

SHAKESPEARE'S ENGAGEMENTS: THE RICH POTENTIAL OF SHAKESPEARE STUDIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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This paper uses the changing face of Shakespeare, from stage to page to film and through the gamut of critical approaches, as a way of suggesting the value of Shakespeare studies in teaching English as a foreign language at tertiary level. In the first part of the article the changing patterns of appropriation of Shakespeare are considered in relation to changing critical approaches. The period from the establishment of the Globe theatre in 1597 to the opening of the International Globe Centre 400 years later has seen Shakespeare drawn into every major critical debate and shift in theatre or film practice in the western world. The second part of the article teases out the value of Shakespeare studies in the specific context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in German universities. The third section raises the wider kinds of learning which are likely to be associated with the study of Shakespeare. This paper moves strongly against the current of instrumentalism in much foreign language teaching to see the acquisition of the foreign language as part of a larger education, preparing the way for lifelong learning.

In hierdie artikel word die verskillende verwerkingsmoontlikhede van Shakespeare: van verhoog tot boek tot film, en die aanwending van 'n verskeidenheid kritiese benaderings gebruik om die waarde van die bestudering van Shakespeare as deel van die onderrig van Engles as vreemde taal op tersiêre vlak te sugereer. In die eerste gedeelte van die artikel word die veranderende aanwendingpatrone van Shakespeare bespreek teen die agtergrond van veranderende kritiese benaderings. Sedert die stigting van die Globeteater in 1597 tot en met die opening van die Internasionale Globesentrum 400 jaar later, is Shakespeare betrek by elke belangrike kritiese debat en klemverskuiwing in die teater- of filmpraktyk in die Westerse wêreld. Die tweede spesifieke konteks nl. die onderrig en leer van Engles as 'n vreemde taal aan Duitse universiteite. In die derde gedeelte word die soorte leer wat waarskynlik met die bestudering van Shakespeare geassosieer sal word, aangespreek. In die artikel word daar sterk standpunt ingeneem teen die instrumentalisme-stroom binne vreemdetaalonderrig wat die verwerping van 'n vreemde taal sien binne 'n groter opvoedingsopset wat die weg baan vir lewenslange leer.

THE CHANGING FACE OF SHAKESPEARE

The Globe as starting point

The most famous theatre of Shakespeare's time, the Globe, was a reconstruction. Its story begins with the dismantling, transportation and rebuilding of the Theatre, which had been the first permanent venue for theatrical performances in London. The lease for the land on which the Theatre stood was due to expire after twenty-one years in April 1597. The owner of the land, Gyles Allen, was not willing to offer a new lease on terms acceptable to James Burbage who owned the Theatre. Had Burbage not dismantled the building before the 'expiry of the lease, it would have become Allyn's property. The move was not strictly legal, but it was sensible.

But dismantling was easier than rebuilding. Times were hard. There were constant conflicts between the acting companies and the city authorities. The theatres were frequently closed for long periods when there were outbreaks of plague or other troubles. And playwrights and even noble patrons were constantly changing allegiance. In addition, there was a growing demand for a more comfortable, hall-type theatre instead of the amphitheatre style. However, the uncertainties gave the amphitheatre Globe outside the city priority over Burbage's hall theatre venture in the city of London. James Burbage died, and it was left to his son Richard to carry through the erection of the Globe on the south bank of the Thames across from the city of London. Shakespeare and other members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men were the chief investors in the project. By July 1599, the English metropolis had a new and splendid amusement venue.

These observations are not merely interesting reflections on historical events. They help establish an initial context for exploring the critical reception of Shakespeare. They also provide a suggestive image of the course of Shakespearean studies. The story of the transmutation of the Theatre into the Globe demonstrates a series of creative responses to changing and challenging circumstances. Similarly, the products created for the stage and on the stage were far from fixed, invariable or sacrosanct, but subject to continuous changes and new appropriations under changing conditions.

