

# Shakespeare and the Blackboard Jungle: Teaching and Performing Shakespeare in Contemporary Britain

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## Shakespeare and the politics of desire

Shakespeare's ideological viewpoints remain a source of critical fascination, and are important because not only do they shape our personal response to his works in our own time but also they exercise an innate aesthetic effect; for example, a Marxist critic may have no difficulty in conforming a Shakespeare play to a Marxist view of society, whilst at the same time being moved by a contradictory reactionary element in Shakespeare's dramaturgy.<sup>1</sup> Most readers would aver that Shakespearean drama is reactionary, expressing a fear of rebellion and social disorder, and recognize that Shakespeare profited personally from the popularity of the theatre in the growing mercantile economy of Elizabethan and Jacobean London, and that his theatre is linked, therefore, with the origins of British imperialism. Yet the plays, while affirming the rights of monarchy, also arouse sympathy for the victims of tyranny and oppression. In late romances such as *The Tempest* (1610), power is legitimated through divine providence, but nevertheless questioned by the sufferings of Caliban and his like; Caliban is treated by his master Prospero no better than one of the African slaves being transported at that time to Britain's new colonies in the Americas.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to apply modern labels such as 'liberal' and 'conservative' to a society which enjoyed only a limited form of parliamentary democracy, and in which real power abided with the monarch and a handful of powerful courtiers, although this is not to suggest that the rest of society was not inherently political. The problem is that modern political labels are founded on modern notions of subjectivity that had little meaning in Shakespeare's age; in particular, Renaissance thinkers had yet to make the fundamental separation of mind and matter postulated by Descartes in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, grounding their thoughts not in the primacy of individual consciousness but in divine revelation and the social order.<sup>3</sup> If, therefore, one were to ascribe any political position to Shakespeare, one might view him as a kind of 'floating voter' or as what in Japan has come to be called one of the *mutōha*, namely as someone whose loyalties change according to circumstances and disposition.<sup>4</sup>

The comparison with Japan is instructive because, whereas in the United Kingdom support ratings for each of the three main political parties have shifted by little more than 10% or 15% over the last twenty years, support for the ruling party in Japan can easily fall from 70% to 20% within a matter of a year, suggesting that Japanese voters are closer to the Elizabethan age in their volatility; moreover,

voters could well become 'floating' in order to defend certain, perhaps quite conservative values that they feel to be threatened by the status quo. This article focuses on a similarly uncommitted sector of British society, although uncommitted for different reasons: those who are either too young to vote (school children) and those who are still in the process of forming their political opinions (young adults in tertiary education), and it aims to do so through a cultural practice that is supposed to be open to all comers, whatever their political views, namely Shakespeare performance.

Shakespeare education and performance are driven by conflicting impulses in the present age, namely an economic need to maintain standards (and hierarchies) and a cultural need to enhance individual and collective identities; it goes without saying that these impulses do not necessarily conflict with, and can reinforce, each other. What is most striking, however, about the last thirty years of Shakespeare's reception in his home country is how central Shakespeare has become to the national life, and how this popularity has derived from a determination to save 'the national poet' from bardolatry. Over the last sixty years, Britain has become a postcolonial society: postcolonial, both in the literal sense of returning its former colonies (with a few controversial exceptions such as Northern Ireland and Gibraltar) and in the ontological sense of renegotiating its identity in a world no longer set on the trajectory of Western imperialism. The political response to the new world order can be roughly said to reflect the two dimensions observed in Shakespeare's plays: a reassertion of national potential (Thatcherism) if not supremacy, and at the same time a recognition of cultural diversity (New Labour) following mass immigration from Britain's former colonies in the Caribbean and South Asia since the 1950s. Yet the particular irony of the Shakespearean model is that Shakespeare was writing at the beginnings of British imperialism, when the nation was still relatively small, weak, poor and short-lived, and the need 'to seize the day' (*carpe diem*) was not just a poetic genre but a reality for all those – especially males – who survived beyond childhood.<sup>5</sup> Dominic Dromgoole, the artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe, captures this sense of urgency when he writes that

the Shakespearean way is the greedy way, the 'and' way, the wanting more of everything way.  
(Dromgoole 2007, 204)

Shakespearean 'greed' can be appreciated in its historical context, but in the present age has obviously become detached from the trajectory of imperialism, and defined by all the other uses that are made of Shakespeare, whether cultural, educative, or political.

