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The Play's the Thing: Investigating the Potential of Performance Pedagogy

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THE PLAY'S THE THING: INVESTIGATING THE POTENTIAL OF
PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

THE PLAY'S THE THING: INVESTIGATING THE POTENTIAL OF PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY

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Master of Arts

In the last ten years there has been a resurgence of interest in teaching Shakespeare through performance. However, most literature on the topic continues to focus on the pragmatic selling points of how performance makes Shakespeare fun and understandable while remaining surprisingly silent on issues of theory and ethics. By investigating the ethical implications of performance pedagogy as it affects our students' construction of identity, empathy, and pluralistic tolerance we can better understand and discuss the potential of performance pedagogy in relation to the ethical goals of the Humanities.

Performance Pedagogy has particular ethical potential due to the structure of performance and the effects of role-play on a student's identity. Lessons learned in the fictional world of a play can be transferred to real life allowing learning to take place in a world of more flexible rules and without real life consequences. Further, role-play also

creates a unique blending of actor and character that encourages a compassionate rethinking of self and other. Although imperfect in its empathy, this emphasis on connection is still a moral alternative to the dehumanizing effects of seeing others in terms of complete alterity. Lastly, because performance encourages interpretation, it is a fruitful tool to encourage pluralism, a much-needed philosophy for our students today and one that in relation to Shakespeare can render particularly humanizing ends. Such a discussion of the ethical effects of performance pedagogy itself also focuses on principles of connection that ought to be applied to all scholarly endeavors in order to increase their meaning and morality.

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INTRODUCTION

A visitor inquired of me recently, ‘What do you do with a play of Shakespeare?’ ‘Act it,’ I replied. What else can you do with a play?

--Caldwell Cook, 1917 (Peat 1)

[Students] having well studied a play . . . should have gained too much regard for it to be ready to defame it by a crude performance.

--Harley Granville-Barker, 1946 (O’Brien 166)

In the world of academia, the question of what to do with a play is an old one. While novels and poems are written to be read, plays are written to be performed and seen. Though this may seem unimportant, such fundamental differences raise intriguing pedagogical questions and have incited debate for more than a century. Is a play literature or is it theatre or both? Should it be enjoyed as entertainment or scrutinized as scholarship? Who should teach it, where and *how*? Perhaps these questions would have remained on the periphery of English departments, only garnering the attention of drama specialists, if it weren’t for one key name—Shakespeare. For at the center of this debate lies the most iconic figure in Western literature, the most taught author in American schools, the playwright who for many students will forever shape their view of literature, “high-art,” and their own abilities to “get” English. For teachers this can be a daunting realization. “Fact is,” contends Peggy O’Brien, “though the man’s plays are performed more frequently on more stages than those of any other writer, most people meet Shakespeare in school” (165). As long as this is true, a question that has puzzled teachers for more than a century remains relevant and pressing: how do we best teach Shakespeare?

The Playwright/Author and His Audience/ Scholars

Knowing how to approach Shakespeare in the classroom is particularly difficult because of the duality of drama. By duality I mean the fact that drama or “a play” can be understood to be either a text (script) that is read, or a performance enacted. So although the play may indeed be *the thing*, just what type of a thing it is—performance or text—will largely dictate the way teachers and students approach Shakespeare. Looking back over the last 100 years, Shakespeare has generally been held up by American schools as the icon of Western literature, the great *author* to be *read* in every high school and dissected in scholarly prose. But it wasn’t always so. The Shakespeare of America’s eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a dramatist. Regarded as popular entertainment, his works were parodied in minstrel shows and folk songs (“All the world’s a bar and all the men and women merely drinkers”) and performed on stages throughout the country to audiences from all levels of education and social classes (Levine 3-4). “By the turn of the century,” however, Shakespeare would be “converted from a popular playwright whose dramas were the property of those who flocked to see them, into a sacred author who had to be protected from ignorant audiences and overbearing actors threatening the integrity of his creations” (Levine 72). This was a crucial switch that took Shakespeare from American stage to schoolbook page.¹ It was the beginning of a tradition that anointed scholars and editors as the guardians of Shakespeare’s written texts and emphasized the dichotomy between entertaining performance and scholarly textual analysis—a tradition that has held surprising sway in the academy—until now.

Decrying the disrespect of crude student performances in 1946, Harley Granville-Barker’s famous quote at the beginning of this paper was only the beginning of a long

line of scholars concerned with the fluff and amateurism of performance in the classroom. Speaking 30 years after Granville-Barker, Edward Partridge contrasts performance approaches to teaching Shakespeare with the importance of serious textual study concluding, “[teachers’] business is finally critical and scholarly and analytic. Our business is long hours of critical analysis”(206). And while there were notable scholars and teachers who consistently asserted, as J.L Styan did in 1974 that “the way of discovering [Shakespeare] is by playing him,” throughout the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s although celebrated by the few, performance approaches to teaching Shakespeare were seemingly never embraced by the mainstream (199). As Peggy O’Brien points out, “In three volumes, each titled *Teaching Shakespeare*, none of the several dozen essayists mentions teaching Shakespeare through performance. In a fourth volume of the same name, only one writer out of fifteen discusses performance-based teaching” (See Mizener, ed; Davis, ed.; Salomone, ed; Edens, etal, eds. cited in O’Brien 168).

But despite (or perhaps because of) being ignored, the pro-performance camp has made its fair share of provocative assertions, including H.R Coursen’s recent claim that “a Shakespearean script exists only in performance. Period” (qtd. in Sauer and Tribble 40). Not surprisingly, such extreme stances have evoked some heated responses including Martin Buzacott’s biting censure of “the primacy given to actors over scholars as interpreters of Shakespeare” (Sauer and Tribble 40). Buzacott’s contrasting depictions of the “corporeal body” of the actor with the “venerated institution” of the scholarly study of character leaves little wonder about his view of the scholarly (in)efficacy of performance (Buzacott 27). Harry Berger in *Imaginary Audition: Shakespeare on Stage and Page* uses similarly telling rhetoric when he “contrasts the ‘slit-eyed Analyst’ with the ‘Wide-eyed

Playgoer'. For Berger . . . only in the study can [the play] be subject to the kind of reflection that produces good criticism" (qtd. in Sauer and Tribble 40).

Like most debates, however, the truth of this matter seems to be in the more moderate middle. And fortunately one of the somewhat ironic effects of "the current performance revolution" (Walton 321) has been a growing recognition that "both performance and written texts [and teaching approaches, I would argue,] have their own kinds of legitimacy"(William B. Worthen qtd. in Sauer and Tribble 41). With this reasoning in mind, any persuasive argument for the appeal of one approach over the other needs to first lay out the unique capacities of both textual and performative approaches to Shakespeare's plays. Only by understanding the differences and similarities each method affords can we fully appreciate what is gained and lost by following either of these pedagogical frameworks.

Reading Versus Performance

Perhaps the clearest way to get to the pith of any discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches is to briefly catalogue their differences. Just what are the distinctions for students between the experience of reading Shakespeare and the experience of acting Shakespeare? After all, I would argue that both methods (should) interact with the text in ways that are imaginative and performative at heart. In a silent reading of Shakespeare, however, the reader becomes director and actor—a one-person show—free to imagine how each scene looks and sounds and how each character's voice rises or falls. Along with such freedom come many benefits: the reader can re-read a passage or a word as many times as they would like. They can pause for a dictionary or look to the footnotes for help on difficult words. Each individual reader may decide how

much to read at one time. Students can highlight passages and write notes in the margins, flipping back to previous pages to mark foreshadowing or parallelism. From a teaching view, reading can be assigned without any worry about group work, props, or performance prices. In short, reading is in the hands, or perhaps more precisely, the mind of the reader. Because of this internal, self-propelled nature, reading has traditionally proven a very good tool for scrutinizing the language of the text and helping students understand its meaning in depth. Also, reading may be the closest way to let the student approach Shakespeare (or at least an edition of him) directly in order to form his or her own interpretations of character and plot unshaped by someone else's production.

On the other hand, this independent characteristic of reading can also be viewed as a weakness, reducing drama's multiplicity to one voice. "When you read to yourself," Richard Schechner contends, "the multiple voices remain imaginary, they are all versions of your own voice. Reading silently, so effective and efficient for comprehension and speed reduces great dramas to monologues, and we must, these days especially, react against the monological" (139). Of course for many teachers silent reading is only the first step, a foundational exercise used to spur class discussion. But even when students try to discuss and debate each person's own version of the play, without a performative outlet, these discussions will be hard pressed to break out of the "monological" phase and truly invite dialogue.

To illustrate this point let's imagine a class discussion where one student is disagreeing with another student about Beatrice's feelings toward Benedick at the end of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Imagine both of these students have read and thought about the play previous to coming to class and both cite the exchange in Act 5 scene 4 when

Benedick asks, “Do not you love me?” and Beatrice responds, “Why no, no more than reason” (5.4.73-75) to back their opposing views of the play’s dénouement. Each student can try to explain to the other how that exchange sounds in their heads, for example, “She says that straightforwardly” or “no, I hear it with a smile in her voice” but even with the best description, what each student hears in their own head, is their own internal approximation of the given description—their own voice. It is not until one student reads the lines out loud, giving voice inflection, facial expression, and perhaps body language to the script that the rest of the class can hear and see what *that student* had in *their* head as they read the passage. Maurice Charney argues that this is how performance extends reading, “making it more palpable and less abstract” ultimately “realizing a reader’s most profound ideas of what a scene is really about” (265). What Charney is alluding to here is the insertion of the body in the text. It is this embodiment that allows monological interpretations of silent reading to become visible and audible in a tangible way that encourages not only dialogue and debate but also highlights the fluidity of the text for students. Through sparring with classmates over interpretations that can be seen, heard and reacted to, students may very well stumble across the startling idea that there may be more than one “right” way to read (or perform) Shakespeare, a realization that is particularly important when dealing with an author as iconic as The Bard.

It is important to reiterate here that I am not suggesting that reading cannot also lead to debate and push students to become interpreters of Shakespeare. As I pointed out earlier, silent reading—when done “well”—is a crucial mode of interaction that allows students to have direct say over their own imaginative performance of the play. Because of this capacity, I would argue that silent reading is a foundational learning mode in both

more traditional and performance pedagogies. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of the more obviously performative teaching methods of performance pedagogy, such as acting workshops or full-fledged performance, without assuming that the students participating in such activities had already spent time engaging the script as a close reader. What I would contend, however, is that “good readers” of Shakespeare read with the questions or awareness of actors and that performance pedagogy itself forces students to interact more fully with the text, be it as a *reader* or as an *actor*.

The foundational reason for this is that *performance forces choices that silent reading does not*. As Michael Tolaydo reminds us, “when we attend a theatrical performance, the words, pauses, vocal and technical sounds, movements, music, facial expressions, gestures, stage pictures, lighting, actors, costumes, and more are all working together to tell us something”(27). Conversely, it is performance that forces one to confront these types of choices, and from the outcomes of such decisions meaning accumulates. In other words, these are the types of choices— who is on the stage, where is each person standing, how does each character say their lines, what facial expression is elicited, etc.—that are integral to the meaning of a scene or entire play, yet these are the types of “details” that are often ignored in a silent reading.

To illustrate how performative choices can open the door to discovering different meanings that are easily missed even by a studious reading, Patrick Stewart likes to begin his workshops on teaching Shakespeare with this question about Act 5 scene 3 of *King Lear*, “Do we know that the Captain whom Edmund sends with secret instructions to murder Cordelia is a captain when the scene begins?”(qtd. in Rocklin 48). Stewart then details how this scene, usually read as a straightforward summons, can be played as a

promotion and bribe: “Imagine, [Stewart] continues, that Edmund says, ‘Come hither,’ and that the soldier steps forward, then visibly starts with surprise as Edmund continues with ‘captain,’ and that the soldier is still recovering his composure when he hears, ‘One step I have advanc’d thee’” (5.3.26, 5.3.28). How does the scene change if there is the implication of a bribe? Further, if acted out this scene will demand a response from the “new captain”—will it be one of initial outrage or devious agreement? Here is another choice that forces interpretation and raises questions about the rest of the play (Rocklin 48).

Stewart’s example is effective and provocative in pointing out how meaning can change when a reading is enacted because it plays with the discrepancy between the meaning of the words on the page and the embodiment of those words and their subtext. What Stewart is highlighting in this exercise is what Edward Rocklin calls the “two languages” of every Shakespeare play: “the language of the script” and “the language of the stage.” And while Rocklin correctly labels both of these “second languages to our students,” traditionally, English students are much better at focusing on the language sitting before them on the page (50). Unfortunately, what we are finding is that often this means students are much less likely to initiate the type of imagination and engagement necessary to read a Shakespeare play and picture all of (or any of) the stage language crucial to interpretation and meaning.

This then becomes a crucial and practical distinction between student reading and student performance. While performance forces students to confront such questions as “How does Antony move his hands and hold his body as he orates to the Roman crowd? What is the look in Hamlet’s face when he is with Ophelia, and how is that look different

when he is with Gertrude? [Or] with what striding does Portia move across the room just before the casket game?”(Schechner 135), reading too often is a passive exercise only concerned with trudging through the words on the page, or at best imagining (only) the voice of the character speaking. This is a realistic obstacle that cannot be sidestepped in a theoretical discussion about the imaginative and engaging possibilities of silent reading. Practically speaking, in contrast to reading that I would call “performative” (i.e. reading that imaginatively enacts a play in the reader’s mind), most students have not been “trained to transform the words on the page into imagined voices and imagined actions—or to imagine how radically the meaning of the words uttered by such voices can be transformed through a performer’s choice of action” (Rocklin 50). In relation to understanding the basic distinctions between reading and performing Shakespeare, this means that while “active” silent reading and performance do fundamentally differ to a certain degree, if the silent reading of our students is not fully engaged, not performative, the spectrum of difference between these two approaches widens dramatically.

Happily, it is in this potential weakness that performance not only differs from, but can also aid, reading. Nothing forces students to visualize a scene, or think about the voice inflection of a line, or the placement of two characters like a reading assignment tied to performance. A student may read through a scene, focusing on the words of each character without ever visualizing where each character stands when they are not speaking. But, for example, if that same reading is connected to a “blocking” assignment, that imaginative choice is highlighted. Through such pairings, performance can be used to train students to *read* like actors or directors by confronting them with performative choices that provide personal involvement and a specific point of view for each

participant (Riggio 2). Thus performance pedagogy, as I am conceiving of it, does not buy into the need for an either/or approach to reading versus performance teaching strategies. Instead it claims that placing silent reading in a more performative context encourages a more engaged, critical interaction and that such reading skills are vital if our students are to reap any of the benefits of meeting Shakespeare directly through his script.

Ultimately, it is precisely this type of synergy that leads many self-labeled performance enthusiasts to assert that performance pedagogy done right is a holistic teaching approach that harnesses the strengths of both textual and performative approaches to Shakespeare's plays. For my purposes, I am defining performance pedagogy as a range of activities from performative silent reading, dramatic class readings, and acting workshops to student performance, and the use of professional performances through video or theatre attendance. Throughout this thesis, then, although I will focus in on specific methods within this range to investigate potential strengths and weaknesses, it should be remembered that performance pedagogy as a teaching methodology consists of a wide range of teaching techniques and is most often taught using many of these activities in tandem.

While this range of differing activities can make it difficult to analyze and discuss performance pedagogy as a whole, it is also a key reason for performance pedagogy's recent rise in popularity. Not surprisingly, this encompassing nature has proved vital in persuading long time "traditional" teachers and scholars to give performance pedagogy more credence. As they realize performance pedagogy is not a simplistic rejection of silent reading and textual analysis, more and more traditionally trained academics have

been willing to give performance a try. And apparently, if the last ten years are any indication, the great majority of those who tried incorporating performance into their classrooms liked the results. No longer the snubbed minority, today performance pedagogy has become *the* way to teach our students Shakespeare.