Theatre versus literature

A full study of the appropriation and reception of Shakespeare would have to cover a great deal. It would have to begin with an account of the changing responses to his work from audiences and readers through four centuries of the modern era. Beyond that, it would have to consider different critical and theoretical approaches and the perspectives they yield, changes in performance practice and technology, and the theory and history of editing and translating texts for a changing readership. This paper touches on those aspects which are of particular significance to foreign language learning in the context of tertiary education today.

The world-wide appeal of Shakespeare is in part the result of the appropriation of his work in the course of the historical genesis of English, and more general, literary criticism and scholarship and the complex frame which it provides. In this sense, the case of Shakespeare constitutes a paradigm in literary theory and criticism.

Sir Philip Sidney propagated a neo-classical theatre ideal in the 16th century. Shakespeare's contemporaries, Ben Jonson, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher strove after this ideal. Whereas they were regarded as more ingenious in their treatment of subject matter, and in Ben Jonson's case specifically honoured for drama as poetic literature, Shakespeare was a skilful adapter of well-known material, content with drama as production. Jonson was better liked by the educated elite, Shakespeare was much better appreciated by general theatre audiences (see Schabart, 1978: 680-81).

The concern with this difference between performance and literature is strongly reflected in the critical and dramatic work of John Dryden. The continuous development of the drama in England was interrupted by the closing of the playhouses between 1642 and 1660, during the Civil War and the revolution which followed it. When Charles II returned from exile, the theatre culture which emerged was much changed. Public theatre with a strong indigenous dynamic had flourished on the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries up to 1642. At the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, changed political, economic, social, cultural and theatrical conditions favoured court theatre, strongly orientated towards French and other continental models. The changes in theatre practice were accompanied by shifts in critical criteria.

Dryden was strongly drawn to aspects of the work of his predecessor. In the much changed circumstances of the late 1660s, he attempted to re-establish what we now call "theatrical communication" between Shakespeare and Restoration audiences. His adaptations of the plays for bourgeois-aristocratic audiences in the new style of indoor theatre were a far cry from anything produced in Shakespeare's lifetime half a century earlier. However, they were evidence of the struggles with the dynamic of Shakespeare which strongly influenced the development of literary theory and criticism in the years which followed.

Through his criticism, Dryden put an emphasis on a "creative concept of imitation" of nature (i.e. mental and material reality) in poetry and drama in the Aristotelian sense of mimesis. This, as well as the emergence of commercial publication and changes in the social status of playwrights, eased the way for drama to be considered as literature. Consequently, in the 18th century, Shakespeare advanced to the status of a literary classic (see Bimberg, 1995). Scholars turned their attention to his works on the page and assigned him the first position in literary history, ahead of the more conventional literary figures of Edmund Spenser and John Milton. The documents most relevant here are the prefaces by Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson to their Shakespeare editions of 1725 and 1765 respectively. They reveal much about the contemporary reception of Shakespeare's works, and are instructive about editorial principles and methods and the state of literary criticism at the time. The tension between drama as literature and drama as staged performance is felt throughout.

In the prefaces, Shakespeare is praised for the poetic quality of his plays, his intuitive knowledge of the world, the closeness to life of his works (explaining his unclassical mixture of dramatic genres and conventions), his skilful characterisation and writing of dialogue, and his rhetorical effectiveness in manipulating audience response (see Bimberg, 1987). His overly strong concern to cater for the tastes of the audiences of his time, his failure to observe the dictates of ancient literary models, and his ignorance of certain "rules" of decorum are seen as detractions. In the end, Shakespeare's originality swings the balance against neo-

classicism: his plays are much more exciting than those of writers who keep all the rules.

As the 18th century wears on, the debates around Shakespeare continue in Romantic form. Neo-classicist rules are condemned as a straight-jacket for authors, failing to increase or guarantee artistic quality or verisimilitude in any way. Dryden's idea of the "mature spectator" is developed to describe someone who, while watching a play, is able to combine awareness of reality with imagination, and is able to succumb to illusion without losing a hold on reality. Increasingly, also, Shakespeare provided the occasion for 18th century writers and critics to come to terms with the phenomenon of obviously differing standards of judgement for dead and living authors. This led to new criteria of literary criticism (see Bimberg, 1986: 67-74; Bimberg, 1987: 21-32).