### **Playing each strain as it is**

Shakespeare's plays can be expected to unleash a politics of desire in contemporary society that will lean either towards the discursive and textual or towards the communal and experiential. Shakespeare is one of a number of phenomena, along with football and reality television (and their admittedly larger audiences), that have sought to fill the gap opened by the decline in religious participation, which was likewise divided between individual interpretation and group identity.<sup>6</sup> Yet reading direc-

tors such as Dromgoole and Declan Donnellan and academic theatre critics such as Michael Dobson, one soon realizes that for them there is no ideally integrated style of Shakespeare production: that, as Dromgoole puts it, 'A good production will play each strain as it is. A bad one will try to make it all one.' (Ibid., 172) Dobson laments a prevalent style of production which he calls 'the Perfectly Composed Production' (PCP), that is unable to reach beyond itself, and whose 'emphasis will always be on playing Shakespeare's lines in those costumes on that set'. (Dobson 2001, 294) This kind of production does not dare to suggest that it has boundaries which are worth transcending. The problem, for Donnellan, is one of directorial vision:

I can see things, or I can try to control how things see me. I cannot do both at the same time. Who I am is what I see.

(Donnellan 2005, 84)

The attempt 'to make all one' may be a desirable end in itself, the intention of both Puck and Prospero for example, but as a strategy risks alienating an audience who instinctively doubt that a Shakespeare play can be compared to some religious experience that is above and beyond them: that is telling them what is good for them. The title of Dromgoole's compendium on contemporary playwriting, *The Full Room* (2000), presents the other side to Peter Brook's landmark treatise on theatre *The Empty Space* (1968). Brook focuses on the stage, Dromgoole on the disorderly masses who crowded into the theatre he ran in west London for six years and on the playwrights who wrote for it: it is asking too much to keep one's eyes on both stage and audience at the same time.<sup>7)</sup>

Hovering in the wings of both Brook's and Dromgoole's arguments are the issues of funding and the theatre's relationship with the state. In British theatre, the key determinant is always money, above all the public funds which are distributed each year by an organization set up in 1945 by the Labour government of Clement Atlee, the Arts Council of Great Britain. The Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal National Theatre, the London Barbican, together with a host of small and regional companies and theatres are all dependent on the Arts Council for funding, although Shakespeare's Globe and the Donmar Warehouse are private organizations, which look instead to self-sufficiency as well as to commercial and other sponsors (including the National Lottery) for financial support. The availability of funding is of course subject to political and economic factors, including the artistic tastes of senior politicians, so that when luminaries such as Sir Peter Hall claim that British theatre is in a state of crisis, what they quite frequently mean is that their Arts Council grant has been cut from the previous year. (Billington 2007, 363)

Under the governments of Margaret Thatcher (1979-90) and John Major (1990-97), British theatre undoubtedly suffered from funding cuts and a consumerist ideology of 'bums on seats' that favoured West End musicals above new writing and innovative Shakespeare productions. The doyen of London newspaper critics, Michael Billington suggests that 'if one thing especially characterized the Eighties it was the gradual shift from a creative to an interpretative culture.' (Ibid., 322) This cultural shift no

doubt reflected the economic shift that had begun in the 1960s from the secondary to the tertiary sector, in particular to the City of London, and just as new money could be made out of old, Shakespeare's appeal to Thatcher's Conservatives was self-evident: 'a stable enduring symbol of Englishness in a shifting world'. (Irish 2008, 8)

After a faltering start, the New Labour prime minister Tony Blair (1997-2007) together with his culture minister, Chris Smith (1997-2001), did recognize the value of public funding, so that as Billington argues, the talent moved away from the commercial sector. When in 2001 Blair decided to involve British forces in an unpopular war in Afghanistan and Iraq, it was the public theatre which was in the position to criticize his policies. An outstanding example of the social relevance of contemporary Shakespeare performance would be Sir Nicholas Hytner's production of *Henry V* at the National Theatre in 2003, in which a black actor, Adrian Lester, starred as Henry. Dobson ranks it 'as the most successful attempt to get Shakespeare back into the centre of serious public discourse in England for many years'. (Dobson 2004, 284) Although the war has been fought against a very different scenario from England's Hundred Years War (1337-1453) against France, it may still be argued that both campaigns were basically unnecessary and that Blair - like Henry in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century - was needing to assert his credentials in the global order; as a black actor among a largely white cast, Lester may have been referring to the prime minister's status as a middle-class outsider in his party, and to New Labour as an unlikely bedfellow in the sphere of global capitalism. In any case, the financial cost of the war has been considerably more than state funding for the theatre over the last ten years.

