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At the present moment, college literary study is caught between two conflicting, though essentially conservative, agendas: the nostalgic demand for the preservation of traditional values, on the one hand, and the insistent urgency of the quasi-vocational and pre-professional mission of the modern university on the other hand. On the face of it, the Shakespeare course seems well-suited to the former goal, and ill-suited to the latter. Traditionalist scholars and neoconservative politicians have rushed to defend Shakespeare against a perceived onslaught of "lesser" writers--particularly women and people of color--who, they argue, would displace Shakespeare from the canon and the curriculum. At the same time, many vocationally-oriented students question the value of required humanities courses, such as Shakespeare, which seem to have little relation to their career goals.

I don't think teachers of Shakespeare should cater to either of these positions, but, on the other hand, we shouldn't ignore them. Instead, we should focus our courses at least partly on an analysis of the ways "Shakespeare" (as an icon of cultural literacy) gets defined or represented in relation to different sets of values. By identifying the socio-cultural coordinates from which Shakespeare is variously appropriated or resisted by groups within the academy and the society at large we can begin to produce what Jerry Herron has described as a sort of "critical" literacy: a contingent set of terms and rhetorical practices which will enable us to openly and self-consciously engage in the (often masked or suppressed) ideological conflicts through which social values are established (117-29).

As an exploratory effort toward developing a "critical literacy" approach to Shakespeare, I will briefly critique what I see as the two most pernicious ideological functions of Shakespeare study in the academy: the use of Shakespeare as an ideological underpinning for a quietist, apolitical individualism; and the production of Shakespeare as a class talisman or commodity fetish of upper middle class taste. Then I will discuss several strategies for engaging students in a critical analysis of "Shakespeare" as a social phenomenon.

Shakespeare and Individualism

As Marxist critics have demonstrated, conventional literary studies has been more complicitous than any other academic discipline in the (re)production of the dominant ideology of individualism. According to this critique, the traditional literature course operates as what Terry Eagleton has called a "moral technology," maintaining a vaguely elitist standard of sensitivity which functions more than anything else to produce individual students as liberal humanist subjects. The liberal humanist conception of subjectivity is that of a unitary, constant

entity, originating from a rational individual consciousness which is relatively unconstrained by socio-historic forces. Literary studies helps to maintain liberal humanist individualism through its emphasis on authorial genius (focusing on "great men," such as Shakespeare, to the neglect, for example, of the socio-political determinants of textual production and reception) and through its cultivation of "original," "individual" response to literature in students. By representing individual genius as the essence of literature, and by granting literature a privileged role as the prime repository of human experience, the traditional curriculum represents liberal humanist individualism as the "natural" and "universal" mode of human subjectivity. But this particular construction of the "human" is itself the product of a specific socio-historic framework. Postmodern critical theory has radically problematized the idealist-humanist conception of consciousness as prelinguistic and of the individual subject as an originator of language rather than as an effect of language.

The "common sense" readings of texts favored by traditional literary studies are revealed, then, as unselfconsciously biased ideological effects. They take for granted an unproblematized relationship between author and reader as two autonomous, individual, self-present consciousnesses in communication. There is a specific political imperative to resist the privileging of individualism in this practice, for, as Terry Eagleton has demonstrated, it amounts to a form of ideological coercion in the interests of a conservative, elitist politics (102-4). Yet, notwithstanding the current prominence of critical theory, the study of English literature remains deeply implicated in perpetuating liberal humanist individualism. Precisely on this point the discipline of English most strongly resists criticism and change: it is almost unthinkable to suggest an anti-individualist approach to literature because individual genius is seen as the fundamental ground of literature.

From a Marxist perspective, the main problems with the sort of individualism promoted by traditional literary study are two-fold. First, students are discouraged from thinking in terms of collective political action (hence, participation in the political process is imagined mainly at the level of the individual vote between extremely banal choices). Second, students are discouraged from identifying systemic and structural problems with the social order (hence, inequities in social justice and distribution of resources are seen as the results of the different efforts of "hard-working" or "lazy" individuals rather than as, at least partly, the results of social privileges enjoyed and obstacles encountered by different social groups).