Diverse responses over the past two centuries

The patterns in the reception of Shakespeare since the early 19th century are so diverse that no attempt can be made at an historical or complete account in a paper of this compass. Each approach emphasises certain characteristics or features of a work while other characteristics are ignored or underplayed. The following observations about schools and approaches, not arranged in historical order, illustrate the point. Each approach is described in the present tense because all of them continue to have some currency.

Literary positivism aimed at a complete reconstruction of the author's life to find out about all that contributed to the genesis of a text. One such examination of Shakespeare's sonnets leads to his being seen as a morally doubtful, promiscuous person and a libertine. Literary positivists examined Shakespeare plays which had been neglected in Romantic criticism and undertook what they called "character criticism". The fictitious figures were treated as historical, and were analysed psychologically. Some of the analyses of tragic characters are still informative and striking. Other projects are obviously unhelpful. One sought to recover the details of Hamlet's stay at the University of Wittenberg. Another invested in the childhood of several of Shakespeare's heroines.

Sociological criticism regards literature as a product of society and pays special attention to the functioning of a text in relation to certain political and economic conditions. This approach has produced useful studies of the political and social conditions and philosophical ideas of Shakespeare's age. The histories in particular have been given detailed and useful attention. However, the assumption that an author will follow the interests of the social group or class he grew up in throughout his life is untenable.

Geistesgeschichte (spirit/mind history), a German school, emphasises individual intuition in relation to the spirit rather than the circumstances of the age. Shakespeare is seen as a creative genius, a phenomenon to be explained by reference to the individualism and worldliness of the Renaissance which he exemplifies. Sometimes his works are categorised into different epochs, such as the Renaissance and the Baroque. Anglo-American scholarship is profoundly sceptical of this approach, questioning whether there is a homogeneous character or prevalent spirit of the age permeating literature, art, music, philosophy, etc.

Historical criticism represents a reaction against both the positivist and *geistesgeschichtliche*

approaches. It directs scholarly attention to an understanding of the intellectual background of a work and the period when it was produced. Shakespeare is seen as an actor, playwright, sharer, amanger and director who makes use of existing theatre conventions and works under the conditions of a specific theatre for paying audiences of heterogeneous taste. This has been illuminating, but it tends to reduce the meaning of the work to the historical intention or engagement of the author.

Reception theory draws attention away from the aesthetics of the production of a text to its reception. It explains convincingly the discrepancies between the past significance and the present or potential meaning of literature. One and the same text can be read in different terms by different readers at different times. Some studies of this kind devoted to Shakespeare stress the qualities in his work that make it appear contemporary or modern.

Psychoanalytic criticism, based on anthropological rather than historical premises, conceives of a literary text as a psychopathological document referring to the self of the author. Artistic activities are seen as providing an alternative to forced renunciation of certain urges by satisfying them in fantasy. Shakespearean characters and their complex actions are subjected to similar analysis, being understood in terms of underlying instinctual processes. Interpretations of this kind still emerge in today's performances or films.

Mythological criticism, taking the "collective unconscious" as its point of departure, searches for archetypal patterns. It reinterprets Shakespeare by finding parallels between *dramatis personae* or dramatic events and figures and rites from folklore customs. This has not only led to a loss in the dramatic characters of their historical, social and psychic identity, but also to the loss of the ethical dimension to Shakespeare's plays. The comedies, with their ceremonial endings of marriage and dancing, lend themselves particularly to mythological interpretations of spring and life defeating winter and death.

New criticism avoids attempts to access literature through external information: biographical, social or *geisteswissenschaftliche* references. It concentrates on close reading and detailed textual analysis. The personality of the author, the sources of the texts, the history of ideas, the time of genesis of the text or its original functions and political and social implications are seen as extraneous to the well-wrought art text. Shakespeare's use of metaphors, imagery, word chains and puns, sound colours and combinations, and rhyme and metre are seen as the instruments of meaning and given priority in analysis. This can lead to neglect of dramatic functions of language, and sense of the audiences addressed and the special theatre conditions which gave significant shape to the plays.

