her early modern counterpart, providing a compelling discussion topic for post-GCSE students. *Romeo and Juliet* has perhaps attracted an even greater number of modern reworkings. Two recent plays which work especially well in extract form are Gary Owen's *Romeo and Julie* (2023), a contemporary take on the star-crossed lovers set in the working-class Cardiff community of Splott, and Ben Power's *A Tender Thing* (2009), a deftly-managed collage of Shakespeare's play that depicts the lovers as they might have been had they enjoyed a happy marriage, enduring well into their old age. Attending to a brief passage from the play will exercise the new A level student's textual recall, as Shakespeare's lines are resituated, reassigned and occasionally rephrased by the adapter.

In the later stages of the A level course, offering extracts from contemporary stage adaptations of the set Shakespeare play can provide a fresh lens for exploration and revision. Such comparative study can also prepare prospective English undergraduates for the approaches they might encounter in university modules. Three pairings which work especially well are *Antony and Cleopatra* and Derek Walcott's *A Branch of the Blue Nile* (1983); *Othello* and Lolita Chakrabarti's *Red Velvet* (2012); and *Hamlet* with Jack Thorne's *The Motive and the Cue* (2023). All three modern plays have in common the setting of the rehearsal room, thereby keeping students alert to the fact that their set Shakespeare play is intended primarily for the stage – not the examination room.

A Branch of the Blue Nile is a postcolonial treatment of *Antony and Cleopatra*, telling the story of a Caribbean theatre company mounting an indigenized performance of Shakespeare's Roman tragedy. Walcott's play interacts with Shakespeare's most broadly in its mirroring of Antony



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and Cleopatra's relationship in a love affair between the actors cast in the titular roles: Sheila and Chris. As rehearsals progress, Sheila comes to feel that her Black body does not align with what she regards as a character essentially conceived as white. Reading the scene when Sheila expresses her fear that 'the world sniggers' (2.3) when a woman of colour speaks Cleopatra's lines, opens opportunities for students to consider contextual issues such as the traditional casting of white Cleopatras, leading perhaps to the question of how far the play's language provides evidence that Shakespeare intended a Black queen. Informing these discussions with snippets from seminal works of Critical Race Studies by scholars such as Celia Daileader, Kim F. Hall and David Sterling Brown, can take learning into the realms of undergraduate study.

Lolita Chakrabarti's *Red Velvet* offers a rehearsal scenario loosely grounded in fact: Ira Aldridge's induction into the acting company at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden in 1833. Aldridge was chosen to replace the admired actor Edmund Kean following his collapse on stage in the role of Othello – a replacement that was met with racist hostility by some theatre reviewers. The first actor of colour to play Othello on the patent-theatre stage, Aldridge is a

"when a woman of colour speaks cleopatra's lines, opens opportunities for students to consider contextual issues such as the traditional casting of white cleopatras, leading perhaps to the question of how far the play's language provides evidence that shakespeare intended a black queen."

key figure in the performance history of Shakespeare's tragedy, but one that was missing from the performance record until relatively recently. Scene 2 of Chakrabarti's neo-Victorian drama imagines Aldridge and Ellen Tree rehearsing Othello and Desdemona's reunion in Cyprus. As the two actors discuss performance strategies, issues around the 'correct' delivery of the verse emerge, as in this interchange about Othello's speech (2.1.181–91):

> ***Ellen Tree:*** *Do you mind a little friendly observation? When you said 'content' you put the emphasis on the first syllable which is very American I think . . .*
>
> ***Ira:*** *I like its scale, its volume, 'wonder great as my content' wonder as vast as myself . . .*
>
> ***Ellen Tree:*** *Yes of course, I see that, I do. I, I just thought if you try 'content' as we say it, meaning happiness, it makes the scale larger. Allows the line to expand even more.*
>
> ***Ira:*** *'It gives me wonder great as my con-tent, content To see you here before me.' Yes, I see. Interesting, I'll try it. Thank you.*

Reading this scene in its entirety (around 600 words) is a thought-provoking means of revising one of Othello's major speeches. Yet it could also generate the type of broader discussion topic encountered at degree-level: the proprietorial British attitudes to Shakespeare in the nineteenth century, to name but one example.

Closer in time, both in its setting and performance history, Jack Thorne's *The Motive and the Cue* tracks daily rehearsals for a 1964 Broadway production of *Hamlet*, directed by John Gielgud and starring Richard Burton. First performed at London's National Theatre, Thorne's drama played to sell-out houses and was warmly received by theatre critics. Placing one of the play's sixteen scenes alongside Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can illuminate some of the structural and linguistic details of the source play, as well as introducing twenty-first-century students to theatrical celebrities of the mid-twentieth century. Discussion might focus on the enduring popularity of the play-within-a-play, or the daunting prospect of performing a role as theatrically iconic as Hamlet. Alternatively, an activity might attend to one of the scenes where the acting company drills down into Shakespeare's language. Take, for example, Act I Scene 7, which features a disagreement between director and actor over how Hamlet's third soliloquy (2.2.484–540) should be articulated:

> ***Gielgud:*** *Richard, if I may, there's a music in this speech that I think might give us help here.*
>
> ***Burton:*** *What music?*
>
> ***Gielgud:*** *This speech is a gentle build. Is it not monstrous? One phrase poses, the other answers. Until eventually a climax is found. Hear the Handel in it, it's Zadok – da-ba-ba-da-ba-ba da-ba-ba-ba-ba . . .*
>
> ***Burton:*** *I'm not sure I – without meaning to cause a problem – I'm not sure I hear the music like that – I hear it differently –*
>
> ***Gielgud:*** *Exciting. What is your music?*
>
> ***Burton:*** *I'm not sure the music I hear has been written.*

Richard Burton *did* find his own 'music' for the role and students can hear it in a filmed version of the stage show which, at the time of writing, is available on YouTube.

Working with dramas such as those featured in this article prepares prospective English undergraduates for some of the broader questions around canonicity, originality and co-creativity they might encounter at university. In addition, such study lays the foundations for the rich variety of adaptation modules offered by today's universities and some of the concepts explored therein: Does an authentic Shakespeare exist? Do Shakespeare's plays hold universal truths that can be passed from one era to another? How far is reworking Shakespeare an act of homage? Such an approach will at least have got students thinking about the cultural status of the world's most studied author.

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‘the spice and salt that season a man?’

HOW STUDYING SHAKESPEARE AT A LEVEL BENEFITS THE FUTURE LEARNING OF MALE STUDENTS

My summer 2025 exam series A level English Literature class was almost 65% male. I am proud over my 16-year career as an English teacher to have had a significant number of A level English Literature classes that have been at least 50% male, if not more. That is not to say that this has been the case every year and, unfortunately, I have seen the overall decline in male students over this period too. Through the years, my male students have gone on to study degrees in English Literature, English Language, History, Business, Management, Law, Geography, and Design, as well as studying at various conservatoires, both in music and in drama. I strongly believe that studying Shakespeare helped prepare my students for all of these courses, as well as helping them to navigate what it means to be a man in modern society. In this article, I will discuss the benefits of studying Shakespeare, in A level English Literature, for male students.

‘I dare do all that may become a man.
/ Who dares do more is none.’ ***Macbeth***

To teach Shakespeare to male A level English Literature students is to present them with a range of different types of masculinity. In a time where young men are often bombarded with a very narrow, hegemonic, view of masculinity in popular culture, as well as the ‘crisis of masculinity’ which is an ongoing feature of the ‘2020s’, the teaching of Shakespeare offers diversity and scope to dare (Mercer and Smith, 2022). Through Shakespeare, young men are able to engage with and critique different masculinities through the lens of the past, and draw their own conclusions about both the texts and different models of male identity in society and culture. The age of Shakespeare’s writing provides a safe distance from the issues of today, that enables our young men to identify the possible continuities of his themes into the modern day. The power of studying Shakespeare lies in granting our young men to define for themselves what it is to ‘become a man’.

‘What a piece of work is a man!
how noble in reason!’ ***Hamlet***

Shakespeare presents his audience with all types of male characters, from kings to servants, the wealthy to the poor, heroes to villains, the melancholic to the clown. Importantly, most, some may say all, of these characters are flawed (Horlacher, 2015). They feel as if they are human. For young men who do not conform to the type of masculinity presented by certain influencers, drill music, and other media, Shakespeare’s extensive presentation of masculinities is essential, as it allows them to critique models of maleness at a safe distance from their own lives.

Shakespeare gives us imperfect, realistic men who are thinkers, as well as doers, in a time where, arguably, young men are being told that they are valued more for what they can do, or gain through falsified ‘Insta-perfect’ reels, rather than what they can think and feel. In doing so, he validates the pursuit of ‘noble reason’, a particularly important message in a time when we are seeing fewer male students progress to university, especially to study the Arts and Humanities.

‘Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast.’
Romeo and Juliet

Studying Shakespeare is a lesson in endurance; the full reward of the depth and layers of meaning do not come quickly to the A level English Literature student, or indeed, any student of English Literature. However, the patience of cumulative, thorough study and engagement is requited in the ability to engage with, understand, discuss and evaluate both the literal and the metaphorical. Developing these skills to a high level, through the study of A level English Literature, is crucial for success in all higher education, regardless of degree subject.

Furthermore, the care, patience and time required to study Shakespeare in detail is essential for the sustaining of attention spans, which research tells us are becoming shorter, sadly (Fargol, 2025). For students whom algorithms feed shorter and shorter TikTok videos and other social media reels, pausing and working ‘wisely’ and ‘slowly’ to fully appreciate Shakespeare not only helps to create a longer attention span but also delayed gratification, both of which are vital skills for success in degree-level study, and beyond. Walter Mischel et al. found that: ‘[. . .] children who delayed gratification longer [. . .] developed into more cognitively and socially competent adolescents, achieving higher scholastic performance and coping better with frustration and stress’, a (Mischel et al., 1989, p. 933). It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the development in delayed gratification through studying Shakespeare will benefit male students in higher education.