The consequences of a narrowly individualistic framework can be seen, for example, by considering different emphases in teaching a play such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. A traditional approach, attending to Aristotle's prescriptions for great tragedy, or following the influential model of A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, might focus on the character of Macbeth. Macbeth's personal struggle with ambition might be

emphasized, or the discussion might turn on his susceptibility to Lady Macbeth's influence. This sort of reading makes a certain kind of sense for us, and some version of it would, no doubt, have been available for Shakespeare's original audience as well. But there are other operative frameworks of meaning for *Macbeth*. An historicized perspective would note that the play also served an ideological function in legitimating the Stuart accession. As Richard III had embodied all the evils of the Yorks in one person against whose villainy Queen Elizabeth and her Tudor predecessors could appear in heroic glory, Macbeth did the same for King James. Recognizing this ideological function enables a certain kind of critique of individualism to emerge; we can see how political propagandists may simplistically "demonize" a particular individual in order to mobilize public opinion in favor of some particular program or cause or to divert public attention from some pressing crisis.

As students may notice, this is essentially what happened on American television during the recent Persian Gulf War. Saddam Hussein was demonized; President Bush was apotheosized. The United States' less than altruistic interests in the Persian Gulf were forgotten, as were domestic problems such as the recession and the savings and loan crisis. We are not accustomed, perhaps, to thinking either of Shakespeare or of our television news media as propagandists. Nonetheless, each of these discourses--Shakespeare and the nightly news--have at times performed propagandistic functions. Teaching our students how to "read" such functions across different discourses and in various contexts is, in my view, one of the most urgent missions of a college education.

Shakespeare as Cultural Capital

A pedagogy focused on critical literacy would reveal "Shakespeare" as a body of knowledge shaped and constructed by critical and pedagogical apparatuses, rather than a distinct and substantial subject which exists independently of our work as scholars, teachers and students. As Gerald Graff has reminded us, the familiar subjects and methodologies of our curricula are themselves products of historical conflicts which have been systematically forgotten (247-62). What the teacher can do, in this situation, is to acknowledge his or her implication in the institutional assumptions and conceptual frames which produce our particular constructions of "knowledge." This acknowledgment in turn calls for a questioning of those intellectual boundaries and opens up the possibility for alternative knowledges produced in other cultural sites to contest the social values implicit in the institutionally supported curriculum.

In fact, I would suggest, such a critical strategy is the only way to achieve an intellectually responsible pedagogy. Any "knowledge" (even an aesthetic appreciation of Shakespeare as "knowledge") which is not self-conscious about its enabling assumptions and conceptual frames can only reproduce itself, can only adduce new data and win new converts to support what it already knows. Such teaching is inherently limited to the passive transmission of known information as "knowledge" and can only stumble upon new ways of understanding by accident, when the system breaks down, when someone misunderstands and others happen to recognize the misunderstanding as a viable alterna-

tive. Much is to be gained, therefore, from a pedagogy which systematically focuses on misunderstanding.

The "indoctrination" model of literary study--like what Paolo Freire has called the "banking" model of education--assumes that students come into the university as blank slates waiting to be stamped with a set of values. In fact, of course, students enter our classrooms as subjects situated within complex networks of sociopolitical power. Students, that is, are always already indoctrinated; they are "organic intellectuals," in the Gramscian sense, who already have a stake in the political struggles that shape our society. In this context, literary study presents itself to the progressive intellectual as one of several important sites of ideology production available for political struggle, including the entertainment industry (especially popular music and cinema), news media (ostensibly "objective" newspaper and broadcast journalism as well as the subjective discourse of television pundits, newspaper columnists, etc.), and the radio and television call-in programs which blur the lines between entertainment, education, and journalism. These various discursive arenas each present different opportunities and obstacles for critical analysis, but the literature classroom, I would argue, offers the greatest potential for a sustained, articulate debate on sociocultural values. We simply have more time and space and shared commitment to devote to the project of critical literacy than do the editorial writers, movie makers, and talk-show hosts.