Performance Revolution

So why *has* performance recently emerged from the shadow of more traditional approaches to teaching? Undoubtedly there are concerns and drawbacks. More traditional teachers may worry that time spent on producing good acting could be better used in close reading. Some may argue that over-focus on delivering lines could take away from a more encompassing synthesis of the play. Surely there is concern that if students first meet plays in performance they will be less able to return to the text with the creativity and scrutiny necessary to bring about a personal reading. Why, despite these fears and other concerns about amateurism, inexperience, shyness or trespassing on drama departments' terrain does teacher after teacher testimonial glow with performance success stories? Not surprisingly, over the last decade as performance pedagogy has fought to convert scholars and teachers to their growing cause, answering these 'whys' has been the dominant concern of the literature in this field. If there is one thing teachers, professors, and scholars have all been talking about it is why, despite the projected shortcomings, they have switched to a more performance-centered Shakespeare classroom. While the reasons naturally vary depending on each teacher's theory of education and especially the academic level of their classroom, there is also surprising focus on a few major selling points. For collegiate professors and academic scholars much of the current justification rests on the richness of performance's interpretive

power. As our discussion of the differences between performance and reading suggested, the fluidity of drama as well as the multiplicity of its creation make it a particularly potent tool for negotiating meaning and destabilizing a text. This reasoning is well summarized by Gavin Witt and David Bevington, who team up to teach a Shakespeare class at the University of Chicago using theatre workshops. Bevington and Witt defend their encouragement of acting approaches to learning Shakespeare's plays by arguing that acting, more than reading 1) pushes interpretation, 2) is interactive, and 3) "sets in motion a pragmatic, flexible link between each student and a character in a scene obliging the student to see the dialogue and action from a series of specific points of view" (170). While reasons one and three are just beginning to crop up more in the writings of scholars and teachers dealing with college and graduate level students, Bevington and Witt's second point of defense, acting's interactive aspect, hints at the two crowning reasons that have long dominated the celebration of performance in any classroom setting and at all academic levels: performance's interactive nature makes Shakespeare *fun* and *easier* to understand.

It really shouldn't come as a surprise that these two promised consequences have been the fuel of performance pedagogy's rise to acclaim. After all, as any high school English teacher knows, the two most voiced complaints against the illustrious Bard are, "This is boring" and "I don't get it." Of course when students are first confronted with the idea of acting out Shakespeare there are usually a few complaints about this as well. Ginny Graham, a ninth grade English teacher in Arlington, Virginia opens her article, "'To Perform or not to Perform?' A Question Worth Exploring" by detailing the moans she gets at the beginning of every term: "Are you going to make us act out Shakespeare

like they did last year?” and “I don’t act, if I wanted to I’d be taking drama” are a few of the common murmurs. Yet, despite this inauspicious beginning, Graham insists that she continues to teach using performance because “year after year even these would-be evaders become absorbed and enlivened by activities centered around Shakespeare’s text” and “I would never teach Shakespeare any other way” (80). In conclusion, speaking of the non-performance teaching approaches that dominated the Academy as well as her own teaching for decades Graham confesses that “the idea that Shakespeare could be fun was an oxymoron;” yet, for her, and a host of other persuaded teachers, “fun is the only way [to] describe this active and revolutionary approach”(80).

Students seem to agree. In a recent *Washington Post* article interviewing the 12- and 13-year-old cast members of a school production of *Richard III*, the amazement over Shakespeare becoming fun and understandable was inescapable. “Most kids don’t see a lot of Shakespeare, so they think it’s boring,” concluded one young thespian. “If they went to see Shakespeare they would think otherwise.” Concerning the all-too-lamented language barrier, 13-year-old Brian Riemer added, “Sometimes it doesn’t sound like English. But even if you don’t understand what [Shakespeare] is saying, you can understand it by what’s going on in the scene. As an actor you have to help the audience understand” (*The Washington Post*). The power and fun of performing Shakespeare has even been incorporated into the juvenile detention center in Laurel, Virginia, where many of the young inmates have performed *Macbeth* for different events, including a teen festival at the Folger Shakespeare Library. For this group of teens, hands-on performance was the only way for them to connect to Shakespeare. Even watching performances didn’t seem to work for them. Not until they put time into learning the rhythm and “hip-

hop” flow of the language did they finally relate to Shakespeare. After that, their director says, “They really took to it. They see that Shakespeare wrote for the masses” (Fisher).

Even respected, traditionally trained Shakespeare scholars like Maurice Charney, who recently converted to “performance techniques” after 47 years of more traditional teaching, are getting caught up in the fun claiming that “the ultimate justification for a performance-oriented course is that students wind up being excited by Shakespeare”(257, 265). And while getting students excited about Shakespeare again is indeed something to celebrate, with all the enthusiasm about Shakespeare becoming fun and approachable, scholarship looking at performance pedagogy has seemed too content to stop the conversation there. While there has been an explosion of scholarship on how to teach Shakespeare over the last ten years and while much of it now focuses on the pragmatic side of student performance, what has been missing in this national discussion is a more in-depth look at the theoretical and ethical effects and extensions of this type of teaching; the what ifs and whys beyond the initial wave of apologetics.

Upon her return from a workshop on teaching Shakespeare, Ann Thompson summed up the situation well when she offered this problematic praise, “I was immediately struck not only by the overwhelming consensus that the ‘right way’ to teach Shakespeare was through performance and classroom workshops but also by the almost total absence of literary theory and cultural politics” (qtd. in Sauer and Tribble 33). It is into this theoretical absence that this paper hopes to step, pushing the potential of, and raising questions about, the ethical implications of performance pedagogy as it affects our students’ construction of identity, empathy, and pluralistic tolerance.

Exploring the Ethics of Performance Pedagogy

The three specific issues I wish to address all radiate from a central intersection of theory, theatre, teaching Shakespeare, and ethics. Appropriately, the etymology of two of the words framing my discussion—theater and theory—also illuminate the ethical strand that is its focus. Both ‘theory’ and ‘theatre’, derivatives of the Greek words related to “‘seeing’ or ‘looking at’” (Gillespie qtd. in Radulescu xiii) are apt companions to my discussion about the ethics of teaching Shakespeare which has as its focal point the goal of helping us to *see*—each other and ourselves—more clearly and with more compassion. This choice of focus rests on a more foundational belief about the potential and purpose of the humanities, in general, to underscore the humanity in each of us by helping us to see with more discerning and compassionate eyes. Believing this ethical dimension to be one of the most important rationales for teaching literature, drama, and art makes Shakespeare, as the most taught text within the humanities, a vital site of exploration into the ethical implications of our teaching strategies. However it is not just the practicality of Shakespeare’s popularity that justifies him as a site of focus in this discussion. In their themes, content, and iconic status, Shakespeare’s plays are particularly well suited to foreground and further the specific ethical issues I wish to explore here.

Imagination’s Impact on Reality

To lay the groundwork for my discussion I want to begin by returning to one of the most foundational and controversial premises of performance: the transformative power of imagination, especially in relation to role-play, to shape reality and identity. As performance pioneer J.L Styan has argued, “the study of drama is the difference between the wish and the result; and that is where students should look in the study of a play”

(qtd. in Peat 152). In my first chapter I would like to push this concept one step further by highlighting imagination. After all, it is in this relationship between wish and result, fear and action, real and ideal—between what can be and what will be that imagination becomes powerful in shaping future realities. And it is also here in this relationship between real and not real that the ethical implications I wish to investigate arise. Specifically, through using drama in the classroom, not only in fictional plotlines and characters, but also particularly in the embodied experience of role-play, students are confronted with simulated imaginative worlds that allow them to play with connections between idea and action and explore cause and effect in an environment that casts them in different roles and suspends many of the rules of their “real lives.” In this chapter I will ask: just what are the ethical implications of such an imagined space for discovery and learning? And how blurred is the boundary between reality and fiction? If theatre, as David Saltz has argued, works to “explore and expose—not merely to assert or signify—the nature of the games that structure our own lives and to demonstrate ways we might change the rules” what real-life applications are catalyzed when students experience the fictional world of a role? (77).

Shakespeare’s plays themselves foreground these issues of imagination and role-play, layering metadramatic moments that call attention to the power and dangers of taking on a role. In this way the ethical questions about the transformative power of role-play and imagination, which are weaved throughout so many of Shakespeare’s greatest works, provide a natural if not pressing context to confront these issues with our students. Moreover, by using performance to teach Shakespeare this context is only magnified as

student actors simultaneously confront the issues of role-play explored by Shakespeare's characters.

The Empathy of Acting

Building on the implications of this bridge between real and not real, between role and identity, my second chapter focuses on the ethics of an actor's claim to empathy. Respected acting teacher and professional director Kurt Daw has argued that as theatre's spontaneous "sense of life . . . is lived in front of [the audience's] eyes the humanity of the subject matter comes through" (10). Of course Daw is not alone in championing the humanizing effects of the stage. Actor Jeff Goldblum has defined acting's purpose as humanizing life (Daw 10), and Thornton Wilder has gone so far as to define acting as "The most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being" (qtd in Daw 11). Embedded in such claims on common humanity lies a compelling question of compassion and empathy: in playing a role and humanizing a character through embodiment on stage does an actor come to experience that character in a tangible and compassionate way that can increase the actor's empathy for others who may seem similar to the role she has taken on?

This debate about the fluidity between character and actor has long been a source of contention and excitement among directors, theatre scholars, and actors. Method acting, which has recently been recuperated and reexamined after falling out of favor due to its focus on "first person-acting," is most famously connected with this idea of blurring the boundary between actor and character. Among actors this connection is often talked about in terms of Stanislavski's "magic if." The magic if is a shift in thinking that goes something like this, "if I were in Othello's situation this is how it would feel to me." Its

goal is to help the actor think in first person and react to the stimuli of the scene in a real way (Daw 56). Although the actor does not believe himself to *be* the character, his own emotions and thoughts are focused on relating, and indeed reliving, the character's experience.

An example of the physical effects of making this shift in thinking was illustrated in a particularly moving performance of *Hamlet*, recently performed by Tom Hulce. From his vantage point sitting in the audience of the Washington D.C theatre, Kurt Daw describes Hulce's face throughout the opening scene when King Hamlet's ghost appears to summon his son:

The color drains from Hulce's face. Stunned, he falls to his knees and listens, and then, as the apparition speaks, he crawls across the floor and reaches out to it. His hand unexpectedly hits something solid and his paleness disappears. Where I am sitting, near the stage, I can see the blood rush to Hulce's cheeks. He is shocked that his dead father is so real and tangible. I can practically hear his heart pounding. It is an intensely moving performance . . . But people connected with the show confirmed that he performed this scene this way, complete with noticeable blanching and, later, visible flushing, every night. (128-129)

What makes these physical changes possible is Hulce's ability to put himself so completely in the role of Hamlet that his own body reacts to the scripted stimuli as if they were real. And in fact the stimuli are real: the actor's body that Hulce feels when he reaches out for his father's ghost, for example, is a tangible body. Although the situation is scripted, Hulce's body reacts to the imaginary circumstances in much the same way it

reacts to other sensory perceptions of reality (See Daw Chapter 3). A similar effect occurs when, for example, an audience watching a movie about the Arctic actually has their body temperature drop despite the regulated temperature of the theatre. Because the brain is reacting to sensory experiences, imaginary circumstances can physically be interpreted as real. Of course the consequences of such an imaginary experience are not the same as the consequences of its real-life counterpart. No theatre-goers will die of frostbite watching a screening of *Alive*, for example. However, the fact that our emotional investment in a fictional situation can be strong enough to induce even such minor physical responses speaks to our somewhat illogical ability to be profoundly affected by something we know is fictional.

Such physical parallels between experiencing an imagined scene and actually living it in real life lead to questions about the emotional efficacy of acting. Can an actor feel emotions while in a role that would allow them to empathize with another person's lived experience? By taking on the roles of Shakespeare's characters and entering a fictional world foreign to their own, can students emotionally connect to that imagined character and world in such a real way that their role-playing leads them to become more compassionate towards those unlike them? And in the end are such claims of compassion ethical or merely another form of containment (i.e., in such an attempt to relate to someone else's lived experience do we dilute the difference and uniqueness of their calls for change or compassion by attempting to remake their experiences in our own fashion)?

Properly used, the "magic if" is supposed to lead an actor to substitute their character's worldview and assumptions for their own. In his description of negative capability, John Keats explores a similar idea even going so far as to claim that in the act

of creating a literary character the poet “has no self” and speaks not “from [his]self; but from some character in whose soul [the poet] now lives” (qtd. in Perkins 1286). In this chapter I will scrutinize whether such a shift is possible (both for the writer of the play and the actor portraying a character) and what ethical consequences may come from the attempt. Here again Shakespeare, who is often touted as the great humanist playwright, a creator of characters that speak to universal human foibles, fears and prejudices, carries specific possibilities and liabilities connected with the ethical concerns of encouraging our students’ connections to such characters through performance. Through opening up a more in-depth discussion of this topic, I hope to begin to probe an ethical dimension of performance pedagogy that though often overlooked must be confronted if a teacher is to ethically push performance methodology in their classroom.

Practicing Pluralism

In addition to questions of role-play and empathy, performance pedagogy also has the potential to increase tolerance and understanding through its environment of pluralism. In my last chapter I will turn my attention to this aspect of performance, demonstrating how acting is able to break down binary thinking of right and wrong by illuminating multiple “correct” meanings of a text and arguing that such educational models are particularly necessary in teaching Shakespeare to our students today.

Jeanne Addison Roberts speaks to this ethical issue of pluralism in her article “Triple Threat Shakespeare” when she claims that drama is uniquely structured to work out “genuine human conflicts for which there are no clear solutions” precisely because drama “has not one narrative voice” and “different audiences will see the plays differently” (4). In her introduction to the recent MLA compilation, *Teaching*

Shakespeare Through Performance, Milla Riggio also foregrounds the interpretive instigation of performance contending that if we agree that Shakespeare's plays are stories full of contradictions and sticking points in meaning, these ambiguities in the script will inevitably come to a head as students confront the choices of performing a scene line by line, action by action (1-18). Such a process is especially important for the teaching of Shakespeare, whom many students see as one of the greatest sites of cultural authority. Coming to a realization that *his plays* are open to interpretation can be a critical shift in thinking that reshapes the ways students negotiate meaning and approach concepts of right and wrong more generally.

Moreover, despite Shakespeare's iconic authority, educating students about the prominent role of editors, competing quartos, ambiguous stage directions, and varied editions is an exciting and necessary step towards scholarly interaction with the plays and their textual possibilities. And while these issues of textual indeterminacy are located in the play as script, performance, which lends itself more easily to not only recognizing, but playing with variance in a text, can be useful in helping students to overcome their initial reservations about creating and interacting with the plays. Richard Shechner has echoed this reasoning, claiming that awe of textual authority, a residual consequence he derives "from the special place the Bible has occupied in Western thought," is one of the biggest downsides to *reading* a Shakespeare play (131). Performance, in contrast, places the students as co-creators of the play along with Shakespeare—a position of confidence. As James N. Loehlin puts it, it is through performing Shakespeare that students "can actually create the thing they study" (286).

Of course, this capacity to create meaning by interpreting and embodying a play is tempered by the boundaries set by the script *if the teacher is intent on teaching the play as dramatic literature* (Schechner 132). Such a teaching approach to Shakespeare's plays sees the script, conflicted as it is, as the limiter of possible meanings and thus pushes against a philosophy of relativism. While this is not the only way to approach teaching dramas through performance (Richard Schechner, a self-proclaimed "radical relativist," places this approach as a middle ground in a spectrum of other deconstructionist and formalist approaches [Schechner 137, 140]), it is by far the most common and, for the purposes of encouraging pluralism, the most fruitful. This approach to dramatic literature states that although options for interpretation are generously diverse, in order to be persuasive and compelling an interpretation must square with the restrictions of the text. With these boundaries, performance does not become a teaching method where anything goes. This is a crucial aspect of the ethical claims of performance pedagogy as a binary-breaking system because it highlights the crucial distinction between a relativism that does not assert any view as wrong and a pluralistic philosophy that admits that there *are* wrong answers as well as many right answers.