'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers' *Henry V*

The A level English Literature classroom, particularly when studying Shakespeare, is a space for discussion, debate and dialogue. We tackle 'the big topics' – discrimination, prejudice, inequality, human behaviour and emotions – and, most importantly, there are no 'right answers', no 'right' opinion to have; we encourage, champion, and inspire idiosyncratic, unique thought. When a group of teenagers discuss these issues, under the guidance and steering of a teacher, there develops a strong sense of camaraderie and belonging, between students from all backgrounds and experiences.

Wolstenholme and Sen found a general reluctance in male students to discuss personal 'big issues', such as mental health, which can have detrimental impacts on their overall wellbeing (Wolstenholme and Sen, 2025). Therefore, the strategies that are employed in the classroom by the skilled teacher to encourage and develop this discussion about Shakespeare's characters, such as creating a safe and open environment, accepting and acknowledging all answers from students but mitigating where required, and requiring contributions from all members of the class, are essential. If our male students can discuss the 'big issues' of fictional characters, it also encourages them to explore these personally. Additionally, given that we are preparing students for the diverse environment that is university, and ultimately the workplace, students of A level English Literature are especially well-prepared to work effectively with others, to discuss in a balanced and understanding way, and to be able to put forward their own views well.

However, these male students are also likely to be in the minority, as, in June 2025, only 8,247 male students sat A level English Literature (JCQ, 2025). Given that 665,070 young people applied to begin undergraduate degrees in September/October 2025, and if we presume that all of the male A level English Literature students progressed to university study, that would mean that only 1.2% of current first year undergraduate students at UK universities are males with an A level in English Literature (UCAS, 2025). Therefore, it could also be assumed that, should aspiring male undergraduate students wish to 'stand out from the crowd' through their A level subject choices, they should consider joining the 'few' that make up the 'band of brothers' of male students studying English Literature.

'[. . .] what's past is prologue.' *The Tempest*

Studying Shakespeare at A level means examining the social, political, economic and historic context of the time period in which he was writing, and reflecting on how these influence the writing and reception of the text (Smith, 2001). It also asks students to examine etymology, the history of English Literature, and the stage, all the way back to Greek theatre and medieval morality plays. Combined, all of these contribute to a greater understanding of not only Shakespeare, but to the layers of past study and human factors on which everything is built. Ian Pye has studied how men are generally socialised not to engage in discussion (Pye, 2018). Breaking through these barriers by studying Shakespeare, therefore, enables our male students to develop skills that will benefit them both academically and personally. Given that every subject that can be studied at university is built on the knowledge of the past, skills in understanding and evaluating, along with appreciating, the influence of the past on present knowledge, aids male students who have studied Shakespeare to apply these transferable skills to any future degree. Studying Shakespeare, therefore, becomes the 'prologue' for all future study.

'[. . .] but be not afraid of greatness.' *Twelfth Night*

To conclude, the benefits to male students of studying Shakespeare to A level are numerous and wide-ranging, especially in the development of transferable skills for future university study. But, in my opinion, perhaps the most important benefit is that Shakespeare himself is a male creative, who feels deeply and expresses those emotions, whilst also exploring the human condition, and, in being so, his texts teach our young men that this type of masculinity has strength and longevity, enabling them to achieve ongoing academic success, and is a 'greatness' of which they should not be 'afraid'.

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'SONNET 138'

IN A LEVEL, students can often be studying dissimilar subjects simultaneously. It is not unusual to find in an English Literature class learners who are also exploring topics as varied as Biology, Spanish and Physical Education. The careful balancing of these diverse disciplines can be demanding in and of themselves for the learner. However, if a multi-disciplinary mindset is facilitated, one where the study of one subject can feed into study of another, broader advancements of learning and intellectual inquiry can be the result.

Some subjects have self-evident imbrications. Performing Arts, for example, with its emphasis on deconstructing dramatization aligns neatly with studying plays in textual form. Others, however, can function at a clear, distinct remove from English Literature. A case in point is Mathematics. Often misperceived as a 'boy's subject' in opposition to English Literature's perceived remit as a 'girl's subject', this academic discipline appears to differ drastically from its literary counterpart (Francis, 2000; Parish, 2021; Li et al., 2022). Most obviously, the notation of Mathematics – algebraic and not alphabetic – is entirely different, marking an orthographic incongruence for those who 'think in words' and those who 'think in numbers'. Despite this difference, there are still a significant number of students who combine these subjects. According to the Office for Qualifications entry information for 2023-2025, a combination of English Literature and Mathematics features in the top ten of 'English Literature and other subjects' variations (Ofqual, 2025). Overall, over 2500 students in the 2024-25 cohort (nearly 930 in the top 25 choices) sat a combination of English Literature and Mathematics or Further Mathematics.

The purpose of this article is to set out pedagogical methods which might cater to these students and their mathematical interests. Taking advantage of the knowledge gained through Assessment Objectives embedded within A Level Mathematics, teachers of English Literature can guide and elucidate learner understanding of the subject, cultivating a potential symbiosis between both subjects in the process. In an insightful survey of the relationship between 'Science' and 'Technology' in Shakespeare's lifetime, Pamela O. Long writes:

> *In Shakespeare's age, the worlds of scientia and ars – the investigation of nature and the fabrication of things – were drawing closer together. Values derived from the arts, including the appreciation of handwork, individual experience, and firsthand observation, influenced the growth of the new, empirically based sciences that flourished in the late sixteen and seventeenth centuries. (Long, 2016, p. 247)*

By replicating the interdisciplinary spirit identified by Long in the early modern period, learners can be adventurous in the intellectual methods they bring to their A Level study.

Recourse to the specification for the most popular exam board for A Level Mathematics in England – Edexcel – indicates several key objectives across ten key subject areas. Learners completing the qualification are expected to be able to:

- *Understand and use the structure of mathematical proof, proceeding from given assumptions through a series of logical steps to a conclusion; use methods of proof, including [p]roof by exhaustion and [d]isproof by counter example.*
- *Understand and use proportional relationships and their graphs.*
- *Work with sequences including those given by a formula for the nth term and those generated by a simple relation of the form.*
- *Understand and use exponential growth and decay.*
- *Carry out simple cases of integration by substitution and integration by parts; understand these methods as the inverse processes of the chain and product rules respectively. (Pearson, 2017)*

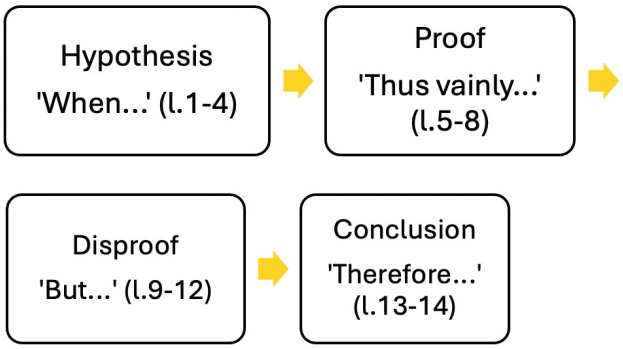
As a demonstration of how these proficiencies may be applied to close reading within an A Level English Literature classroom, I would like to look at 'Sonnet 138'. An outstanding illustration of Shakespeare's skill in rhetorical persuasion, the poem utilises both vocabulary and logical structure to propose, evidence and deftly resolve an initial conjecture. It has an intricately systematised plan of oppositions ultimately settling to a finely measured balance. It employs a number of the key mathematical principles recognisable in the A Level Mathematics curriculum: proof, sequencing, proportionality, exponential variation and integration. The enumerated skills, I hope to demonstrate, can be shown to be directly applicable to an analysis of Shakespeare's sonnet, emphasising how a

'mathematical approach' to the poem can yield insight into the complexities of its structure, vocabulary and tone.

As a starting point, consider the primary learning objective, '[to] [u]nderstand and use the structure of mathematical proof, proceeding from given assumptions through a series of logical steps to a conclusion'. The phrasing of the Assessment Objective provides a clear narrative framework for reading 'Sonnet 138'. The poem's structure points towards an undergirding mathematical schematisation, wherein enumeration, equivalency and logical flow coalesce to form an evidenced proof or statement. As the equations below demonstrate, the operative vocabulary of Shakespeare's argument coincides closely with this logic:

I do believe her/I know she lies =
state given assumptions
Vainly thinking she thinks / though she knows /
simply I credit = follow logical steps
But wherefore says she not / And wherefore say
not I = consideration of disproof
I lie with her and she with me =
assert clear conclusion

This structure is further foregrounded by the lexical signposts demarcating the first three quatrains and the concluding couplet. Highlighting these can encourage use of more spatialised forms of interpretation. Shakespeare's rhetorical framework may be diagrammatised by students like so:



For mathematically-minded students, whose GCSE learning will cover familiarisation with graphs as a problem solving methodology, such visualisation has obvious utility. The schematisation of the unerring, ratiocinative structure of the poem highlights the knowingly-ironic logic of this seemingly illogical poem, which asserts the fidelity found in lies.