Classroom Strategies

In an oppositional classroom Shakespearean texts can become the subject of ideology critique--a practice which reconstructs the historical conditions in which the texts were and are (re)produced, and places the Shakespearean text in relation to other contextual and "counter-textual" texts. I introduce the issue of the ideological effects of literary study with one or more assigned readings--usually Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" and Terry Eagleton's essay "The Subject of Literature"--at the beginning of each semester. These essays--particularly Althusser's--are difficult for students. Students find them difficult not so much because they are written in high academic style, or because the ideas set forth are particularly complex, but because the arguments made are relatively unfamiliar to students. Both Althusser and Eagleton argue that education often serves to limit one's personal freedom as much as to expand it. This thought makes some students uncomfortable, but their discomfort can lead to productive discussion and debate.

In the core curriculum or general education Shakespeare course, for example, we often teach students--business majors, science majors, and other students pursuing technical and explicitly vocational degrees--who are merely fulfilling a graduation requirement and who have no particular interest in Shakespeare. As teachers we may fall into the uncomfortable habit of trying to cajole such students into enjoying Shakespeare's plays. A much better strategy, however, is to acknowledge and critique this discomfort as a symptom of the conflicting agendas I mentioned earlier--the concern that students be indoctrinated with traditional values, on the one

hand, and the need for a streamlined technical training, unencumbered by a critical encounter with culture, on the other hand. One implication of Althusser's and Eagleton's view is that the general education Shakespeare course may function as a sort of values-indoctrination for vocationally-oriented students. If this implication is considered, students' resistance to Shakespeare takes on more urgent significance, and can become an important issue for class discussion.

After addressing the general problem of the place of literary study and "Shakespeare" in the academy and in the larger social formation, I next raise the question "who is Shakespeare"? Students find this question both surprising and fascinating. I usually assign a general theoretical reading on the problem of authorship and intention such as Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" in conjunction with other readings specifically focused on the Shakespeare authorship question. The first chapter of Marjorie Garber's book, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, gives a colorfully-written account of the principal nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates over whether William Shakespeare of Stratford or some other mysterious person or persons actually wrote the plays. These debates are often quite entertaining in their own right, but they also open up opportunities to raise key theoretical questions concerning the plays. Does the meaning of *King Lear* change, for example, if the play was actually written by the aristocratic Earl of Oxford, as Charlton Ogburn thinks, instead of the middle-class Shakespeare? I often use a transcript of a program entitled *The Shakespeare Mystery* from the Public Broadcasting System's *Frontline* series. In the statements of scholars and interested partisans interviewed for this program, students can identify several distinctively different "Shakespeares": Charles Burford, a descendent of the Earl of Oxford, observes that only a cultivated, educated aristocrat such as his ancestor could have written the plays; Enoch Powell, a retired cabinet minister, argues that the author of the works known as Shakespeare's must have been someone with a first-hand experience of governing; Charlton Ogburn is moved to tears as he spins a sentimental, romantic tale of Oxford as a great man tragically unrecognized; and scholars such as A. L. Rowse and Samuel Shoenbaum haughtily dismiss the Shakespeare-Oxford authorship controversy as a tempest in a teapot cooked up by "ignorant" and presumptuous amateurs.

What the authorship controversy illustrates most clearly is that there is real cultural power at stake in the Shakespeare "industry." If students gain an understanding of how and why "Shakespeare" can be claimed as a "member" of one group or another--liberals or conservatives, pragmatists or idealists--then the function of "Shakespeare" as a sort of cultural capital produced and disseminated in the university can be explored. Perhaps the most famous modern instance of this sort of appropriation of "Shakespeare" for a propagandistic use is Laurence Olivier's 1945 film version of *Henry V*. But Margo Heinemann gives an interesting account of a more recent instance in an essay entitled "How Brecht Read Shakespeare." Heinemann analyzes an interview with Nigel Lawson, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which the conversation turns on Ulysses' speech on chaos and social hierarchy from *Troilus and Cressida*: "Take but degree away, untune that string, / And hark what discord follows." To the interviewer's query why he likes those lines,

Lawson responds:

The fact of differences, and the need for some kind of hierarchy, both these facts, are expressed more powerfully there than anywhere I know in literature.