In such a climate, both Blair and his successor Gordon Brown (2007-10) were characterized as obsessed with their public image, and heavy-handed towards dissenters in their own ranks. In 2005, at the time of the July 7<sup>th</sup> terrorist bombings in central London, incitement to racial hatred (including on the Internet) became an offense punishable by imprisonment, and although few opposed this gesture toward racial harmony in a multiracial society, such restraints on self-expression did seem at odds with the freedom and spontaneity of Shakespeare's plays. Moreover, in a society dominated increasingly by younger figures in their 30s and 40s, a performance such as Sir Michael Gambon's Falstaff in Hytner's production of *Henry IV, Part I* at the National in 2005 articulated libidinal energies that were in danger of being swamped by political correctness. Dobson records that

His pronunciation veered wildly between and within scenes, encompassing the most bizarre affectations of Cockney, aristocratic, Irish and on some vowels hints of Australian, according to his addressee of pose at any given moment, with this protean linguistic performance safely anchored, as Falstaff recognizes, in the undisguisable bulk of his stomach.

(Dobson 2006, 325)

At a time when notions of both Englishness and Britishness were losing their credibility following the devolution of Scotland and Wales in 1999 and the perceived loss of sovereignty in Europe, Gambon's capacity to speak in many voices in order to be true to Falstaff may well be true to what Shake-

spere continues to mean to British audiences today.

The single most significant event of recent years – albeit for banal reasons – was the arrival of the new millennium on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2000. Directors such as Hytner at the National and Adrian Noble and Michael Boyd at the Royal Shakespeare Company marked this event with substantial productions of the histories, although it could be said that Shakespeare's Globe (opened in 1997) had already addressed the issue by simply 'being history', or at least an authentic reconstruction of Shakespeare's original theatre.<sup>8)</sup> Shakespeare's histories represented opportunities to side personal with historical narratives, and so discover new identities. The latter was a particularly pressing matter for the Royal Shakespeare Company, whose 'patriarchal, heterosexual and white' family-oriented culture had come unstuck in the final years of Noble's reign as artistic director. (Chambers 2004, 187)

One of Noble's ideas had been to turn the theatres into a Shakespeare theme park, but it was left to Boyd (who succeeded Noble in 2003) to balance the books and to find a new direction for the company. One of Boyd's strategies has been to rebuild the main Royal Shakespeare Theatre at the company's site in Stratford-on-Avon, but he would readily admit that there can be no overriding plan in the quest for artistic and commercial success. The Royal Shakespeare Company is said to speak with somewhat less certainty than it did under Hall and Peter Barton in the 1970s, but this voice may acquire a legitimacy after years of change within the theatre and country at large. In Hall's generation, the voice of authenticity had been that of Peter Brook, but Dobson's remarks about his soul-searching *Tragedy of Hamlet* (2003) suggest that even Brook has become outdated:

I have to admit that I was beginning to find all this elaborately paraded simplicity, all this intensely un-coarse acting, rather wearing, and was wondering [...] whether the quest for universal spiritual truth wasn't best left to rich hippies.

(Dobson 2002, 302)<sup>9)</sup>

## **Keeping the children's attention**

In the field of education, we can find a similar determination to keep Shakespearean drama at the centre of the curriculum, but one which is both undermined and enhanced by disagreement as to how Shakespeare should be taught in schools and whether Shakespeare is worth teaching at all. For television personality Carol Vorderman, Shakespeare's plays are quite simply as 'dull as ditchwater',<sup>10)</sup> while Dominic Dromgoole expresses the Keatsian sentiment that

To see a relish for Shakespeare igniting in a child is an assuring joy. You know they are walking into a world of kindness and plenty.

(Dromgoole 2007, 12)

Individual responses seem to have a great deal to do with how Shakespeare has been taught at school, and in particular whether there has been an opportunity to act Shakespeare. Two prominent alumni of

Scottish public schools are no doubt typical of the Establishment in having played Shakespearean roles in their teen years: the Prince of Wales acted Macbeth at Gordonstoun, Tony Blair acted Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* at Fettes. Prince Charles has remained an ardent supporter of Shakespeare in schools in his role as President of the Royal Shakespeare Company, while the former prime minister is apparently more interested in Christianity than Shakespeare, but like many religious people he also enjoys the theatre and appointed a well-known actress turned Labour politician (Glenda Jackson) as a junior minister in his first government.