Furthermore, in a striking consonance with Mathematics, Shakespeare's literary *tour de force* makes skilful use of proportionality to buttress its argument. Again, the assessment scheme emphasising 'proportionality of relationships' coincides with a key feature of 'Sonnet 138'. Helpfully, this is identified by one of the simplest activities in Mathematics – quantification through counting. Consider, for example, Shakespeare's use of personal individual, personal collective, and possessive pronouns. In a poem concerned with the duality of a romantic relationship, these may be appropriately tallied into two categories – the personal (I/me/my), the referential (she/her):

PRONOUNS	
She/her	I/me/my
𝍸 𝍸 I	𝍸 𝍸 I

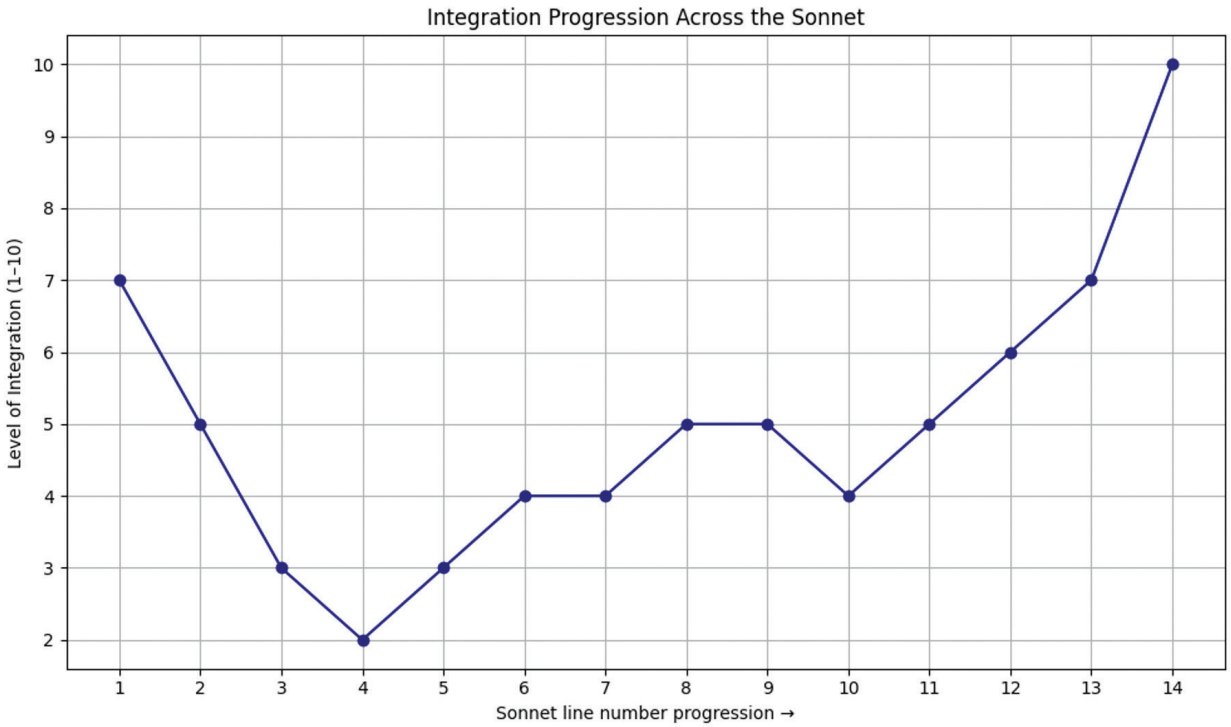
As with outlining a logical structure of the sonnet within mathematical terms, tabulation highlights the poet's meticulous balancing of pronouns up to the final couplet, referring to the speaker and the subject. There is a striking symmetry in the count – both she/her and I/me/my appear eleven times. This evenness underscores the poem's focus on the equality of the relationship between the speaker and his love. Furthermore, the lexical schema of the poem reinforces a sense of interaction that resolves in communion. While 'she/her' and 'I/me/my' repeat proportionately through the poem's first thirteen lines, by the concluding line a new equipoise and integration emerges: 'And in *our* faults by lies *we* flattered be' (14). Just as the differences over truth and falsity has given way to unity, so the personal pronoun has given way to its collective counterpart. Appositely, too, this word class appears twice.

If the poem rewards focus on concepts such as logic, sequencing and equilibrium, another key aspect of its language may be interpreted through the mathematical notion of exponential growth and decay. Broadly speaking, the poem charts the development of a relationship and its interactions. However, at the heart of this development is the changing status of fidelity: both sides lie to each other to the point where 'simple truth' is totally 'suppressed' (8), before a knowing faith emerges, growing into a more profound understanding of the lovers' respective qualities. To track the development of integration ® separation ® integration in the sonnet's relationship, teachers of mathematically-minded learners may encourage them to consider using a technique often applicable to algebraic computations – setting out a graph. Gauging the level of integration between the speaker and his lover on a rough scale of 1-10 on a line-by-line progression, students may tabulate rewording alongside the poem's text:

SONNET TEXT
"When my love swears that she is made of truth," *"I do believe her, though I know she lies,"* *"That she might think me some untutor'd youth,"* *"Unlearned in the world's false subtleties."* *"Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,"* *"Although she knows my days are past the best,"* *"Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:"* *"But wherefore say she not she is unjust?"* *"And wherefore say not I that I am old?"* *"On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd."* *"O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,"* *"And age in love loves not to have years told:"* *"Therefore I lie with her and she with me,"* *"And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be."*

PARAPHRASE / INTEGRATION (1-10)
Claim of truth, allusion to integration (7) Mixed, slight separation (5) Distance in understanding (3) Separation grows (2) Mutual, deliberate misperception emerging (3) Distance acknowledged (4) Acceptance of falsity, reluctant integration (4) Questioning of lack of faith (5) Recognition of own deception (5) Reciprocal action (6) Admission of the fragility of trust (7) Knowing acceptance of the flawed other (8) Communal action (9) Joint acceptance for self-validation (10)

The below schema can then be plotted. Thus, a parabolic trajectory emerges within the relationship, where integration decays then grows as the lovers' familiarity with 'love's best habit' enhances. The undulatory nature of the graph underscores visually the Sonnet's focus on the volatile complexities of love and its intricate vacillations between falsehood and truth.



This essay hopes to have demonstrated how thinking about Shakespeare's great poem using a variety of disciplinary methods may create new interpretative tactics. Drawing diagrams, constructing tables, charting sequences, evaluating proportionality, even counting – all these ostensibly mathematical skills are embedded within the Mathematics A Level specification and, if considered imaginatively by the English Literature teacher, can be used to elucidate new and interesting aspects of the poem, particularly for students whose primary interest may not be overtly 'literary'. Moreover, perhaps, they alert us again to the capaciousness of Shakespeare's lyricism and its multiple, often mathematical, significances.

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teaching 'sonnet 130' to forced migrant students

ENGLISH TEACHERS across the sector are familiar with the unique challenges of teaching Shakespeare: unfamiliar language, metre and rhyme schemes, and a lack of the relevant cultural contexts, to name but a few, tend to complicate basic comprehension and create barriers to learning. While the level of instruction may sequentially increase, along with expectations of deeper and more nuanced readings, these challenges remain consistent across the sector, in Secondary, Further and Higher Education. Intralingual translation, a type of 'rewording' or paraphrasing that allows students to modernise language and update unfamiliar cultural contexts, has long been used in the Shakespeare classroom (Jakobson, 1959, p. 232). However, as Paula Blank argues, early modern English is 'continuous enough with our own Modern English that we cannot and do not draw formal language boundaries between them' (Blank, 2018, p. 15). This has led to a pedagogical focus on providing enough context on sixteenth and early seventeenth-century society and culture to make Shakespeare navigable to readers, rather than irrevocably changing his language in classroom readings. While I have used this approach to good effect in first-year seminars, it is not an entirely adequate approach for teaching students whose native languages and cultures are disparate to Shakespeare's own. Fabio Ciambella suggests that, in these instances, more 'extreme attempts to modernise Shakespeare's Early Modern English are absolutely respectable and extremely useful for their intended readers'(Ciambella, 2024, p. 81). This provides a useful context for a teaching space that includes readers who are approaching Shakespeare in their second (or, as is often the case, third or fourth) language.

This article reviews my experience of teaching 'Sonnet 130', the most well-known of Shakespeare's so-called 'dark lady' sonnets, at the University of Glasgow's widening participation Summer School in 2022. The programme runs for four weeks, with daily lectures and seminars that condense roughly one semester's worth of study in a month. In the spring of 2022, I wrote a fresh curriculum, in which I focused on balancing breadth and depth, and ensuring granularity while giving students a broad overview of the possibilities of an English degree. However, this was all done without prior knowledge of the shifting nature of the cohort, which had changed with the inclusion of significant numbers of two sets of forced migrant students. In previous years, summer school students were drawn from three main groups: secondary school leavers from schools in SIMD 1–4 postcodes; FE students with recently completed HNDs; and students who had been invited to attend by the university's disability service. This constitution was upended by the inclusion of Ukrainian secondary school students from across the UK, who had sought asylum following the Russian invasion in early 2022, and Scottish secondary school students, who had come to Scotland as young children through refugee routes from North African countries (primarily Libya) in the early 2010s, and who had now reached the end of the secondary schooling in the city. Thus, the inclusion of these students required a tailored approach to the course, specifically early modern content such as 'Sonnet 130'.

The University of Glasgow's summer school has run since 1986 and is open to students whose conditional offers mandate their attendance. Students typically study two academic subjects closely aligned to their destination degree programmes, as well as an accompanying academic skills module. It is a key part of the University of Glasgow's widening participation and transitions programme and it typically leads to higher performance in classes and coursework in first year, and a stronger likelihood of degree attainment, than students from similar backgrounds who do not attend (Browitt et al., 2023, pp. 21–23; Scottish Funding Council, 2025).[1] In 2022, the summer school was delivered fully online, as it had been in the two previous years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This made it more accessible to students out-with the greater Glasgow area, and is what enabled so many Ukrainian students, a number of whom lived in England, to attend. Despite obvious similarities between these two groups of students, there are some important distinctions. The students from Ukraine had taken standard, English Literature university admission exams – mostly A levels, with some Scottish Highers, whereas the North African students had largely been streamed through the Scottish Higher ESOL track.

1. This data has been gathered by the widening participation team at the University of Glasgow but is yet to be published. A brief summary of their findings is thus: students who study on the University of Glasgow's Summer School generally have higher student retention rates (continuation after 1st year) than the average for widening participation students from SIMD20 postcode areas. The Scottish Funding Council report that, in 2023-4, 86.1% of students from SIMD20 postcodes continue their studies after 1st year, while the national rate is 89.5%. Summer School students, thus fall in between these numbers have continuation rates above 86.1%.