In this chapter, I will specifically argue that such an academic environment is especially necessary in creating a middle ground for today's students who too often are sandwiched between a scholastic culture of multiple choice tests preaching authoritative interpretation and a backlash message of empowerment that levels all claims to truth and judgment. Lastly, this chapter will also serve as a pedagogical tool, modeling methods that highlight the varied interpretations of Shakespeare's plays through the use of both live and recorded performances.

Conclusion

In his introduction to *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, noted cultural historian Lawrence W. Levine shares a personal story most students can relate to: his own struggle to believe “that I was worthy to work on Shakespeare” (5). Despite recognizing the need for his book and the validity of his scholarship, Levine confides that he was having a difficult time overcoming his own feelings of inadequacy in approaching the iconic Bard. Urged on by a friend, he visited the Folger Shakespeare Library and began reading, not through Folios and quartos, but “through playbills of nineteenth-century American productions of Shakespeare.” Only then, Levine claims, did he begin to feel up to the task of his book (5-6). Only then was he convinced of his own argument—Shakespeare used to be approachable, he used to be fun.

Levine’s story should sound familiar. It nicely parallels the narrative of teaching Shakespeare in the last 15 years: as many novices entered English classes paralyzed by Shakespeare’s iconic status, performance pedagogy was wielded by engaging teachers who were able to help students realize, like Levine, that Shakespeare could be fun and approachable. However, the story shouldn’t stop there. Just as Levine’s epiphany among Shakespeare playbills led to the creation of an acclaimed book of scholarship, our own interactions with performance pedagogy need to move past the recognition that Shakespeare can be fun for our students, to more thoughtful realizations of performance’s particular strengths as a learning methodology. Through the following discussion of three particular ethical issues that are confronted in a performance classroom, I hope to stimulate as much as to convince and to open rather than close the doors of this type of

discussion. In the end the goal of this thesis is the same as the ethical goal against which I am interrogating performance pedagogy: sight—an enlarged view and deeper look into the possibilities and ambiguities of teaching Shakespeare through performance.

CHAPTER ONE: SCULPTING REALITY AND IDENTITY: THEORIES OF
IMAGINATION AND ROLE-PLAY IN PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Drama at the University of Cambridge, Raymond Williams reflected on that morning's State opening of Parliament noting, "it is one thing to say that it was pure theatre; it is harder to see, and to say, that beyond its residual pageantry was another more naturalized process which is also... a cousin to theatre" (57). This naturalized process, Williams goes on to explain, is the process of playing a role so well that it becomes your identity—something monarchs have done for a very long time. But "what is new," Williams contends, is the recognition that this is not simply an ancient rite of royalty, but a powerful process we each participate in (57). A realization that "like many actors, people find roles growing on them: they come to fit the part, as he who would play the King" (57). By choosing this particular anecdote to begin his inaugural lecture, Williams is underscoring two of drama's most controversial and exciting premises: 1) that there is a tangible connection between the imaginary world of theatre on stage and the drama of our lived experience, and 2) that although an actor seems to only momentarily pretend to be a character, role-play may actually have the power to transform identity. These two premises hold compelling ethical possibilities for teaching Shakespeare through performance; at heart they both claim that a student's fictional experience can affect identity and reality.

What power *do* imagination and role-play hold for students? Parents and teachers frequently discuss the importance of encouraging students' imaginations—to what end? Is it merely to encourage a healthy release from "the real world," or does the imaginary directly affect the creation of reality? Specifically, what are the consequences of having

students take on roles in order to enter the imagined context of a play—what effects, if any, can such “make believe” have on their real lives? In order to grapple with these questions fully, I will first look at how imagination is able to transform identity by altering particular kinds of contexts. I will explore this issue in relation to *Othello* and a recent experiment on Cyberbullying, paying particular attention to the ethical dimension of whether one can transfer what is learned in an imagined world to real life. I will then complicate the discussion by weaving in the thread of role-play and its effect on learning, especially as it takes place in the fictional world of Shakespeare’s plays. In order to illustrate the transformative power of roles, I will use scenes from *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Merchant of Venice* in addition to a recent psychological experiment regarding drama in education. Such discussions will bolster my claim that imagination and role-play, far from being whimsical side notes, have surprising power to shape how students see and judge, both others and themselves.

To begin our discussion we must first try to clarify how, if at all, imagination is able to affect our identity. This is no easy task, for although as children most of us easily used our imaginations to make us over as princesses, firefighters, or grown ups, trying to analyze and specify the relationship between such intangible terms as imagination and identity can prove challenging. And yet, if we are to draw out ethical possibilities or conclusions from this process, we must try to specify and understand exactly what imagination’s effect is on identity. I find that the clearest way to think about this relationship is in terms of context. Imagination is able to shape our thoughts and actions—our identity—because it has the power to transform our view of reality. What we imagine about others, our circumstances, and ourselves directly affects the person we

become and the choices we make. For example, if we imagine that our spouse is cheating on us, we probably will become distrustful, resentful, and our actions towards them will change regardless of the reality of those suspicions. Imagining ourselves as wronged we construct a new identity for ourselves, perhaps as “innocent victim,” perhaps as “justified avenger.” Hence, our every-day experience teaches us that we commonly make choices and construct our identity based more on *how* we view our context, *how* we *imagine* others and ourselves, than on any ostensibly objective reality.

In his tragedy *Othello*, Shakespeare takes this causal relationship between imagination and action as his central premise. Imagination is the tool Iago is able to manipulate in order to transform Othello’s view of Desdemona, his marriage, and therefore himself. Led by Iago’s vivid imagery, Othello acts like a man who has actually seen his wife copulating with another although, in reality, his only views of such behavior are in the images of his mind. A telling demonstration of the force of such imagined scenes is illustrated in a famous exchange between Iago and Othello in Act 3 scene 3. Responding to Iago’s insinuations about his wife, Othello rationally counters, “No, Iago, I’ll see before I doubt” (3.3.187-194), highlighting his desire to base his actions and beliefs on reality and not mere speculation. Yet, when Iago paints Othello an imagined scene: “Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on, / Behold her topped?”(3.3.400-401), Othello’s response, “Death and damnation! O!” shows the powerful effect of this purely imagined sight. From this point on, Iago continues to feed Othello’s imagination with vivid pictures of Desdemona’s infidelity, and Othello increasingly acts like someone who has indeed had ocular proof of his wife’s adultery.² As Othello becomes increasingly unable to discern the difference between the reality of his wife’s innocence and the power

of his imagined fears, his actions likewise shift to create a new identity for himself that matches the imagined context he sees around him. Because of this imagined construction of his marriage, Othello's own identity formulation shifts from loving husband to righteous avenger.

However, in focusing on the destructive changes to Othello's identity, it is crucial not to miss the tragic continuity that allows him, a seemingly good man, to be capable of astounding evil. This distinction is vital in understanding imagination's transformative power because it recognizes that in shaping our idea of reality, imagination changes the context of our characteristics so that actions that in one context seem moral, in another context render evil ends. Looking at this principle in *Othello* we can see that because Othello imagines that his wife has truly betrayed him, his own betrayal of her becomes justified in his mind and even his murder becomes a saving show of love, a righteous mission (see Act 5 scene 2). Chillingly, by using imagination to alter Othello's context/reality, Iago is able to create an environment where Othello's character devolves into evil even though—and precisely because—Othello sees his moral identity as staying constant. Indeed, at the beginning of the play Othello is someone who fights for right and is willing to sacrifice for love (for example, he marries Desdemona despite the prejudice and opposition he faces from her father and the court). Similarly, though somewhat paradoxically, after Iago manipulates Othello's imagination and thereby changes his reality, Othello still sees himself as a righteous avenger, willing to sacrifice Desdemona out of (an albeit warped) sense of love (see 5.2.18-19, 26-36).

It is precisely because Othello can be seen as a tragic figure and not a demonic villain that *Othello* is best able to illustrate how imagination can alter context and how

that context then shapes the perceived morality of actions. In Othello's case, although it must be conceded that Desdemona's murder would be immoral even if Othello's imagined fears of infidelity were founded, Othello's capacity to kill his wife, and particularly his apparent need to see that act as one fueled by love, highlights the vital role of imagination in shaping our own idea of the morality of our choices and character. Perhaps more than truly changing our "identity" then, what imagination more precisely has the power to do is to change our context so that the core characteristics that create our identity and inform our actions are applied in moral or immoral ways. We see this principle at work in our daily lives. A person who refuses to stop when people tell them to in one context may be an inspirational athlete, in another a rapist. The huge discrepancy in morality between these people depends on their ability to understand their context and then to ethically decide which characteristics and actions are therefore appropriate and moral for that situation. Similarly, the difference between being stubborn or determined, steadfast or closed-minded is a difference often determined more by context than an innate difference in character.

Applied to performance pedagogy, if context is key in shaping the morality of actions, imagination's ability to alter context becomes crucial to discussions of the ethical implications of creating imagined constructs for our students. On one hand, such a distinction lessens the transformative power of performance pedagogy by claiming that a student's essential identity is *not* transformed by taking on a role in a play. From an ethical standpoint this is actually good news. In an important sense this understanding absolves performance pedagogy from a source of tremendous moral responsibility. On the other hand, this specification heightens the personal application of the ethical lessons

available through role-play. After all, suggesting that students will connect with a role by drawing from their own emotions and core character does not diminish the fact that in taking on that role the student is confronted with a fictional world, a particular context, wherein their own core characteristics can be explored in moral or immoral ways.

However, in order to validate this issue's efficacy in a classroom, one must first agree that an understood imagined construction, such as a play, can wield transformative power similar to that of an imagined construct presented as reality. In other words, it is one thing to look at Othello as an example of someone who is tricked into believing an imagined context is real, and discuss the implications of that belief on his identity, but it is quite another thing to claim that an imagined context *understood as imagined* could yield comparable transformative power. To substantiate this claim then, let me first discuss the surprising effects of an imaginary context created for a recent experiment on cyberbullying before connecting this discussion to performance pedagogy and the added complication of role-play.

In September of 2006, ABC Primetime aired parts of an experiment conducted by Brigham Young University professors Clyde C. Robinson, David Nelson, and Craig Hart aimed at uncovering the ruthless realities of cyber bullying ("Cyberbullying"). While the results of the study were shocking in their depiction of the cruel uses of technology, what was equally surprising was the effect the experiment's set up—an imagined construction—had on its participants.

Eleven young girls between the ages of 13 and 17 were chosen to participate in this three-day experiment aimed at demonstrating the ruthless realities of bullying in the Internet age. Although they were all from Atlanta, Georgia, none of the girls had ever met

before this study so they had no old scores to settle, no previous reason to dislike each other. Among the girls selected, one “was a national merit scholar being courted by Harvard and Yale, one was active in her church youth group”—not your typical bullies by any means (“Cyberbullying”). The experiment divided the younger girls into groups of three and placed each group in a room that had a computer with Internet, email, a webcam, and a cell phone. The older girls (17 years), joined by 4 college-aged boys and dubbed the “popular crowd,” were placed in a different room with the same technological capacities. The imaginary context was simple—the older teenagers were “the cool kids” and the younger girls were to imagine themselves in competition with each other, trying to curry favor from the cool crowd and be invited in (“Cyberbullying”).

Once the imaginary scenario was set up, the girls were turned loose on their technology and creativity while Diane Sawyer and the researchers monitored their activities by video in an adjoining room. It didn’t take long before interactions turned ruthless and feelings were hurt to the point of tears. Even the researchers were “startled to see how quickly the rivalries began” (“Cyberbullying”). At one point one of the younger girls had to be taken out of the simulated context and reminded that the situation was imagined and that there were no hard feelings between the girls. Making that distinction, however, seemed rather difficult. As one girl noted, “it was really hard to keep it in the fantasy world” (“Cyberbullying”). At the end of the experiment all of the participants were brought together for a post-study discussion and retrospective. One girl, who had become particularly nasty during the experiment, wondered out loud about how the girls could have changed so quickly just because of an imagined reality, “the funny thing was that from the beginning we had absolutely nothing to fight about . . . Why were we so

mean to each other at the beginning?” Asked what she had learned about herself from participating in the study she simply replied, “I didn’t know I could be that mean” (“Cyberbullying”). Ultimately, all the girls agreed that they had learned valuable lessons about themselves and believed they would be more kind in real life after having felt the sting of being on the losing side in their make-believe world.

Interestingly, even though the teenagers in this study were aware of the imagined reality being created for them, the force of their imagined context was still able to transform their characters in destructive ways. Like Othello, because these girls were given an imaginary construct that altered their view of others, and their relationship to them, they found their previously “virtuous” identities transformed into cruelty. What they claimed they would normally never do, when confronted with an imagined scenario that seemed to justify such cruelty, became an all-too-easy response. Further, although the girls were “only taking on a role,” Dr. Robinson pointedly observed that “they [could] only go to scripts that they already ha[d]” (“Cyberbullying”) and thus their actions were at some level their own. But despite the negative parallels between the girls in the study and our tragic hero there is a hopeful difference. From an ethical standpoint, the crucial distinction between Othello and the girls in this experiment lies in the end result. For Othello, realization comes too late; Desdemona is dead, and within the life of the play “real” consequences have occurred. The girls in the experiment, however, can (and claimed they would) step out of the imaginary play to apply what they learned about themselves. They can apply the lessons learned from participating in an imaginary context to the circumstances they confront in their real lives.

This capacity to explore and discover lessons and consequences in a fictional context that can then be transferred to the real world is a crucial baseline for discussing the ethical possibilities of performance pedagogy. Speaking of drama's capacity to facilitate this type of liminal space for learning and discovery, the anthropologist Victor Turner has described how drama places both the actor and audience "betwixt and between" more permanent social roles and modes of awareness, . . . allow[ing] the spectator [and actor] to accept that the events of the production *are both real and not real.*" This enables one to play "around with the norms, customs, regulations, laws which govern her life in society" (qt in Kershaw 3-4). This type of simultaneously "real and not real" acting is ethically important for performance pedagogy because it opens up a free space for discovery and learning that allows students to experience circumstances that could not (or perhaps should not) take place in the fixed, rule-bound roles of their 'real' lives. Further, it does so without incurring 'real life' consequences. Yet while limits and consequences may be suspended in the 'what if' world of theatre, the *lessons learned* in this liminal space may be transferred back into the actor or audience's real life.

In his article "Performance, Community, Culture," Baz Kershaw echoes this argument when he contends that "the 'possible worlds' encountered in the performance are carried back by the audience (and I would add actors) into the 'real' socio-political world in ways which may influence subsequent action" (4). It is precisely this transfer of knowledge, from an imagined world to the real world, which appears to have been the intended goal of the Internet bullying experiment, an objective that seems to have been reached if judged by the comments made in the post-experiment discussion. As teachers using a performance approach to Shakespeare, then, what we likewise hope is that by

using the imaginary world of performance, we can create a context for our students to have this type of hands-on experience, this type of discovery, and that this likewise will enable them to learn important lessons in the fictional world of Shakespeare's plays that will be similarly transferable to their daily lives³.