In my own case, I was taught Shakespeare from the age of 15 in a traditional textual way, but by teachers with Oxbridge degrees and a real enthusiasm for the plays. I also took small parts in the school's summer Shakespeare productions, but due to other interests, I did little Shakespeare at university. It was only in my late twenties, when I had to teach Shakespeare as a teacher at first a so-called low-achieving comprehensive school in Essex and then a high-achieving girls' grammar school in Lincolnshire, that my interest in Shakespeare was reawakened; I have been fortunate to be able to continue teaching Shakespeare during the past eight years at Japan Women's University. More than anything else, I believe that my reawakening has come about through a realization that the classroom is itself a theatrical environment, and that the problem of teaching Shakespeare is not so much the language (which can be approached in any number of ways) but that of communicating to students something of the nature and relevance of drama. Language is always relevant, because we use it every day, but drama can seem more esoteric.<sup>11)</sup>

The classroom is a theatrical environment for the obvious reason that the teacher addresses students as an audience, but also – more discretely – because teachers and students must to some extent suppress their usual roles and personalities, and become 'actors'. Reading current discourse on Shakespeare in education, one realizes that many of the academic and practical problems that are raised centre on the difficulty of switching roles, especially as the authority of the teacher must inevitably depend on young people 'doing what they are told'. An essentialist viewpoint that insists on the truthfulness of Shakespeare will inevitably meet with resistance from those who respond that Shakespeare's truths are remote from their own. Essentialism has been a criticism of the director John Barton and the former Royal Shakespeare Company voice coach Cicely Berry, both of whom have emphasized the importance of discovering a universal, 'natural' way of speaking Shakespeare. Although their exercises may be effective at getting actors to make themselves heard, the notion of a natural voice may alienate young people who feel that they are being forced to become someone that they are not, in other words an ahistorical, timeless Shakespeare character. Loehlin, among others, advocates a constructivist or performative approach that enables students to

discover that the meaning is not fixed in the language; that the process of performance will involve them in multiple interpretive decisions that will make them co-creators of the play's meaning, and that may in some cases challenge the authority of the text.

(Loehlin 2008, 634)

Conversely, as Lichtenfels suggests, Shakespeare's language may instill students with an order and discipline that is lacking in their everyday speech, and which itself provides an impetus for making interpretive decisions. (Lichtenfels 2008, 654) Language study and performance do not have to be exclusive of each other. It is surely the academic and holistic benefits that have made Shakespeare study such a tantalizing component of the school curriculum.

Shakespeare's plays have been taught at schools and universities since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it is only in the last twenty years that some level of Shakespeare study has become compulsory in British schools. In 1989, Thatcher's education minister, Kenneth Baker (1986-89), introduced a National Curriculum of obligatory subjects and standards of attainment that is still in effect today. One of the requirements was that pupils at Key Stage 3 (ages 11 to 14) should study all or part of a Shakespeare play, and then be tested on what they had learnt at age 14. Although some Shakespeare study remains compulsory, the test was recently dropped after years of contentious debate among civil servants, politicians and educators as to the appropriate format of test questions.<sup>12)</sup> The plays most commonly set were *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The traditional type of question treating 'the play as a story fixed within a range of interpretation rather than a script for performance' was criticized as being too hard for many students, and therefore elitist: for example, with regard to Act 1, Scene 3 of *Julius Caesar*, 'At this point in the play do you support the conspirators?' On the other hand, questions allowing 'a more interpretive response' were felt to be too subjective and unfocussed, as one on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 3, Scene 1: 'If you were directing the scene, what would you tell the actors to help them bring out the comedy?'<sup>13)</sup>

The debate on the Standard Assessment Test goes back to a government report published as long ago as 1921, the Newbolt Report, which noted that 'Anything in our treatment that makes Shakespeare dull or distorted is a crime against his spirit.'<sup>14)</sup> Yet for many teachers, it was Shakespeare who was 'dull and distorted', and it was not until the pupil-centred ideology of Newbolt started to become more generally accepted in the 1960s that it was finally recognised that it was not the plays which were dull but rather how they were taught. There remains, nevertheless, a striking and, for many, ineradicable difference between a textual approach that promotes 'a sharing of minds' within the classroom and an experiential approach that promotes, as it were, 'a sharing of bodies'. Kenneth Baker, who was educated at a London public school before reading English at Oxford, recalls in his autobiography that

We studied Shakespeare in that thorough textual way which meant one really had to know the play backwards. Greater understanding led to greater enjoyment and I still think this is the best way to teach Shakespeare.<sup>15)</sup>

This approach inevitably favours pupils at private schools and the higher echelons of the state sector who can be expected to have acquired the literacy skills necessary for reading Shakespeare from scratch.