This qualification focuses on English use 'in the contexts of everyday life, work and study', preparing students to use the English language functionally (SQA, 2019, p. 2). It does not, however, introduce students to literary texts and the writing and presentation skills that are necessitated by an English studies degree. The practical situation this created for me was twofold: while the Ukrainian students had a working familiarity with academic writing, having spent only a matter of months in the UK school system, they tended to write essays according to Ukrainian, rather than, British standards. This produced essays that were more fulsome on background and contextual information and were thus more descriptive than those required at A level or Higher. This situation, where they straddled two dissimilar education systems, had created barriers to their direct admission to university and required an approach that helped to recalibrate existing skillsets in relation to the study of Shakespeare. The North African students, on the other hand, were entirely fluent *speakers* of English with little experience of reading literary texts, let alone writing or speaking about them in a classroom or assessment context. In this case, I was, in a sense, starting from scratch – not just with Shakespeare, but the study of literature itself.

This situation created the following challenges: I now had a proportion of students who were unfamiliar with basic standards of essay writing in the Arts; uneven educational familiarity with the study of Shakespeare; and students who would be reading in a second or other language. It

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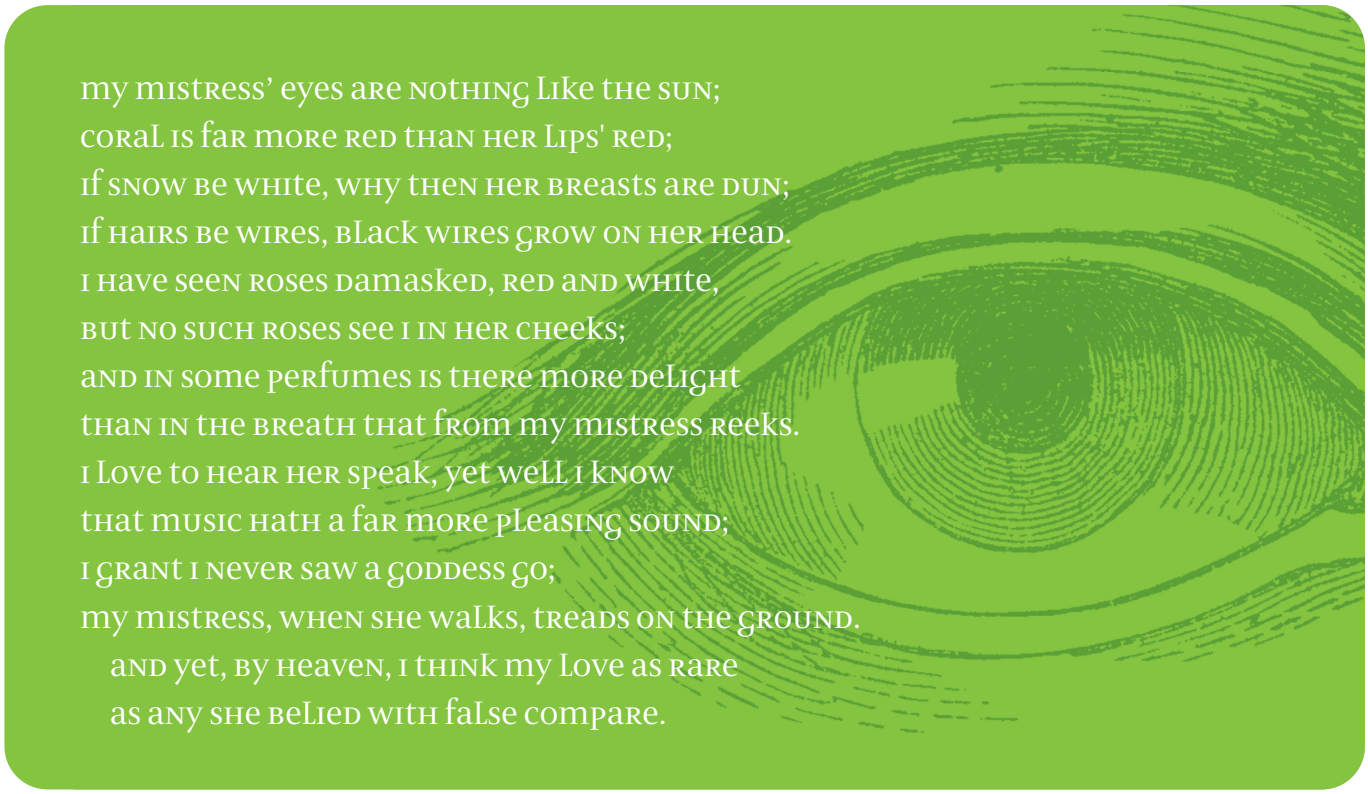
was in this context, with a syllabus and reading list that it was too late in the day to change, I found myself teaching Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 130'. I had initially anticipated there would be some push-pull with this work, name brand recognition playing off against any number of off-putting factors (negative previous experiences of studying Shakespeare, archaic language, in iambic pentameter, no less, to name but a few). I was largely correct in this assertion, but only amongst the students who had received their majority schooling in the UK and studied English Literature A-levels and Highers. The forced migrant students seemed relieved, on the one hand, to be faced with a work in English by a writer they had heard of. This was a welcome surprise and gave me an unexpected hook with which to engage their interest. However, my concerns about unfamiliar language and the syntax precipitated by iambic pentameter led them to stumble at the first hurdle, when the reality of reading Shakespearean English set in. I thus decided that a form of intralingual transition would be a useful tool in keeping these students' interest in Shakespeare and helping them understand the content of 'Sonnet 130', in order to facilitate a fruitful seminar discussion.



my mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
coral is far more red than her lips' red;
if snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
if hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
but no such roses see I in her cheeks;
and in some perfumes is there more delight
than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
that music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
my mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
as any she belied with false compare.

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"I decided that, instead of simply encouraging students to break the sonnet down in plain English, I would ask them to 'translate' it into their English. This allowed for use of dialects and pidgins, and it platformed first language interference in the form of syntax variation."

At this juncture, I decided that, instead of simply encouraging students to break the sonnet down in plain English, I would ask them to 'translate' it into *their* English. This allowed for use of dialects and pidgins, and it platformed first language interference in the form of syntax variation. Students prepared these intralingual translations in small nationality/area groups in breakout rooms (this could just as easily be done in small groups in the physical classroom) and presented them to their peers. This resulted in multiple rich, engaging and insightful readings of Shakespeare's sonnet, which played with notions of gender, sexuality and race. One such example transformed 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun:/ Coral is far more red than her lips' red' (1–2) into 'Her eyes ain't nothin' much to look at / an' her lips are all kinds of ashy'. In synthesising the results of this group work to segue into whole class discussion back in the main room, I stressed the importance and validity of plural Englishes over one expected, standard and correct English. This facilitated students taking ownership over the non-standard forms of English that they use, and to celebrate them within a structured educational environment. In the final part of the seminar, I encouraged students to consider the role of literary whiteness in 'Sonnet 130'. I extracted from the assigned seminar reading, Kim F. Hall's '"These bastard signs of fair': Literary whiteness in Shakespeare's sonnets', presenting a concise, bullet-pointed summary of the article to the class. I put students back into breakout rooms in the same small groups as before and asked them to identify binary language and imagery in the sonnet, using their intralingual translations as an access point.[2] They were given a link and access code for a Mentimeter word cloud, which allowed me to easily see the most common responses as they grew larger on the screen before I brought everyone back into the main room. The top three responses were, in order, 'black wires grow on her head' (4), 'If snow be white, why then her breast are dun'(3) and 'roses damasked, red and white' (5). The final discussion of Shakespeare's language was fluid and perceptive, with students confidently contributing to a discussion of whiteness, Blackness and race in 'Sonnet 130'.

Overall, this approach allowed me to create a 'more inclusive space for [my] students; one where the position of a particular group is not subtly prioritised as dominant by the very language which is under examination' (Stacey, 2023, p. 26). This was a particular priority, given the national and racial identities of the forced migrant students I was working with. It was received as empowering by students who had, at various times in their educational journeys thus far, felt they were on the back foot, whether as a result of doing ESOL rather than English Literature qualifications, or because of a sudden, forced shift in educational systems and standards. Taken together, students were genuinely excited by the opportunity to use their own Englishes in a legitimate educational environment, which ultimately allowed them to engage deeply with 'Sonnet 130', and to present sensitive and nuanced readings that reflected on Shakespeare's relationship to race within the wider context of early modern society.

"Taken together, students were genuinely excited by the opportunity to use their own Englishes in a legitimate educational environment, which ultimately allowed them to engage deeply with 'Sonnet 130', and to present sensitive and nuanced readings that reflected on Shakespeare's relationship to race within the wider context of early modern society."

2. I took my cue for this task from Richard Stacey's excellent icebreaker in 'Teaching Whiteness in Shakespeare's Sonnet 18'.

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DRAMA-BASED STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING *THE TEMPEST*

WHEN ENGLISH Mastery and Shakespeare's Globe began building a new CPD model for *The Tempest*, our aim was to bring performance and scholarship into a closer, more purposeful dialogue. Many teachers already draw confidently on a wide range of approaches, and this work seeks to extend that repertoire by offering practical ways to explore the play through action as well as close reading. The intention is to move beyond treating *The Tempest* solely as a text for page-based analysis and open up the possibilities that come from approaching it as a play crafted for the stage. Below are three of the strategies we explored with teachers – straightforward techniques that invite meaning to emerge through voice, movement, and interpretation.

FREEZE FRAMING

In one session, we began with Act 1 Scene 2, when Prospero reminds Ariel of the service he owes him. Teachers created freeze frames that captured this moment. Some arranged Prospero standing over Ariel; others made the pair more equal, joined by the same sense of tiredness. Each group added one line from the text, and predictably many picked 'Dost thou forget / From what a torment I did free thee?' (1.2.250-251).