Yet in order to fully treat the ethical potential of this knowledge, gained from a student's experience in the fictional world of a play, but applied to their real life, we must also look into the transformative power of role-play in addition to the transformative effects of an imagined context on identity. For unlike Othello, or even the girls in the experiment shown on Primetime, who all interacted with their imagined contexts directly as themselves, students enter the imagined world of a Shakespeare play not as themselves but in the role of a character. Thus, through performance not only do the student-actors occupy a liminal space between real and not real worlds, *they* take on a liminal role in those contexts that is simultaneously me (the student) and not me (the character). Because of this, besides the effect an imagined context wields on shaping identity, the student acting out a scene or play has an added ontological layer to explore—the transformative power of role-play. This layer heightens the implications of our discussion and leads to new questions. For if entering an imagined context as oneself pushes adaptations to our identity and creates a space to experience consequences and learn from fictional results, what additional ethical implications are added when one enters that context as a fictional character, where possibilities closed to oneself can be approached in the role of the character? Just how real is the experience of role-playing? To what extent can the fictional experience of a character practically translate into the lived experience of a student and thus shape the way they view the world?

Like imagined possibility, this question of role's effect on identity is explored in many of Shakespeare's plays. As a playwright whose livelihood rested on the powerful effect of actors taking on roles—on their ability to transform their identity for the audience in a convincing way—it is not surprising that Shakespeare's characters often explore the potential of role-play to shape or even change who we are. In both *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Merchant of Venice*, this powerful capacity of role-play is explored from many angles. One angle that seems especially compelling is the exploration of the transformative effects and ethical consequences of being “cast” as a certain role in a community. The comedic casting of Beatrice and Benedick contrasts instructively with the tragic casting of Shylock, and highlights the transformative power of role on identity, which can lead to either happy or tragic consequences.

In Shakespeare's comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*, we meet two masters of metamorphosis: Beatrice and Benedick. For all of their nontraditional quibble they, perhaps more than other Shakespeare characters, conform their identity to the roles and expectations created for them. Their initial roles of sparring partner and word-warrior seem perpetuated in large part because of the expectations they have established about their roles in relation to each other and the community at large. In act 1 scene 1, Leonato demonstrates such community expectations of their word-warrior performance when he explains that, “there is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her [Beatrice]. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them” (1.1.50-51). We know what to expect and Benedick and Beatrice deliver. Comfortable in their roles, their performances seem to correctly reflect who they really are.

Indeed, for the first half of the play Beatrice and Benedick's identities seem indistinguishable from their roles as witty enemies. Beatrice, so accustomed to playing her role, or because she has actually become that role, doesn't alter her response to Benedick when she calls him to dinner, not reacting to circumstances that call for a different reaction. To Benedick's kind praise, "Fair Beatrice I thank you for your pains" Beatrice snaps, "I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me. If it had been painful I would not have come" (2.3.219-22). The disparity between Benedick's kind words and Beatrice's curt response humorously highlights the fact that Benedick has taken on the new role of lover while Beatrice is still operating under the assumptions of their previous role as nemeses. Of course in the next scene Beatrice will follow suit.

The play's humor itself depends on the fact that both Beatrice and Benedick are able to perform such a turnaround of identity. In act two Benedick swears, "I would not marry her (Beatrice) though she were endowed with all that Adam had left him before he transgressed" (2.1.218-220). But that is the Benedick of the word war. Just two scenes later, Benedick, cast as lover by Don Pedro and Claudio exclaims, "I will be horribly in love with her. ...When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live 'till I were married"(2.3.214-216). This kind of a seeming personality switch is a possibility precisely because both Beatrice and Benedick's identities change as their roles do. And although the ending seems positive, a close look at the means to the end—the community's seeming capacity to guide Beatrice and Benedick by the expectations inherent in the roles they are cast in—provides surprising commentary on performance's

ability to lead us to certain experiences and contexts only opened as a result of who we become when we don a particular role.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, a more tragic demonstration of role-play's power is explored as Shylock is cast in the role of "dog" and "cur" by the Venetian Christians. In Act 1 scene 3, we first encounter Shylock when Bassanio and Antonio ask him to lend them money. While the scene is never without tension, it seems to escalate at line 94. After Shylock has told his story about Jacob's sheep, and has made a joke about breeding his money, Antonio rudely interrupts saying, "Mark you this Bassanio? The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" (1.3.93-4). A few lines later Antonio continues in his description of the role he sees Shylock playing, telling him, "If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not / As to thy friends . . . / But lend it rather to thine enemy/ Who if he break, thou mayest with better face / Exact the penalty" (1.3.128-133). Hearing himself cast as devil, dog, and enemy, Shylock's later response to Antonio before the court scene follows suit, and shows his understanding of the role he has been cast in: "Thou called'st me a dog before thou hadst a cause, / But since I am a dog, beware my fangs" (3.3.5-6). It is almost as if Shylock is saying, you have cast me in this role, shall I not play it? Thus cast by Antonio himself, this is exactly the role Shylock will take—a role that seems to transform his identity into the horrible epithets he had earlier fought to discredit.

It is noteworthy that the Duke also talks of this idea of role playing at the beginning of the court scene, telling Shylock that he and all of Venice believe "that thou [Shylock] but lead'st this fashion of malice to the last hour of act," intending to take off the mask and show mercy and humanity (4.1.16-19). The Duke seems to believe Shylock is merely playing the role of devil, and can take off the costume at any time. That

Shylock does not do this seems to assert an unsettling effect of roles on identity. Do people really become what you tell them they are? If they act the role with enough vigor will they forget it is a mask or that a different context calls for a different role?

Ultimately, Antonio too seems to buy into the social power of role-play as he casts Shylock as a Christian, believing perhaps that this will also be a role that will mold Shylock into who the Christians want him to be.

Just as these characters' identities are molded by the roles they take on, actors also often experience a blurring of who they "really are" versus who they become when they take on a role. In a recent production of *The Merchant of Venice*, Al Pacino claimed to be so invested in his role as Shylock that when director Michael Radford asked him to go so far as to begin to poke actor Jeremy Irons (Antonio) with his knife in the trial scene Pacino refused saying he was worried that so immersed in the role he would not be able to stop himself from actually stabbing Irons (*The Merchant of Venice*, 2004, director's comments).

Granted, students will most likely not get into a role to this degree, yet taking on a role does create a unique situation where the student's own emotions, reactions, and body are blended with the context, lines, and identity of the character in a way that makes the feelings evoked in the role very personal and indelible. For example, a student playing Othello finds him or herself seeing the reality around them in the skewed imaginary guise created by Iago. They feel the rage of betrayal. Pushed to think of motivations, they may imagine what it would feel like to be a black Moor in a white Italian culture. Trying to portray Othello persuasively, they translate their own understanding of the desperation of imagining your worst fears have come true. Shakespeare provides the lines, but acting

requires the student to internalize the motivations, to imagine themselves so fully in the fictional context that when they speak the lines they feel like expressions of genuine reaction. Because of the focus on one character that acting encourages, the connection between character and actor often becomes quite intense, even to the point of feeling and thinking about the fictional character in first person. This is illustrated in Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* during a discussion of an upcoming scene in a production of *Richard III*. Passionately arguing with her fellow actors' conclusions about her character's motivations in a scene, the actress playing Lady Grey, switching unintentionally into first person, yells "I keep throwing it back at them and that's why I'm so hysterical" (*Looking for Richard*, 1996). And even if student actors do not become quite so emotionally attached to their characters, by taking on a role that asks them to enter the world of the play from one character's perspective⁴ they are not only given a road to emotionally caring and connecting with the play; they are at least placed in a situation that encourages the student to experience and question how his or her own identity is transformed when confronted with Shakespeare's imagined context.

Like Beatrice and Benedick, students may find certain roles bringing out positive qualities or emotions they didn't realize they had. They may find themselves following an imaginary road that leads them to consequences they would like to mimic in their own lives. On the other hand, like Shylock's character suggests, students may very well find themselves cast in a role that leads them to experience hate and vengeance. As is often the case, they may be somewhat surprised to realize just how well or how enjoyably they can play the role of villain. In such a scenario, much like the girls in the cyber bullying experiment, the vivid, enacted experience of acting in a role that blends your own identity

with the identity of the character could highlight a student's own proclivities toward such reactions, as well as the particular contexts that make legitimizing hurtful behavior easier for them. Guided by class discussion and assignments, and most of all by their own core ethical beliefs, such role-play could hopefully lead many students to a better understanding of how to avoid a similar performance in their own life. In the least, Shakespeare's plays do allow the student in role to experience some of the consequences, good and bad, that follow certain choices and behavior.

This type of experience can even occur for students in the audience as they too are cast in a role by the actors performing a scene. Ralph Cohen, one of the premiere proponents of teaching Shakespeare through performance in a way that focuses on original staging, likes to emphasize this idea by pointing out that "writing for a thrust stage and a visible audience," Shakespeare writes scenes where the audience is not only cast in character but also manipulated into a certain response (95). Perhaps surprisingly, Cohen and others have further argued that student performance in a classroom is in many ways the closest parallel to the interactive environment of the Elizabethan theatre and thus brings with it great opportunity for student actors to explore these powers of casting and manipulating their peer-audience (see Cohen "Original Staging and the Shakespeare Classroom").

Although it was not a student performance, a recent production of *The Merchant of Venice* that I attended at the Utah Shakespeare Festival utilized Cohen's points about a thrust stage and visible audience to successfully cast most of the audience as members of the Christian Venetian clique—with shocking results. Cast as a member of the inside Christian group, invited into their handshakes and inside jokes, courted for their favor,

the audience was manipulated into participating in Shylock's persecution. Despite the incredible humanistic performance of Shylock, despite the powerful pathos he created between the audience and his character during his "Hath not a Jew Eyes" speech, the Christian characters were so adept at including the audience in their "gang" that when the pinnacle of the trial scene came, and Shylock is foiled, the audience actually cheered and laughed as Antonio pronounced his condition that Shylock's money be given to Lorenzo and he presently be made a Christian. As Graziano taunted Shylock cruelly, the audience hooted and clapped, audible bursts of glee escaping their mouths.

Having read, studied, and probably most importantly, acted out this scene myself, I felt my own sorrowful reaction as a jarring anomaly in the crowd. Disgusted and thinking the crowd had totally missed one of the great ethical teaching moments of the play, what became most poignant for me was the deadly silence and utter reversal in mood that came over the audience as Shylock, slowly weeping and shaking, removed his yarmulka and kissed the cross forced around his neck. In that instant, purposefully silent and absent from the celebratory gibes of the Christian characters, the audience seemed to realize who they had become. A few hands went up to mouths and not a few eyes looked shamefully around as many people appeared to come to a realization that they had taken on a role that resulted in their being complicit, even cheerleaders of a tragic exchange unethical to their "real" 21st century sensibilities. Like the girls in the cyber-bullying experiment, as the audience filed out I heard a few people murmuring their astonishment at how easily they had slipped into a role so foreign to their "real" morality, as others were already making parallels between this experience and similar circumstances in their lives.

Of course some critics may scoff at the idea that role-play, especially student role-play can really have such dramatic effects on identity and create such opportunities for self-reflection and moral growth. Undoubtedly the intensity of my *Merchant of Venice* example would be the exception, not the expectation, for the depth of ethical experience generated in an in-class performance. However, growing scientific exploration about the cognitive differences between thinking in a role and thinking outside of a role seems to suggest there really is something unique about the transformative power of role-play and the possible effects acting can have on self reflection and understanding.

One recent study looking at cognition in drama education cites a case where several 7-year-old students in suburban U.S schools were “presented with live land snails and told to ‘find out everything you can about snails’” (Andersen 4). In each case the children were divided into two groups with each group having exactly the same learning tools at their disposal. The only difference between the two groups was that one group was engaged in a drama where they took on the role of ‘expert zoologists’ who knew all about snails. To underscore this imagined scenario, one teacher set the drama up by telling the students: “I want to thank all of you here for leaving the other important research projects you have to be here with us to help and guide us with this latest challenge here at the zoo. And maybe this isn’t a problem . . . I mean . . . well, you tell us. We have an exciting opportunity.” The teacher went on to explain that the zoo had received a large number of snails and was wondering if the experts could tell them how to care for them. After slight tiptoeing, the 7-year-olds stepped fully into their role as “experts” and began to confer and diagnose what they saw as problems. Interestingly,

Andersen reports that across schools “The inquiry + drama group” performed significantly better on several measures of learning” (286).

As Andersen points out, this study and others like it lead to intriguing questions about the fundamental differences between (and potentials of) thinking in a role versus thinking outside of a role. One question Andersen explicitly asks is “How similar is the thinking of the student-in-role-as-an-expert to the thinking of a real expert?” (286).

Looking at the snail study suggests that the students who were acting as experts were able to think differently about themselves and their capacity to understand and grasp difficult concepts. Andersen’s data also showed that the “expert-students” approached the problems differently because of their new role (285). Applied to our discussion of teaching Shakespeare, this study seems to support the claim that approaching problems in a role allows students to explore both problems and possible solutions from vantage points different from their usual thinking modes, and that this can lead to greater or deeper understanding of a given issue.

Further, Andersen also comments on the link between role-play, and the ability to then step outside of the role and reflect on what was learned in the imaginary world, by arguing that taking on a role allows for a particular type of metacognition. Alluding to other recent psychological studies on the effects of thinking in a role and then stepping outside of that role, Andersen explains that such action allows the person to more objectively and critically examine their own thinking by allowing one to step outside of one’s self and view cognition as an external object (283). This transition from taking on a role to then stepping out of that role to re-examine the character as an outsider also nicely reminds us of the empowered role of reading in performance pedagogy. Indeed, it is

through the alternating roles of the student-as-character and the student-as-engaged-reader that the metacognition Andersen alludes to can be most effectively achieved. If as teachers we are attempting to make the ideas and issues of Shakespeare's plays relevant to our students' real lives, teaching in a manner that encourages such self-reflection and synthesis is vital. Additionally, if one of the goals of great literature and art is to help us not only open our eyes to other ways of thinking but to also guard against self-blindness, a pedagogy of performance that facilitates viewing our own thought processes from a distance could perhaps take even a small step towards helping us to see ourselves more clearly and critically.

Lastly, returning to Andersen's suggestion that the thinking of a student-in-role-as-an-expert may be significantly similar to the thinking patterns of a real expert (286), we are brought to a final ethical possibility regarding performance pedagogy—the possibility that by taking on a role students could approach the thinking of a fictional character. What are the ethical possibilities and pitfalls of such a claim? On the one hand, if we believe that Shakespeare's characters are complex, true reflections of humanity, could the act of role-playing such a character and even momentarily thinking as that character allow students to expand their empathy and view situations from a different perspective? Or would the student's inability to ever truly step outside of their own ideology merely create a superficial claim to sympathy that does more harm than good? While having students take on roles that confront them with issues of prejudice, hate, misunderstood love, class segregation, etc., would seem to have particular potential to shape thinking and expand tolerance, we as teachers would certainly want to be wary of any quixotic claims that equate taking on a role in a classroom performance with the day-

to-day accumulation of lived experience. Such questions are complex and hold real-life implications.

For literature teachers such discussions should remind us of the impetus of the novel and what many still believe is the great reason to read: to get into a character's mind and relate to other human beings and circumstances that would otherwise be beyond our reach. Based on the particular circumstances of acting, which may allow students to think like a certain character and enter and explore a world that is simultaneously real and not real, performance may be able to take such an ethical goal one step further—more deeply awakening our empathy by helping us to understand ideas and people in a more relational context of personal connection. In order to explore the ethics and possibility of this aspect of role-play in more detail, I will turn to this issue in the next chapter. In doing so I recognize that to be truly ethical the power of role-play and imagination must not only open up a world of learning that helps us to see ourselves more critically, it must also help us to see others more clearly and with more compassion.

CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER: PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY
AND THE ETHICS OF EMPATHY

E.M Forster once observed that most of the trouble in the world is due to our “inability to imagine the innerness of other lives”(qtd. in Kohlberg 15). In his article on moral education, psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg agrees, defining morality as the ability to see an issue from other people’s point of view (15). Yet although most people would concur with Kohlberg and Forster in asserting the pivotal roles of understanding and empathy in creating compassion and community, the ability to truly relate to other human beings ethically often proves more difficult than we would wish.

This plight of disconnection has traditionally been an important issue for English teachers who have often tried to cultivate a sense of empathy through the teaching of literature. In her memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Dr. Azar Nafisi echoes an ethical argument made by many teachers when she petitions her students on the first day of class to enter the other world offered by the novelist and to “hold [their] breath with the characters and become involved in their destiny.” Nafisi warns her students that if they don’t “inhale the experience” they will “not be able to empathize” which, she argues “is at the heart of the novel” (111). As my previous chapter details, while I would agree with Nafisi on this point, I would also argue that the physical experience of role-playing a character heightens the stakes and effects of creating a relationship between the student’s world and that of the character. Specifically, as our discussion of some of the possible implications of Christopher Andersen’s snail study has suggested, performance pedagogy, with its emphasis on role-play and the liminal relationship between student and character, creates a learning environment that would seem particularly potent in

cultivating the kind of compassion Nafisi, and so many other humanists, are hoping for. However, if the benefits of encouraging empathy seem higher in a performance setting, the possible pitfalls are equally potent and deserve careful consideration. To this end, this chapter will look carefully at the potential of role-play to emphasize similarity and foster empathy, as well as the possibility that such claims are at heart more inclined to assimilation than understanding. Such a discussion is especially relevant in relation to Shakespeare, whose own iconic status is largely due to the believed complexity and humanity of his characters. Along these lines, if we, as teachers of The Bard, find such ethical claims among our own reasons for teaching his plays, it is vital that we believe our pedagogy truly invites compassion and understanding rather than fostering unethical caricatures of alterity.

To begin, then, let us start with the central question of our investigation: how could choosing to take on roles that are completely outside our own experience create greater empathy, compassion, and understanding for those we tend to see as unrelated to our own experience, and therefore somehow less sympathetic than ourselves? Inherent in such a query, of course, is the idea that seeing *similarity* between others and us is the first step to building a compassionate connection between two people. Although such a claim is debatable, let's begin by accepting its terms and pushing its application to role-play.

Through taking on a role, actors blend their own body, voice, and emotions with the words, actions, and appearance of a character. This simultaneous *me* and *not me* identity blurs the differences between the actor and the character in ways that can complicate and break down previously held hierarchies of difference and prejudice. As discussed in my introduction, Stanislavski's "magic if" pushes actors to adopt the

character's viewpoint, making acting more natural. Kurt Daw describes this in specific terms as "adopting the character's worldview and the assumptions that arise through his or her experience, as well as the immediate lines and actions" (148). This description is telling in its implication of an attempt to understand the character's worldview by thinking beyond the immediate lines and actions of the play. In other words, taking on a role pushes the student to put their character in context. Such a task invites questions about motive and careful thinking about what events in the play shape later responses. It does not seem far-fetched, for example, to have a student who, cast in the role of Shylock in the final court scene, combs back through the text looking for greater understanding of why her character reacts the way he reacts later on. And, because the student is the one who needs to give a convincing performance of the end scene, implicit in their coming to understand Shylock better is the link they can make between what the text offers as reason and motive and what they themselves can see as believable, as compelling. In this bridge the student-actor finds similarity between him or herself and the character, and this in turn opens up a more compassionate viewpoint that can then be taken away into their real life.

Robert Hapgood, professor emeritus at the University of New Hampshire, illustrates this principle through his description of his experience teaching many classes on *Much Ado About Nothing*. Focusing on act 4 scene 1, where Beatrice tells Benedick to "Kill Claudio," Hapgood relates how after reading through the play, his students very often see the scene as, "simply an exchange between, as they put it, a bitch and a wuss" (148). While Hapgood acknowledges such an interpretation as "a defensible view of the passage, [he] encourage[s] the students to explore other ways of interpreting it that are

more sympathetic to the two characters” and suggests that to that end they may try putting themselves in the role of either Beatrice or Benedick. After giving his students some time to rehearse in their new roles, Hapgood says that inevitably the interpretations become more complex, and in his view more true to the text. “How does this adjustment come about?” Hapgood questions—because “students who take Beatrice’s part will call attention to her plight” and vice versa (150).

Simply put, acting focuses our point of view when approaching a play. As an audience member we may, and hopefully will, get pulled into many different views as each character makes their case on the stage. But as an actor cast in a certain role, a student is pushed to read and think from one point of view. In this way they are able to more deeply connect to a certain character and understand their perspective. When put in the position of taking on many different roles, this process should further complicate students’ judgments, and in turn open up their understanding of the viability and variability of the morality of the characters and action in a scene or play. As teachers we can push students to recognize and think about the shift in their views of a character from before and after they have taken on a role, and lead them in discussions of how such an experience can apply to the ways we judge and relate to those we see as un-relatable.

Lastly, practically speaking, the foundational assumption that theatre rests on, the idea that a person can role-play another “someone,” perhaps drastically foreign in class status, belief system, race, or gender, and be convincing enough in the role to affect the audience and not seem farcical, seems itself to rest on a premise of foundational similarity (humanity) between the person taking on the role and the character performed. Because of this, acting is uniquely able to emphasize our ability to portray someone or

something thought to be innately different from us and push the consequences of such a performance. Specifically, because of this peculiar aspect of role-play to showcase similarity, especially in cases where difference has been thought innate, acting has sometimes led to radical re-thinking of social hierarchies.

One such social hierarchy, long defended on the basis of innate difference, and particularly interesting in connection to the drama of Elizabethan England, is the difference between the sexes. Shakespeare's plays in particular often have moments of gender role-play that can destabilize the innate differences, and even opposing natures historically ascribed to gender, and being preached in his day. In this vein, Portia's performance of Balthasar is a particularly compelling test case for the possible ethical implications of role-playing the Other. On one hand, although Portia plays the role of boy convincingly, the humor in the play comes from the moments where the audience can most clearly see *Portia* playing Balthasar. The clearest examples of this include her ironic aside when Bassanio says he would sacrifice his wife to save Antonio (4.1.277-284), and her set up of, and reaction to, Bassanio's unwitting betrayal of her in the ring escapade (4.1.405-444, 5.1).

However, while Portia may remain true to her identity as Bassanio's wife while playing this role, her brilliant performance as a Doctor of Law opens doors for discussion about essential identity in relation to gender. For although Portia's famous 'mercy speech' and her constant focus on forgiveness, even after Shylock is stripped of his property, seem to be tied to her identity as a woman, her tight logical thinking and her almost upsetting stoicism in exacting the law would definitely have been viewed as more characteristic of males in Elizabethan culture (see McDonald 260). Thus the effect of

role-play on identity is not dismissed here, only complicated. In Portia's case specifically, either the role-play has changed her so she has become like a man, or else as a woman in a different context, she is able to show that her ability to play this role must assert something about who she has always had the capacity to be.

Such issues are only complicated further when we take into account the peculiar transvestite nature of the Elizabethan theatre. For not only is Portia (the character) a woman playing a man (Balthasar) but in Shakespeare's time a boy (actor) would have played Portia. In this situation the levels of role-playing the opposite gender are doubled: a boy playing a girl playing a boy. Such a circumstance doubly illuminates the performative aspects of gender, including but not limited to, costume. For in attempting to perform maleness or femaleness, the culturally taught depictions of gender are inescapably emphasized. On this point, speaking of England's transvestite theatre specifically, Stephen Orgel has argued that "it surely has broad implications, both cultural and sexual, that have nothing to do with practicality and everything to do with the way societies conceive and construct gender"(102). But in addition to destabilizing myths of innate difference in gender for their audiences, by having boy actors perform women, particularly in scenes where they are mistreated due to their sex, couldn't such performances also help to increase awareness of the unjust treatment of women? For example, one can only wonder what kind of epiphanies or moments of recognition or understanding might come for a boy actor cast in the role of Hero or Desdemona. Imagine a boy actor being physically flung around the stage and verbally abused as he acts out the scene of Hero's accusation, as he, as Hero, tries to see things from her view.

What could be the power of being treated like those on the outside of your own dominant community, even for a few hours, in changing how one relates to the powerless?

Although gender and race differences are arguably the easiest hierarchies to perpetrate based on theories of born difference and inequality, historically other distinctions such as social class have also been justified in similar terms. Especially in societies eager to safeguard a monarchy or ruling elite, the argument that class inequalities were innate and God-decreed was vital to the social status quo. In Elizabethan England, such ideology seemed to be both supported and subverted by the performances of dramas like Shakespeare's. While on the one hand, performing plays that highlight royal history and upper class heroism would seem to reinforce ideas about class hierarchies, the production of such dramas also necessitates the performance of upper-class roles by lower-class actors. In such cases, much like the destabilizing force of the transvestite theater, if the performance is convincing, its very success pushes against the argument that class is in-born rather than learned. Louis Montrose echoes this argument in his article, "Shakespeare, the Stage, and the State," asserting that if Stephen Greenblatt's claim is true that "kingship always involves fictions, theatricalism, and mystification of power," then these same devices are also "the very media through which royal power is demystified" (48).

In the same article, Montrose reinforces the demystifying power of performance in Elizabethan England when he quotes Sir Henry Wotton's concern that The King's players' production of *Henry VIII*, with their elaborate costumes and props, was in danger of "mak[ing] greatness very familiar...." Montrose concludes, "[Wotton's] concern is focused upon the inherent capacity of dramatic representation in the public theatre...to

appropriate and to demystify...the monarchy, and to do so by the very process of staging it” (48). Such demystifying of even the highest class demarcations seems probable when “payment of a penny might entitle” the lowest classes of Elizabethan England “to judge the player-kings who were allowed their ‘little scene, / To monarchize’ (*Richard II*, 3.2.164-65) upon the public stages” (Montrose 47). Specifically, the shocking similarity between, for example, players taking on the role of King or Queen, and the awe inspiring real life drama of royal processions, seems likely to raise questions about the inherent noble qualities of royalty. After all, when actors could be coached to speak the lines of King Henry, or to dress in magnificent robes and strut the stage as a Queen, such innate assumptions about class become increasingly difficult to defend.

In contemporary culture such questions about identity and difference have fueled studies not far a-field from the acting performances of the Elizabethan stage. Building on earlier evidences of role-play’s potential to highlight similarity across previously held strongholds of difference, contemporary attempts to use role-play to overcome religious, class, and racial intolerance abound. Conversely, just as acting was sometimes feared as a potentially radical force of destabilization in Elizabethan England, role-play’s transformative power continues to have contemporary critics warning about its risks.

One interesting contemporary example that speaks to both of these issues is the *California 3 Rs Project*’s prohibition against using role-play to teach students about religion. Although this project was inspired by a desire to use student role-play as a way to increase compassion and understanding of Muslims, it was met with strong resistance by those that simultaneously feared that it was both too real and too inaccurate. Responding to an Oakland, California, school’s implementation of a role-play where

students received Muslim names, read verses from the Qur'an, and learned to write in Arabic, the *California 3 R's Project* cautioned educators to “not use methods, such as role-playing that could risk ‘blurring the legal distinction between constitutional teaching *about* religion and school-sponsored practice of religion’” (qtd. in Kafer 134).

Interestingly, the Oakland School teachers themselves seemed cognizant of the idea that role-playing would take learning passively *about* something a step closer to *experiencing* that thing. Not surprisingly, the handout for their Islam unit read, “From the beginning, you and your classmates will become Muslims” (Kafer 135). Understanding the power of role-play to disrupt the way we view and therefore value those unlike us, it is not surprising these teachers thought this the most powerful method to counter the prejudice they saw in their own culture. Ignoring the fact that through a political lens this type of connectivity to other religions in a school setting may be inappropriate, the messages this debate reveals about the power of performance, in blurring the difference between us and other, does highlight the potential power of teaching through role-play.

Conversely and equally important, however, the *California 3 R's Project* also highlights an important concern in the ethical arguments for role-playing the Other: the ability to truly depict the person or culture one is trying to come to understand. In the *3 R's Project*, besides fearing the reality of a religious role-play, opponents also balked at the idea that a portrayal of Muslims by Christian California kids was a true representation of Muslims. If the school really wanted to build understanding and compassion, critics argued, then they needed to have “real” Muslims to interact with in order to build true, rather than superficial, understanding (Kafer 135). In relation to the ethical claims of performing Shakespeare, this concern seems to posit that in order for role-playing to have

the chance to truly create empathy and tolerance, the Shakespearean characters being performed must themselves be “true” rather than caricatured depictions of foreignness. I will take this point up in more depth in a moment.

Other contemporary class and race role-plays in the social sciences have proven equally conflicted in the discrepancy between their moral aims and criticized shortfalls. They too are likewise helpful in establishing some baseline conditions that must be met if performance pedagogy is to be considered in a truly ethical light. Two well-known books that echo the praises and concerns about role-playing those foreign to your own community are Barbara Ehrenreich’s recent book *Nickle and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* and John Howard Griffin’s famous book, *Black like Me*. *Nickle and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* chronicles Ehrenreich’s experiences of taking on the roles of minimum-wage workers in America. As an undercover reporter, Ehrenreich spent one month in three U.S cities taking on low-end jobs, and only living off her meager earnings in order to write a book that highlights the plight of low-wage America and thus earn compassion for the poor. Similarly, John Howard Griffin’s famous book, *Black Like Me*, depicts the prejudice he (a white male) encountered as he traveled through the segregated South passing as a black man.

While both of these books raised social consciousness and while the role-plays taken on seemed to have greatly increased both authors’ own understanding and empathy, such methods have elicited mixed reactions with regards to the ethics of pretending to be part of a community you are not really a member of. Ehrenreich and Griffin’s books raise questions about containment,⁵ as each author unconsciously appropriates the Other into their own perspective and judgments. A telling example of such comes at the end of

Ehrenreich's chapter about her experiences as a house cleaner in Maine when she comes "out" about who she really is and asks the other workers "the question [she has] wanted to ask all this time": how do they feel about the rich owners of the houses they clean when they themselves are always scraping to get by (118)? Having read Ehrenreich's description of her experiences in these homes, it is fairly clear that her own role-played experience has made her feel misused and enraged at the disparity between the rich owners and the poor cleaners. Thinking from this context, it is not too surprising that Ehrenreich's reporter prose cannot hide her slight disappointment and outsider perspective as she presents the answers she gets from the ladies she has worked next to. One girl tells her, "All I can think of is like, wow, I'd like to have this stuff someday. It motivates me . . ." while another states, "I don't mind really, because I guess I'm a simple person and I don't want what they have" (118-119). Seeing such responses as misguided, Ehrenreich belies her own upbringing and highlights the fact that although she has gained hands-on insight into the lives of these women, she has filtered her experience through her own worldview.

Again, such concerns echo some of the potential pitfalls of performance pedagogy's claims to enlarge student perspectives. And while one could argue that such pitfalls are minimized in the situation of using performance to teach Shakespeare (due to the crucial distinctions of taking on a fictional role in a play where, as we have discussed previously, the actor is given lines and actions that push them to think more like the character being played), it would be disingenuous to ignore the problems all together. Rather, all three of these contemporary studies showcase the potential of role-play to help us connect to the Other, as well as important potential obstacles in using role-play as a

means to true empathy. By analyzing these examples, then, we can identify at least two conditions that must be met if role-play is to lead us to true compassion: 1) we need to believe that the role we (or our students) are taking on is a “true” depiction of the Other and not the biased caricature of prejudice, and 2) we must be confident that in building bridges between ourselves and those we see as different, we are not merely masking our containment of alterity in a rhetoric of empathy. I will take these issues on in this order by investigating Shakespeare’s character Shylock through the lens of several theorists interested in these issues of compassion and containment.

Let’s begin with the first question: can Shakespeare, or any artist for that matter, truly create a character that is outside the prejudices of that artist’s own ideology? Looking at Shylock, what evidence is there that he is indeed a humane character that is truly “Other” and not a caricature of anti-semitism? In making the case for Shylock as truly Other, and as contrary to the prejudices of Shakespeare’s time, two passages strike me as holding particular ability to elicit a humanizing performance. The first is the famous, “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech.

Any discussion of this play’s capacity to either humanize or degrade foreignness must acknowledge the plainly subversive message a sincere performance of these lines would create. It would seem rather difficult to try and portray Shylock as a stock villain in this moment, when in the face of bigotry he asks:

Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and

cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us
do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? (3.1.49-55)

This plea is so straightforward in its humanizing rhetoric, so powerful in its call for a sense of empathy, that to dismiss its sincerity seems almost impossible. If the play were indeed pure propaganda, this impassioned speech would appear to be a huge oversight on the part of the author. Especially in a time when Marlow's *Jew of Malta* was only the latest in a tradition of fiendish depictions of Jews, with little or no redeeming quality or acknowledged subjectivity, such humanizing lines at least complicate what could be a caricatured villain.

Adding to this speech, the second passage that I would cite in making the case for Shylock's capacity to truly present a humane depiction of otherness hinges on a more subtle depiction of subjectivity. After Jessica has fled with Lorenzo, Tubal tells Shylock that his daughter was last seen selling a ring for a monkey. Upon hearing this, Shylock replies in agony, "Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise. I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" (3.2.100-103). This is the only time there is any mention of Shylock's wife, but in just one line Shylock becomes a loving husband. This line is not only completely unnecessary in forwarding the stereotype of Shylock as the evil, greedy Jew, it seems to purposefully complicate the binary that puts Christians on the side of good and Jews on the side of evil.

A powerful line on its own, this image is intensified drastically when it is juxtaposed to the secondary plot line's story of both Portia and Nerissa's husbands thoughtlessly giving away their own wedding rings. This contrast is highlighted during

the court scene when Shylock comments on the flimsy vows that seem to bind the Christian marriages of Portia to Bassanio and Graziano to Nerissa. After each man has testified of his willingness to sacrifice his wife in order to deliver Antonio, Shylock says in an aside, “These be the Christian husbands. I have a daughter. Would any of the stock of Barrabbas / Had been her husband rather than a Christian” (4.1.290-292). Putting aside any debates about Shakespeare’s feelings concerning the good of putting wives above male friends, or the bigger issues of companionate marriage in Shakespeare’s time, the inclusion of these lines highlights both Shylock’s concern for his daughter and his love for his own wife. In short, these details humanize him, and that perhaps is the first step towards compassion.

But in order for the compassion we feel for Shylock to be a genuine step towards connecting to and understanding those that are distinctly outside our own circle of belief, one would have to grant Shakespeare the capacity to create such a character—a character that by all historical accounts appears to be completely foreign to his experience, and at least to some extent, outside the prejudices of a bigoted hegemony. In order to do this, many critics have pointed to Shylock’s humanizing moments as evidence that Shakespeare was beyond his time in tolerance and above the ideology of his day. However, it may be more pragmatic to see such moments of subversion as support for Louis Althusser’s theory of a true artist, someone who because of his genius as an artist is able to create moments of true alterity that go against even the artist’s own ideological beliefs.

In his discussion of ideology and art, Althusser explains how an artist within an ideology can still create art that seems to argue against the hegemony at work through the

conflict between the artist's aesthetic ideology (the aesthetic techniques and demands of the artist's trade), and the ideology of their culture (the perspective and worldview reflected in their lived experience).⁶ Althusser's theory focuses on moments of artistic supremacy that fight against the author's own beliefs and prejudices. This tension, Althusser claims, allows for moments of true subversion. Applying this to our discussion of Shakespeare, for example, one might argue that by upholding an aesthetic standard which demands dynamic characters and more richly nuanced conflict, Shakespeare is able to create characters and moments in his plays that help us "perceive (but not know) in some sense *from the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which [he is] held" (Althusser 204). If Althusser's theory holds, it means that great artists are able to create moments and characters that in a real sense *are* truly Other—moments that carry a subversive power perhaps particularly able to illuminate the holes in their own hegemonic system.⁷ Returning to our focus on teaching Shakespeare through performance, if we grant Shylock as a "true" site of discovery for students to connect to the Other, having students take on the role of Shylock would push their capacity to connect and empathize with a character very much on the outside of a hegemonic system, and perhaps very foreign to the student's own belief-system, class, or race.

As I have argued throughout, there is one level of subversion and enlightenment possible in reading the lines, "Hath not a Jew eyes, Hath not a Jew hands, . . ." that would likely result in a sense of connection to the victimized who would say these words. However, there is the possibility of quite another level of understanding to actually look face-to-face at a living, breathing person who adds voice, facial expressions, mannerisms, and eye contact to those lines. Further, if we return to Althusser's theory of art and

ideology, we can imagine that an actor—whose own aesthetic ideology demands that he try to think, look, and feel like this character and try to make the audience understand and relate to this character’s motivations— will be even more susceptible to empathizing with the viewpoint of the role he has taken on.

As we acknowledge these possible steps towards compassion, however, we must still confront the question of whether a theory of understanding through performance is not in itself a sort of containment strategy rather than an ethical compassion for the *truly* Other. If one of our top goals in teaching Shakespeare is to place our students in an ethical connection to people and ideas outside their own perspective and experience, we must seriously consider whether a theory of understanding through performance is an ethical way to achieve these goals. Specifically, can a student who undeniably must use their own body, understanding, and imagination to role-play a character ever truly relate to that character without slanting that understanding to their own ideology? And if they cannot, what are the consequences of such imperfect attempts at understanding?

In his descriptions of the process of subversion and containment, Stephen Greenblatt helps us to see the startling and unexpected consequences that can come from such seemingly ethical moves. Particularly relevant to our discussion is a notion Greenblatt labels “recording.” Initially this process of recording the Other (i.e. letting the Other speak, “permit[ting] subversive inquiries” and registering “alien voices” in a sort of “conversation among equals” Greenblatt 36-37), sounds right in line with any ethical call for granting subjectivity to those most different from us. Much like the argument that Shylock’s “Hath not a Jew eyes?” speech simultaneously showcases his otherness (being a Jew) and his similarity to the Christians (his common humanity), recording likewise

allows the dominant culture to see the subversive culture as both different and similar to themselves. In terms of performance pedagogy, we might say that by taking on a role, and speaking the lines of that character, a student participates in a process similar to recording; a process aimed at building a bridge between the student/ actor and the character that establishes both similarity and difference between the two.

Yet Greenblatt's theory also uncovers an ugly possibility empowered in this same process. While viewing alterity as both *other* and *like us* does not seem antagonistic, Greenblatt sees this swift inclusion as a move that ultimately serves the purposes of containment. Through assimilating the Other's differences into sameness, Greenblatt contends, a dominant group is often able to contain and control what is truly different or threatening (36-38). To illustrate this idea more clearly, and to help us see what its possible application is to performance pedagogy specifically, we turn to *The Merchant of Venice*.

We may agree that in moments throughout the play, such as the moving "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech, Shylock is given the opportunity to speak, to showcase his similarity to the dominant Christians. Greenblatt's theory of containment asks how such "recording" ultimately allows the Christians to control Shylock's subversion. One possible and disturbing answer to that question is that because Antonio comes to see Shylock as a fellow human being, Antonio is motivated to "render him mercy," "saving" Shylock's life both physically and spiritually at the troubling conclusion of the court scene. In this view what seems like the cruelest moment in the play: Shylock's loss of all his possessions, and most tragically, his forced conversion to Christianity, can convincingly be interpreted as an act of mercy and generosity in Antonio's mind. After

all, not only does Antonio *not* keep Shylock's money for himself (as is his right), but he also "saves" Shylock and brings him to "the truth" (see 4.1.375-385). Interpreted this way, the play's ending contains the threat of Shylock's earlier subversive lines by overtly squashing the person outside the dominant culture. More subtly, and perhaps more frighteningly, by making Shylock a Christian, Antonio also belies his recognition of Shylock's humanity as someone deserving of "salvation." In other words, rather than coming to ethically understand and respect Shylock, Antonio's grasp of his similarity to Shylock, only serves to encourage his own assumptions about who Shylock should become. Does this subtle form of containment, also apply to role-playing the Other?

Applied to performance pedagogy, one might question whether the sympathy (or even empathy) that may be cultivated by having students take on a role that represents someone outside their own perspective, does not also serve to diminish the alterity of the Other in its focus on commonality between actor and character. Granting that we can never fully understand what it is like to be someone else, does emphasizing the empathetic capacity of role-playing a character trivialize the real differences that divide cultures, genders, or perspectives? Surely a white student claiming to understand what it is to be black because they have played Othello would be viewed as offensive and ridiculous, but is there harm (or truth) in that same student's belief that playing Othello helped them to better understand some of the pressures placed on minorities? Likewise, do teaching strategies that ask students to question and hypothesize about the motivations of a certain character create an ethical sense of understanding or negate the power of diversity in a friendly assimilation?

Ultimately the question rests on whether or not there is any way to connect with others, and to try to understand them without succumbing, however unintentionally, to a form of containment. In dealing with this question, Emmanuel Levinas posited two types of relationships with the Other where alterity is not compromised although connection and love still thrive. Although Levinas used familial metaphors to name and describe these ethical relationships, the principles Levinas articulates about how these relationships cultivate love and compassion without imperial underpinnings are intriguing in their application to the claims of performance pedagogy.

The first relationship that Levinas talks about is a relationship that exalts difference without any attempt to contain the “absolutely other” partner. Levinas refers to this relationship in terms of the erotic relationship between male and female, although he also clearly points out how the principles of this type of relationship apply in understanding and cultivating the opposing aspects within each of us (66, 68). In this way Levinas’s discussion seems to recognize ‘male’ and ‘female’ as both actual divisions of sex as well as philosophical categories. In terms of our discussion, this latter emphasis is most fruitful in discussing the ethics of role-play. Acting’s blending of identity and role-play’s exploratory environment make performance a uniquely encouraging environment to discover and engage the opposing attributes within each of us.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the imaginary world of a play that is both real and not real in its rules and consequences is a particularly fruitful place for exploring muted or previously undiscovered aspects of ourselves or for appreciating the capacities we have to assume roles we would classify as opposite to our own perspective, race, gender, etc. Conversely, through finding roles that because of their foreignness are

difficult, or even impossible to perform convincingly, students may also be reminded of the reality of difference, which is itself perhaps a necessary guard against overgeneralization and the containment strategies of sameness. Such moments could also be effective catalysts for class discussions about these issues of difference and containment and how to balance the needs of connection and diversity.

Levinas's second ethical relationship, the connection between parent and child, emphasizes this idea of connection between self and other and balances the emphasis on distinction that characterizes the erotic relationship. While the metaphor of the erotic relationship between male and female was used to talk about a relationship that exalts complete difference, Levinas' second relationship uses the metaphor of paternity to describe a relationship of connectivity where, in Levinas's words, "the Other is radically other, and where nevertheless it is in some way me" (69). Like the erotic relationship model, although Levinas describes this type of ethical relationship using the metaphor of parent and child, he also emphasizes that the principles of this type of relationship are not contingent upon "the tie of biological kinship" and should be sought in non-familial relationships as well (70-71).

Levinas describes such a relationship as "beyond the possible" (71)—"of seeing the possibilities of the other as your own possibilities, of being able to escape the closure of your identity and what is bestowed on you, toward something which is not bestowed on you and which nevertheless is yours"(70) . . . "a relationship with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is me" (71). This language of liminality, with its focus on the ontological duality of a connection to an Other that is simultaneously me and not me, is strikingly similar to Victor Turner's language regarding the power of role-play to blur the

identities of actor and character. And while Levinas is very clear that the ethical connection in this type of paternal relationship is “not some sympathy through which I can put myself in the son’s place,” his counter definition of this connection as one that is “through my being . . . a pluralist existing” (72), can be interpreted in relation to the difference performance pedagogy is itself trying to assert about the embodiment of acting versus the purely imaginative process of silent reading. After all it is not just “through sympathy” or through imagination that an actor puts him or herself in a character’s place, although they certainly do that. Role-playing is distinct in the actual embodiment of a character so that the actor is in the character’s place by action, voice and body as well.

Because of this “pluralist existing” (Levinas 72), role-play seems to cultivate many of the traits Levinas has attributed to this “paternal” ethical relationship. Both expand possibilities; role-play, in its overlap of character and actor, opens up new possibilities for the actor enabling an escape from “the closure of [their] identity and what is bestowed on [them]” (71). Also, role-playing connects the character and the actor through a type of “pluralist existing” where the character while being completely other, is in a physiological respect also “me” (the actor) (71). Similar in these respects, it seems fair to argue that role-playing should likewise carry some of the ethical dimensions of understanding and compassion Levinas attributes to the unique relationship of paternity.

And yet, no matter how exciting performance pedagogy’s potentials are to help us understand the Other, it would be beyond naïve (and an act of containment in itself) to laud any teaching theory as nuanced enough to completely solve such complex issues of ethics and compassion. However, as a struggle particularly present in the humanities, the question of how to create compassion and empathy without consuming alterity is one we

must engage our students in; it is something too important to ignore simply because it seems unsolvable. After all, most of the ideas that matter most in our lives (i.e. love, forgiveness, intelligence, etc.) are in some sense indescribable, abstract and unattainable—they are experienced as real yet encircled with mystery. Such limitations should not stop us from striving to maximize such moral goods, even recognizing our attempts as flawed. Performance pedagogy *does* seem to carry substantial potential to help students to understand others, even if it does so imperfectly. The questions then seem to come down to 1) whether the benefits outweigh the risks and 2) how we as teachers can maximize the positive potential while still highlighting issues of containment to minimize harm.

If on one hand role-playing risks containing alterity in a superficial gesture of empathy, on the other hand it emphasizes feelings of humanity and similarity that can create compassion and understanding. As the inheritors of perhaps the epitome of Otherness, feminists have long struggled with this type of negotiation. While they have been leaders in illuminating the costly colonial gestures that dull their difference, they have also been among the most articulate in describing the devastating cost of total otherness. In Simone De Beauvoir's foundational text, "The Second Sex," I believe this debate is brought into focus when De Beauvoir argues that far from providing any connection to the Other, such "awe" of feminine alterity left man "in the company of a living enigma . . . alone with his dreams, his hopes, his fears, his love, his vanity." Compellingly, she concludes that for many this subjective game is "a more attractive experience than an authentic relation with a human being" (256).

De Beauvoir's poignant conclusion about the effect of not attempting to connect to the Other because of a perceived *total* alterity alludes to what I would argue is the most horrifying result of all—dehumanization. And while containment and assimilation do not provide appropriate counters to this demeaning conclusion, any road that leads students to see the Other's subjectivity, even through an imperfect and personal lens, leads away from the violence and hate that are the inevitable results of a dehumanized Other.

Returning to Levinas and his metaphor of the Other's face—the humanity in the Other which commands “thou shalt not kill” and “ordains me to serve him,” (97)—provides the perfect framework for the potential and goal of performance pedagogy in this regard. For the embodiment of words is a concrete way to give a face to the Other. By giving life, literal humanity, to the lines of Shakespeare, an actor allows both the audience and fellow actors the chance to see the Other face-to-face.

Lastly, in order to maximize these humanizing effects of performance pedagogy, we as teachers must be more aware of the theoretical assumptions grounding our teaching. Only by more explicitly debating and investigating these pedagogical choices, and the theories behind them, can we take this complicated issue head on, deciding for ourselves if the grounding assumptions of role-play more powerfully subvert or support our goals of increasing tolerance and compassion in our classrooms. Depending on the level of school being taught, such issues should also be integrated into class discussions so that students are able to engage with the difficulty and necessity of trying to ethically relate to others. Additionally, besides emphasizing similarity and connectivity through role-play, performance pedagogy also fosters an environment of diversity and pluralism that can serve as a productive counter concept of tolerance. This theory will be discussed

in the concluding chapter and illustrates the ethical arc of teaching Shakespeare through performance.

CHAPTER THREE: PLURALISM THROUGH PERFORMANCE

Supreme Court Justice William Douglas has argued that “full free discussion even of ideas we hate encourages the testing of our own prejudices and preconceptions,” and that such discussions are the best way to “keep a society from becoming stagnant and unprepared for the stresses and strains that work to tear all civilizations apart”(Gillmor, D.M., et al. 5). And yet, if our school system is any indication, it would seem that many Americans have lost interest in a model of learning that encourages such debate. By casting knowledge as a non-negotiated right answer on a bubble sheet, we too often cheat our students of a more sophisticated conception of truth. If instead, we reframe the binary of right and wrong to allow for the possibility of multiple right answers while not discounting the existence of wrong answers, we encourage our students to negotiate truth with greater clarity and more respect for opposing viewpoints.

Particularly as teachers of Shakespeare, performance pedagogy provides a much-needed vehicle for fighting against simplistic and unethical formulations of “right” and “wrong.” By helping students to navigate an ethical pluralism that lies between the extremes of moral binaries and “anything goes,” performance-fueled teaching offers an ethical lens for dealing with a complicated world. In tandem with the sympathetic thrust of role-play discussed in the previous chapter, performance pedagogy’s pluralistic environment works to cultivate “a tolerance for disagreement” that increases understanding and helps to highlight the ethics of diversity (Martinson 120). Such a pluralistic perspective is especially vital for students studying Shakespeare today and particularly well suited to a performance-driven pedagogy. In fact, with all the recent acclaim for performance’s interpretive structure it is somewhat surprising that the ethical

effects of such a learning model haven't really been explored yet. For although the academic boons of critical thinking and analysis go hand in hand with the ethical side of performance teaching, this implied dimension deserves explicit attention. In this concluding discussion, then, I hope to refocus attention on the interpretive power of performance pedagogy. Along with critical thinking skills, such a learning environment fosters tolerance and moral maturity. In order to set up this concluding discussion, however, let me first revisit the need for a carefully understood pluralistic teaching methodology in English classes.

In his recent article, "Cultivating the Moral Character of Learning and Teaching: a Neglected Dimension of Educational Leadership," Robert J. Starratt complains about the seeming disconnect between the understanding, personal engagement, and critical thinking skills teachers desire to cultivate in their classrooms and the messages embedded in their methods of education. Analyzing the metaphors of a "curriculum 'delivered' by teachers to students who, in turn 'master'" information and supply "right answers" on multiple choice tests, Starratt argues that such teaching promotes an unethical type of learning that is "inauthentic and irresponsible," where an "authentic encounter" with knowledge becomes "a pillaging of texts in search for answers to the teacher's or the test makers' questions" (401-402).

Moreover, a perspective that only privileges a single right answer mirrors a hegemonic power structure that subjugates other voices of interpretation and intimates inequality. Arguing for the validity of feminist interpretations of literature in 1980, Annette Kolodny pointedly alludes to this issue of inequality when she asserts the feminist's "own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances

from these same texts.” And while “she claims neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for her different readings,” Kolodny’s insistence on “their usefulness” and validity illustrates her recognition of the connection between scholastic pluralism and social egalitarianism (18). Likewise, a classroom setting that recognizes multiple interpretations and right answers to a question not only encourages students to engage in critical thinking and offer their own interpretations of a text, it also engages students in a system of ethical decision-making that can be transferred to their negotiation of truth outside the classroom as well.

At this point in our discussion some English teachers may start to wonder how this argument really applies to the study of literature, which in this post-modern age has been repeatedly highlighted as conflicted and open to multiple interpretations. All English classes, they may contend, already reject the right/wrong paradigm when discussing interpretations of literature. While this is simply not always the case (see Holt-Reynolds 8), it is probably true that the majority of contemporary English classes tend to be less authoritarian and more open to interpretation than many of their counterparts in other subjects such as science or math. Unfortunately, however, in the backlash against binary systems of interpretation and reading, many English teachers have gone to the other extreme: asserting a relativism where any interpretation is as valid as the next—a teaching philosophy equally unhelpful in aiding student’s academic and moral development.

In a recent study on prospective English teachers’ conceptions of their roles as authority and discussion facilitators, Diane Holt-Reynolds explores these trends and assesses the troubling effects of both of these teaching extremes (3). Illustrative of the

shaping effects of a student's scholastic context of right and wrong answers, Holt-Reynolds' longitudinal study found that prospective teachers' understanding of the complex boundaries between right and wrong answers directly shaped the authoritarian role they would take in a literature classroom (1). For some of the prospective teachers interviewed, their own experiences as a student in English classes led them to conceptualize the role of teacher as *the* source of interpretive authority and possibility (8). One stark example of such thinking was a prospective teacher named Amber, who, after sharing her interpretation of the moral of *Romeo and Juliet*, was asked how she would respond to students who interpreted the moral differently. Amber's response showcases her belief in a binary structure of truth as well as her acceptance of an authority-driven model of gaining knowledge: "I would just have to kind of drill it [her interpretation] into them. ... I think, as a teacher, I have that right" (8).

On the other extreme, Holt-Reynolds' study corroborated the notion that "by far the most popular role" these prospective teachers wanted to take on was the role of a non-authoritarian discussion facilitator. As they grappled with the balance between eliciting differing interpretations from their students and evaluating the validity of all interpretations, however, most of these prospective teachers ended up claiming that "everyone has a right to an opinion and none is better than another"(10). In a troubling conclusion to her article, Holt-Reynolds reports that while a handful of the prospective teachers interviewed seemed to show signs of becoming English teachers "able to draw most students into a conversation," only two of the prospective teachers in the study projected roles for themselves as teachers that could "make [such] conversation[s] truly educative" by "drawing on and actively teaching ... the discipline of interpreting" (25).

Clarifying what she sees as the importance of a “discipline of interpreting,” Holt-Reynolds concludes, “A teacher who believes that, ‘Whatever you think is good enough,’ misses the point and power of classroom discussion, misses the opportunity to help adolescent readers read more independently ...and defen[d] one’s interpretations” (25). For Holt-Reynolds such a relativistic philosophy ultimately renders its adherents impotent. Applied to these prospective teachers specifically, she argues, that until they “can achieve a kind of peace amidst the ambiguity [of right and wrong answers], ...We cannot hope that they will learn to shape students as thinkers and knowers. We cannot hope that they will actually teach” (26).

In lieu of these extremes, the question becomes, just how is pluralism different from either of these philosophies and why is it a better moral choice? The crucial distinction between relativism and pluralism is that while relativism does not assert any view as wrong, a pluralistic philosophy admits that there *are* wrong answers as well as many right answers. This is an important distinction for teachers to make because it helps students to see a perspective that does not dismantle the needed ethical distinction between right and wrong, but does reflect the complicated reality of there being more than one correct way to judge a situation. David Martinson puts it this way, “students must understand that being a tolerant person is not analogous to being ‘wishy-washy’” (119).

Indeed, in stark contrast to a wishy-washy position, William Perry has called such a pluralistic perspective “a position of commitment” where there is awareness of multiple right answers but also a recognition of a need to select from among them one course of action to follow. “Perry calls the position a committed one because... the young adult so

positioned is willing to choose a disciplined method for selecting a best answer and then to commit to the consequences of her/his choices” (qtd. in Holt-Reynolds 18). Such a committed position keeps the ethical partnership of choice and accountability intact while also highlighting the importance of a method of judgment and decision-making.

In a literature classroom, committed pluralism also opens the way for teachers to emphasize the important role of evidence in supporting any claim. Speaking to the same issue in a social studies setting, Martinson argues that the teacher must point out the enormous difference “between arriving at an informed opinion and believing something to be true based on prejudice, mental sloth, imprudence, or some combination of the three.” To this end, he concludes, “the teacher should insist that those supporting [any] viewpoint be capable of presenting evidence in support of their particular position” (120). Such recognition of the contestability of truth is not only a symptom of “good thinking” (Pithers and Soden 238), but a necessary safeguard against relativism and prejudice.

Of course, just because a student is able to support his or her case textually does not mean we cease to disagree. As Annette Kolodny clarifies, “adopting a ‘pluralist’ label... means only that we entertain the possibility that different readings, even of the same text, may be differently useful, even illuminating within different contexts of inquiry. It means, in effect, that we enter a dialectical process of examining, testing, even trying out the contexts...that led to disparate readings” (18). Conceding that even by using such a process “not all [readings] will be equally acceptable to every one,” Kolodny nevertheless calls attention to the ethical strand of such an approach when she reminds us that, “at the very least, because we will have grappled with the assumptions that led to [an interpretation], we will be better able to articulate *why* we find a particular

reading or interpretation adequate or inadequate.” Such an investigation, she concludes, “gives us access to its future possibilities, making us conscious, as R.P Blackmur put it, ‘of what we have done,’ ‘of what can be done next, or done again,’ or, I would add, of what can be done differently”(18-19).

In conclusion, although it is understandable that many English teachers, like the prospective ones in Holt-Reynolds’ study, may shy away from a teaching style of “learning by controversy,” the morality of such a system of gaining knowledge deserves careful consideration (Graff and Phelan 108). It is important to realize that although superficially such a system may look like an aggressive “symptom of a masculinist professional and cultural ethic,” the aim of such a process far from “determin[ing] who is the best critical prosecuting attorney or fastest critical gunslinger” (Graff and Phelan 108), is to help our students become open-minded and committed in approaching decisions. Capable of articulating why they support a certain position, students move toward recognizing (and encouraging) the equivalent right of others to do the same.

If we grant the ethics of a pluralistic methodology, the question in regards to our discussion then centers on how a performative teaching lens more easily encourages and empowers students to interpret Shakespeare from differing views. As mentioned earlier, the richness of performance’s interpretive power has become one of the most discussed selling points for collegiate professors and academic scholars eager to justify their switch to using performance in their classrooms. And this is for good reason. As my introductory discussion of the differences between performance and reading details, because of the fluidity of drama as well as the multiplicity of its creation, performance is a particularly potent tool for negotiating meaning and destabilizing a text. Further, because

performance pedagogy forces students to confront questions about blocking, voice inflection, facial expression, casting etc., it brings personal interpretation to the forefront and empowers student readings. Silent reading that does not approach the text with such questions in mind, in contrast, too often remains a passive exercise only concerned with trekking through the words on the page, or at best imagining the voice of the character speaking.

Such an argument is the foundation of many recent articles and books, such as MLA's compilation, *Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance*, whose variety of essays are united in contending that if we agree that Shakespeare's plays are stories full of contradictions and sticking points in meaning, these ambiguities in the script will inevitably come to a head as students confront the choices of performing a scene line by line, action by action (Riggio 1-18). In order to strengthen such accounts, and by way of practical example, let's look briefly at two different models of how performance can be used in the classroom in order to highlight the multiplicity of valid interpretations available in a Shakespeare play.

In *Much Ado About Nothing's* closing scene, Benedick and Beatrice's last verbal tilt concludes with the line and stage directions "[kissing her] Peace, I will stop your mouth" (5.4.96). In the Norton edition, this line is attributed to Benedick, and although this seems more than reasonable, a close look at the textual variants listed at the end of the play shows that it is not the only plausible possibility. Indeed in this case, and in many others like it, it is not only uncertain which character should be attributed this line, "Peace, I will stop your mouth," but it is also unclear who the stage business [kissing her] belongs to. Such textual indeterminacy abounds in Shakespeare due, in part, to the layers

of editors that have attempted to create an authoritative text where no original exists. This particular interpretive opportunity opens up the chance to point out such issues to a class, allowing students to debate the persuasiveness and effects of attributing this line and/or stage business to other characters—a discussion that is fueled by performative choices.

To illustrate this point, let's imagine that because Beatrice is the character speaking right before this line, with no attribution given, students argue that she could viably be the speaker. While her line attribution is an issue of textual indeterminacy located in the play as script, pushing the persuasiveness and consequences of such an interpretive choice brings the student to questions answered best through performance. For example, to explore why an editor might want to give the line to Benedick rather than Beatrice or to debate how attributing the line to Beatrice shapes meaning throughout the play, students will first have to determine the different options for playing this line via Beatrice. In other words, if Beatrice has the line *how* does she say it?

While this could be approached in a discussion (as I must do here), the real effects of such variations are better approached through performance. Perhaps two students act the scene out in such a way that when Benedick is about to open his mouth to keep his comebacks coming, Beatrice silences him with the line *sharply*. Perhaps a different performance has Beatrice say the line *in exasperation*, perhaps *in seduction*—initiating the kiss that follows. All of these choices have consequences and change meaning both in the scene and, arguably, for the entire play. Keeping with our definition of pluralism, such an exercise opens up the possibility of multiple “right” answers but also sets up a debate about why certain interpretations are more persuasive than others. Ultimately

such interpretations also reveal interesting biases on the parts of editors, directors, and the cultures such choices come out of and/or are aimed to please.

In addition to having the students act out a scene in class, using film adaptations is another good way to use performance to encourage interpretive debate. For even though many performance pedagogy advocates would agree with W.G Walton Jr. when he claims that “the most rewarding” way to teach Shakespeare through performance is “to get students performing,” most teachers would also agree with his assertion that “the most popular strategy...over the last two decades has been to bring professional performances to students through recordings, chiefly on video” (321). Walton even goes so far as to argue that while “the ascendancy of postformalist theories” and other factors are surely important, the technological advances that have made DVD and video recordings of Shakespeare ubiquitous are “the most important factor” in “the current performance revolution”(321). Undoubtedly, the ability to juxtapose different professional productions of a certain play, even a specific scene, without having to bank on the location and frequency of live performances greatly increases the usability of fully staged performance in the classroom. Moreover when it comes to using performance to demonstrate the spectrum of, and debate the validity of, differing interpretations of the same text, film recordings of Shakespeare are decidedly fruitful tools.⁸

In the Folger Library series, *Shakespeare Set Free*, a lesson plan focusing on the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* explains the usefulness of juxtaposing two different video productions of the famous moment saying, “Thus they [the students] will see with their own eyes that there is more than one way to read Shakespeare’s lines, that the best acting choices are based on the lines themselves, and that the lines were written for

actors” (O, Brien et al. 154). Note that this explanation hits on two of the key aspects of ethical pluralism we defined earlier—the idea that there are many right answers (here interpretations) coupled with the recognition that not all answers are equally valid (there is a clear principle here for discerning the best acting choices). Finally, emphasizing the engagement such a lesson plan is able to elicit, the teaching outline concludes that “if students, in viewing the video scene, voiced approval or argument about scene choices, you know they are seeing themselves in the role of director or actor—a very different role from that of a student laboring through an incomprehensible text” (O’Brien et al.155). Such a description of intended class dynamics makes it clear that in addition to the boon of personal engagement and understanding of the text (the usual justifications of performance pedagogy) such a lesson also creates an environment of pluralism—an environment that enhances ethical discernment.

Although our discussion so far has focused on pluralism’s general merit as a pedagogical stance that encourages intellectual and moral sophistication, its importance increases when its ethical implications are placed in the cultural context surrounding our students *today*. This is because in addition to growing up in a scholastic system focused on grades and right answers, today’s students are surrounded by political and cultural environments characterized by fear, sarcasm, and demonization. Unfortunately, a common alternative response to such contention and rigidity often mirrors the passive relativism illustrated by the prospective English teachers in Holt-Reynolds’ study, a move that is decidedly more tolerant but ultimately impotent and by definition a-moral. Sandwiched between such extremes, pluralism’s committed yet tolerant middle ground becomes an essential ethical alternative for students.

Speaking to these cultural trends in his 1997 article, “Unity, Liberty, Charity,” R.R Gaillardetz argues that the contemporary American political scene has been characterized by what he calls the “politics of demonization” (23). In the wake of 9/11 and the ongoing War on Terror, I would argue that such demonizing has reached even greater heights with just one illustration coming in the recent debates about torture and security. Such demonizing is marked more subtly by an increase in biting sarcasm and “embittered hostility directed toward those with whom one disagrees” (Martinson 119). Not surprisingly, such discomfort with respect-filled disagreement and diversity fills much of our radio and television. In the case of the many shows holding political debate, the problem is not a shortage of opposing views but rather, “the unwillingness to grant good intentions on the part of one’s opposition” (Gaillardetz 23). Unfortunately it is not hard to find examples of this on both sides of the political isle. Calling concern about the ozone layer “balderdash” and “poppycock,” conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh myopically concludes that the only people who disagree with his view are “environmental wackos”(“The Way Things Aren’t” ¶ 2). “Feminism,” he asserts on another occasion, “was established to allow unattractive women easier access to the mainstream of society (“Rush Limbaugh”1.7). From the democratic side of things we have presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton confessing that, “it’s crossed my mind that you could not be a Republican and a Christian” (qtd. in Kurtzman ¶ 1).

Although disagreement has not always meant disrespect, current political and cultural climates present an environment that often counts tolerance as moral laxity (Martinson 118), or conversely, (especially in younger circles), rejects the holding of a committed opinion as the epitome of ‘un-cool.’ And while the fireworks of name-calling

and the structure of winners and losers may be compelling entertainment, David Martinson rightly argues that “one must seriously consider whether it [such a structure] provides for increased understanding of the complex issues that affect contemporary society” (122).

As teachers we must realize that our students have been inundated with this type of intolerant and divisive dialogue. In contrast to it, and the backlash culture of “who cares,” we must try to foster a classroom environment in which well-supported conflicting ideas are respected and debated with sincerity. With its enticement to engage in creation and interpretation, performance is well suited to such a cause. Of course such complicated and pervasive societal problems are not going to be magically fixed in the debate and performance of Shakespeare in English classes. But, precisely because of Shakespeare’s cultural clout such a pluralistic perspective *in relation to him* does have increased importance. Coming to a realization that *his plays* are open to interpretation can be a critical impetus in empowering students in their ability to offer well-considered assertions. This can in turn shift the ways they negotiate meaning, and approach ethical issues more generally.

Behind these ethical concerns is a pragmatic point. Practically speaking, pluralism is a preferable stance from which to teach Shakespeare because of the shaping influence of editors, competing quartos, ambiguous stage directions and varied editions that are part and parcel of Shakespeare scholarship. Add to this the fact that the specific texts in question are dramatic scripts (written by a dead author) which will inevitably be interpreted as they are enacted, and the notion of teaching definitively on meaning in Shakespeare is untenable. Thus, Shakespeare is specifically set up for multiplicity. As

Robert Hapgood argues, “It is not merely that his plays are subject to interpretation by their performers and viewers; the same could be said of any play. To a unique degree, the variability of Shakespeare’s plays is built into them” (145)⁹

This being the case, it is somewhat ironic that in the switch that took Shakespeare from stage to page, Shakespeare’s scholastic authority, and maybe more importantly, the authority of those who interpreted him for us, has combined to create a cowering among students and scholars alike. The testimonial of Lawrence Levine noted in the Introduction is just one example among many scholars who have similarly questioned their “worth[iness] to work on Shakespeare” (5). As the appointed Shakespeare “scholar” among my own family and friends, I have witnessed a similar hesitancy and doubt regarding any attempt to enter the distinguished club of Shakespeare interpreters and practice the pluralism I have been valorizing. Like Levine, however, I have also seen these inadequacies minimized by attending a performance or even putting on a dramatic reading in the living room. Such experiences add to my conviction that performance is key in empowering and engaging people to see Shakespeare in this pluralistic light, and that once the barriers to Shakespeare *are* brought down, his clout actually works to magnify the ethical implications of such engagement.

I conclude with a discussion of Agnes Wilcox and her Prison Performing Arts organization. Agnes’ project puts on Shakespeare performances in Missouri prison and correctional facilities. The prisoners practice for months before putting on two performances, one for fellow prisoners and one for an outside audience of family and neighbors. Recently, through a radio broadcast of “This American Life,” host Ira Glass and reporter Jack Hill brought a part of that process to life for a more general audience by

interviewing the men in the Missouri Eastern Correctional Facility as they prepared and performed Act V of *Hamlet*. These men's experiences of approaching Shakespeare through performance shed important light on the ethical power of a pluralistic Shakespeare.

Asked why he would choose to participate in such a laborious process (and one that involves invasive security checks before and after each interaction with the cast), inmate Edgar Evans, who plays Claudius in the production, talks about the interplay of ideas and discussion of meaning that takes place in rehearsals. He concludes, "[director Agnes Wilcox] makes us feel human, man" (Act V). Inmate Bratt Jones echoes Edgar saying, "I think this keeps me sane" before adding, "I was surprised to find out that I'm not stupid" (Act V).

Reporter Jack Hill seemed somewhat similarly taken back by the *depth* of intelligent analysis the men offered about plot and character, realizing that after all, by their own admission most of these men had little or nothing to do with Shakespeare before their time in the prison performing group. When asked about differing interpretations of the play, the men were confident in their arguments and pleased to make them. Indeed, as I listened to the radio program, what struck me most was the inmates' clear recognition of the elevated respect and cultural power that comes along with engaging *Shakespeare*. In a paradoxical move, Shakespeare, the contemporary icon of education and class, had become the great equalizer; in the after performance mingle he was the common ground between university professor and prisoner.

Finally, a pluralistic perspective of a diversity of right answers as well as the necessity of persuasive evidence was a vital part of the structure of all these discussions.

In fact it was key to the ethics of the entire project. Such an intellectual environment, one inmate observed, such a structure of debate, emotion, and tolerance, contrasts starkly with the violence and inwardness characteristic of prison life (Act V). This is a powerful observation. For at its core such stark differences between the demeaning nature of a prison, and the empowerment of performing and discussing Shakespeare also point eloquently to the foundational ethics of a pluralistic methodology—like performance itself, its greatest strength, is a push to humanize.

CONCLUSION

In his seminal text, *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that contemporary culture has lost a meaningful sense of morality. All we truly possess, he claims, is the language of moral expression, “fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived”(2). Poignantly, MacIntyre diagnoses the modern sense of a fragmented self, that is distanced from relationships with community, as a dire consequence of such disconnection. Yet despite the catastrophic tenor of his concern, MacIntyre posits a possible road to redemption: connection. Appropriately, in the face of fragmentation and disconnect, MacIntyre’s entire work centers on finding a common history, a unifying theme in the historical-philosophical narrative that can *connect* us to the ethical understanding we have lost and, in the process, reconnect us to ourselves and to each other.

In my own discussion of the ethical potential of teaching Shakespeare through performance, connections across boundaries have proven an equally redemptive and potent theme and it is here that I look for conclusion. Specifically, using MacIntyre as a lens, I want to reiterate three connections that must be established not only for our teaching to be ethical, but also for any of our scholarly endeavors to have true meaning, true morality.

Connection Through Relationships

Central to my investigation of performance pedagogy has been the question of whether performance helps us to ethically connect to each other. This question should be the focal point of any ethical investigation because as MacIntyre claims, we find our moral identity “in and through [our] membership in communities such as those of the

family, the neighborhood, the city, and the tribe...” (221). Our discussion has specifically looked at the relational context of role-play, asking if acting a fictional part in a play can help us more compassionately connect to those we see as most different. In this issue, while I concede that complete empathy may be impossible, I have argued that the imperfection of performance’s claims for definitive empathy nevertheless foreground a more practical issue regarding ethical relationships: the benefit of even imperfect attempts to sympathize.

While we must continually be on guard against issues of containment and assimilation, I believe that we must also recognize that dehumanization and disconnection are too costly a price for fear of misappropriation and misunderstanding. Rather, precisely because of the importance of difference, and because of our recognition of the inescapability, and responsibility of relationships, we must continually strive to connect across divides regardless of the difficulty of being accepted in perfectly distinct and sympathetic terms. In the end, it will be easier to correct misrepresentation, and approach true, ethical relationships with those most unlike us, if we balance our important claims of diversity with a foundational acceptance of our equal and binding humanity. As my third chapter details, learning to debate difference without disrespect is a vital step toward learning the types of discussions that such reconnection will require.

Lastly, as we have talked so much about role-play in the sense of performing a character in a play and how such acting can connect us to each other, we should not forget that in real life our conception of the roles we play also presupposes the centrality of relationships in our lives. After all, in naming our roles: daughter, sister, wife, teacher, friend, student etc., we quickly see that all of these identities are defined through

relationships. Thus a play, or a life, based on the idea of roles inherently assumes the significance of relationships. Such a conception of reality is a vital counter to the inevitable destruction of selfishness, dehumanization and moral solipsism so prevalent today.

Connections Across Academic Boundaries

Rebutting critiques of the shortcomings of his interdisciplinary approach to *After Virtue*, MacIntyre points out that his particular argument required him to write in a manner that “made [it] clear how [his] thesis was deeply incompatible with the conventional academic disciplinary boundaries, boundaries which so often have the effect of compartmentalizing thought in a way that distorts or obscures key relationships” (264). The interdisciplinary nature of my own project, which I have described in terms of an intersection of four roads: theory, theatre, teaching Shakespeare, and ethics—underscores my own similar belief in the virtue of such connection over division, and the value of an interdisciplinary approach to finding truth. Like MacIntyre, I would argue that while the scope of my argument may leave me open to critiques from specialists in any one of these four fields, the implications of such a frame are important in asserting that ethics and knowledge are best viewed from multiple sides.

For MacIntyre, the partitioning of academic knowledge is intimately connected to the fragmentation of the self and modern (mis)understanding of morality. I would similarly contend that in order to truly empower our scholastic endeavors, and to apply specialized discovery to real life issues, we must eschew a construction of truth and knowledge as compartmentalized canons. One practical way to do this will be to learn to write in such a way that those beyond our specialized academic discourse can understand

and participate in our discussions. We must also be careful that our current cultural pressures to over-specialize do not whittle down our perspective until it is useless to any but the most specialized concerns. One important way to reach across academic boundaries, then, is to ground our research and teaching in concerns that reach across disciplinary boundaries. As a lens, ethics might provide such a context—assuming we are able to cross one last connection.

Re-Connecting Ethics and Academics

The last disconnect that needs to be bridged if we are to make our scholastic endeavors meaningful and moral is the divide between academics and ethics, between moral education and intellectual training. Of course, such compartmentalization was not always in vogue. “According to Aristotle,” MacIntyre reminds us, “excellence of character and intelligence [could not] be separated.” And yet, MacIntyre concludes, such a view has become “characteristically at odds with that dominant in the modern world” (154). For MacIntyre the results of this fragmentation have been disastrous. In his aptly titled essay, “Cultivating the Moral Character of Learning and Teaching: A Neglected Dimension of Educational Leadership,” R.J. Starratt makes a similar case arguing that in “societies dedicated to human rights and civil liberties, schools are meant to help young people grow toward a fuller humanity, to develop ... ‘human capabilities’,” but that as a society we are neglecting this vital role of education (400).

Both of these claims and concerns mirror the foundational argument of my own project, which likewise has attempted to serve as a call to re-connect and re-examine performance pedagogy through an ethical lens. Moreover, by affirming the interconnectedness of ethics and academics, particularly in regards to the humanities, I

have tried to show that ethics are not “a kind of value-added, icing-on-the-cake supplement to the more basic intellectual character of learning,”(Starratt 410), but rather an inseparable part of the ‘intellectual’ pursuits of a classroom. I would further these claims to all of our scholastic endeavors, both in teaching and research, asserting that in an important sense, this argument makes a humanizing assumption about both our students and us. By reconnecting our ethical concerns with our academic pursuits we are implying that we are not divided beings, learning ethics in church and thinking in schools. Such a conception also heightens the importance and applicability of our work, allowing academic discourse to speak to the most important aspects of our life.

Lastly, I want to return to the goals I outlined for this project, for they too speak to this desire to reconnect the abstract sterility of academics to the issues of morality. In my introduction I said that I hoped to stimulate as much as to convince and to open rather than close the doors of my discussion. Reiterating that desire, I encourage and invite criticism of my claims regarding the ethics of teaching Shakespeare through performance. For while I stand by my assertions, such debates would ultimately fulfill my own goal of refocusing our academic discussions on questions of human relationships and issues of compassion and community—of ethics. As long as such critiques were focused on *how* best to connect to the Other, *how* the teaching, or acting, or researching and writing about fictional characters and worlds can most powerfully help us to live more ethically in our own, *how* we can learn to engage in debate that is open and yet committed to choice and accountability—if such questions, and others like them, are at the center of the critiques and discussion spurred by my work, by its own terms it will have been a success.

NOTES

¹ Although Shakespeare was included in school primers early on and before being granted iconic status, the fundamental switch alluded to here focuses on the switch that would take him beyond primers to an author elevated to scholarly status.

² It is no accident that directly after this initial description of Desdemona's infidelity, Iago's language becomes replete with imagery: "It is impossible you should see this, Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, as salt as wolves in pride" (3.3.405-409) and more vividly, "In sleep I heard him (Cassio) say 'Sweet Desdemona...' And then sir, would he grip and wring my hand, Cry, 'O, sweet creature!', then kiss me hard, As if he plucked up kisses by the roots, That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o'er my thigh, And sigh, and kiss, and then cry 'Cursed fate, That gave thee to the Moor!'"(3.3.423-430). Iago has recognized that Othello's imagination is the most potent tool in giving his fears life. It is only after Othello's imagined visualization of Cassio with Desdemona that he shifts his stance on his wife's innocence, "Give me a living reason she's disloyal"(3.3.414). The question is no longer 'if' but 'why.'

³ It is granted that strictly by this reasoning actors as a population should prove to be more morally and ethically aware than the average population. While this does not necessarily seem to be the case there are far too many other factors involved, e.g. money, fame, and of course individuality etc., to conclude on how acting itself affects each particular actor's ethics, tolerance etc.

⁴ This perspective can be both a physical perspective change due to the student-actor actually enacting the blocking of the scene as well as the perspective that comes from the more emotional charge to react to other character's lines and generally filter the action of the play from that one viewpoint.

⁵ I am using the term 'containment' here as Stephen Greenblatt uses it to talk about the subtle crushing of subversion. Much like a prison contains a prisoner from escaping, a hegemonic system tries to contain ideas and theories that would threaten its supremacy. This containing process is often more similar to a type of assimilation rather than a direct confrontation and hence can more easily be cloaked in a rhetoric of empathy.

⁶ See *Ideology and the State* for an in depth discussion of Althusser's depiction of Ideology. On page 152 of that work he defines Ideology as "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."

⁷ For a full critique of Althusser on this issue see "Marxism's Althusser: Toward a Politics of Literary Theory" by James H. Kavanagh.

⁸ For a good in-depth discussion of how to use film adaptations in the classroom see "Part IV: Films and Electronic Resources" in *Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance*, Ed. Milla Cozat Riggio.

⁹ It is noteworthy that Hapgood is careful to balance such language by recognizing what he terms "controlled variability," in the spectrum of viable interpretations available. Using a metaphor of a deck of cards "from which, in performance, many hands may be dealt and played," Hapgood reveals himself as a performance advocate who still recognizes the text as a limiter in what can or cannot be created. In this way, his grounding assumption about the authority of the script would limit what could otherwise destabilize any principled method of judging between interpretations.

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