The introduction of Shakespeare to the curriculum has led to new textbooks and teaching approaches, not to mention in-service training for teachers provided by education authorities and institutions such as the Royal Shakespeare Company. Rex Gibson, based at the Cambridge Institute for Education, was renowned as a pioneer in this field. In 1986, he initiated the highly successful 'Shakespeare in Schools' project; in 1991, the first of his school editions of the plays appeared, published by Cambridge University Press. The Oxford School Shakespeare, edited by Roma Gill, is another well-established series suited both for textual study and the drama studio. Gill's *Hamlet*, first published in 1992 with black and white photographs from contemporary productions, detailed side notes and drawings of skulls and rapiers, is not so different in format from an academic edition, except for the absence of editorial history. Gill is writing for 17 and 18 year olds, and so it is interesting to examine how she attempts to justify the play in the terms of that age group. She writes on the first page of the introduction that

For the well-being of any community, hidden injuries must be revealed, and wrongs must be punished. And there is in all of us, surely, a desire to see that justice is done, and that everyone gets what they deserve? In real life, of course, this does not always happen; but sometimes in the imaginary world of fiction we can have the satisfaction of seeing the crime disclosed, the criminal unmasked, and the forces of good triumphing over the evil. Even if the victims cannot always be recompensed – the murdered cannot be restored to life – at least their suffering is avenged.

(Gill 2009, v)

This textbook may be used within communities where the police have a poor record of solving serious crimes, and where even if young people would agree in principle that everyone should get what they deserve, they may not want that principle to be applied too strictly to their own lives. Gill is suggesting that it is the feelings that matter, and that a work such as *Hamlet* shows only what is possible. She takes care not to curtail their natural interest nor to patronize them. As Polonius puts it, 'Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar' (*Hamlet* 1.3.61).

Teenagers provide a fascinating audience for Shakespeare, because while they have been conditioned to accept whatever they have learned from their parents and teachers, they are naturally skeptical of authority. For many adults, the reverse may be true: that having forsaken their childhood beliefs, they long to be told what to believe. Shakespeare speaks to both audiences, because his plays represent the same 'sea-change' from skepticism to belief and from faith to doubt.<sup>16)</sup> Skepticism includes the text, in other words the fact that the printed word may not be what Shakespeare originally wrote. Justifying her decision to follow Harold Jenkins' Arden edition (published in 1982, and according to Gill, 'a masterly study, which has not been surpassed'), Gill notes that

Professor Jenkins believed that Q2 is the most reliable of the three texts, and probably based directly on Shakespeare's own manuscript. But even Q2 is obscure in some places, and a modern edi-

tion must seek help from Q1 and F to clarify the difficulties.

(Ibid., xxvii)

Gill thereby alludes to the ongoing debate on the authority of Shakespeare's texts, which feeds into broader social debates on textuality, for example legal interpretation. Purcell writes that

when popular Shakespeare productions assume a 'textual' or 'literary' attitude towards the text, they tend, broadly speaking, to imply that popular Shakespeare equals 'authentic' Shakespeare; when they assume a 'metatextual' or 'performative' attitude, the implication may be that popular Shakespeare is a subversion of – or at least a jazz-like 'variation' upon – the 'authority' of the text. (Purcell 2009, 217)

Both attitudes are justified because there is enough of both of them in Shakespeare – whether of the language or anarchic subversion – to claim that Shakespeare's intentions are not being traduced.

Fortunately, both Stratford and the London theatres are accessible by coach within an area that encompasses the greater part of the school population, namely the Midlands, East Anglia, the South, and the South-East, while other centres such as Newcastle and Plymouth regularly stage touring productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company and other companies, for which school parties are offered substantial group discounts. At Key Stage Three, however, pupils are more likely to experience Shakespeare on film rather than at the theatre, especially as since 1999 the study of a Shakespeare play has been required for GCSE English Language (although this is not a compulsory examination). Baz Luhrman's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) is popular, with one teacher reporting that it shows how Shakespeare's art 'helps us to understand our lives a little'. (Irish 2008, 16)

It is evidently in the interest of theatre companies to promote Shakespeare in schools in order to secure the audiences of tomorrow, but depending on their level of public funding, they may find themselves subject to unbearable political pressures. This is what happened at the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1990s, when cuts in school arts budgets led its education department to overextend itself and neglect its core work with directors and actors, while government was unwilling to increase the company's grant to cover the gap. (Chambers 2004, 174) This tension between ideal and reality may well be representative of a broader disparity between a middle-class institution that is set within the wheat fields of Warwickshire and committed to speaking Shakespeare's verse properly and one that aspires to something greater in order to fulfill its public mission. Within this political hothouse, it is unsurprising that the new director, Michael Boyd, should have introduced an initiative encouraging schoolchildren to sign a petition on the company's website indicating their support not for Michael Boyd but simply for 'Shakespeare'. 'Stand Up For Shakespeare' eventually attracted 14,348 'signatures'.<sup>17)</sup>

Boyd might admit that the best thing to have happened to his company over the last twelve years has been the Globe. Christie Carson asserts that the difference between the two institutions is largely

cultural, contrasting 'the American free-trade model of Shakespeare at the Globe' with 'the British public-service model at the Royal Shakespeare Company'.