Structuralism is concerned with signs and signification, and is open to all the conventions and codes of communication and all the means by which humans convey information and judgements to each other. The major implication is that text analysis cannot hope to reveal the author's frame of mind or the psychological state of the characters. Shakespeare's texts are therefore seen as integral self-referring, self-supporting structures rather than psychological analyses (see Weiß, 1979: 59-85).

Post-structuralism developed as a response to and displacement of structuralism. It sees the meaning of any text as fundamentally unstable. With regard to Shakespeare, it argues that language cannot describe the real presence of character. Deconstruction undermines the

illusion of character and of access to the author's mind, focusing instead on rhetoric.

Feminist criticism attacks the dominance of male notions of value in literature. Texts by male authors, among them Shakespeare, are analysed to disclose their presentation of women and the social position or role ascribed to them. Another strategy is deliberate re-reading of texts by both male and female authors from a self-consciously female point of view. In analysing *Macbeth*, the focus falls on Lady Macbeth, rather than her husband, and on witchcraft and its possible significances. A third approach of feminist criticism is *écriture féminine*, or writing which refuses to go along with the naturalised notions of patriarchy, and demystifies the position of women. Virginia Woolf's speculation about the life of a fictitious sister of Shakespeare is a fine example of an attempt to explore the difficult genesis of female professional writers by exploring the material conditions of male-dominated (see Hawkes, 1992: 287ff).

Many more examples from literary criticism and theory could be given here to illustrate the variety of critical and theoretical paradigms in the 19th and 20th centuries. Shakespeare and his works have been subject, within short spans of time, to a broad variety of approaches, and have even provoked some of those theoretical innovations. For first-year students of Anglistics, it can be an amazing and even startling experience to realise how different the results and judgements arising from literary analysis can be. So much depends on the kinds of questions, interests and intentions brought to the analysis. Thus a text can be understood as a biographical document, a reflection of social reality or of the spirit of the time when it was written, an expression of the author's psychic state, or even an aesthetic object without any function and purpose and not bound by time.

Shakespeare's appropriation in film and through the reconstructed Globe

The most recent critical and creative appropriations of Shakespeare have come through the visual media: film, TV and video. These create the possibility of bringing the classics to a world-wide audience. The filming of Shakespeare's plays represents an appropriation that is similar to staging them. However, there is no live interaction with the audience, and the more advanced technology makes very different effects possible.

The modest beginnings of filming Shakespeare in the era of the silent film reached their heyday between 1908 and 1914 in Britain, Italy, France and the United States. The products focused on decoration and spectacle. Today these films have little appeal outside the context of theatre and film history. The sound dimension, including the use of music, enhanced the potential of the medium considerably. Since the 1940s, colour has also been used to enrich the visual effect. Important milestones in the film history of Shakespeare over the past 60 years have been produced by Olivier, Mankiewicz, Kurosawa, Welles, Zeffirelli, Brook, Kozintsev, Hall, Polanski, Jarman and Brennagh among others.

Popular modern appropriation of Shakespeare's oeuvre has come about through the visual media, which have brought time-bound as well as time-transgressing material close to modern recipients. They are well placed to portray the complex and fascinating characters, lively action, thrilling plots and diverse subplots of Shakespeare's plays. Sensitive camera technique can move a modern audience between intimate and crowd scenes by very different means to

the Elizabethan platform stage, but no less effectively. There are, of course, some artistic difficulties caused by the generic differences between theatre and film. Film, for example, tends to the realised visual where in Shakespeare's theatre the words had to conjure an appropriate scene in the imagination. Nevertheless, filmed Shakespeare is entertaining, often prompts a reading of the work, and may suggest new perspectives and interpretations to advanced students who already know the text. It may also provide models of acting and design for theatre students and of acting styles for students of performance history (Hapgood, 1992: 273ff).