"So," the interviewer asks, "Shakespeare was a good Tory?"
And Lawson replies "Shakespeare was a Tory, without any doubt."

There is an especial irony involved in this particular appropriation of "Shakespeare," because it flouts the conventional ironic interpretation of that passage from *Troilus and Cressida*. "It's interesting," as Heinemann goes on to observe, that

to make his point Mr Lawson has to remember his examples so wholly out of dramatic context, disregarding entirely the conflicts of values and actions that surround them in the plays. Ulysses may talk about the sacredness of hierarchy and order, but the setting shows him as a cunning politician whose behaviour undercuts what he says here, as indeed does the whole play. (203)

One sometimes hears the criticism that introducing historical or political contexts into the study of Shakespeare results in "reductive" readings of the plays. Perhaps this may occur if the teacher focuses on a single issue. But an emphasis on poetic excellence or plot structure can be just as reductive, and such issues are more likely to seem merely irrelevant. In using texts and strategies such as those I have described above I aim to make visible the social, institutional, and historical contexts in which the class is reading Shakespeare. Having begun to develop these kinds of contextual frames for reading the plays, students can make connections and critical comparisons between the knowledge and values produced in the Shakespeare course and in other areas of their social and academic experience.

In addition to introducing supplementary texts which raise larger institutional questions about literary study, Shakespeare's plays can be "expanded" in ways which enable larger political and philosophical questions to be raised around them. In this way, we can engage our students in issues that are more important to them (and to us, perhaps, more often than not) than esoteric and unconnected questions of history and aesthetics. With the goals of critical engagement and significance in mind, I never teach a play as an isolated text. Instead, I teach Shakespeare's plays as parts of ensembles or clusters of texts which implicitly or explicitly problematize some reading of the play, or vice versa. For example, I often teach the *Cliff's Notes* or *Monarch Notes* for a play alongside the play itself. This produces several interesting effects. Since many students see these study guides as aids for cheating, they are surprised to find them on my syllabus, and this can lead to productive considerations of what it means to "read" or to "know" literature. As condensed (often reductive and formulaic) readings of literary texts packaged for the student/consumer who is "too busy" to read for him/herself, the

study guides promote the most pernicious aspects of the "cultural literacy" approach to education; they encourage readers to memorize disjointed facts at the expense of critical thinking, and they present a body of mostly centrist-to-conservative values and opinions as the authoritative interpretations of literary texts. But they are useful as teaching tools precisely because of these shortcomings. By reading various study guides in conjunction with the plays themselves students can gain an understanding of how meanings of social texts (such as the plays) are mediated and negotiated through other texts, and of the transformations in meaning which may result from this process.

Along with the commercial study guides, I use film adaptations and parodies of the plays, advertisements, music videos, newspaper reviews, scholarly journal articles, and introductions to literary textbooks, as "contextual" texts available for critical and oppositional readings by students. Often I introduce accounts of provocative modern productions of the plays. When teaching *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, I have students read a *New York Times* article in which reporter Nita Lelyveld describes the Cornerstone Theatre Company's 1989 production of the play in Port Gibson, Mississippi. The Cornerstone Theatre Company is a traveling troupe which goes into small rural communities, putting on classic plays with the help of local residents. In this way Cornerstone brings art into some out-of-the-way places, and, more often than not, they bring out unrecognized individual talents and unexpected displays of community spirit among the local residents. In the Port Gibson production the play was adapted slightly, with some of the language updated, and the cast featured a black Romeo and a white Juliet. According to the Times article,

the resulting script for *Romeo and Juliet* was both very much in the spirit of the original play and a critique of Southern society and racism. Lord Capulet, for example, became Mamaw, Juliet's grandmother and a harsh and unbending Southern matriarch. Tybalt, played by a company actor, Ashby Semple, was a racist young woman full of hatred for blacks. Friar Lawrence, played by a company actor, Peter Howard, became Father Lawrence, a Catholic priest forced by Romeo to put into action the liberal beliefs he espouses.(5)