The Globe model in many ways undermines the previously held truths of the cultural-capital model represented by the RSC.

(Carson 2008, 33)

Purcell goes even further when he states that

British Shakespeare owes much of its hybrid and self-contradictory identity to imported US Shakespeare, particularly due to the proliferation of American cultural products through the mass media.

(Ibid., 7)

It is difficult to see what Purcell means by 'imported US Shakespeare', unless he is talking about the cinema, but the influence of American culture on young people can hardly be ignored, and has been embraced as a phenomenon by Sam Mendes among others. (Wolf 2003, 36) For Mark Rylance (the Globe's first artistic director from 1995 to 2005), performance is an improvised conversation with the audience, in which it is hoped that returns will exceed the investment, or as he puts it, where 'the consciousness of the audience as a whole [is] larger than the consciousness of any individual audience member or actor'. (Rylance 2008, 109) At Stratford, the combination of performing talent and technical wizardry combine to create a rendezvous with genius that is not so far removed from the Victorian perception that Shakespeare is 'good for you'.

Since the Opening Season of 1997, the Globe has developed an educational programme for what the founding Director of Globe Education, Patrick Spottiswoode calls 'three different but not mutually exclusive audiences: school students and teachers; undergraduates, graduates and scholars; and the general public' (Spottiswoode 2008, 136), although Globe Education as such was founded in 1989 and the theatre's founder Sam Wanamaker had been experimenting with theatre education and exhibitions as long ago as 1972. As of 2010, Globe Education was employing a healthy complement of twenty-six full-time staff and sixty freelance Globe Education Practitioners.

An institution like the Globe provides students at all levels with a wealth of information and resources about Shakespeare's texts and historical background, as well as bringing the plays alive for students through workshops with professional actors, both at the theatre itself and on school visits. A promotional video released in 2005 shows practitioners working with three very different groups: local primary school pupils getting into character for Desdemona's murder scene in *Othello* by playing around under an expansive coloured bed sheet; American drama majors being drilled into attacking the stage like the chorus line of a Broadway musical; and, mentally handicapped adults speaking lines from *Romeo and Juliet* in strict iambic rhythm (Globe Education 2005).<sup>18)</sup> These activities seemed ap-

propriate to the needs of each target group, and indeed to suggest something about each of the plays being addressed: the innocence of Desdemona, the innate professionalism of Shakespeare's texts, and the social transcendence of erotic love.

This article has largely ignored the teaching of Shakespeare at universities and colleges on the assumption that students' interest will already have been caught. The phrase 'the blackboard jungle' is meant to describe the channeling of a confusing nexus of emotions into the act of writing, and if Shakespeare is the writer *par excellence*, then it can be assumed that students will have safely escaped this jungle by the time they reach the tertiary level. In fact, as Loehlen illustrates, students may still have a lot to learn about Shakespeare through performance, and may feel frustrated by academics who adopt a strictly textual approach to the plays. Nevertheless, it is the teaching and research of academics that still has a decisive impact on how Shakespeare is taught and performed elsewhere. The contest between textual and experiential pedagogies is in part a reflection of the replacement of the formalist approach dominant in the 1950s (influencing directors such as Sir Peter Hall) with the latent New Historicism of younger directors such as Dromgoole.<sup>19)</sup> Moreover, a number of academics have been allowed a direct, consultative role in professional Shakespeare performance: Professors Andrew Gurr and David Crystal (with his original pronunciation productions) at Shakespeare's Globe, and Professors Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson writing numerous programme notes for Stratford audiences.

The difficulty of teaching Shakespeare to young people reflects the difficulty of making Shakespeare 'our contemporary', when in many crucial respects he is not our contemporary at all; in particular, the roles of scientific knowledge and religious experience in public discourse have been almost completely reversed. Although it may be difficult to ascribe universal values to Shakespeare's plays in our own postmodern age, what continues to excite audiences about Shakespeare is not so much 'what he tells us' but 'how he tells it', and if therefore the medium is appealing, then the message may be memorable as well. Writing as he did in an age of discovery and at the beginning of the modern age, Shakespeare dramatizes an act of knowing or being in the world that is expressed, for example, in Dobson's review of Sam West's performance of Hamlet in the production directed by the late Stephen Pimlott at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in 2001:

It is one of Sam West's great strengths in this part that while he actually has years of theatrical experience behind him, and as conscientiously developed a vocal technique as any actor of his generation, Sam West can still plausibly simulate the body-language of a dangerously fit malcontented 25-year-old, scruffily unshaven but perfectly capable of holding his own with a rapier against Erroll Flynn in his prime.