This discussion of the 400-year history of Shakespeare appropriation and criticism ends fittingly with the reconstructed Globe, opened recently in London a few yards from the original site. In one sense, the International Globe Centre takes us back to what Shakespeare's theatre was like. In another, it embodies and represents the history since then. The critical debates that have unfolded since the erection of the original Globe are, visibly or invisibly, part of the revival in the resurrected theatre. The historically precise reconstruction of the old Globe under the guidance of the American actor and Director, Sam Wanamaker, also represents a new construction for the purposes of our present dialogue with Shakespeare.

THE USE OF THIS CRITICAL HISTORY FOR TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT TERTIARY LEVEL

"Shakespeare and no end," said Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. His profound insight is confirmed as we pursue the value of using what we might call the Shakespeare portfolio in education. As the large numbers of students who choose to do further study in Shakespeare confirm, to study Shakespeare means to do something exceptional. A thorough and inspiring university training which encourages students to think through the discussion of works of literature in a foreign language cannot but have considerable value. What follows suggests what the value of analysing and interpreting Shakespeare in the context of foreign language learning at university might be:

- (i) In studying Shakespeare, one has to become aware of the changing meanings of words, or the historicity of language and literature. This intensifies foreign language acquisition and develops the students' historical and linguistic consciousness.
- (ii) Reading critically develops an understanding of genre in literature and drama, leading to an enhanced aesthetic-stylistic experience. Shakespeare studies also invites a rewarding comparison between page and stage, text and scenic presentation. The use of music, songs and dances, or the close contact of the clowns with the spectators, exemplify the plurimedial codes and channels of transmission in drama by contrast with, say, the lyric text (see Pfister, 1982). Both of these aspects lead to a broadened communicative repertoire.
- (iii) Multilayered plays such as *The Tempest* demonstrate the complex interrelationship between reality and fictionality, as well as between illusion and reality on stage and the manipulation of the audience in the real world. The manipulation of readers and audiences also becomes clear through a study of the fools and clowns, the girls and women in disguise, the mirroring functions of the main and sub-plots and the framing

actions. Opinions and attitudes are frequently modified in the process. By recognising the playwright's writing strategies and manipulation of audience response, students develop their own rhetorical repertoire.

- (iv) Shakespeare's adaptations of well-known historical, literary or dramatic material allow students to see the difference between the poetic material itself and the historical, philosophical, ethical or political issues negotiated in the play adapted from it. Their awareness of the highly complex interrelationships between content, form, structure and genre is also increased. They read with more and more sophistication.
- (v) An analysis of the alterations and adaptations that Shakespeare effected in reworking his source texts reveals, embedded in language, his strategies and the functions of the *dramatis personae* as imaginatively reconceived by him.
- (vi) Students become aware of the large variety of different methods and approaches available for interpreting each work, and so of the dynamics of communication.
- (vii) Shakespeare's platform stage did not depend on the creation of illusion. It was disillusionistic and depended on the words and the imagination of the spectators. This presents special difficulties for staging Shakespeare today. The director has to take into account very different audience expectations, modes of reception and perception, and a changed relationship between illusion and reality on stage. A study of the text in relation to performance heightens awareness of the differences in communicative modes between different cultures in different historical circumstances.
- (viii) A reading of the plays (before any film material is used) forces the student readers to visualise the stage business and the complex business of Shakespeare's plays themselves first. This requires a much more active mode of reception than is demanded by the visual media, because the student is much more dependent on applying his own reading and his experience of theatre and life and developing the linguistic resources to express his insights.
- (ix) The diverse cultural appropriations of Shakespeare's works in criticism, theory, translation, staging and filming demonstrate *par excellence* the parallels and differences between the past signification of a text and its potential meaning today. An example of the parallels would be that, despite certain social changes since Shakespeare's time, some of the more general issues addressed by him still (or once more) challenge modern readers.
- (x) The example of Shakespeare also demonstrates that despite the large variety of approaches, literature is by no means a "free for all". You cannot just read anything out of a text or interpret anything into it. Through the rich example of Shakespeare studies, students may develop a subtle sense of how the author guides and manipulates the reader through certain writing strategies. The understanding of literary texts cannot be compared to the solution of mathematical equations where there is only one result possible. Yet it is not arbitrary. Interpreting a literary text requires that the reader engages complex cognitive and affective skills and brings his wider reading and life experience to bear judiciously in reaching conclusions.