This scenario, and the passionate scenes between the two leading characters, at first caused some apprehension among local members of the cast. But the end result seems to have been worth the risk. In a forum held after the production closed townspeople and Cornerstone staff had an open and enlightening discussion on such issues as "the de facto segregation in area schools."(5)

This article raises several interesting theoretical questions. To begin with, is this Shakespeare? At what point does an adaptation of a Shakespeare play cease to be the "real thing." Is this adaptation better, or worse, in some way, than a traditional production? By what critical standards can such a judgment be made? Does the aesthetic value of Shakespeare's play suffer from Cornerstone's politicized production? How is the issue of racism altered when it presented through an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*? How students answer these questions is

less important to me than it is for them to develop the habits and skills to engage in thoughtful, critical discussions of such questions.

In another critical textual juxtaposition which is particularly popular among my students I provide brief excerpts from a version of *Romeo and Juliet* in a high school textbook for comparison with the play as we read it. For many students who have studied *Romeo and Juliet* in high school, this comparison produces a startling revelation. They often remark that they didn't like the play in high school; that it seemed boring, or didn't make much sense. Now they understand why. The editors of the high school textbook version have silently "bowdlerized" the play, cutting out most of the language containing sexual puns and innuendo. Students are amazed to see how much difference it makes to read an uncut version of the play. More importantly, introducing the bowdlerized text raises a variety of crucial issues such as censorship, aesthetic integrity, the question of how aesthetic appreciation is produced, and the role of literature in education.

A similar instance in which we discuss the teaching of Shakespeare in high schools focuses on an incident reported in the Winter, 1987 issue of *The Shakespeare Newsletter*. The teaching of *The Merchant of Venice* was prohibited in a Waterloo, Ontario high school after parents became concerned that the play was fostering anti-semitism among students. When I teach *The Merchant of Venice* I devote a considerable body of time at the beginning to a lecture on the history of anti-semitism in Europe and America, and to the characteristics of Christian-Jewish relations in various historical contexts accessed by the play as we will encounter it: Renaissance Venice and London; modern England, America and Canada. After developing these contexts at some length, I give students copies of *The Shakespeare Newsletter* article, describing incidents of anti-semitism among students and reporting arguments in school board meetings from parents and teachers on both sides of the controversy. I ask my students to take up positions on the question of whether *The Merchant of Venice* should be taught in high school, and we debate the issue.

Often it is precisely the peripheral material associated with a literary text that provides the loose thread which will unravel an ideologically oppressive construction of the work. For example, when the British Broadcasting Company Shakespeare plays were aired on the Public Broadcasting Company several of the plays were accompanied by short introductions and closing interviews featuring executive producer Jonathan Miller and, occasionally, one of the actors from the production (John Cleese, who played Petruchio in *Taming of the Shrew*, and Warren Mitchell, who played Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*). Miller's comments on the controversial plays reveal a concern to forestall criticism of Shakespeare as sexist, racist, or anti-semitic. Miller acknowledges, for example, that modern viewers may be offended by the apparent sexism of *Taming of the Shrew*, but he urges us to bear in mind the historical context of the play. In the case of *Othello*, Miller opines that the key element of the tragedy is Othello's jealousy, not his race, and that the play could be produced with a white actor portraying a white character

with no loss of tragic power. In an interview with Warren Mitchell, who played Shylock in the BBC's *The Merchant of Venice*, Miller fends off an anticipated charge of antisemitism with a pre-emptive reversal, noting that the production is unique in that it had a Jewish producer (Miller) a Jewish director (Jack Gold), and Mitchell as a Jewish actor playing Shylock, and expressing a passing concern that the play may be taken as anti-Christian. I provide transcripts of these introductions and interviews for students to respond to in position papers, and I focus paper topics and class discussions on the issues of sexism, racism, and antisemitism in relation to the BBC productions and to Miller's comments.

I require students in my classes to produce several one to two-page critical response/position papers on key issues which are raised in the course. Each week I reproduce a packet of eight or ten of these student-generated texts, along with position papers that I write against some of them, for distribution to the entire class. In this manner a considerably larger proportion of the class discourse is textualized than would be the case in a traditional lecture/discussion course. The position papers produced in the class become part of the general text to be studied, decentering the institutionally-authorized content of the course and producing alternative centers of meaning (on the margins of the discipline) where readers situated differently in relation to class, race, gender, and other culturally significant discursive categories engage the "official" texts of a Shakespeare course. Through this practice of publishing the texts of students and teacher, positions are occupied in a way that makes them much more accessible for critique than in the traditional classroom discussion.

Increased textualization also produces some welcome practical side effects. For one thing, it encourages students to give more carefully considered thought to their responses to the issues raised in the course. Though many teachers use reading journals to achieve this purpose, I think the response/position paper has considerable advantages over the journal. As an ostensibly "private" mode of writing, the journal is unavailable as a source of knowledge and as a target of criticism for other participants in the class. Thus, the journal cannot contribute directly to the productive conflict that I seek. Another useful side effect results from the attention focused on students whose papers are circulated to the entire class. This attention, I have observed, is inevitably perceived as a mark of distinction, even when the students' positions are subjected to the critical attacks of the teacher and other students. Thus, the response/position paper functions as a sort of reward, allowing a relatively large proportion of the work produced in the course to remain outside the institutional sphere of the grading system.

I can imagine several kinds of objections to the somewhat unorthodox approach to teaching Shakespeare that I have described in this essay; I have felt some of them myself. For example, it does take some extra effort to assemble the extra-canonical materials I use to produce contextual clusters around the various plays. For several years now I've been collecting these items; saving newspaper reviews of the plays, haunting garage sales and

second-hand bookstores for *Monarch Notes* and *Cliff's Notes*, keeping track of controversial scholarly articles, and noting instances of Shakespeareana in popular culture. It does take some time, but the extra-canonical material is extremely useful as a way of bridging the gap between students' reference frameworks and the reference framework of Shakespearean scholarship.

Further, in the juxtaposition of these different frameworks, or discourses, each of the knowledge and value system may be problematized, or thrown in relief in ways which enable students to see the values and limitations of different discursive positions with increased clarity.

It may be objected that the kind of critical pedagogy I have described for the general education Shakespeare course does a disservice to the plays themselves. With all of this extra reading and discussion going on, the reader may wonder, when does one have time to read the plays themselves? It's certainly true that we spend less time on close, line by line readings of the plays in my classes than on other projects, and it's also true that we read fewer plays (usually only five or six per semester) than we might if I merely focused on close reading of the plays. But I would argue that it's more important for students to gain a critical, contextual understanding of "Shakespeare" as a social and ideological phenomenon than to read several plays with the goal of merely developing an understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare. This appreciation may not happen, at any rate, if students are not able to see any way in which the plays relate to their lives. And, while I don't think the inculcation of taste and "appreciation" should be primary goals of any university literature course, nonetheless, in my experience, students are just as likely to develop a fondness and appreciation for Shakespeare after reading the works in relation to problematic contexts as they are after reading the works as isolated aesthetic masterpieces.

Finally, some may ask, "what is wrong with the goal of producing students as members of a cultivated audience who can appreciate Shakespeare?" The very fact that such an audience has to be produced--that it will not just be found--begs the question: Why produce it? What interests are served by its production? As this mission is generally understood, I think, it means producing an audience who will acquiesce in subjection to a conservative historical reverence which supports an oppressive status quo. It is not surprising that students resist this kind of subjection. Producing this sort of faithful "appreciation" of literature is not a proper goal for a college course.

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