(Dobson 2002, 297)<sup>20)</sup>

Contemporary British Shakespeare performance offers numerous other examples of theatrical daring, most prominently perhaps in the construction of an authentic replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in the 1990s.

## Notes

This article is based on a presentation given at a workshop on 'New Synergies in Contemporary British Shakespeare Performance' at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Shakespeare Society of Japan, held at the University of Tsukuba on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2009. I am grateful to Emi Hamana for inviting me to organize the workshop, and for the useful suggestions of the other participants, Tomonari Kuwayama, Kyoko Matsuyama, Yumi Sato and James Tink. I am also indebted to Dominic Dromgoole and Patrick Spottiswoode of Shakespeare's Globe, whom I interviewed separately on 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2010, and to the Globe's Treasurer, Robert Brooke, for kindly organizing those meetings.

- 1) Nuttall observed that 'There is plenty of political theory before the Enlightenment, but it presents itself as analysis, not as a complex social ethic. The peculiar note of entirely godless moral uplift is absent.' (Nuttall 2007, 171) In other words, the ethics of Shakespeare's audience were informed mainly by orthodox Christianity, but when an idea, such as republicanism in *Julius Caesar*, is presented in a dramatic context, it can seem strikingly contemporary.
- 2) The triangular slave trade connecting England, the west African coast and the Americas was developed by Sir Francis Drake and others from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Caliban is not necessarily an African slave, although both Prospero and Caliban himself call him such, and he does not obtain his freedom until the end of the play.
- 3) Grady argues for a less reductive or unitary view of Shakespeare's thought, noting (for example) that 'Hamlet is a humanist of the Montaignean sort – one who sees into the shifting, uncertain, contradictory, and unstable qualities of the self, not a humanist of the Rousseauistic school which makes of the self a fixed, essential source of unproblematic values and perceptions.' (Grady 2002, 261)
- 4) The word dates from the 1990s when many Japanese voters became disillusioned with the main political parties following the collapse of 'the bubble economy'.
- 5) The life expectancy of an adult male at this time was 47 years, but only 25 years among the London poor, with their greater exposure to diseases such as plague. About 40% of people died before their mid-teenage years.
- 6) The former is especially associated with Protestantism and its appeal to individual conscience, while both Anglican and other denominational forms of worship might be said to promote strong community ties.
- 7) From 1990 to 1996, Dromgoole was artistic director of the Bush Theatre, a studio theatre in Shepherd's Bush that regularly commissions new work.
- 8) Boyd was also to organize a Complete Works Festival in 2006 and 2007, suggesting that the new millennium called for 'completism' as well as historicism.
- 9) Brook's production consciously sought universal myths behind the play, although Dobson suggests that the only such myth unveiled was the well-known myth of Oedipus. (Ibid., 303) In a postmodern age that is generally sceptical about universals, it is difficult to reconcile Brook's approach with an element of dramatic surprise.
- 10) Quoted in Irish 2008, 1.
- 11) Drama may seem esoteric when the actor's body is idealized, or restricted to a talented élite, and the process of theatrical interpretation detached from that of reading from the printed text. Above all, it is necessary to avoid confusing the totality of the reading experience with the totality of performance. In our interview, Patrick Spottiswoode made a clear distinction between 'drama' and 'theatre', since although many young people never go to the theatre, they are daily exposed to drama on television and other media, and (whether they are aware of it or not), drama is part of their daily lives. In a broad sense, dramatic art refers

not only to genres such as Shakespearean tragedy and the musical but to the natural human tendency from infancy onwards to employ vocal and physical effects for desired ends. I would, however, make a distinction between conscious acting and instinctive behaviour, as well as dramatic, but unplanned eventualities, such as accidents.

- 12) As pioneers in Shakespeare education, Spottiswoode and his team at Globe Education played a key role in advising government on the new curriculum, and are campaigning for the restoration of the Shakespeare test at KS3.
- 13) Quoted in Irish 2008, 11.
- 14) Quoted in *Ibid.*, 4. Sir Henry Newbolt, ed., *The Teaching of English in England*, Phaidon, 2005, 319. The report, chaired by the poet Sir Henry Newbolt (1862-1938), was radical in proposing the replacement of classical languages with English in British schools, which was linked to a general concern about loss of British identity as a result of the First World War.
- 15) Quoted in *Ibid.*, 8. Kenneth Baker, *The Turbulent Years: My Life in Politics*, Faber and Faber, 1993, 192.
- 16) Shakespeare's comedies move towards a shared faith, his tragedies towards doubt, or humility in the face of circumstances, as when Edgar declares at the end of *King Lear*, 'The weight of this sad time we must obey, / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.' (*King Lear* 5.3.322-23)
- 17) The promotion ran from March 2008 to April 2009.
- 18) I showed this part of the video during my presentation at the workshop in Tsukuba in October 2009. The vocal work at Globe Education is led by Glyn McDonald. Globe Education has so far provided workshops for 25,000 primary school pupils in the London Borough of Southwark, where the theatre is located.
- 19) Whereas Hall emphasized the speaking of verse, Dromgoole is typical in his refusal to adopt a unitary view of Shakespeare or to idealize the text, but to defer meaning both to realities within Shakespeare's context and to our own realities. In our interview, Dromgoole even suggested that there is no need for director to adopt specifically political approaches to Shakespeare as it is the audience, with its individual political concerns, that make a production political; in other words, the politics is already there.
- 20) In our interview, Dromgoole referred to Shakespeare's 'unique capacity to whisper stuff in your ear.' Comparing his own approach with that of his predecessor Mark Rylance, Dromgoole said he was trying to give the theatre 'more belly' (or earthiness) and 'more heart'.
- 21) Sam West was already 35 at the time of the production.

### Some notable productions

YEAR	PLAY	DIRECTOR	VENUE
2000	<i>Hamlet</i>	John Caird	National Theatre ~ Simon Russell Beale as Hamlet
	<i>Richard II</i>	Stephen Pimlott	The Other Place, Stratford ~ Sam West as Richard
2001	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	Nicholas Hytner	National Theatre ~ Alex Jennings as Leontes
	<i>Hamlet</i>	Stephen Pimlott	Royal Shakespeare Theatre ~ Sam West as Hamlet
	<i>King Lear</i>	Declan Donnellan	The Other Place, Stratford · RSC Academy
	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Sam Mendes	Donmar Warehouse ~ Simon Russell Beale as Malvolio

2002	<i>The Tempest</i>	Michael Grandage	Sheffield Crucible ~ Derek Jacobi as Prospero
2003	<i>Henry V</i>	Nicholas Hytner	National Theatre ~ Adrian Lester as Henry
	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Mark Rylance	Middle Temple, London (Shakespeare's Globe) ~ Mark Rylance as Olivia
2004	<i>Coriolanus</i>	David Farr	Old Vic Theatre ~ Greg Hicks as Coriolanus
2005	<i>Hamlet</i>	Michael Boyd	Royal Shakespeare Theatre ~ Toby Stephens as Hamlet
	<i>Henry IV, Parts 1&amp;2</i>	Nicholas Hytner	National Theatre ~ Michael Gambon as Falstaff
	<i>King Lear</i>	Stephen Pimlott	Chichester Festival Theatre ~ David Warner as Lear
	<i>Pericles</i>	Kathryn Hunter	Shakespeare's Globe ~ Corin Redgrave as Pericles and Patrice Naiambana as Gower
	<i>Richard II</i>	Trevor Nunn	Old Vic Theatre ~ Kevin Spacey as Richard
	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	Edward Hall	Watermill Theatre, Newbury ~ Propeller theatre company
2006	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	Gregory Doran	Swan Theatre ~ Patrick Stewart and Harriet Walter
2006-7	<i>King Lear</i>	Trevor Nunn	Courtyard Theatre, Stratford ~ Ian McKellen as Lear
	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>	Marianne Elliott	Royal Shakespeare Theatre ~ Tamsin Greig as Beatrice
2007	<i>Othello</i>	Michael Grandage	Donmar Warehouse ~ Chiwetel Ejiofor as Othello
	<i>Macbeth</i>	Rupert Goold	Minerva, Chichester · Gielgud ~ Patrick Stewart as Macbeth
2008	<i>Hamlet</i>	Gregory Doran	Courtyard Theatre ~ David Tennant as Hamlet
2009	<i>Othello</i>	Barrie Rutter	Northern Broadsides · West Yorkshire Playhouse ~ Lenny Henry as Othello
	<i>As You Like It</i>	Thea Sharrock	Shakespeare's Globe ~ Naomi Frederick as Rosalind

## Chronology

1894	foundation of Oxford English Faculty
1921	Newbolt Report ('The Teaching of English in England')
1944	R.A. Butler's Education Act

- 1951 introduction of General Certificate of Education (GCE)
- 1959 formation of Royal Shakespeare Company
- 1963 Newsom Report ('Half Our Future')
- 1986 Rex Gibson's 'Shakespeare in Schools' project
- 1989 introduction of National Curriculum  
founding of Globe Education
- 1993 'The Battle of the Bard' (Conservative Party conference)
- 2009 abolition of compulsory testing of Shakespeare at Key Stage 3

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