

SHAKESPEARE STUDY DAY

A WORKSHOP FOR A-LEVEL TEACHERS, HEADS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS AND TEACHERS IN TRAINING

- Explore creative approaches to Shakespeare
- Refresh your Shakespeare teaching
- Develop effective teaching strategies for A-Level Shakespeare
- Discover inspiring ways to meet the Shakespeare assessment criteria
- Discuss the most popular A-Level texts, including *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*
- Suitable for all teachers at any stage of their career
- Appropriate to all five English Literature exam board specifications

1. Shakespeare and Genre - Pamela Bickley and Sean McEvoy
2. Using adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare as a way into exploring interpretation - Jenny Stevens
3. Practical ways of approaching close reading: using drama in the classroom - Sean McEvoy
4. Getting through the text - Jenny Stevens

Saturday 5 October 2019
10:00 - 15:30
G11
Senate House, University of London

EA THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION



SHAKESPEARE AND TRAGEDY

Sean McEvoy

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION



On how tragedy was understood in Shakespeare's time:

Colin Burrow, 'What is a Shakespearean Tragedy?', in Claire McEachern (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).



e magazine article

Sean McEvoy, ‘Tragedy Then and Now’, *emagazine* (85), September 2019, pp.27-9.



Burrow on Shakespearean Tragedy (p.18):

- Shakespeare experimented with the late medieval tradition of tragedies concerning the fall of princes, and ‘gave them political force in the light of contemporary beliefs that tragedies could influence the government of the state’.
- Shakespeare ‘absorbed and adapted Marlowe’s tragedies of social aspiration and moral transgression, which gives a profoundly unclassical edginess and sense of displacement to his central characters.’
- Many of his tragedies ‘show an interest in the nature of the will and human desires’. He’s interested in how those desires get projected – unsuccessfully - onto the world. The destruction that follows that unsuccessful projection often seems to resonate with nature and with the world around the projector. This shows the influence of Seneca.



Sidney, *The Defence of Poetry* (1595)

‘Excellent tragedy … showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that with stirring the affects of admiration and consideration teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundation golden roofs are builded.’

(ed. Gavin Alexander, [London: Penguin, 2004], pp.27-8)



Revenge Tragedy and Social Justice:

Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).



‘A Theory in Ruins’

Chapter One of Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).



Hugh Grady. Tragedies are …

‘… plays that take on issues of death, of suffering, of identity, of human nature, of human meaning, and more. They never supply tendentious answers to any of these issues but instead explore, curse, rage, joy and wonder in ways that shift as we move from culture to culture and age to age.’

Hugh Grady, ‘The Modernity of Western Tragedy: Genealogy of a Developing Anachronism’, PMLA, 129.4 (2014), p.796.



Raymond Williams

Modern Tragedy (London, Verso, 1966). Second Edition 1979.



Jennifer Wallace on tragic recognition by the audience or reader

‘… witnessing and bearing witness to a tragedy have a double sense: viewing events but also participating in the experience, sharing the burden of that tragic acknowledgement.’

‘Tragic recognition entails a reciprocal process of understanding, sharing in each other’s vulnerability and limitedness. In this way gain comes paradoxically from loss.’

Jennifer Wallace, *Tragedy Since 9/11* (London: Bloomsbury 2020), p.10.



An attack on divine providence?

Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, third edition (London: Palgrave, 2010). First Published 1984 (Brighton, Harvester Press).



Jennifer Wallace on tragedy and historical transition

‘Greek tragedy arose when a religious, mythical sensibility gave way to a secular, logical and democratic outlook and the clash of values led to uncertainty and conflict. Shakespeare was writing during the Reformation when beliefs in purgatory, confession and the miracle of the Eucharist were overturned and kingship lost its divine right.’

Jennifer Wallace, *Tragedy Since 9/11* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).



Hugh Grady on Shakespeare's Tragic World:

'As numerous contemporary critics have noted [...] Shakespearean drama is more compatible with the skeptical-pragmatic philosophies of Machiavelli and Montaigne than received Christianity, especially in the so-called great tragedies'

'Shakespeare's tragic world is a world of modernity, replete with three of the defining conditions of modernity [...]: a secular, post-religious mentality; instrumental, value-free rationality; and a developing (preindustrial) capitalist economy.'

Hugh Grady, 'Tragedy and Materialist Thought' in Rebecca Bushnell (ed) *A Companion to Tragedy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.140



Paul Kottman on Shakespearean Tragedy

‘Shakespearean tragedy works through the loss of any ‘given’ – nature, or God, of ‘fate’ – that might explain human societies, actions, destinies, relationships, and values. At the same time, Shakespearean tragedy works through the loss of social bonds on which we depend for the meaning and worth of our lives together – showing those bonds to be, in spite of that dependence, fully dissolvable. In this way, Shakespearean tragedy helps us to make sense of how we interact with one another […] with only the interactions themselves as sources of intelligibility and meaning.’