SHAKESPEARE STUDIES AND A GENERAL EDUCATION

Shakespeare studies are a rich medium and instrument for teaching at tertiary level because they afford access to so much. In addition to the linguistic, communicative and hermeneutic enrichment we have discussed, studying Shakespeare affords access to a range of historical and philosophical issues and can serve to raise ethical consciousness.

- (i) Through being exposed to the literary and theatrical experiences involved in coming to terms with Shakespeare, students become acquainted not only with certain historical models of society, but also with utopian and dystopian counter-models of the historical reality of the time. Through vicarious experience, they are able to expand their insights and to modify their own standards of judgement as they explore the implications of historical and fictionally realised social values. The subtle relationship between ethics and aesthetics can be mediated to students through comparing Shakespeare's works with those of his later adapters such as Dryden. The students are offered the opportunity to grasp the complex artistic concept of truth in literary and dramatic works - a concept that differs from historical or empirical notions of truth.
- (ii) From the process of affirmation or negation of the models offered in the fictional worlds of drama, the spectators or readers derive ideas for a meaningful individual life of their own, or at least become aware of alternative possibilities and options. The necessity of a well-balanced point of view of one's own that takes complex requirements, presuppositions and skills into account in making such judgements may contribute to personality development. Certainly, the study of Shakespeare can offer the student opportunities to enrich and modify his world view and outlook.
- (iii) The necessary evaluation of the models, alternatives, visions and roles offered in literature and theatre is itself important. The more sophisticated and witty comedies of Shakespeare offer a complex exploration of love, sex and partnership which seems particularly valuable at a time when the definition of gender identities is of particular concern. The fact that the female roles were acted by men in Shakespeare's time suggests very complex mental processes when the women in the plays adopt male disguise. For readers and audiences of today it is fascinating to see how Shakespeare puts the traditional role behaviour of the sexes to the test and offers alternative perspectives.
- (iv) The study of Shakespeare can support the development of historical consciousness and an awareness of historico-cultural changes and inter-cultural relationships, and so can foster the ability to think dialectically. The history of Shakespeare scholarship makes plain that there are no sudden revolutions, but rather a fascinating interplay of tradition and innovation over long spans of time. This encourages students to recognise and understand continuities, breaks, caesuras, reactions, counter-reactions and contradictions. Shakespeare also invites an exploration of multiculturalism by displaying the turbulent encounters of various cultures and showing that identity is a very unstable, temporary category, always open to review.
- (v) The field of Shakespeare studies is so wide-ranging that it exemplifies the history of literary and theatrical criticism, of literary theory, history and scholarship in Great

Britain, the United States, Germany and many other countries world-wide. Coming to terms with it opens up several important possibilities. Recognising that the questions directed to a text already determine the direction from which an answer is expected and thus the kind of study that is being undertaken should enhance the student's consciousness of his own methods, tools, aims and skills. The realisation that all literary, historical, aesthetic and cultural values are subject to change and therefore have to be critically evaluated time and again may also be liberating. The variety of approaches to Shakespeare can further the development of tolerance, farsightedness and pluralism of opinion. Earlier approaches which now seem absurd have to be understood in context. And where different approaches are enlightening in various ways, the student is encouraged to develop multiple strategies appropriate to each text.

- (vi) The attitudes, skills and modes of thinking fostered by Shakespeare studies encourage a qualifying, critical approach, which breaks ideological bonds and encourages fresh engagement. With sensitive guidance through the discipline by competent and personally committed teachers, students will certainly feel more confident about their own opinions, skills, aesthetic and ethical judgements and critical standards. The overall, long-term results of engaging all these cognitive and affective processes may be cultural pluralism and social competence.

"Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital," said Oscar Wilde. Twentieth century literary theory would assert that you can turn to a text with different experiences and read it in different terms at different times, but that is altogether duller than what Wilde intended. The remarkable thing about reading or experiencing Shakespeare's drama is that it continues to generate excitement: after 400 years. It is still "new, complex, and vital".

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