As teachers talked about their images, the conversation shifted from arranging bodies to thinking about the relationship. They noticed how Prospero's stance often echoed the emotional pressure he places on Ariel. One teacher said that saying the line aloud made its manipulation far clearer than when they'd only read it. Others spotted small signs of resistance in Ariel's posture, which mattered even though they were subtle.

Teachers said the activity allowed them to move smoothly between physical choices and close reading, helping students picture the relationship before facing the harder language. It shows that performing a moment is another way of reading it, giving students a route into character relationships without sending them straight into dense text.

SCENARIO SHIFTS

The *Scenario Shifts* strategy takes a single scene and reimagines it through different social or emotional filters. In the CPD, teachers watched the Prospero–Caliban exchange from Act 1 Scene 2 performed three times:

- *as **parent and teenager**, with Prospero overbearing and Caliban embarrassed*
- *as **showman and heckler**, with Prospero playing to an audience and Caliban cutting through his authority*
- *as **guilty and manipulative**, with Prospero's control weakened by remorse and Caliban taking advantage of that hesitation*

Seeing the same lines played in contrasting ways changed how teachers heard them. The 'parent and teenager' version made people laugh at first because Prospero's scolding felt familiar. What mattered here was that it also opened up a softer side to their relationship for some: Prospero wasn't only a tyrant, but a figure weighed down by frustration and old affection. We discussed the idea that perhaps he once saw Caliban as a son before seeing him as 'monstrous'.

The 'showman and heckler' dynamic made the scene suddenly public: Prospero performing authority and Caliban trying to puncture it. The 'guilty and manipulative' version slowed the scene down; pauses carried as much weight as the insults.

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In the short discussion afterwards, teachers explored how each version uncovered something different. One said that the 'guilty' Prospero helped her hear 'This island's mine' (1.2.332) not as simple rebellion, but as a reminder of a damaged relationship. Another said the 'parent and teenager' reading made 'this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine' (5.1.275-276) feel newly loaded, almost parental.

This led us to talk about how quickly students fall into 'good' versus 'evil', and how activities like this help them move past those instincts. Teachers discussed using the technique to help Key Stage 3 learners track how relationships shift over time; affection turning into disappointment or power. In classrooms, this approach becomes a way to deepen interpretation. Replaying scenes with altered contexts helps students see that meaning is shaped by tone, distance and intention. More importantly that Shakespeare's stagecraft is built on choice.

I WANT TO SAY VS I HAVE TO SAY

This strategy works especially well with moments where power restricts speech. We used Ariel's plea for freedom in Act 1 Scene 2: 'Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains, / Let me remember thee what thou hast promised' (1.2.242–243).

Teachers performed the lines twice: first saying what the character *wants* to say, then what they *have* to say, because of status or fear. The difference was immediate. The first version had energy and defiance; the second was quieter, hesitant, tinged with frustration. The exercise exposed the constant negotiation between honesty and obedience that sits under the text.

In discussion, teachers said this approach encourages students to think not just about spoken lines, but about what remains unsaid. It opens questions about power: who stays quiet, who forces that quiet, and who gains from it. Many said they would adapt it for Miranda and Ferdinand, or for Prospero and Caliban. It can be used anywhere a character hides parts of themselves because they don't have the freedom to speak openly.

DID YOU JUST SAY?

A related exercise, *Did You Just Say?* is light-hearted but revealing. Working with Caliban's 'Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises' speech, teachers worked in pairs. One read the lines, while the other interrupted at instinctive moments with 'Did you just say…?' followed by a chosen word. The reader would then repeat and emphasise that word before continuing.

As teachers tried it, the room filled with laughter and interest. Words like 'sweet airs', 'instruments', and 'dreaming' reappeared. When asked why, teachers said the repetition changed what they noticed: one teacher mentioned she had never thought much about 'instruments' but repeating it made her see the strangeness of man-made sound on the island. Another said that repeating 'dreaming' made the speech feel more troubled than she expected.

By the end, teachers agreed that slowing the text in this way made its imagery feel close and physical. What makes this strategy particularly helpful is that it can be done while seated. With large classes, teachers often avoid drama because they worry about movement becoming unmanageable. This seated version keeps things simple, encouraging students to listen closely and linger on words that catch their attention. It's a reminder that Shakespeare's rhythm carries meaning before any formal analysis begins.

REFLECTIONS AND IMPACT

Across the CPD sessions, what stayed with us was how much teachers gained once they stepped from reading into performing. Even those who started cautiously found that speaking a line or shifting tone revealed ideas that reading alone hadn't. The discussions that followed were braver, more curious, full of 'what if' and 'maybe'.

Teachers will start using these approaches when teaching *The Tempest* from spring 2026. We look forward to hearing how students respond – especially how these performance-based methods help them connect with character, voice, and interpretation.

For English Mastery and the Globe, this collaboration showed again that teaching Shakespeare doesn't require a choice between careful analysis and creative practice. When teachers treat *The Tempest* as something to move through, question, and speak aloud, students begin to approach it with the same confidence and curiosity.

If you'd like to see these approaches in action or explore them further, you can watch the free webinar. Scan the QR code or visit: https://youtu.be/7SvfyoEs80c.

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FROM SANTINIKETAN TO THE AI CLASSROOM

LAST SUMMER I was lucky enough to visit Santiniketan, the school in West Bengal founded by Rabindranath Tagore, and it immediately struck me as a place where Shakespeare would thrive. Its open-air classrooms, emphasis on creativity, and commitment to moral and aesthetic education create precisely the kind of environment in which Shakespeare's plays – works that demand imagination, ambiguity, and ethical engagement – feel most alive. Tagore's belief that education should awaken wonder rather than merely deliver information offers a striking model for how we might teach Shakespeare today. In this sense, Shantiniketan prefigures what Hilary Cremin's recent call in *Rewilding Education* to reimagine the school system urges: an educational ecology where Shakespearean thinking – complex, unpredictable, and deeply human – can take root.

This broader educational conversation forms the backdrop for the British Shakespeare Association's decision to dedicate its February conference entirely to the impact of AI on Shakespeare studies. That such an institution now treats AI not as a peripheral curiosity but as a major force in Shakespeare scholarship reflects how profoundly digital technologies are reshaping the field. Shakespeare has, of course, always been an area of interpretative multiplicity, and the arrival of AI raises new questions about authorship, textual interpretation, and the authenticity of reading practices. The anxiety is not simply about technology, but about who gets to interpret Shakespeare – and how.

This anxiety resonates with a persistent public rumour that leading technology entrepreneurs quietly send their own children to low-tech or no-tech schools (perhaps like Santiniketan). Whether true or not, the rumour captures a growing fear that some may be shielding their children from the very AI-saturated culture they promote for others. For those of us concerned with teaching Shakespeare, the stakes are clear: will Shakespeare be protected as a space for human thought and reflection, or will he become one more dataset for algorithmic processing? The suspicion that the 'real' education is being preserved elsewhere feeds a sense of inequity and intensifies the struggle over what Shakespeare should mean in the digital age.

This struggle surfaces clearly in the Curriculum and Assessment Review final report of November 2025. Chaired by Professor Becky Francis, the Review offers an expansive set of recommendations for embedding digital and AI literacy across the curriculum. For English teachers, however, the proposals feel oddly incomplete. The Review acknowledges Shakespeare's canonical status, yet offers little sense of how Shakespeare might function within an

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AI-transformed curriculum. What does it mean to read *Macbeth* when predictive text models can generate essays about ambition? What does the close reading of *King Lear* look like when machines can simulate interpretation? Many of us expected the Review to defend the rigour and imaginative depth of Shakespearean study, but it could be said to lean instead toward technological adaptation rather than disciplinary renewal.

These questions are even more pressing because the boundary between Sixth Form and university Shakespeare teaching has become increasingly blurred. A level students are asked to produce sophisticated critical analyses that can resemble early undergraduate work, while universities find themselves teaching reading practices that might once have been learned at school. Shakespeare sits at the heart of this overlap. Students encounter him repeatedly, yet often in fragmented or contradictory ways: Shakespeare as cultural capital, Shakespeare as political text, Shakespeare as performance. The result is a pedagogical continuum that can stimulate but also confuse. Clarifying Shakespeare's role across this transition – what we want to learn from him, and why – is now more important than ever.

Drama-based pedagogies offer one of the most promising ways to reclaim Shakespeare's vitality in this shifting landscape. The early Play Way system at The Perse School in Cambridge, with its emphasis on creativity, embodiment, and experiential learning, resonates strongly with Shakespeare's own theatrical origins. It reminds us that Shakespeare is not merely a text to be decoded but a collaborative, physical, and emotional encounter. Contemporary pedagogy increasingly reflects this insight: both the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe have recently released major new teaching resources, albeit without apparently consulting one another. Their simultaneous efforts show the urgency of rethinking Shakespeare education, even if the field remains somewhat fragmented. Meanwhile, resources such as Amanda Guigere's *Shakespeare and Violence Prevention: A Practical Handbook for Educators* (2025) demonstrate how Shakespeare's explorations of conflict, power, and reconciliation can serve as practical tools for cultivating emotional literacy in students.

This broader reframing invites us to consider Shakespeare's relevance in a world marked by geopolitical instability and rapid technological change. It is not unreasonable to wonder whether Shakespeare now serves as a kind of secular ethical resource, offering guidance through complexity at a time when easy answers abound. Shelley's famous claim that poets are 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world' takes on renewed resonance here. Shakespeare's plays – so attentive to moral ambiguity, political contingency, and human frailty – continue to legislate our imaginative possibilities, even if quietly.