Paul Kottman, ‘What is Shakespearean Tragedy’, in Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.4.



Jonathan Bate on the ‘Tragic Flaw’

‘Imagine Hamlet in Othello's situation and Macbeth in Hamlet's. Would Hamlet be duped by Iago's story about the handkerchief? Of course not. He would endlessly speculate on every possibility and devise a scheme to test the evidence - perhaps he'd put on a play about adultery and watch for Desdemona's reaction. He'd soon discover that Iago is not to be trusted, and there would be no tragedy. Now imagine Macbeth commissioned with Hamlet's task. Would he hesitate and agonise? No, he’d go straight to Claudius and unseam him from the nave to the chops before you could say Danish bacon. Again, there would be no tragedy. The tragedy comes from the mismatch of person and situation, not a pre-programmed psychological cause.’

https://www.rsc.org.uk/macbeth/tragedy/definitions.html



SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY: ‘WHAT’S TO COME IS STILL UNSURE’

Pamela Bickley

‘[The] subject of drama is confusion: whether evoking horror or hope, drama gives shape to the disarray and precariousness of our lives.’

(John Creaser, ‘Forms of Confusion’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*)

EA THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION



Courtship and marriage

‘The central experience of most of the comedies is courtship, and, in the words of Edward Berry, “It was Shakespeare ... more than any other writer, who developed the myth of romantic marriage that has survived, though today in fragments, since the seventeenth century. And he achieved this by depicting courtship as a period of disorientation similar to a rite of transition – a nerve-racking, potentially dangerous, chaotic, but ultimately re-creative time out of which may emerge the form and meaning of marriage.”’
(John Creaser, ‘Forms of Confusion’, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. A. Leggatt (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 31–32).

'The most outstanding feature of Shakespearean comedy is its pervading obsession with marriage […] The tragic hero lives and dies a fundamentally lonely figure, traumatically separated from his God, his society and his surroundings. [Comedy] focuses primarily on the experience of the group […] showing humans in a relationship […] of indissoluble bonding, [holding] out the promise of renewed life in the birth of offspring’.
(Lisa Hopkins, ‘Marriage as Comic Closure’ in *Shakespeare’s Comedies: A Guide to Criticism*, ed. Emma Smith pp. 36, 37)



The heroine

‘‘In the comedies Shakespeare seems if not a feminist then at least a man who takes the woman’s part. Often the women in the comedies are more brilliant than the men, more aware of themselves and their world, saner, livelier …'
(Linda Bamber, C*omic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare*, Stanford University Press, 1982, p. 2)

‘The uniqueness of Shakespearean comedy is that it operates powerfully on us through the play of a paradox: a conventional (patriarchal) community is revitalised by the incorporation through the institution of marriage, of the remarkable energies of a charismatic female presence; yet she has spent much of the play flouting patriarchal protocols.’
(Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare’s Unruly Women*, Routledge, 1994, p.178)



Comic confusion

‘‘The plays dramatize contradictions, and they are themselves contradictory. ‘How shall we find a concord of this discord?’, asks Theseus in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when confronted with the ‘very tragical mirth’ of the mechanicals’ play. How indeed?’
Michael Mangan, *A Preface to Shakespeare’s Comedies*, Routledge, 1999, p. 122)

‘With [the] comedies, as the title of *Twelfth Night* explicitly declares, we are entering a licensed temporal period, a liminal dream-time, during which we may expect the reverse of what officially passes for normal to prevail. Hierarchies of social and sexual power may be turned upside down or levelled, sexual identities transformed and confused, and all fixed positions and settled assumptions destabilized and laid open to dispute.’
(Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd edition, Palgrave 2002, p. 108)



Comic resolution

‘In Comedies, *turbulenta prima*, *tranquilla ultima* … Comedies begin in trouble and end in peace’
(Thomas Heywood, An Apology for Actors, 1612)

‘I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you’ (Malvolio, TN, 5.1.371) ‘The utopian closure of Shakespearean comedy and romance is qualified by the intrusion of these harsher, unredeemed realities and disquieting intimations which it cannot repress, and which stress the fragile fictionality and incompleteness of its state of concord.’
(Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, p. 121)

‘[Shakespearean comedy] speculates imaginatively on modes […] of enlarging and extending the possibilities of … good. Its heroes or heroines … are voyagers in pursuit of a happiness not yet attained, a brave new world wherein man’s life may be fuller, his sensations more exquisite and his joys more widespread, more lasting, and so more humane.’
(H.B. Charlton, *Shakespearian Comedy*, 2nd edition, Methuen, 1938, pp. 277-8)



