



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1979 Volume V: Strategies for Teaching Literature

Shakespeare:Active and Eclectic

Curriculum Unit 79.05.01
by Chris Angermann

I usually introduce Shakespeare as a popular *playright* who wrote for a mass audience. Were he alive today, he'd probably work in Hollywood or for TV, turning out juicy documentaries, disaster epics, soap operas and episodes for *Fantasy Island* . I offer examples: *Watergate Classics—The Tragedy of King Richard* , *Twelve Nights to Live* , *All's Well in the Family* (with an explanation that “well” also meant “dead” 400 years ago).

I set the historical stage: Shakespeare's society, like ours, was in turmoil. International conflicts—with Spain and the Pope—abounded during Elizabeth I's reign. Her secretary Walsingham set up an extensive spy network in England and on the continent (his agents wielded a heavy hand in the execution of Mary Queen of Scots). Political intrigue surrounded Elizabeth's succession. Catholics, Jews, Martinists, foreigners suffered persecution at various times. Plague visited the cities periodically, like Legionnaire,s disease and economic depression. People brandished swords and daggers in public and killed each other with them, occasionally in broad daylight. Pubs and whorehouses were popular . . . So much for the highlights. Most people tried to survive with their families and live quiet lives.

When I have drawn divers and sundry parallels to contemporary events (CIA, handguns, drugs, racism, etc.), I start with *Macbeth* , the Idi Amin among the ancient Scots.

My primary goal for this first play is to remove the expectation of failure , the feeling many students get after the first few speeches: “Oh, my God, I'll never understand this.” I try to anticipate and reassure: “Don't worry if everything doesn't make sense at first. You'll find that it gets easier as we go along. There are words here that *I* still have to look up . . . ”

At the same time I want students to experience how exciting Shakespeare can be as a dramatist . His plays contain love, passion, fools, ghosts, kidnapping, rape, murder and mutilation, slapstick and swordplay, corny jokes and clowns. He had to compete, after all, with such attractions as bearbaiting and public executions. A brief description of “breaking on the wheel” or “disemboweling after hanging” makes the point well. ¹ This is not to say that Shakespeare's times were bloodier or less “civilized” than ours, but that brutality was a more direct part of most people's experience.

I also want students to get a sense of the difference between theater and literature . Shakespeare's plays were scripts intended for performance first; and that is how we should approach them. They were meant to be *seen and heard* . When the Bard was interested in literature and immortality, he wrote sonnets and narrative poems.

At least read the plays out loud with your students. Assign parts (the heftier roles to the better readers; you'll know they're hooked when they start to compete for parts) and encourage dramatic reading. If you can count on regular attenders, you might occasionally make up a ditto in the form of a broad-side *program*, listing students' names and the characters they'll play that class period.

Arrange the chairs in the room for each scene. That may be a little tedious at times, but it makes a point. You can get students to think about how to set the stage. A throne room in a castle, Duncan at the head, preferably above the others (he could sit on a desk). For battle scenes divide the class into camps. This also works well for *Romeo and Juliet* to indicate the enmity between the Capulet and Montague houses. Balcony scenes present more difficulties; window sills, in rooms that gave them, might provide a partial solution. Have students walk in procession to indicate a long journey (as was the custom on Shakespeare's stage). They might think some of this silly, but it will sharpen their attention to setting; and they will probably like the change of classroom atmosphere and convention. If "all the world's a stage," why not the classroom?

Repeat certain scenes to get a more emotional delivery of the lines, or to experience the flow of a smoother reading once linguistic difficulties have been cleared up. Take small parts or difficult speeches yourself on occasion and deliver them with dramatic fervor. (I usually do one of the witches in the first act of *Macbeth* in my most maliciously nasal voice, braving my students' titters and pitying glances—they think it's weird, but they love it too!) Some students will begin to take similar risks in their reading once they've become more comfortable with the lines. Some will get *louder*, and that's a small victory.

Stop the reading when you feel like it: to explain a word, a whole speech, a recurring image (time, blood, disguise in *Macbeth*), a character's motivation (the subtext), a pun, a point of theater, of set, of costume, of stage convention ("Why sinks that cauldron?" in *Macbeth*, IV, i, 106?—Shakespeare's stage had trapdoors), of how a scene relates to yesterday's news bulletin, to today's incident in school. If you're on, there will be a rhythm to *your* performance, and you'll know when to break in, when to let something pass—no one the first time through *Hamlet* needs to know *all* the words or comprehend *all* the imagery. Perhaps most students will remember only the names of major characters and the plot. It's okay. That certainly was me on *Hamlet* in high school.

You can hardly fail with *Macbeth*. Witches, black magic, corruption, deceit, lust for power, blood, guilt, madness, battles, grisly murders—ACTION; relatively short speeches (although the imagery is often dense); and perhaps most important of all—Two Fascinating CHARACTERS. Adolescents identify deeply with the people they read and hear about as a way of testing their own desires, limits, fantasies. They may not *like* Macbeth and his Lady, but they'll find them compelling.

Also, there's Douglas Campbell's educational film trilogy about *Macbeth*. Campbell provides a model for how a *director* approaches the play with loving irreverence as a text for performance. He interrupts scenes to comment on dramatic structure, character, poetry, meaning, interpretation—always from the perspective of the stage. The acting is credible, at times moving, especially in Macbeth's soliloquies following the murder of Duncan and the appearance of Banquo's ghost. Campbell's overall approach to the play is psychological. He treats the witches, for example, as projections of Macbeth's psyche and uses *film* techniques anticipating Polanski's *Macbeth* to visualize his contention. Whatever you may think of his interpretation, his films have the virtue of dissecting *Macbeth* as a Problematic Script to Grapple With. (Students can identify with "problematic" and "grapple" from their own experiences with the play.)

When your students have made it through this play and feel successful—Great! They've waded through the

knottiest language they'll encounter until the directions for their income tax returns (and *Macbeth* tends to be more rewarding). If they haven't drowned, they'll be ready for more; and they've probably felt some of the witches' phosphorus bubbling through their veins. In discussions and assignments about the play, they should discover *Macbeth* inside themselves, as a contemporary phenomenon (recent parallels can begin to bridge historical and cultural gaps: Remember the stories of Nixon drunk and reeling through the White House gallery, talking to the portraits of former Presidents, before his resignation). With Campbell's films they've had a sound introduction to Shakespeare as theater.

Although most students are fascinated by theater, they're also scared of it. They prefer to go to the movies or watch TV. Many have never seen a live professional play! The prohibitive cost of theater tickets has something to do with this, as well as ethnic expectations of what "culture" to pursue. But I suspect there are deeper reasons as well. Theater is an engaging, sharing, collective experience: a process that takes place between actors and audience. Emotionally, it is less safe than other visual media—more of a challenge. At its best, more intense, more rewarding.

The active approach I have suggested with Shakespeare is one way to begin overcoming students' wariness. In a limited way they'll have reproduced the theatrical process by becoming performers and audience for each other. Inviting actors into your classroom to perform scenes and to discuss them with students afterward is another step. Taking students to see plays is also important; but especially with Shakespeare it's useful to lay additional groundwork first. Students must gain a sense that there is positive value in the difference between theater and TV in character, setting, conventions, the force of spoken language, for example. (This in addition to bridging a 400-year gap in history, culture and language). Until then, films of Shakespeare's plays—*Romeo and Juliet*, *Taming of the Shrew* by Zeffirelli, and Polanski's *Macbeth*—are the best productions for students to see.

Two Gentlemen of Verona (TGV)—a good contrast to *Macbeth*—can be used to explore some of these issues and to provide comic relief from the dark, twisted Scottish landscape. Students will coast through its sunny, northern—Italian setting without much effort and enjoy the scenery along the way. As one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, it has the advantage of short speeches, simpler language; and you can trim it easily without mutilating it fatally. (See below for suggested cuts).

TGV examines the conflict between romantic love and friendship, offers a wry view of Love-at-first-sight ("Love is blind," says Speed, servant to Sir Valentine), and treats True Love, Fidelity and Faithlessness with gentle parody. The play teems with passionate outbursts, cute jokes, bawdy banter, deceptions, disguises (verbal and costume) and misunderstandings. Its wonderfully silly finish will provoke double-takes among your students: Proteus apologizes for trying to seduce and rape Valentine's Silvia. Valentine says, "'Then I am paid;/And once again do receive thee honest.'" Five lines later he adds a bizarre generosity to forgiveness and offers Silvia to Proteus, presumably out of friendship. (He is a little dense throughout most of the play.) Only Julia's well-timed fainting and revealing herself undisguised to Proteus saves the day and helps to align the marriages properly.

One of the marvelous things about *TGV* for teaching is its treasury of mistakes. The play is like a colorful summer coat patched together by an inexperienced but gifted apprentice. The seams are showing, but we can use it and enjoy it and learn from it, seams and all.

There is much confusion about where *TGV* takes place. Except for the title, there is no indication that the two gentlemen—Proteus and Valentine—come from Verona. But if the opening scenes play there, then Valentine embarks for Milan (Act I, i) by ship—quite an undertaking, as a brief glance at a map shows! Most of *TGV*

seems in fact to be set in Milan; yet Speed welcomes Proteus' servant, Launce, to Padua (Act II, v). The Duke, Silvia's father, says that he is in love with a "lady in Verona here" (Act III, i) to trick Valentine into betraying his plan to elope with Silvia. But Proteus and Thurio, intending to serenade Silvia (Act IV, ii), plan to meet at Saint Gregory's well, which was in Milan. Later (Act IV, iii) Silvia says she will travel to Mantua to meet Valentine, who has been banished by her father. ³ There are many other inconsistencies. Students might enjoy playing detective, discovering other clues to Shakespeare's carelessness when it came to details in his scripts. As a playwright and man of the theater he clearly had other priorities.

Whatever surmises and explanations the critics have offered—forgetfulness, printing errors, hurried rewriting, cuts and additions during performances—they are not very important. Time and place are frequently out of joint in Shakespeare—even in the Roman and English history plays—and deliberately so. Naturalism hadn't been invented yet, realism wasn't the goal, the classical "well-made" play a thing of the past and future. Unlike TV and the movies, Elizabethan theater never pretended to show reality as people *saw* it around them. For students it's useful to present *TGV* as a puzzle whose solution emerges because the pieces won't fit neatly together. The point is that we're *not* in Milan or Verona or Mantua, but *on a stage*. The SETTING is artificial: an imaginary place, a magical world, a fantasy realm. Its reality is emotional and analytical, germane to a set of problems, issues, situations. That perception, I think, is crucial for grasping what theater—especially Shakespeare's theater—is about. (It's also very helpful when dealing with *Measure for Measure*, for example.)

I also want to use *TGV* as a developmental bridge between *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure* in regard to CHARACTER. Macbeth dominates his play thoroughly. He becomes so powerful, so overwhelming a presence for students that they often resist objectifying him for "merely" didactic purposes. The two gentlemen of Verona are less complex and engaging, yet better models for demonstrating that CHARACTER can have different functions on stage, that it is not always the most important aspect of a play.

Valentine addresses Proteus by name in the very first line of *TGV*. Ask your students what "Proteus" means. ⁴ Don't they think that's a weird name for a person? (Of course, after the Scottish nobles, they'll tell you all names in Shakespeare are strange!) Tell them about the sea god of Greek mythology who could alter his shape at will and who gave us another word for changeable—protean. Many in Shakespeare's audience would have known that. What's the point? You know you can't trust this guy Proteus before he ever opens his mouth! What's the point of knowing that? Leave that an open question, if your students don't know.

Valentine is an easier matter because of Valentine's Day. Shakespeare already had this sense in mind when he has Launce describe Silvia's Paramour: "'There's not a hair on's head but 'tis a Valentine'" (Act III, i). Valentine actually comes from the Latin *valere*: to be well, healthy, strong. His association with "sweetheart" probably stems from the fact that St. Valentine's Day coincided with the Roman Lupercalia, a fertility festival.

In *TGV*'s cosmogoly of Love and Friendship, Valentine inhabits the sphere of Truth and Fidelity. Proteus, like the phases of the moon, embodies Love's unpredictable, weathervane aspects. Recognizing the clues in a character's name will prove helpful to students later when they confront Angelo, the would-be saint turned fallen angel, in *Measure for Measure*. ⁵ They might also see that Proteus and Valentine's purpose in *TGV* is to be neither central characters like Macbeth, nor mere agents in a cute PLOT of love triangles. Shakespeare meant them to tell us something about *Amour* in the process. This realization is crucial for *Measure* where Angelo, Isabella, Claudio, Lucio and the Duke are compelling CHARACTERS, yet ultimately secondary to the working out of the play's issues.

Another important function of character *on stage* occurs in Act V, ii, when Thurio asks Proteus how Silvia feels

about him. Julia (in disguise as Proteus' "boy") listens in on the exchange:

Thu. Sir Proteus, what says Silvia to my suit?

Pro. O sir, I find her milder than she was,

And yet she takes exceptions at your person.

Thu. What? That my leg is too long?

Pro. No, that it is too little.

Thu. I'll wear a boot, to make it somewhat rounder.

Jul. [Aside] But love will not be spurr'd to what it loathes.

.

Thu. What says she to my valour?

Pro. O Sir, she makes no doubt of that.

Jul. [Aside] She needs not, when she knows it cowardice.

Thu. What says she to my birth?

Pro. That you are well derived.

Jul. [Aside] True: from a gentleman to a fool.

To whom is Julia speaking here? To herself, certainly; but to us as well. Her barbed commentary mediates between the action (verbal) on stage and the audience. In a performance I can imagine her addressing us directly. This is different from soliloquies (Macbeth's, Proteus' Act II, iv and vi), in which we overhear a character's inner thoughts at a point when he thinks himself alone. When Julia makes fun of Thurio, she half steps out of her role for our benefit. Her mockery deflates his pretentiousness for us, while teaching us a lesson: "Love will not be spurr'd . . ." The didactic impulse behind that statement is mild and passes quickly; but it serves a purpose nonetheless.

In the first interview between Angelo and Isabella—she has come to plead for her brother Claudio's life—(*Measure*, Act II, ii), Lucio acts as such an intermediary character. Encouraging Isabella (audible only to her and to us), he comments on the exchange between her and Angelo: "Ay, touch him: there's the vein" (1.70); "That's well said" (1.111); "Thou'rt i'th' right; more o'that" (1.130); "Go to: 'tis well; away" (1.157). Like a good sportscaster Lucio draws out attention to the subtler levels of the game, to well-executed plays, to the essential *issues* of the *argument*, giving them equal weight to the emotional conflict and the contestants.

Students might not accept that description of Lucio since the argument itself and the characters engaged in it are so compelling. But I think they can see how Julia speaks directly to them. Since she is also the most likeable character in *TGV*, the most appealing to students, her pivotal role in the *dramatic* structure of the play can benefit our teaching concerns. In her part the disguise and deception imagery of *Macbeth* becomes,

as it were, embedded in the verbal and visual structure of *TGV*. In a play where nothing means just one thing, where people pun incessantly, lie to one another and themselves, disguise their motives and desires, Julia is *in disguise*.

Dressed as a boy to hide her identity from others, especially Proteus, her language must be cloaked as well. Language has double meaning for most characters in *TGV*, and they know it, use it, delight in it. (This is different from SUBTEXT, which refers to a character's MOTIVATION beneath the words.) You can point to this double-edged use of speech in Lady Macbeth's welcome to Duncan: "'All our service/ In every point twice done, and then done double,'" (*Macbeth*, I, vi). But a more accessible scene, I think, occurs in *TGV* (Act IV, ii), when Julia, disguised, overhears Proteus serenading Silvia. The Host who brought her to the spot notices her discomfort:

Host How now? Are you sadder than you were before? How do you, man? The music likes you not.

Jul. You mistake: the musician likes me not.

Host Why, my pretty youth?

Jul. He plays false, father.

Host How, out of tune on the strings?

Jul. Not so; but yet so false that he grieves my very heartstrings.

.

Host I perceive you delight not in music.

Jul. Not a whit, when it jars so.

Host Hark, what a fine change is in the music.

Jul. Ay; that change is the spite.

Host You would have them always play but one thing?

Jul. I would always have one play but one thing.

The host apparently has one conversation with Julia (although there are hints that he knows her incognito), but we in the audience know she means something else. Double-messages in love, dating, day-to-day life often lead to pain, disappointments and fights. Students are aware of this purposeful uncertainty in language. (Another good example most students will be familiar with are the double—entendres in James Bond movies.) But it's useful to make students aware of the more serious possibilities in Shakespeare, particularly in view toward *Measure*, where the double meanings and duplicity become more charged.

Julia's costumed cover also anticipates the Duke in *Measure* under cover. Like Lucio in Act II, ii, he becomes an interceding figure between the action on stage and the audience. The Duke controls the strings to the plot almost like a stage manager. More importantly, his disguised presence—known only to us—assures us not to worry. The tragic tide will be turned in time, all will be well at the end. At the same time, by removing our

suspense in the outcome, Shakespeare invites us to witness the resolution with some detachment, to give more than equal billing to the issues. But rather than direct students' attention to how the dramatic structure accomplishes this, let the machinery work its effect first.

Before delving a bit deeper into *Measure*, though, a few last comments about *TGV*. The play can be used as a springboard into other complex plays as well. The scenes of Julia and her maid, Lucetta, anticipate the bantering exchanges between Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. The clowning obscenities of Launce (Proteus' servant) are a good warm-up for Mercutio's bawdy cynicism, or Lucio's lecherous humor. Never be afraid of Shakespeare's coarser language. It's a great hook for students. I've had marvelous discussions about the word *codpiece*—Julia and Lucetta bandy it about in Act II, vii of *TGV*—ranging from initial disbelief and nervous laughter to philosophical explorations of etymology and why words change. (The opening of *Romeo and Juliet* is also quite sexy, aggressively so, and could give rise to some terrific class discussions. ⁶)

Finally there is the question of the happy end. Valentine says to Proteus, (Act V, iv): “our day of marriage shall be yours/ One feast, one house, one mutual happiness. Some students may feel—quite rightly—that this assertion of communion and happy-ever-after after all that's happened has a hollow ring. Encourage such comments. Solicit them by asking how long these marriages will last. What kind of relationship will Proteus and Julia have after their wedding? A bit of healthy skepticism here paves the way for *Measure for Measure*, in which marriage becomes a curious means of resolving apparently irreconcilable conflicts.

Measure for Measure combines the darker shades of love, lust, sex, with characters who, like Macbeth, have some difficulties wielding power. The play contains some of Shakespeare's more lecherous humor, as well as some disgust with sexuality. It raises complex moral and emotional issues: questions of law and injustice, authority and repression, mercy and forgiveness, life and death, human nature and the need for social order; its unorthodox, yet Catholic, religious atmosphere should appeal to a large number of our students.

Critics used to label *Measure* one of Shakespeare's problem plays. To the degree that it's true, we're in luck. For the problems the play raises engage us almost against our will. Ideally, we should read it twice with our students—once to experience it, then to examine what it seeks to tell us more dispassionately.

Measure's force comes not from busy ACTION. There are no assassinations, no murders, no sword-fights. No one has his eyes put out in full view of the audience. The pivotal sexual encounter between Angelo and Isabella's stand-in, Marianna, happens far away off-stage. The only visual theatrics result from the Duke's disguise as a friar: He must endure Lucio's slanderous remarks (Act III, ii and Act IV, iii); and he reveals himself in his true shape (Act V). The rest is arguments, disagreements, discussions, convoluted plot and a long tribunal-trial sequence (the whole fifth act).

The intensity of the play is the result of relentless confrontations between irreconcilable forces embodied in powerful characters. *Measure* works its magic by presenting us with passionate figures—Isabella, Claudio, Angelo—people we want to identify with—and whisks them out of the spotlight just as we begin to care for them. In part there lies a key to the play: answers to the dilemmas it raises do not lie within the scope of individual characters.

If students become dissatisfied—appropriately so—turn their reactions toward exploring *why*. Why does Angelo disappear from our sight for two acts at the point when he's become interesting, revealing his inner conflicts and struggles to us in his soliloquies. (It's as if Shakespeare had dropped Macbeth following his doubts about the assassination of Duncan, and spent the rest of the play on Macduff.) Why does Isabella move into the background after her magnificent debates with Angelo, becoming merely a cog in the Duke's

machinations? The perception from *TGV* of the stage as a stage is useful here. Although set in Vienna, *Measure's* actual SETTING is more of an arena, a laboratory in which the Duke, like a behavioral scientist, manipulates others to see what happens. As he says of Angelo, after giving him absolute power, "Hence shall we see/ If power change purpose, what our seemers be" (Act I, iii).

During the first reading, though, keep to the characters. Ask about Isabella's attitude toward virginity. Is she merely a prude? What about Claudio? Is his request that his sister sacrifice herself for him unreasonable? Students will probably dislike Angelo and prefer the Duke for his fatherly, positive traits. You might ask them how they feel about his treatment of Isabella, causing her terrible anguish by lying about her brother's escape from execution. (The Duke has a psychotic side: in his own way he is as unable to wield power graciously as Angelo. He enjoys manipulating people. *Measure* suggests aspects of power that *Macbeth* can't touch.)

Angelo presents a different problem for students. Although he is probably the most modern character in the play, students may want to reject him. He is too close to home. Repressing his feelings and desires, he becomes especially vulnerable to them. Make him contemporary without referring to his youth. He has counterparts in politicians and church leaders who rail against prostitution in public, and occasionally get caught with their pants down during police raids on brothels or Chapel-and-Howe. Angelo's phenomenon of incorporating power and insatiable sexual appetite has analogies to recent stories about John F. Kennedy and the private lives of various members of Congress. For other expressions on Shakespeare's part of the conflict between head and heart, libido and conscience, primal lust and civilized limits, there are two sonnets (see below) you can read.

If students balk at the melodramatic premise of the play—Angelo's invoking an ancient law that punishes fornication by death—remind them of some of our own Puritan excesses. Until 1970 in New Haven police spied through windows to catch people cohabiting and copulating without a marriage license. It is still illegal in Connecticut to live with more than 4 unrelated people in the same apartment. Remind them of the man in Texas who received 30 years for possessing 1 joint of marijuana (1968). Refer them to the Islamic code which obtains in several Arab countries, that punishes adultery with death and includes stoning as one form of execution.

At least do the first Angelo-Isabella interview a number of times. Experiment with staging and its effect: Have the two main characters face each other closely—Lucio and the Provost behind Isabella and Angelo respectively. Put Angelo and Isabella across the room from each other, Lucio at her side, requiring the antagonists to shout. Seat Angelo and Isabella facing each other, Lucio like an (im)partial referee between them. Return to the scene after you've finished the play once. Show students how the situation imagined in Isabella's words to Angelo,

I would to heaven I had your potency,

And you were Isabel! Should it them be thus?

No; I would tell what 'twere to be a judge,

And what a prisoner.

(Act II, ii)

actually occurs in Act V, when Isabella pleads for Angelo's life. Then demonstrate how the warring

positions—absolute, unyielding justice and mercy—are debated, explored, confronted in the context of Angelo’s finding in himself what he condemned in Claudio: sexual desire. Yet the two positions end up farther apart than at the start of the interview.

The second encounter (Act II, iv) is more difficult; the language denser, more layered. Students should have no difficulty, however, getting the main thrust: Angelo’s becoming clearer and increasingly forceful about his sexual demands on Isabella. Returning to the scene a second time, you might point out how Angelo and Isabella’s roles become reversed. Now he is the aggressive suppliant, she steadfast in her denial.

You might also contrast these scenes with the encounters between Lucio and the Duke in Act III and IV. The conflict here is comic—tall tales about the Duke’s amorous adventures, which the Duke in disguise cannot refute. There is no resolution here either. The trickster, Lucio, refuses to be truthful; and dramatically, this has a point. The Duke in disguise, after all, is falsifying himself too!

Lucio is very important in *Measure*, playing a number of roles and functions. Always ready in “obscenity” for comic relief, he aids Claudio, supports and encourages Isabella (Act I and II), while drawing us into the issues of the play directly. Later he becomes a foil for the Duke, incorrigible in his bawdy cynicism. His “Nay, friar, I am a kind of burr, I shall stick” (Act IV, iii) has a prophetic ring, and it explains why the Duke finds it so hard to forgive him at the end. Lucio has ruffled his feathers too successfully, attacked him where he feels vulnerable; he prefers to remain a burr—honestly unrepentant. Lucio remains the dark, lecherous, libidinal, rebellious force that the Duke works so hard to contain and banish from his realm.

Which brings us to the resolution. As an answer to the law of “measure for measure,” tit for tat, an eye for an eye, the Duke proposes an enforced compromise—legal justice tempered with mercy: marriage. ⁷ Marriage here seems a kind of punishment; certainly for Angelo and Lucio, perhaps for the Duke himself and Isabella too? I suspect Shakespeare had no such shadowy reading in mind; but who knows? Considering the current and still rising divorce rates, the end of *Measure for Measure* contains a subversive dash of irony. Nevertheless, the resolution is open to debate, and should remain so in our classrooms.

I think the sequence: *Macbeth*—*Two Gentlemen of Verona* —perhaps *Romeo and Juliet* —culminating in *Measure for Measure* will offer students an exciting experience of Shakespeare as a contemporary presence in their lives. It will also begin to give them a sense of the unique value of theater. I would hope that all students—advanced, special or otherwise—would meet Shakespeare this way initially. If they’re serious about English, they’ll get plenty of literary analysis and formal criticism in college. If they’re not going on, better that they see the Bard as a marvelous playmaker who can speak to them—not a difficult, tedious unit in high school English. Perhaps at some future point they’ll turn to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on TV instead of re-runs of *Mork and Mindy* . Who knows?

Suggested Cuts

Two Gentlemen of Verona

Act I, i, 11 21-28

42-50

ii, 11 93-98

Act II, i, 11 49-59

	iii, 11 1-32	Launce's speech—if there is time, try it; but it is full of visual implications that require close reading and interpreting. Slowing it down loses the humor.
vi, 11 6-16		
vii, 11 25-32		
Act III, i, 11 13-21		
11 262	after “knave”—374 (end of scene). This is mostly verbal banter. Unless you have a class willing to swim through a sea of puns—most of them put-downs of women—skip it.	
ii, 11 72-87		
Act IV, iv, 11 1-39	This speech by Launce is the most accessible of his monologues, but it contributes little to the action.	
11 198-201		

Measure for Measure

Act I, i, 11 3-9	“ . . . work.”
11 29	“Thyself . . .”—42
ii, 11 1-44	This plunges us right into Lucio and Mistress Overdone—perhaps a bit too quickly; but it avoids some obscure, obscene puns that would slow things down too much.
11 161-173	
Act II, i,	have Escalus exit, then cut 11 41-283 (end of scene) don't exit the Provost and go directly to: Pro. “Is it your will . . .” (17), cutting
ii, 11 1-6	
Act II, iv, 11 1-17	Angelo's second soliloquy—too dense and difficult to tell students much.
Act III, i, 11 19	“thou art . . .”—41 “ . . . these odds all even”
ii, 11 6-9	
11 43	“ . . . what, at the wheel”—51
11 210-251	
Act IV, ii, 11 26-51	
iii, 11 1-20	Pompey's first speech (same problem as with Launce)
v, 11 1-13	The whole scene

2 Sonnets for *Measure for Measure*

Two of Shakespeare's sonnets strike me as especially apt for the dilemma Angelo finds himself in. If you're interested in combining the literary Bard with the playwright, they might provide an easy entry into the poems, since the dramatic force of Angelo's struggles will clarify their emotional issues.

Sonnet 94

They that have pow'r to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow;
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flow'r is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die;
But if that flow'r with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worst than weeds.

Sonnet 129

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and, till action, lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;

Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind a dream.
All this the world knows well; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

Notes

1. See annotation on A. Burgess, *Nothing Like the Sun*, in bibliography.

2. A. M. Nagler, *Shakespeare's Stage*, p. 23

3. The Arden Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Clifford Leech, ed., p. 17.

Lecch catalogues 20 such “mistakes” in the introduction and lists another 21 internal inconsistencies between various scenes, relating to characters.

4. I often, as a related activity, have students think of names with obvious meanings: Faith, Joy, Ernest, Rose, Forrest. Then I have them discover what their own first names mean (some dictionaries have sections on names; or use a book on names for babies, which include meaning and cultural origins).

5. This does not *reduce* them as characters. They are not just allegorical figures, existing only to represent and personify ideas. A good activity that makes this clear is to present students with certain attributes—Beauty, Strength, Speed, Evil, Wealth—and have them name famous people who embody them. Then discuss other aspects of their lives: Ali’s Muslim beliefs, failed first

marriage; Richard Pryor's heart attack . . .

6. Cf. Eric Partidge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, pp.34-35, for a detailed exposition of that scene.

7. Cf. the blood feuding in *Romeo and Juliet* that requires always new sacrifice. The resolution of that play seems tainted and dubious too.

Bibliography

The Arden Shakespeare editions of the plays under consideration are the most valuable texts, since they provide voluminous footnotes, summarizing the research compactly in its most up-to-date version. The introductions are also quite useful.

Measure for Measure , edited by J.W. Lever, Methuen Co. Ltd., London: 1965

Two Gentlemen of Verona , edited by Clifford Leech, Methuen Co. Ltd., London: 1969

For secondary material on *Measure for Measure* , I found 2 articles especially helpful, from the *20th-Century Interpretations Series*, George L. Geckle, Ed., Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J: 1970:

Caputi, Anthony, "'Scenic Design in *Measure for Measure*,'" pp 86-97.

Fergusson, Fraacis, "'Philosophy and Theater in *Measure for Measure*,'" pp 73-85.

Both articles discuss the play from the point of view of Theater, rather than literature, offering insights into its problem as a dramatic text.

General Works:

Harbage, Alfred, *Shakespeare's Audience* , Columbia University press, N.Y: 1941.

A loving, yet thorough study of who went to see Shakespeare's plays. Some of Harbage's findings are surprising and amusing. Above all, his gentle humor and delight in his historical snooping make the book a pleasure to read.

Nagler, A.M., *Shakespeare's Stage*, Yale University Press, New Haven: 1958.

The ideal companion to Harbage. This little book—only 111 pages—brings together all we know about the Elizabethan stage. Some of the accounts of incidents in the theaters are delightful and will liven up your Shakespeare in the classroom.

Partridge, Eric, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, E.P. Dutton, N.Y: 1960.

If you think that a passage from Shakespeare might contain some veiled obscenity, you're probably right; and this naughty little book will verify it. It contains a useful introductory essay and an ample glossary of terms. Meander, go to't, and see what hidden treasures "'Ireland, clip, trot, punk, try, and cover"' can yield.

Tillyard, E.M.W., *The Elizabethan World picture* , Random House, N.Y: 1942.

This little book—109 pages—traces the cosmology, symbolism and ideas which inhabited the minds of the Elizabethans, with plentiful examples from Shakespeare, Donne and Milton. Students of astrology will find this particularly exciting. Seasons, humors, the four elements, the Cosmic Dance—a full representation of the 400-year gap in science and our sense of the world.

Weiman, Robert, *Shakespeare and the popular Tradition in the Theater* , John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore: 1978.

A dense, scholarly and academic treatise seeking Shakespeare's theatrical origins. If you can wade through the convoluted arguments, there is a lot of fascinating stuff here; but Harbage and Nagler will do just fine for high school purposes.

Other:

Bohannon, Laura, "'Shakespeare in the Bush,'" *Natural History Magazine*, August-September, 1966.

A witty account of an anthropologist trying to tell the story of *Hamlet* to Tiv bushmen in Africa. The article is a wonderful model of how to adapt Shakespeare to your audience—Bohannon has Hamlet hoe his mother's fields and gets into profound arguments whether the 'ghost' wasn't perhaps an omen sent by a witch or a zombie. It also raises the problem of the enormous cultural gap between Shakespeare's England, our time and other ethnic communities. The result is wryly hopeful.

Burgess, Anthony, *Nothing Like the Sun*, W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., N.Y: 1964.

A novel about William Shakespeare, frothing with cute, verbal play trying to dazzle. The problem is that its author is nothing as powerful as the Bard himself. For all the intricate linguistic pyrotechnics, it reads pretty thin. However, the grisly account of an execution—traitors are hanged and disemboweled (pp.128-131)—captures some of the brutal reality of Elizabethan England. The passage indicated might make for useful in-class reading as background for *Macbeth* or *Lear* .

Campbell, Douglas, *Macbeth* (Trilogy of Films), Encyclopaedia Britannica Films. These films are available through Winchester Library to anyone in the New Haven School System.

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