Yet the pressures of Information and Communication Technology reforms and the rapid expansion of AI have forced many English teachers to change how they work. Those of us who do not find it easy to absorb the all-pervasive ICT approach have had to adapt to systems and frameworks that feel at odds with (arguably) the slower, interpretative labour encouraged by Shakespeare. The pressure to adopt technological developments moving at pace have also forced many English teachers to change how they work. But this adaptation does not have to diminish the discipline. On the contrary, it offers a chance to articulate more forcefully why Shakespeare matters: he teaches readers to tolerate ambiguity, to interpret complexity, to recognise conflicting motivations, and to inhabit perspectives unlike their own. These are precisely the capacities that machines cannot replicate.

Teaching Shakespeare today means holding together a set of tensions: embracing creativity without sacrificing rigour, responding to AI without being subsumed by it, and shaping an educational pathway that respects the transition from school to university. If we can navigate these tensions thoughtfully, Shakespeare will continue to serve not merely as a curricular requirement but as a profound human resource – a guide for thinking, feeling, and imagining in a world increasingly shaped by technologies that struggle to do any of these things well. Returning to Santiniketan, one sees a model for what Shakespeare education might reclaim: a space where curiosity is nurtured, creativity is valued, and reflection matters as much as information. Amid the pressures of AI and digital reforms, such an environment reminds us that Shakespeare's true power lies not in answers, but in the human capacity to question, imagine, and engage with complexity.

"teaching shakespeare today means holding together a set of tensions: embracing creativity without sacrificing rigour, responding to ai without being subsumed by it, and shaping an educational pathway that respects the transition from school to university."

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EASING THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY THROUGH CLOSE READING

THE SEMINAR room can be a daunting space. It is often difficult to encourage a love for literature whilst trying to dismantle some of the preconceptions undergraduates have about university. Most students are excited by language, but this emotional investment can fade after successive school assessments and a summer holiday. To quote Billy Collins’ ‘Introduction to Poetry’, poems can quite quickly turn into things from which learners ‘torture a confession’ (Collins, 2006, p. 14). Qualifications with a mandatory poetry component, such as Highers, Advanced Highers, A Level and International Baccalaureate, have ensured that students are at least familiar with close reading strategies and preliminary connective linguistic analysis. I will show how I cultivate these skills gently to help students adjust to a more challenging level of literary criticism, including the use of critical theory and cultural and political contexts of texts.

A language-centric pedagogy assures that a central part of students’ methodology is close reading. Exploring context and pop culture analogies can catalyse engagement with the poems; however, attempting to elicit certain personal reactions from poetry creates the pressure of expectation that the students must personally relate to the poems to be able to think about them meaningfully. Of course, this connection is encouraged: poetry captures, in language, feelings that are able to resonate across time. A poem does not need to reflect the reader in order to be appreciated or understood, though. A precise focus on language can help hone close reading skills which are critical for an advanced level of engagement with critical effects.

Reading a new text in a university context, amongst strangers, students may feel the pressure of expectation: as if they can only contribute if they have an advanced knowledge of rhetorical or literary technique. A strong technical vocabulary is important, but it can often lead to a ‘Where’s Wally?’ mode of simply spotting patterns and rhetorical forms at the expense of questioning why the poet has crafted the text in a certain way. As I will demonstrate, a teaching style which guides students to find their own evidence and carefully analyse why form and meaning interact is an effective pedagogical approach. This method resembles that encouraged by Ayanna Thompson and Laura B. Turchi, who coax students to ‘develop increased facility and independent thinking beyond simply completing an assignment “for” the teacher’ (Thompson and Turchi, 2016, p. 5).

“a teaching style which guides students to find their own evidence and carefully analyse why form and meaning interact is an effective pedagogical approach.”

In the work below, I will provide an example of the way I might teach ‘Sonnet 30’ to students at the University of Glasgow, who are enrolled on the first year ‘1A Poetry and Poetics’ course taught in the first semester. My chosen pedagogical strategy traces the phonetic effects of the sonnet, to identify how alliterative effects can be used to create semantic links. This process nurtures the close reading skills required of university students, and is a way of establishing these techniques early in the term. In ‘Sonnet 30’ the speaker expresses grief for the death of past friends through monetary metaphor:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time’s waste;
Then can I drown an eye (unused to flow)
For precious friends hid in death’s dateless night,
And weep afresh love’s long since cancelled woe,
And moan th’expense of many a vanished sight;
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o’er
The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before:
But if the while I think on thee (dear friend)
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.

Depending on how self-assured or vocal the group are initially, it can be easier to begin the seminar with a simple starter question: ‘What did you like or dislike about the poem?’

This opening is effective because it is not overly technical and eases into a discussion of ‘what the poem is about’, encouraging students to test their voice in the seminar space. In this case, a student may like the contemplative nature of the sonnet as it follows the speaker reflecting upon loss. The first task, then, is structured around building an awareness of the poetic form. I ask the group if anyone can describe the features of a sonnet: most students will

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be confident in their knowledge of this. I then invite the students to respond to the following question for a few minutes in pairs: 'What can you tell me about other kinds of sonnet form?'. Such a question can lead to an initial discussion about the difference between a Petrarchan and a Shakespearean sonnet, for instance, and persuade students to think about poems as part of a developing genre. The comparative component of analytical thinking which this task elicits introduces the granular close reading skills that will shape the subsequent discussion of the poem.

For the second activity I invite someone to read the poem aloud and ask everyone to listen for specific phonetic effects. I suggest that the group might want to make note of, underline, or highlight linguistic features they find interesting when listening, such as unusual syntax, sounds or images. This auditory experience generates active engagement with the text, hopefully leading to proliferative readings of the whole poem. Although the seminar should be student led, it is important to model the kind of close reading that is expected of an advanced learner. To provide the student with more structure so they do not slip into the 'Where's Wally?' snare, I give a shape to the discussion by saying something along the lines of: 'I found the sounds in this sonnet interesting, particularly the sibilance of the first line':

> *When to the sessions of sweet silent thought*
> *I summon up remembrance of things past,*
> *I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought (1–3)*

I then task pairs of students to find their own evidence to develop their understanding of the conceit. I would steer the conversation by noting, for example, that the repeated 's' sounds, also known as sibilance, create an incantatory tone or a recourse to the past. The repetition of 's' reinforces the 'summon[ing]' (2) of past thoughts and perhaps creates an auditory version of the 'sigh[s]' (3) of which the speaker 'thought' (1). 'Remembrance' (2) therefore reverberates throughout the poem: 'all losses' (14) echoes the sibilance and the sounds of 'remembrance' (2).

It is important to encourage students to think imaginatively about phonetic effects when they surface in a seminar group discussion. Students often limit their critical thinking by fixing pre-conceived meanings to certain sounds. For example, successive 's' sounds are often thought to symbolise spite or jealousy, but such readings can be indiscriminate and neglect the specific evidence found in the text. Even if students need prompting, attempting this phonetically-linked form of semantic word-mapping cultivates research skills: alliterative sounds can link words to create clusters of meaning which can then be analysed using an academic source such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This linear process provides the students with a skeleton of critical inquiry. A formal technique used by Shakespeare has been identified and then read in the

"It is important to encourage students to think imaginatively about phonetic effects when they surface in a seminar group discussion. Students often limit their critical thinking by fixing pre-conceived meanings to certain sounds."

broader context of the sonnet to think about its effect on the reader. It is constructive to make students explicitly aware of this process: as Thompson and Turchi advise, 'the teacher should also highlight the meta-cognitive moves she is making as she uses the frame' (Thompson and Turchi, 2016, p. 28).

For my final task I prompt the students to think about words, metaphors and rhyme-pairs that appear analogous so they can begin to conceptualise the form of the sonnet through a specific lens. Questions should nudge and not dictate: tentative encouragement is important, and it is possible to direct the students rather than doing all of the work for them. For 'Sonnet 30', I might notice the thematic similarity of the words 'account' and 'pay':

> *The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,*
> *Which I new pay as if not paid before. (11–12)*

I do not need to state that Shakespeare is using monetary metaphors, but by isolating these words I provide footholds for the students to work this out for themselves. In pairs, the students can then be encouraged to find other economic inferences; examples might include 'expense' (8), 'cancell'd' (7), 'account' (11), 'pay' (12), 'paid' (12), 'losses' (14) and 'restor'd' (14). I write these words on whiteboard, taking contributions from the group, so that they can collectively add to a 'money-map': a mind map with ideas organised around the central premise of 'Money-related vocabulary'.

The following questions can scaffold the rest of the seminar:

- *What do you find interesting about the way Shakespeare uses commerce metaphors?*
- *How do these choices affect our understanding of devotion, and love and relationships?*

A great exercise to vary the format of the group discussion is to write these questions on two pieces of A3 paper (one question on each sheet) and split the seminar group into two. Each team has three minutes to respond to the question by annotating the page. After three minutes, the papers should be swapped and the process repeated. When the groups have contributed to both mind maps, the room should come together and respond to, and build upon, one another's observations. Such questions build the level of critical thinking that is required at university and give students the opportunity to direct their own learning. I would prompt the conversation by reflecting on how odd the time frame appears to be in the line 'And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste' (4). The successive

"the most important thing for advanced learners to see in their teacher is genuine enthusiasm for language."

monosyllables of the metre echo the regimented tick of a pendulum. Instead of demarking time, past and present seem to merge, a paradox which the speaker attempts to resolve as the poem reaches towards the stasis briefly captured in the last line where, at the thought of their 'dear friend' (13), 'All losses are restor'd, and sorrows end' (14).

In the final part of the discussion I would push the students to reflect on how Shakespeare's semantic clusters reveal anything of interest about how the sonnet form works. The students need to be allowed to explore what the form might mean for themselves. To demonstrate the sort of creative close reading expected at university level, however, I would suggest that the sonnet could be a wider metaphor for a textual cornucopia: analogous to a purse which contains bright riches or 'coins' of insight. From this example students can be encouraged to observe that the sonnet is itself an extended conceit related to money – a tiny bank containing exchange rates of value, or a mint that stamps words with meaning. The sonnet could even be a lump of gold which has to be fashioned and polished by the reader to access and assess its true value.

The most important thing for advanced learners to see in their teacher is genuine enthusiasm for language. Fostering excitement about what the words of a sonnet can do and how they can be combined to generate effects, both formally and contextually, builds a discursive approach to poetic analysis and gets students out of the habit of approaching poems with caution, or the fear of being wrong. To quote Rex Gibson, 'Shakespeare is not a museum exhibit with a large "Do Not Touch" label, but a living force inviting active, imaginative creation' (Gibson, 1998, xii). This comment applies to poetry beyond Shakespeare. There is no better feeling, as an educator, than when the seminar group thread and intersect ideas to create a lattice of meaning. An inquisitive approach can be the cue for students trying to find that elusive entrance to a poem.

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RICHARD III AND STUDENTS AS RESILIENT CRITICS

HOW IS CRISIS useful for teaching Shakespeare? Framing the plays as responses to political, social, and personal tipping points helps students feel their urgency, to see the world around them in new ways, and trains them to be more intuitive and skilled critics.

Our students are quick and eager to narrate the world in crisis – global conflicts, public health emergencies, ecological catastrophe, political turmoil and protest, and community conflicts. This is their world and they are, in many ways, experts in navigating it. Our classrooms are certainly not insulated from these realities and nor should they be. But if crisis defines the conditions of modern life (and plenty of people have suggested as much), attending to crises can equip us to understand and overcome in new ways. Teaching Shakespeare's plays through crisis meaningfully legitimises our students' individual perceptions and instincts; but it also trains critical habits in close reading and historicism, empowering them to ask what is at stake in this play? Who gets to decide? What alternatives are opened up or foreclosed?

Since 2022, I've convened an undergraduate module called Literature and Crisis, a module that asks first-year students to explore and express how literature responds to and shapes our understanding of a complex world. For many of my students, this encouragement to see and treat literature as both responsive and determining – reflecting the world in which it was written, but also creating that world – and themselves as active interrogators of these relationships often feels like new territory; but the key to this approach is getting them to see that they are already critics in their own right, joining an ongoing conversation about how texts make meaning and what follows from that, ethically and politically. As contributors to these conversations, our students are part of a criticism that is collaborative and provisional by nature, building arguments others can revisit, revise, and resist. In doing so, students actively shape the discipline's future.

On this module, students read a broad range of writers, from Chaucer to John McGahern, but this method of teaching literature through crisis is highly applicable to Shakespeare's plays – where questions of authority, violence, identity, social rupture, and resistance are everywhere. As such this approach leads much of the school outreach work that I also do. Presenting Shakespeare through the lens of crisis helps secondary-school students explore the contemporary stakes of English, and makes a clear case for the value of the subject and of studying an English degree. Crucially, these crises also don't disappear if and when students progress to university-level study, creating transitional connections across secondary and tertiary education.

Whether this involves thinking through *The Merchant of Venice* in relation to protest and resistance in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement, as Jessica Walker has done (Walker, 2020), or framing *Macbeth* as a sustained exploration of masculinity in connection with Andrew Tate and the manosphere as I have done with school groups in the past, crisis makes Shakespeare's plays legible as drama written inside emergencies – war, succession, plague, enclosure, censorship – and equips students to test how art negotiates power and the outrages attendant on its abuse today.

Limited historical framing paired with select scenes can let pupils ask who names the crisis, who benefits, who pays? Reflections on contemporary performance decisions turn interpretation into forms of civic reasoning. In outreach lectures this approach lifts engagement and aspiration: students get to see that studying English is a training in empathy, ethics, and consequence-forecasting. They get to see *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Julius Caesar* not as relics but as tools for interrogating misinformation, surveillance, crowd politics, and the ethics of care in their own lives.

But this approach is about more than just framing relevance in a new way; more than relying on real-world connections as a means to engagement. Usefully, we get the word criticism from the same place as crisis – the Greek word *krinein* – meaning 'to separate, to judge, to decide' from the *krei*, to sieve or separate; a crisis is the moment that demands judgment, and so logically criticism is the practice of making that judgment well. For close reading, the relationship between crises as a theme and criticism as a skill centres form: how does this word, image, exchange, staging decision, or rhetorical pattern create a tipping point or new possibilities in the text, and why does it matter?

Now, Shakespeare never uses the term *crisis*, but he certainly staged stories controlled by the logic of crisis.

I've written about this elsewhere, but during Shakespeare's lifetime, *crisis* was not a catch-all term for political or social turmoil in the way it is now (Wiltshire, 2024). In sixteenth-century England it was primarily a technical medical term: the decisive turning point in an illness when a patient either recovers or declines.

For example, Bartholomew Traheron's 1543 Latin to English translation of a surgical textbook by the Italian Giovanni da Vigo glossed crisis as a 'sodayne chaunge' with four outcomes – deliverance, relief, death, or worsening – marking the hinge between cure and catastrophe (de Vigo, 1543, sig.Z2r). Similarly, the English physician Nicholas Gyer cautioned against bleeding a patient too readily, when the 'crisis or judgement' is still distant, in his text *The English Phlebotomy* (Gyer, 1592, p. 174). Only later did the term edge into politics, but even then, it retained its medical flavour: in the early seventeenth century, the poet and politician Benjamin Rudyerd wrote of 'the Chrysis of Parliaments', but even this retained a clinical dimension, continuing 'we shall know by this if Parliaments live or die' (Rushworth, 1659, p. 497). For Shakespeare's contemporaries, then, *crisis* named a perilous decision point rather than a general state of disorder; its later figurative political sense grows from this medical vocabulary of turning points.

So how does this work in practice? With school groups in the past, in sessions exploring *Richard III* (which can be taught under AQA, Peason Edexcel, and OCR), I've started – as you might expect – with the beginning of the play…literally the first word: 'Now' (1.1.1). As part of a wider sequence of plays, Richard III's insistence on a new political and personal settlement-centred on him and demanded through the present-tense urgency of 'Now' – grounds the play in crises of order, selfhood and interiority, and community. I ask students to think about how the adverb 'Now' cleaves the present from the past, demanding a change in personal and national direction; it works well to compare this with the opening 'When' in *Macbeth*, an interrogative adverb that bakes questions of futurity, fate, and providence into the play.

'Now' fixes the play firmly in a present moment, wielding the dual sense of Richard's speech existing in the present but also drawing attention to what follows as an important juncture in the narrative of Shakespeare's History sequence. But in much the same way this play compelled attention on Shakespeare's own time and the growing national unease at a likely (but it turns out, avoided) succession crisis on the death of the childless Elizabeth I, this moment can be leveraged to focus attention on the present tense of our students' lives. How is our now different from the recent past? What challenges do our political leaders face in creating or sustaining new possibilities for our shared futures?

Of course, Richard's insistence on existing in or experiencing this 'Now', this determination to cleave the present from the past last only a few tantalising lines. As he makes clear, this world is not one in which he finds his natural home. Whereas the King and his courtiers have hung up their armour and switched riding war horses for dancing with women, Richard tells us that he's far more suited for times of war and strife. As a figure suited to the past, defined through conflict, Richard tells us he's going to work the world to his image and his benefit:

> *And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,*
> *To entertain these fair well-spoken days,*
> *I am determined to prove a villain*
> *And hate the idle pleasures of these days.*
> *Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,*
> *By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams*
> *(1.1.28–33)*

And so, Richard opens the play by declaring that a national crisis is the perfect climate for *his* kind of self. This provides a perfect opportunity to ask students to think about their own present, particularly to reflect on when they've experienced politicians, influencers, institutions using collective uncertainty to gain attention or push an agenda? The natural follow-up question, linking back to the play is whether this looks like resilience or manipulation – and how does one tell the difference?

As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that Richard is fundamentally ill-suited to the requirements of leadership; it's why he gets Buckingham to do lots of the public, stage management for him. Of course, this can all be housed within Shakespeare writing this play as a kind of ideological ramp into the Tudor dynasty, which solved the Richard problem during the Battle of Bosworth Field. But the play asks two further questions that relate back to the idea of crisis, the first relating to complicity, and the other about our susceptibility to manipulation.

As Greg Doran, director of the acclaimed 2022 RSC *Richard III*, suggests, Shakespeare is 'not interested in historical accuracy, but he is interested in pulling in an audience and keeping their attention.' This idea of assent and, by extension, complicity sits behind much of our relationship with Richard. Asking students to discuss with each other if and where they recognise humour and sympathy in the play can be illuminating; asking them to think about how humour and sympathy is used by political leaders today

can be equally revealing. When the preening Richard says he'll be 'at charges for a looking-glass' (1.2.258), having coerced Lady Anne into submitting to his advances – effectively falling in love with his own fabricated and manipulating self – students should hear the echo of his earlier claim to be poorly 'made to court an amorous looking-glass' (1.1.15). They might also feel the tension between this self-flattery and the gallows-humour of the scene, highlighting how readily sympathy, vulnerability, and humour can be employed to distort or reset the frame of judgement and our emerging moral calculus. Which is to say that Shakespeare ensures Richard has a depth of identifiable feelings and desires that humanise him to use, disrupting our readiness to write him off as simply tyrant and traitor.

The play also focalises the issue of manipulation during times of crisis, particularly in the oft-overlooked Scrivener scene. In near-enough the middle of the play, Act 3 Scene 6, the Scrivener divulges to us how Richard and his cronies have corrupted the expected and ordered relationship between judicial process and events. He arrives holding Hastings's indictment –'neatly penned' within an hour of the arrest – and guides us to see what the document's speed proves, namely that it was composed before the event it purports to record. In a single, short cameo, the Scrivenor exposes how legal and historical writing can be instruments of regime-making rather than records of truth; he also lays bare how fear of reprisal can silence witnesses while documents speak for them, retrofitting legitimacy: 'the world is grown so bad / That wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch' (1.3.69–70).

Explored through the idea of crisis, his scene dramatises a temporal distortion: the present of emergency licensing the convenient fabrication of past to secure an already determined future. Panning back from this isolated scene, students might see both how Shakespeare's play is part of a process of scripting history retrospectively to suit the needs of the present. So too, they might see how all around us, narratives of the past are pressurised to suit political 'truths'.

When we teach Shakespeare's plays through crisis, our students get to experience the plays as a kind of collision between context, power, language, and feeling, encouraging them to practice forms of critical or interpretive courage and ethical judgment in real time. As such, attending to crisis can cultivate the forms of resilient criticism they deserve and which we all know the world needs.

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HAMLET, CRITICAL THEORY, AND THE EVOLUTION OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ASKED BY Polonius, ‘What do you read, my lord?’, Prince Hamlet – flippantly, pointedly, evasively – replies ‘Words, words, words’ (2.2.189). Asked of a different kind of student, the question ‘What do you read?’ speaks to other power dynamics. ‘Justify your degree choice’, it challenges; ‘I question the value of your discipline’, it implies. That challenge has long dogged English Literature students, and the question of English Literature’s ‘value’ hangs especially heavily in the context of contemporary attacks on and cuts to provision for the Humanities in higher education.

The current debate over English Literature’s ‘value’ informed the way in which we set about revamping a notoriously unpopular and low attainment (year-long) level 4 theory module at Northumbria University, over 2023–24 and 2024–25. The course was theoretical in focus, traditionally found in many departments from the 1990s, across the United Kingdom. The content – leaning heavily towards the twentieth century – will be familiar to academics in the field: F. R. Leavis’s ‘Great tradition’ (1948), Cleanth Brooks’, ‘The formalist critics’ (1951), selections from Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957) and/or his ‘Death of the Author’ (1967), Louis Althusser’s ‘Ideology and ideological state apparatuses’ (1970), Hélène Cixous’ ‘Sorties’ (1986), Judith Butler’s ‘Performative acts and gender constitution’ (1988) and Stephen Greenblatt’s ‘Resonance and wonder’ (1990). Often such modules are also peppered with palatably concise selections from secondary sources like Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle’s *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (1999).

Modules like this generally carry the ‘theory burden’ for English Literature programmes. And while critical and theoretical debates of the twentieth century are intrinsic to how English Literature has developed as a university discipline, solidification of, and overreliance on, theory canonicity risks (in Hamlet’s words) an approach ‘weary, stale, flat and unprofitable’ (1.2.133). It can also misrepresent what we do in modern university literary studies by not only distancing theory from deep-textual engagement, but also framing it as something historical; and when this happens, teaching theory can feel like dragging students through an intellectual past, without much thought to the hope of a present or future. Reimagining English Literature theory pedagogy for the 2020s, our approach brought the evolution of the subject itself into the classroom and curriculum. By this we mean, how the concept of ‘English literature studies’ has changed over time, especially in relation to constructs of history, culture and identity politics. Our aim in developing fresh content became to help students not only to use and understand critical theory, but also to learn how English literary study *at university* became what it is – exploring some of its broad intellectual developments, and how knowing about its evolution can help us articulate the value of this embattled discipline today.

While our intention was to innovate, not all the approaches dispensed with tradition and canon. Perhaps most significantly, instead of selecting multiple short texts and extracts to accompany theoretical reading (common practice in theory modules), we chose and foregrounded one literary text: Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Questions and interpretations run through *Hamlet* in a way suggestive of the activities of literary criticism itself, and the play has been central to the formation of English Literature as a university discipline. *Hamlet*’s association with canonicity also makes it an especially revealing site for exploring the politics of literary study. Few works have been as central to how English studies theorises itself, and no literary text has informed, influenced and been reimagined at the scale and cultural significance as this one. We turned *Hamlet*’s unique prominence to advantage by making it a backbone for the module: it helped us to tell a story of the discipline’s birth and development, held together our weekly text and film schedule, and offered a literary focus for assessment tasks. By aligning our deep focus on a single play with Key Stage 5 pedagogy, moreover, the opportunities for transition across levels was identified as a particular strength.

In revising the module, we took a more contained approach to the post-Victorian construction of ‘high culture’ through Leavis’s earlier and more manageable *Mass civilisation and minority culture* (1930) – a pamphlet essay or polemic about culture at what Leavis couches as a time of crisis. Via Peter Barry’s account of ‘Theory before “theory”’, we then introduced Formalism’s and New Criticism’s assumptions about ‘intention’ and ‘meaning’, leading to the rise of Marxism, Structuralism, and what Barry describes as the project of theory’ (Barry, 2017). Retaining Barthes’ ‘Death of the Author’ (1967), week 4 of semester 1 invited students

to consider the Author/author concept in relation to the cultural baggage of a writer they all had studied. Enter William Shakespeare. Through some preparatory readings of *Hamlet*'s opening scenes, students were asked to watch Gregory Doran's 2009 television film adaptation of the RSC's modern-dress production, starring David Tenant and Patrick Stewart. This part of the module then culminated in a formative (workshop-based) task – working in groups to produce posters advocating for the importance of English Literature as a discipline. While we did not frame the 2020s as a time of cultural decline, the set reading for the session raised questions about the status and value of humanities disciplines, and the role of the humanities intellectual in political and cultural ideation.

Over the second part of the module, we traced a history of how *Hamlet* has been read, appropriated, and contested. To help students read criticism for a theoretical approach rather than view it simply as a source of ideas (a key transition from school), we began with Graham Holderness's 'Are Shakespeare's tragic heroes "fatally flawed"? Discuss.' Holderness's playful imitation of an essay question formulation in his title and his challenge to the concept of the 'fatal flaw' (both of which students recognised from school) offered an accessible example of how critics often use opposition to present their own ideological positions. Over the following weeks, we continued to invite students to confront competing ideological positions stated or implied in critics' treatment of concepts like psychoanalysis, nationhood, feminism and economics. Each framework was introduced not as an abstract body of thought, but as part of an evolving conversation about *Hamlet*'s meaning, influence and cultural status, and about what those within and beyond the academy have regarded as constituting 'English Literature' at different points in the discipline's history. Exploring readings of *Hamlet* through New Historicism, psychoanalysis, feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory and blends of these approaches with eco-criticism, the medical humanities and disability studies 'Concepts in Criticism and Culture' breathed new life into the story of the important and ever-evolving intellectual history of university English.

This rich history also informed our 1990s case study, in which students considered why, in *The Western Canon* (1994), Harold Bloom chose to attack (often, by championing *Hamlet*) what were then the dominant approaches to the study of English Literature: feminism, Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, New Historicism, deconstruction and semiotics. Students explored Bloom's reactionary characterisation of these approaches as 'the School of Resentment' and how his big-C Canon could be understood as another expression of what was (for him, then) a discipline again in crisis.

English Literature was shaped by early questions about its validity as a university subject through what we might describe as the professionalisation of the discipline under the influence of Leavis and his early contemporaries. It also survived the internally oppositional period identified in our 1990s case study. Currently, it is caught in a struggle to justify its 'value' within a metrics-driven academy. Throughout this module, then, we reminded students that 'crisis' is not new and explored the ways in which each critical turn and counterturn spoke to a passion for what the discipline can and does do. This narrative of survival and creativity (out of 'crisis'), we propose, offers students armour and weapons against current negative valuations of the discipline that deserve to be challenged.

As perhaps *the* epitome of canonicity in literary study, *Hamlet* helped scaffold key critical concepts at play in the very construction of English Literature as a university discipline. Retracing how it has been read and re-read tells the story of how university literary studies has developed to meet new challenges in a way that brings to light some of the politics of higher education, past and present. Engaging students with that story now, as they begin their undergraduate journeys, will help them speak to the political present and future of English studies in ways that theory modules past perhaps did not have to.

References – see page 30.

Class coverage *Semester 1*

Topic	Text(s)
Part 1: English Literature as a Degree Subject	
Introduction	No set reading. Discussion of representations of humanities degrees in the media.
Rise of the Literature degree	Leavis, *Mass civilisation and minority culture* (1930)
Formation of theory	Barry, 'Theory before "theory"' (1995)
The author	Barthes, 'The death of the Author' (1977)
The text	Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (opening act guidance) Doran (dir.), *Hamlet* (2009)
State of the discipline workshop	Hampson, 'Custodians and active citizens' (2011) Woods, 'The attack on the humanities is snobbery dressed as realism' (2023)
Part 2: Approaches to the Study of Literature	
Cultural materialism	Holderness, 'Are Shakespeare's tragic heroes "fatally flawed"? Discuss.' (1989)
Deconstruction	Derrida, 'Injunctions of Marx' (1993)
New Historicism	Greenblatt, 'Remember me' (2001)
Case study: the 1990s	Bloom, 'Preface and prelude' and 'Shakespeare, center of the Canon' (1994)

Semester 2

Topic	Text
Psychoanalysis	Lacan, 'Desire and the interpretation of desire in *Hamlet*' (1977)
Feminism 1: Gynocritics	Showalter, 'Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism' (1985)
Feminism 2: *Écriture feminine* and the medical humanities	Findlay, '*Hamlet*: a document in madness' (1994)
History of emotion	Steenbergh, 'Emotion, performance and gender in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*' (2011)
Film showing	Gade & Schall (dirs.), *Hamlet* (1921) [German with English subtitles]
Queer theory	Bildhauer, 'Queer Medieval Time in *Hamlet* (1921)' (2011)
Ecocriticism	Laroche, 'Ophelia's plants and the death of violets' (2016)
Race and postcolonialism	Parker, 'Black *Hamlet*: battening on the moor' (2001)
Film showing	Bhardwaj (dir.), *Haider* (2014) [Hindi with English subtitles]
Disability studies	Dasgupta, "'What's with him?": reading *Hamlet* and *Haider* through the lens of disability-craft' (2024)