Further reading

Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (Routledge, 1994)

Lisa Hopkins, *The Shakespearean Marriage: Merry Wives and Heavy Husbands* (Macmillan, 1998)

Alexander Leggatt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy* (Cambridge 2001 and online 2006)

R.W. Maslen, *Shakespeare and Comedy* (Arden Critical Companions, 2006)

Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Smith, Emma Smith (ed.), *Shakespeare's Comedies: A Guide to Criticism* (Blackwell Guides to Criticism, 2003)



ADAPTING SHAKESPEARE ADAPTATION FOR THE A LEVEL CLASSROOM

Jenny Stevens

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION



***Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, 2014**

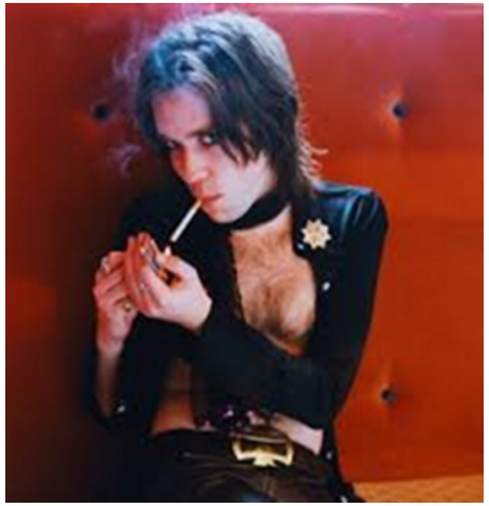
‘[I]t is an article of faith that adaptation is the only cultural life Shakespeare has and the only life his work has ever had. This is as true of the scripts that bear Shakespeare’s name as it is for modern Shakespearean performances or films, for not only do these scripts adapt Plutarch, Ovid, Holinshed, medieval theater, folk practices, and myriad other materials, but the very scripts themselves, even before an editor gets her hands on them, are adaptations for the printed page of manuscripts intended for performance on an early modern stage, performances of stories based on prior stories..’

Douglas Lanier



The YouTube mash-up
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6FFtq5CEoM







Silent *Twelfth Night*, dir. Charles Kent, 1910





Lear Weeping over the Dead Body of Cordelia James Barry, 1786-8
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/barry-king-lear-weeping-over-the-dead-body-of-cordelia-t00556





From Will Eisner's *Hamlet on a Rooftop*







Pamela Bickley taught in the English department at Royal Holloway, University of London, and at the Godolphin and Latymer School. She is the author of *Contemporary Fiction* (CUP, 2008) and the co-author, with Jenny Stevens, of *Essential Shakespeare: The Arden Guide to Text and Interpretation* (2013) and *Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama: Text and Performance* (2016), as well as articles on modern fiction, poetry, and Shakespeare for *emagazine*.



Sean McEvoy was Head of English for many years at Varndean Sixth Form College in Brighton. He has published several articles on the teaching of Shakespeare and of tragedy, and is the author of *Shakespeare: The Basics*, 'Hamlet': *A Sourcebook*, *Ben Jonson, Renaissance Dramatist* and *Tragedy: The Basics*. He is a frequent contributor to *emagazine*. He is currently teaching tragedy and early modern drama at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge.



Jenny Stevens has taught at both secondary and undergraduate level. She is an Ofqual subject expert and combines consultancy work with A level teaching and academic writing. Her publications include the co-authored *Essential Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama*; the forthcoming *Studying Shakespeare Adaptation* will be the third in this Arden series. She is a regular contributor to the English and Media Centre's publications.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION



The English Association is a network of people and organisations who are passionate about English language and its literatures.

Join the Association, be part of our community and access a range of benefits!

As a member, you'll have access to resources to support your lesson-planning and help you to balance your workload with creativity and flexibility. The English Association has a dedicated Secondary Education Committee which works to raise the profile of the English subjects in schools, disseminate information to support teachers of English, and support excellent English teaching in schools across the full age range and sectors of secondary education.

Membership of the Association includes:

- Subscription to one of our publications
- Access to all of our new and existing resources for teachers
- Access to the EA's Newsletter – produced three times per year, the Newsletter contains topical articles, news items, and interviews from across English Studies, and updates about The English Association itself and its activities
- Reduced rates for conferences and events
- The chance to join any of our networks and special interest groups
- As a member, you'll be able to apply for the Chartered Teacher of English designation in recognition of your expertise and commitment to your professional development.

ABOUT THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

EA THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION