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THEATRE *FOR* THE OPPRESSED:
THE EFFECT AND INFLUENCE OF
SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

A
M.ARTS (RESEARCH) THESIS
AT
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

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This thesis was submitted to the Department of English of the University of Sydney
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Masters by Research

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my dear friend

Julie Somers (Hunt) 1928 – 2013

Actress, Director, Producer

My first Shakespearean mentor

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I would like to express my admiration and deep gratitude for their help and inspiration to:

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the powerful effect that Shakespeare has in prison settings. My research will prove that Shakespeare has demonstrable influence on human beings in detention, particularly when they are *speaking* Shakespeare, and that speaking and acting Shakespeare's words moves human beings in situations of incarceration or confinement in deeper and more unusual ways than in other contexts and thus enables them to reconnect with their humanity and the society they are removed from.

The thesis begins with a general overview of the pervasiveness of Shakespeare in the modern world with an overview of a spectrum of diverse areas where Shakespeare is particularly valuable. It then moves on to explore the development of a number of global Shakespeare prison programs. The centrepiece of this dissertation concerns a case study based on my participation in the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble's 2011 Prison Project which took place at a high security detention facility in Ipswich, Queensland. The QSE prison project is the only one of its kind to-date in Australia. It uniquely combines the methodology of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed with conventional drama practice and Kristin Linklater voice training. The case study narrates the Shakespearean journey of a group of male prisoners and highlights the potential effectiveness of such a program in transforming violent offenders.

The final chapter scrutinises in greater detail a number of the more exceptional Shakespeare prison theatre programs and their outcomes and links them to the Australian case study for comparative analysis.

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INTRODUCTION : SHAKESPEARE IN THE MODERN WORLD

‘He was not of an age, but for all time!’

‘The life yet of his lines shall never out.’

Thus was Shakespeare passionately eulogised by two of his closest contemporaries and friends, fellow playwright Ben Jonson and poet Hugh Holland, in the Prefaces to the First Folio of 1623. Despite their great admiration for him and Jonson’s remarkably prescient verse, they could never have imagined just how much their ‘Soule of the Age ! The applause ! delight ! The wonder of our Stage !’ (Holland, 9) would still be revered almost 500 years on, moreover, that ‘the life of his lines’ (Holland, 11) would extend into nearly every country on earth and be a significant part of life in the twenty-first century.

The aim of this thesis is, in part, to explore the continuing omnipresence of Shakespeare in the age of cyber-technology and the ever-increasing sophistication of the internet, social networks, iPods, smartphones, and other devices. Its specific objective is to provide evidence of the significant influence that Shakespeare exerts in circumstances where human beings are deprived of liberty, love, and hope: a prison cell. How, without high-level artifice or special effects, the words of *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and Prospero can move the hardest heart and manifest the power to resurrect the human spirit.

The thesis will begin by outlining the cultural pervasiveness of Shakespeare via a survey of his presence in business, the youth market, self-help, and psychotherapy. Chapter 1 will then explore the world of Shakespeare in prisons, before moving to the centre piece of the thesis which is a case study of the Australian prison project. Chapter 3 will conclude this dissertation by situating the Australian example in a more global context.

It can be said without exaggeration: Shakespeare is everywhere. At any given time there are performances of his plays or poems taking place somewhere in the world, in myriad styles, adaptations, genres, and locations. In fact, a very early international performance of *Hamlet* was staged in Shakespeare's lifetime by the crew of a commercial freighter, the *Red Dragon*, in the Middle East, on the island of Socotra at the entry to the Gulf of Aden in 1608.¹ Since that time, Shakespeare's plays and poems have been translated into a multitude of languages. At the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon, also the headquarters of the International Shakespeare Association, the library collection in 2011 includes the Complete Works in more than 30 languages² as well as individual editions in over 80 languages, from Arabic and Albanian to Yakut, Yiddish, and Zulu. Some translations are available only in limited or privately published editions, while new translations of the Complete Works of 38 plays are constantly in development somewhere. The internet, among copious Shakespeare resource materials, now

¹Holderness, Graham. 'Arab Shakespeares : Sulayman Al-Bassam's The Al-Hamlet Summit: Introduction'. E:\Sulayman Al-Bassam's The Al-Hamlet Summit Introduction « Global Shakespeares.htm. 26 July 2013. Web.

² <http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/Mareike> Doleschal, Collections Librarian, email correspondence - April 2011

features two Complete Works, the first one developed in 1993 by Google software engineer and MIT alumnus, Jeremy Hylton,³ and the more recent, comprehensive and stylishly constructed Internet Shakespeare Editions.⁴ The latter site is the brainchild of Michael Best, Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria, Canada, supported by a team of advisors, editors, and scholars world-wide. Constantly updated, it delivers an outstanding, all-inclusive e-resource for academics, students, and Shakespeare aficionados, at the click of a mouse.

During the London Olympic Games in 2012, a once-in-a-lifetime event took place: 37 of Shakespeare's plays were staged in 37 different languages at the reconstructed Globe Theatre in Southwark as part of the World Shakespeare Festival. Over 600 actors and directors from many nations and diverse cultures collaborated in a large celebration of multilingual and multi-ethnic drama. Josh Jones, a doctoral candidate at Fordham University, New York commented 'I cannot deny that the Bard's work seems to translate across time and space without a loss of its incredible power and pathos'.⁵

The language of Shakespeare has become imperceptibly woven into the fabric of daily life. Excerpts from his plays are quoted on all kinds of occasions, often without the speaker being aware of the literary source. Substantial industries have developed, dedicated to the exploration (and possible exploitation) of every nuance

³ Jeremy Hylton. <http://Shakespeare.mit.edu/>

⁴ Michael Best. *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/>

⁵ Josh Jones. http://www.openculture.com/2012/10/world_shakespeare_festival_presents_37_plays

of meaning in line and stanza; the life of the author; contexts in history and time; theatres, costumes, styles of acting; and so on. Countless scholars from universities all over the world devote their lives to delving ever more deeply into Shakespearean mysteries, expounding on new discoveries, refuting or elaborating on a previously considered argument. Shakespeare festivals, societies, and associations proliferate; the International Shakespeare Association holds a World Congress every five years in a different country, from Stratford-on-Avon to Berlin, Los Angeles, Tokyo, and, in 2011, Prague. The 8th World Congress, held in Brisbane in 2006 on the theme of *Shakespeare's World/World Shakespeares*, drew attention to the wide-ranging global phenomenon that Shakespeare has become. Over 700 delegates examined topics as diverse as: the existence of ghetto-theatre in 'Shakespeare in the Jewish Cultural Association of Berlin during the Third Reich 1933-41' (Zoltán Márkus qtd in Fotheringham, 130); Ania Loomba investigated racial and religious roots under the title, 'The Commitment to Shakespeare or What Are We Celebrating Today?' (Loomba qtd in Fotheringham, 209), while new Asian perspectives on staging were discussed in 'Conflicts and Compromises between a Shakespearean Hamlet and a Chinese Prince: Three Chinese Operatic Adaptations' (Li Ruru qtd in Fotheringham 303).

In the introductory paragraph to her article Loomba points out:

And in our globalised world, a 'hybrid' Shakespeare – one who allows a fusion, a truly postmodern montage, of once-colonised and once-colonising

cultures, [...] has become a highly marketable commodity on stages in different locales. [...] Shakespeare's works provide a common frame of reference that helps unite us into a single community of discourse'. (Loomba qtd in Fotheringham,209)

She infers here that the desire for cross-fertilisation and borrowing from other cultures and religions existent in the Early Modern period, should serve to fuel a positive and open dialogue rather than create division. Transgressing the boundaries of cultural and academic engagement with Shakespeare can, with courage and persistence, be shaped into a more liberal global discourse that could give rise to unlimited creative possibilities.

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate some of the more unusual applications of Shakespeare's art, from the imaginative and ingenious to the downright bizarre, in an attempt to highlight the relevance and ongoing popularity of 400-year-old words in the life of the modern world. Once this context has been established, the thesis will move to the more specific domain of Shakespeare in prisons.

SHAKESPEARE IN BUSINESS - BOOKS

In these times of ongoing financial crises, corporate meltdowns, political upheavals, general fear and uncertainty in the world, and the absence of any significant

contemporary wisdom, big business has turned to the writings of the 'Bard' for inspiration. U.K. journalist and blogger, Martin Hicke, asserts:

While Will might not seem to be the obvious candidate for business models in hard times, by the time he died, he left an estate worth at least £2m in today's terms and had a substantial reputation as a gentleman and businessman. And, coming out of the age of Elizabethan exuberance into the more sober times of the court of James I, some reckon Shakespeare was perfectly placed to witness the changing economic times'. (Hicke, 2)

Furthermore, according to David Lindley from the University of Leeds, whom Hicke quotes in a later paragraph:

His [Shakespeare's] business mind was as sharp as his language skills. His ability as a businessman is an aspect of his achievement which is all too often overlooked. Shakespeare was a writer, but he was also an actor, a sharer in a theatrical company and part-owner of a playhouse (the Globe, and later the Blackfriars theatres). But he was also aware of the economics of the theatre – to put it crudely the 'bums on seats' of the business, or in today's parlance the need for 'clients'. (Lindley qtd in Hicke, 2)

Who better then to demonstrate to CEOs and key executives of today's powerful conglomerates via examples like King Henry V, the kind of qualities a dynamic leader of today should possess. Books on 'Your business will run better with Will' are appearing in bookshops in ever increasing numbers, compiled by people with formidable academic, business, or artistic credentials (sometimes all three), who are convinced that even hundreds of years later the values of characters such as Julius Caesar, King Lear, or Coriolanus can be applied to motivate managers to achieve better commercial outcomes. One book that has attracted a lot of critical attention is *Power Plays: Shakespeare's Lessons in Leadership and Management* (2000), co-written by John Whitney, Professor of Management at Columbia Business School in New York, a former CEO and corporate leader, and Tina Packer, founder and artistic director of Shakespeare & Company, a major year-round Shakespeare teaching and performance centre in Lenox, Massachusetts. The combined business acumen and theatrical experience of the authors coupled with sound interpretative skills, enables them to communicate with clarity the multiplicity of meanings underlying the action in plays such as *Richard II* for instance, who lost his kingdom because he believed his divine right to rule was unalterable and therefore required no other effort. The example of his hubris and inability to use power wisely and effectively is astutely employed as an exhortation to corporate leaders of today to 'use it and use it wisely, or lose it' (36). Equally disastrous consequences are inevitable, if, like Coriolanus, you believe in your own supremacy, are unable to adapt to changes in status, cannot work in unity with your peers, and abuse those

subordinates whose help you rely on to stay on top. *Richard III* and *Macbeth* serve as warnings to those tempted by the seductiveness of ambition and control: how easily it can destroy your humanity to pursue power for power's sake alone (31). *Power Plays* also provides valuable lessons from Richard II and Mark Antony on the importance of timing or the art of persuasion, manipulation, and communication (170). No matter how good a leader's ideas are, he or she will achieve very little if he/she cannot communicate them in the right way. Tina Packer focuses in particular on the role of women in management. In order to succeed as a female in business, you need to be creative, think outside the square, and be ready to take chances like a Rosalind (125). Submissive obedience or weak compliance, as demonstrated by Ophelia, won't get you noticed, let alone promoted (124). Packer also defends the existence of 'Falstaffian' eccentricity in an organisation. She supports the ideas of mavericks, those creative 'fools' without the constraints of ambition or the desire to climb the corporate ladder, who like Lear's fool, are uninhibited enough to speak the truth when nobody else dares to (239-240). Shakespeare's wisdom is interspersed with real events in corporate life including, of course, the participants' own. Those CEOs wary of literary pursuits are reassured by John Whitney that, apart from being an actor, playwright, and poet:

Shakespeare was also a business man, a shareholder in the most successful theatre company of his time, servant of the king, and, by the end of his life, one of the wealthiest men in his hometown of Stratford-on-Avon. (15-16)

Other examples of this new genre are found in *The Bard & Co.: Shakespeare's Role in Modern Business* (2007), a collection of short stories by twenty-six leading business writers (based on the 26 actors listed in the prefaces to the First Folio of 1623), compiled in easy-to-read, contemporary prose, each story using a Shakespeare play as background. 'Creative Partnerships' (69), for instance, is based on *Much Ado About Nothing*. It explores creative friction and the difficulties of working together, but that with persistence and willingness by both sides to change and adapt, this kind of partnership can be extremely rewarding. 'Fortune's Fool: Boom & Bust in Ancient Athens' (94) relates via the model of *Timon of Athens*, how a good man, generous to a fault but somewhat naïve, loses everything he has because he trusts the wrong people. When things go bad for him, nobody is willing to help, so, in disgust, he self-destructs – a victim of the first Global Financial Crisis in the 1600s? 'Top Banana' (108) explains how to motivate your colleagues to go into battle against a take-over bid by a much larger company with the aid of Henry V, ever the preferred model of the perfect leader.

In his book *The Bard and the Boardroom* (2007), John Simmons, a London-based brand consultant and contributor to *The Bard & Co.*, assesses the role of Shakespearean language in improving the language of business and investigates the strengths and weaknesses of individual characters. *Shakespeare on Management* (1999), written by Paul Corrigan CBE, former Labor politician and health adviser to Tony Blair, visiting Professor of Public Policy at the University of

North London, and now Director of Strategy and Commissioning at the NHS London Strategic Health Authority, focuses on the specific leadership skills required in today's fast-paced business environment. Corrigan tackles tactical questions such as 'Are Leaders Born or Made?' (35) and 'Richard II: Is being King enough?' (47). Alluding to King Lear and Richard II, who believed royal blood equalled eternal sovereignty and therefore commanded unquestioning loyalty, he seeks to convey to his readers the necessity of learning *how* to be a leader, the importance of making clear choices, and how to avoid favouritism. Corrigan points out that Shakespeare's lessons are not simplistic and that ambiguities were part of life in Elizabethan times as much as they are now. Even the prime favourite in the leadership stakes, Henry V, charismatic and dynamic though he undoubtedly is, nevertheless has his Achilles' heel. He can be vengeful, act rashly and unjustly when under pressure, and is prone to hubris (148). These flaws and scenarios are akin to those occurring during hostile take-overs in the corporate world, where harsh words, imprudent actions, and unfair dismissals are commonplace. Corrigan cites Coriolanus, the victorious general but otherwise one-dimensional character, who fails because he is incapable of adapting to his changing role from soldier to politician and whose leadership style leaves a lot to be desired. In Part 3 entitled 'Having all the power is not enough', Corrigan scrutinises some of Shakespeare's well-known characters like Richard III, Macbeth and Coriolanus more closely and explains why manipulating your way to the top leaves you isolated and that unrestrained ambition is ultimately a recipe for disaster.

Shakespeare in Charge: The Bard's Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage (1999) was co-authored by Kenneth Adelman, who now teaches at George Washington University, but in his previous career served as Director of the U.S. Arms Control & Disarmament Agency and Ambassador to the United Nations; in collaboration with Norman Augustine they represent the 'big end of town'. A former Fortune 500 CEO, Augustine was past president of the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation and board member of major corporations such as Proctor & Gamble and Phillips Petroleum. Imaginatively designed, the book resembles the format of a play, including a 'Prologue'. Chapter headings are laid out in the form of 'Acts' and end with 'Acting Lessons' to be applied via the historical Shakespearean figures to the failures and successes of today's corporate entrepreneurs.

The purpose of *Shakespeare on Management: Wise Business Counsel from the Bard* (1999) by Jay M. Shafritz, Professor Emeritus of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, is to give basic practical advice to executives rather than entering into sophisticated thought processes. Fifty-six short essays deal with familiar commercial topics like 'Estate Planning', 'Law and Lawyers', 'Mergers and Acquisitions' or 'Motivating Employees'.

Though the literary merits of any of the above remain open to debate, and Donald Hedrick in his essay 'The Bard of Enron: From Shakespeare to Noir Humanism' (2004) is critical of most of them, their continuing proliferation points to the fact

that even in the cut-and-thrust of global enterprise ‘while the accoutrements of corporate life are now dramatically high-tech dominated by e-mail, cell phones, and the web, the basics still hinge on human nature’ (Adelman and Augustine, xii).

What makes Shakespeare so pertinent in the corporate arena is the recognition by the authors who write on Shakespeare in Business, that he possessed both, creative talent and sound business acumen, and furthermore owns the most universally recognisable brand name. The themes of his plays that form the topics of the above books are timeless and represent an immanent part of modern corporate life: power and politics, double-speak and double-dealing, ambition and avarice versus ethics and inspired leadership, and present eminently apposite lessons for CEOs and entrepreneurs of today.

SHAKESPEARE IN BUSINESS - MBA COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

For those executives who prefer a more direct approach to learning, hands-on or interactive seminars and workshops are becoming increasingly popular. The objective of these courses is to instil Shakespearean ethics and values in top executives or up-and-coming professionals, possibly to teach at least some lessons learned from the Enron scandal or the Global Financial Crisis of 2008.

In 2007, the Said Business School in Oxford, U.K., started a new management programme entitled ‘Politics, Power and the Art of Influence’, led by Richard

Olivier, son of the famous Shakespearean actor, Sir Laurence Olivier. Olivier was motivated to start up his own company, Olivier Mythodrama Associates, after running theatre-based workshops with business leaders at the Globe Theatre in London and discovering during discussions on leadership and decision-making after a performance of Henry V, that executives felt ‘they had learned more from the play than from ten years of management workshops’. Olivier’s course uses drama to ‘play things out’. Like Henry V, who motivated his dispirited army into a loyal and steadfast ‘band of brothers’ by appealing to their sense of honour, Olivier states that ‘a modern leader also needs to sell a vision. If you use commitment and passion, which we can coach you how to achieve, the chances are your people will listen more than if you use a PowerPoint demonstration’.⁶ His book *Inspirational Leadership: Henry V and the Muse of Fire - Timeless Insights from Shakespeare’s Greatest Leader* (2001) flows on from his course work. Similarly to *Shakespeare in Charge*, the layout is in play format, including a prologue and an epilogue. To heighten the impact, Olivier added detailed graphs that map out the trajectory of Henry V’s journey to victory with great precision, drawing attention to just how much planning, strategy and effort is required for a venture to succeed, military or business, then and now.

Michael Useem, professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School in Philadelphia, incorporates teaching by Movers and

⁶ Peter Brown. ‘Can Shakespeare really be a useful management tool’. *The Independent*. 18 January 2007. Web. <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/mbas-guide/can-shakespeare-really-be-a-useful-management-tool-432519.html>

Shakespeares and the Ariel Group into his MBA courses. Movers and Shakespeares is a company based in Virginia, run by Carol and Ken Adelman (co-author of *Shakespeare in Charge*), which specialises in corporate training programs based on lessons from the ‘Bard’. The Massachusetts-based Ariel Group, an international training and consulting firm also uses theatre-based, experiential techniques to teach executives how to develop and refine leadership qualities. ‘Both companies help our MBA and executive students to further develop their skills in the areas of stage presence, effective communication, and strategic thinking’ states Useem.⁷ Tracey Draper, a manager of leadership and organisational development in the electronics sector in Los Angeles confirms that ‘using Shakespeare is an innovative way to look at leadership development and bring people to key leadership lessons faster than a traditional lecture-style setting’⁸ and because of this they are able to put these lessons into action in their workplace straight away.

At the MIT Sloan School of Management in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the new MIT Leadership Center has taken the interactive learning process one step further with a ‘Leadership as Acting: Performing *Henry V*’ program. In this week-long course MBA students were challenged to become involved in the play, its history, meaning, and characters as well as other aspects of staging, culminating in the performance of an abridged version on the final day of the course. Leadership lessons via *Henry V* demonstrate how common goals, clearly articulated and

⁷Judy Williams. ‘Lessons of the Bard’. *Human Resource Executive Online*. Web. <http://www.hreonline.com/HRE/view/story.jhtml?id=4361962>

⁸Ibid

inspired by strong, decisive leadership, can achieve great outcomes even when the odds are against you. Additionally, building a strong team develops support and therefore means less stress for the leader, so it's win – win, the Bard's way!⁹

At the high salary end of the seminar scale, the Royal Shakespeare Company performed for and coached MBA candidates at a specially devised 3-day seminar entitled 'Leadership in Shakespeare' at Columbia University Business School, New York, in July 2011. For the impressive sum of US\$6,600, senior executives learned about Shakespeare the man, Shakespeare the playwright, and Shakespeare the entrepreneur, and were able to gain knowledge of how certain strategies used in *Henry V* can lead to increased success in corporate life.

MBA students at Warwick University's School of Business in the U.K. can now benefit from a recently instigated collaboration with the Royal Shakespeare Company, which offers a Shakespeare workshop as part of the 'Leadership and the Art of Judgement' module as well as a two-week Shakespeare boot-camp for full-time MBA candidates.¹⁰

One might be inclined to dismiss this over-popularisation of Shakespeare in the business sector with a certain degree of cynicism and fear a 'dumbing-down' of the

⁹'To Be or Not to Be a Leader'. *MIT Sloan Newsroom*. Web. <http://mitsloan.mit.edu/newsroom/2004-leadership-acting.php>

¹⁰'Shakespeare teaches business leaders'. <http://au.artshub.com/au/news-article/news/performing-arts/shakespeare-teaches-business-leaders>

literary merits of his works. Donald Hedrick puts forward the more enlightened view that, on the contrary, a sophisticated kind of literary sub-genre might eventuate in the guise of a cultural form of 'film noir'. He posits that there is room for all types of appropriations (or misappropriations) which could, nonetheless, make significant and valuable contributions to modern business life, enhance, or even transform it (Hedrick, 20).

Shakespeare's acknowledged 'creativity', normally a benign concept along the lines of the typical praise of Shakespeare's universality, becomes the lever for a different sort of 'creativity' (different from 'creative accounting'). Thus, exposure to Shakespeare through a management manual or seminar could become far more subversive than expected. (Hedrick, 22)

Of major significance in the context of Shakespeare in Business are programs with an interactive content. While the books are on the whole well-written by authors with significant academic and/or industry credentials and appear to generate a lot of interest, it is the hands-on nature and performative structure of the courses and workshops that provide the impetus for change that business leaders on return to their office are compelled to implement straightaway. For instance, one such executive, Walt McFarland of the I.R.S. (U.S. taxation department) in charge of tens of thousands of employees, returned from an Olivier Mythodrama workshop in 2010 a changed man. He felt that Richard Olivier spoke directly to him when he said: 'If

you're leading a major change, you have to be willing to change yourself'.¹¹

McFarland became acutely aware of his responsibility to his employees. On his return he acknowledged the mistakes he had made and implemented the necessary changes, with trepidation, but determined to set his business on the right track.¹²

SHAKESPEARE AND THE YOUTH MARKET

In Australia, the Bell Shakespeare Company recently started a new venture to take Shakespeare into primary schools. Apparently, the kids love it and it looks like the last barrier to engage younger generations with Shakespeare is about to come down.¹³ In the U.K., the University of Warwick, again led by their Business School, broke new ground in another innovative joint venture with the Royal Shakespeare Company, setting up an internet resource 'Teaching Shakespeare' with the objective to deliver high-quality online professional development for teachers to enable them to make teaching Shakespeare interactive and fun.¹⁴ Meanwhile, artists and educators everywhere have begun to find creative ways to 'up-date' Shakespeare through manga-style cartoons, graphic art books, puppet theatre, rap, hip-hop, and anim  features; while Baz Luhrman singlehandedly turned Shakespeare into the 'Bard of Cool' with his gangland-style take on *Romeo and Juliet*.

¹¹ Claire Suddath. 'Shakespeare in the Boardroom'. *Blomberg Businessweek*. 29 November 2012. Web <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-11-29/shakespeare-in-the-boardroom>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Justine Ferrari. 'A pilot program has brought Shakespeare to primary students'. *The Australian*. 1 March 2013. Web. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/education/a-pilot-program-has-brought-shakespeare>

¹⁴ 'Teaching Shakespeare: WBS leads on a new partnership between the University and the RSC'. 13 February 2012. Web. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/insite/news/intnews2/teaching_shakespeare_wbs/

The U.K. publishing firm Self Made Hero, specialising in graphic arts novels, designed a catalogue of 'Manga Shakespeares' in 2010 to capitalise on the popularity of manga, a style of comic book originally from Japan but soon popularised by trendy teenagers world-wide. The ever-expanding collection of titles is now found on their website, mangashakespeare.com, combining cutting-edge drawing and illustrations with Shakespeare's original text in abridged form. The aim of the company is to make Shakespeare and other classic texts more accessible to teenagers and young adults by focusing primarily on key scenes in the plays. The production team is headed by a Shakespearean scholar and every new addition to the catalogue is developed in consultation with teachers and educators. The novels' entertainment value is supplemented by access to a designated social website, acting and costume competitions, and other interactive technology. The colours are striking and the drawings very imaginative, though some editions are a bit peculiar. For instance, the transformation of King Lear into an American Indian chief seems odd; his daughters and their husbands are dressed in the manner of British aristocrats at the time of the frontier wars while those loyal to Lear look like Davy Crockett adventurers, à la *The Last of the Mohicans*. Though one can appreciate the artistic value and inventive way of getting younger readers to engage with the text, this example loses the beauty and impact of Shakespeare's language, is visually confusing, and turns *King Lear* into a caricature.

More on the right track, artistically, is Nicki Greenberg, an immensely talented Australian writer, graphic artist, and lawyer, who put together a large, illustrated tome of *Hamlet* (2010). This is a really stunning book, its pages alive with all kinds of weird creatures including ravens, small cat-like animals, and Hamlet in the shape of an inkblot, which seem to leap off the brilliantly designed pages. Stylishly finished and beautiful to look at, it is a young artist's way of engaging with Shakespeare afresh and opens up one more avenue to make classic literature relevant to the twenty-first century.

In contrast, Simon Hawke's series of novellas *Shakespeare & Smythe* (2000) represents Shakespeare as a fictional character in the company of another aspiring thespian, Symington Smythe, supposedly set in the early years when Shakespeare was still trying to make his break as a young playwright in London. Before success comes their way, the improbable duo turn detectives and become involved in all kinds of not-too-serious adventures: *A Mystery of Errors* (2000), *The Slaying of the Shrew* (2002), *The Merchant of Vengeance* (2003), and *Much Ado About Murder* (2004). These novels make humorous reading for bardophiles, with the author's intention simply to entertain his readers. He claims, ultimately, this was always Shakespeare's desire, too.

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales, consists of a series of twelve plays commissioned by BBC television and first broadcast in 1992 and 1994. Each episode represents a

half-hour adaptation of one of Shakespeare's best known plays. Each play has been skilfully condensed, the animation and colours impact strongly, the characters are well-defined and powerfully created in Japanese animé style, brought to vivid life onscreen by the talented Russian animators. The accompanying short narratives were succinctly composed by children's author Leon Garfield with select quotes from the play chosen with the guidance of renowned Shakespearean, Stanley Wells, featuring voices by well-known British actors. The series has been distributed to fifty countries so far and, deservedly, won many awards. Endorsed by the Department of Education in England, it introduces Shakespeare to a whole new audience of children and young adults brought up largely on computer games and Xboxes.

Another approach is via the use of puppets. On the theme of 'All the World's a Stage', Michael Rogalski, graphic designer, illustrator, and owner of Eyewash Studio in Philadelphia, has crafted a Shakespearean puppet theatre featuring 60 of Shakespeare's favourite characters, 12 sets, and a 96-page folio of scripts. Clearly intended for use in primary schools, it gets children into making up scenarios without being overwhelmed by incomprehensible volumes of text material.

And, strange as it may seem, rap and hip-hop have discovered their love for Shakespeare, too, and the feeling is mutual (say the performers). Andrew Emery, a former teenage rapper and now journalist, has been writing on hip-hop for the past

eighteen years. He came across award-winning rapper Akala running a series of workshops in London in 2008 which explored these links between Shakespeare and hip-hop. Teenagers at the first workshops were initially rather ‘ho-hum’ about the project, but were captivated by the poetry of the language once the relationship between the rhythms of modern hip-hop and the iambic pentameter of Shakespeare’s sonnets was explored. Akala makes the case that, once you leave aside the so-called ‘gangsta rap’ from the U.S. with its sexist language, drug- and violence-riddled lyrics and look at real hip-hop, ‘it’s poetry, it’s social commentary, it’s documenting history’.¹⁵ He gets teenagers hooked on the project by reading out quotations and making them guess whether they’re rap songs or Shakespeare. Most were adamant that the Shakespearean lines had to be rap. Even Sir Ian McKellan, who took part in the launch of the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company in 2009 in London, did not get it right: ‘... I am reckless what I do / To spite the world’ was not a rap line, but comes from *Macbeth* (3.1.111-112).¹⁶ Chanelle Newman, project manager for the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company, is thrilled by the fact that Shakespeare hip-hop workshops are turning out to be a fun way to open up young minds to all sorts of new cultural adventures in theatre, acting, or simply reading (and not just Shakespeare), by reducing the resistance to the perceived ‘high culture’.

¹⁵Andrew Emery. ‘Shakespeare: How do I compare thee to hip-hop?’ *The Guardian*. 15 April, 2009. Web. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/apr/15/shakespeare-hip-hip-rap>

¹⁶ All quotations from Shakespeare’s plays in this thesis are taken from the Oxford *Complete Works*, Second Edition, 2005.

A hip-hop theatre production by the Chicago Shakespeare Company, *'Funk It Up About Nothin'*, toured Australia during March and April 2011 to considerable acclaim. The (not just teenage) audiences were totally 'rapt'. The show was devised and directed by the Q-Brothers, Gregory and Jeffrey Quaiyum, who were also acting, accompanied by a multi-talented cast of actors and dancers, including their own d.j. 'Our goal is to put Shakespeare in the hands of everyone, from pros to pimps to punks to poets. If the hip-hop heads leave with a deeper appreciation of Shakespeare and the bardophiles find some love for rap, and everybody laughs, then our mission is complete', read the program notes. The Q-Brothers, like Akala, found the rhythm of rap and the musicality of the language were a perfect match. It made Shakespeare more real to them and their audiences, and allowed his works to be appreciated in new and surprising ways that in no way diminished their power, quite the contrary, as their live performances resoundingly corroborated. The exceptionally talented cast, with boundless enthusiasm and great linguistic dexterity, played with the language in many surprising ways and, as could be seen (and heard) from their closing 'rap', were extremely passionate about Shakespeare.

There have been innumerable film versions of Shakespeare's plays, some traditional, some avant-garde or sexy, but it was Baz Luhrman's version of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1996 that really modernised Shakespeare-on-film, with its fast and furious portrayal of the Capulets and Montagues as rival Los Angeles crime families.

A more recent attempt to mine Shakespeare's cinematic coffers resulted in the full length animated movie called *Gnomeo and Juliet* (2011). Rival gangs of garden gnomes fight battles with rakes and spades, not swords, accompanied by the music of Elton John. Building on the increasing popularity of animated feature films, it includes some clever special effects and is voiced by well-known actors James McAvoy and Maggie Smith. A fun children's movie that some adults will like as well.

The most bizarre screen version of the tragic tale of the doomed young lovers has to be the 'fully sick' or, more to the point, totally awful *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), described on the IMDb (Internet Movie Database) as a 'punk' adaptation. This movie is truly an appalling piece of film-making. It presents an amalgamation of quite explicit soft-porn, schlock-horror, and gratuitous mock-violence. According to the write-up on the IMDb website, the film 'attempts to impact the viewer in the same way theatre goers were affected in Shakespeare's time'. The hard rock soundtrack by Motorhead is about the only thing that is not too bad, introducing the lovers' theme with the heavy-metal song 'I would not fall in love like this', growled in his usual hoarse fashion by lead singer, Lemmy Kilmister, who also doubles as narrator and manages to recite a version of the prologue in vaguely stentorian tones. The action is set in New York and the film begins with an image of a winking Shakespeare, not very subtly indicating that this film should not be taken seriously. The families, called Monty Ques and Capulets, are pornographic film makers,

headed by Monty Que and Cappy Capulet, who have fallen out and become bitter enemies. Young Juliet, frequently locked in a glass cage by her kinky, abusive father, is a strict vegetarian who carries on a steamy Lesbian affair with the household cook (the nurse). A pink dildo lies on her dressing table next to a Yale (!) edition of Shakespeare's *Collected Works*, while Tromeo masturbates to Shakespearean interactive sex videos with titles such as the *Merchant of Penis* and *As You Lick Her*. Strangely, when Tromeo first encounters Juliet, the sudden impact of first love has Tromeo and Juliet reciting Shakespeare's actual lines 'O, she does teach the torches to burn bright' (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.5.43-109) in a tender, romantic scene, before the film disintegrates rapidly into an orgy of gratuitous sex, bondage, and gross violence, with a bit of incest thrown in for good measure. The ending is par for the course, featuring a massive street fight between the rival youths with heads, quite literally, rolling. The lovers don't die, but the potion obtained from a stoned Rastafarian apothecary has turned Juliet into a boar, which repulses her father's preferred suitor, London (Paris), heir to a meat processing empire. Juliet is transformed back into human form through Tromeo's kiss; she then kills her father in a most horrendous fashion. Juliet's mother reveals that in the distant past she had an affair with Cappy (Romeo's father). Tromeo and Juliet are therefore brother and sister and should not go off together, but they do anyway. The epilogue, set six years later, shows the young family with a couple of two-headed children, of course (!), a new baby that looks oddly normal, and ends with Shakespeare on-screen, laughing uproariously. Apparently, it became a cult

classic in the U.S. Nevertheless, this movie should never have seen the light of day, let alone be connected in any way with Shakespeare, not necessarily because it is a misappropriation or particularly shocking, but because it is quite simply an awful piece of film-making.

An unusual offering on the Shakespearean theatre front in Australia was a short play with a political slant, called 'Kamlet, Kevin Rudd as Hamlet', staged at the Imperial Hotel in Erskineville in March 2011¹⁷ by creative writing teacher and former principal of the first Blacktown Youth College, Gab McIntosh. She felt the idea for a play spark up while reading *Hamlet* in the bath and thought that Hamlet's thwarted idealism was reminiscent of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's, decided to write a one-act comedy, and with limited finances but great enthusiasm produced it herself. Awarded an AOM for her work with disadvantaged youth, she continues to write plays and runs a talent agency to motivate others.

SHAKESPEARE AND SELF HELP

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts. (*As You Like It*, 2.7.139-142)

¹⁷'Kamlet, Kevin Rudd as Hamlet'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 12 March, 2011.

‘Shakespeare’s most recurrent metaphor is of life as theatre’ asserts Professor Laurie Maguire from Oxford University (Maguire, 202). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that some people are turning to him for the ‘basics’ to make daily life a bit more palatable, and Maguire has tapped into this niche market perfectly. *Where There’s A Will There’s A Way: Or, All I Really Need to Know I Learned from Shakespeare* (2006) gives comprehensive advice on how to overcome difficulties in everyday situations, citing examples from Shakespeare and other sources to help overcome whatever life may throw at you. She shares personal anecdotes, quotes numerous literary sources, and uses Shakespearean characters as models of similar behaviour. Arranged to emulate a sonnet, its 14 chapters include sections on Friendship, Jealousy, The Battle of the Sexes: Comedy and Tragedy, Maturity, and Death. Her book does not end with a conventional bibliography, but instead provides suggestions for further study under each chapter heading. Her final words to her readers are ‘A Complete Works of Shakespeare is the only guide to life you’ll ever need’.

Will Power (1996), penned by psychotherapist Dr George Weinberg and writer Dianne Rowe, an executive in radio and publishing, takes this a stage further. It teaches its readers a whole new system of guidance based on insights gained from the writings of Shakespeare in the form of six developmental stages. Beginning at Stage 1 ‘Defining Yourself’ and leading to Stage 6 ‘Nurturing Your Soul’, the book

charts a journey through life, purposing to enable the evolution of a person into a more 'enlightened' existence with Shakespeare as their guide.

The Self Help Daily blog by an obscure female writer identified only as Joi, revels in 'The Wisdom of Shakespeare', dispensing advice on which plays to read first if one is a new convert to the 'Bard'. She recommends *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*, and also lists many of her favourite quotes that now make up so much of the vernacular of daily life in order to convince the novice that it is possible to read Shakespeare purely for pleasure. Flowing on from this, there are many books available that emphasise their authors' desire to engage with Shakespeare without great literary pretensions. Former Australian champion hockey coach Ric Charlesworth's book *Shakespeare the Coach* (2004) deserves a mention here. Under headings such as 'Fears and Doubts' or 'Mind over Matter', Charlesworth focuses on the power of the mind to influence the human propensity for action or procrastination, citing suitable lines in the relevant texts to demonstrate to his readers just how well Shakespeare understood such feelings. By examining Shakespeare's writings from the perspective of a coach, he discovered that 'in most areas of human endeavour, Shakespeare had come up with something that was appropriate, touched a nerve, and was relevant. In fact, he [Shakespeare] seemed to cover the spectrum better than anyone else' (Charlesworth, 2004, xix).

SHAKESPEARE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Shakespeare's inherent ability to engage with the complexities of the human condition almost inevitably lends itself to extensive exploration in the field of psychology. Harold Bloom states boldly: 'Shakespeare invented the human as we continue to know it' (xviii); that 'no world author rivals Shakespeare in the apparent creation of personality' (xviii); and that 'personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness' (4). It comes as no surprise therefore that psychologists have tried to read ever more complex and obscure meanings into Shakespeare's plays and/or characters. Michael Jacobs, a retired psychotherapist and counsellor from the University of Leicester, analysed eight favourite characters in his book *Shakespeare on the Couch* (2008) as part of an ongoing debate about the authenticity of Shakespeare's characters. A.E. Moss from the University of Surrey, in his long and convoluted essay 'Shakespeare and role-construct therapy' attempts to formulate an opinion on whether the 'Bard' was suffering from some form of mental illness and what kind at the time of writing his major tragedies, or whether he was displaying the symptoms of an obsessional neurosis. Similar types of literature, no doubt, provide interesting reading, but are ultimately of benefit only to the expert practitioner if he or she happens to be a Shakespearean, too. Volume 19 of the *Shakespeare Yearbook* featuring Lacanian Interpretations of Shakespeare (Brooks, 2010) belongs in this category, as does *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (Lupton, 1993).

Phillip Armstrong's *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis* (2001) presents an introductory cultural history of the relationship between psychoanalytic concepts and Shakespearean texts. This is played out in a number of contexts and in a variety of locations: Vienna, Paris, Johannesburg, and in two additional chapters deals with Shakespeare's memory and Shakespeare's sex. The subject matter is rather complex in its breadth of application. For instance, it tries to tackle Hamlet, Freud, and the Oedipus Complex, delves into the Parisian intellectual scene, analyses *The Tempest*, looks at 'Black Hamlet' in South Africa, and investigates possible links in a chapter entitled 'Madness and Colonisation'. It also seeks to open up and expand the debate on Shakespeare in the post-colonial world. Catherine Belsey's book *Shakespeare in Theory and Practice* (2008) looks at Early Modern culture, histories, and Elizabethan expansionism. Additionally, it examines the classifications of desire, psychoanalyses Peter Quince's ballad, observes the twists and turns of Hamlet's conscience and, intriguingly, discusses the stylishness of '*Iago the Essayist*'.

In summation, it is striking to observe just how relevant Shakespeare is in this modern age. Big business turns to his plays for examples of leadership and commercial savvy with, naturally, interactive courses being the most revelatory to participants. He is enthusiastically welcomed into primary schools, while Hip-Hop and Rap crazy youths discover new material in his linguistic complexity and find iambic pentameter perfect for rapid-fire delivery. Moreover, there is room for literary fun and entertaining self-help blogs, while the multiplicity and complexity

of meanings in Shakespearean texts and characters allows profound and serious psychological analyses.

Despite the many interesting and unusual examples my research tried to uncover, this chapter is, nevertheless, a limited and incomplete sample of the ubiquity and universal application of Shakespeare in the contemporary world. Virtually every day new volumes of literary criticism and an ever-evolving number of drama and film adaptations appear, which gives some indication of the enormous variety and wealth of ideas centred around him that exist and keep coming. Shakespeare is proving perpetually versatile and adaptable. An often expressed opinion is that if you make the effort to engage with Shakespeare, the rewards are inestimable. Or, in the words of the Q Brothers: ‘when it really clicks for you, it can change your life’.¹⁸

Shakespeare ‘clicks for you’ because the concerns in Shakespeare’s plays are not abstract concepts or philosophies that only a select few are empowered to penetrate. Shakespeare’s works represent a reflection of the whole spectrum of life in all its complexity, and seemingly everyone can find a situation or character to relate to, or find models of behaviour to assimilate with. An added motivational factor lies in the performative value of interactive projects, as the physical application of textual meaning seems to compel individuals to look at themselves in a more profound sense that subsequently compels them to implement changes in personal

¹⁸ *Funk It Up* program note.

behaviours or business practices. Thus, any effects, in essence, are protracted and enduring and as difficult to adequately analyse as human beings themselves.

However, my research attests that few individuals of whatever status or persuasion remain unmoved when engaging with Shakespeare, and the outcomes are rarely superficial. Why Shakespeare? As Harold Bloom so concisely states: 'Shakespeare matters most because no one else gives us so many other selves, larger and more detailed than any closest friends or lovers seem to be' (Bloom, 727).

Shakespeare impacts on a deeper level, as, concealed beneath the mask of a Shakespearean character, it is possible to find something inside oneself 'whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature' (*Hamlet* 3.2.21-22). It is this complex human depth which 'demands' closer scrutiny that makes Shakespeare so particularly effective with incarcerated populations, who discover inner freedom searching for this truth and find liberation in rediscovering their own true selves.

CHAPTER I : SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

How does theatre and, in particular Shakespearean theatre, achieve veritable miracles inside the toughest prisons? That it does and continues to have significant influence on prisoners' lives during and post-incarceration is no idle boast: Curt Tofteland, Founder and Producing Director of the one of the earliest and longest-running Shakespeare-in-Prison programs, revealed in a promotional clip on YouTube that recidivism among inmates who had participated in Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB) was down to 6%,¹⁹ and has since dropped even lower to 5.5% (Tofteland, personal communication, October 2011). A further promo clip from 2012 shows that this total has decreased yet more to 5.3%.²⁰ This figure compares to 29.5% overall for prisons in Kentucky, with the National Average standing at 67% (figures compiled by Matt Wallace and Curt Tofteland, 2011). Other prison arts programs have reported similar outcomes: a study of the Arts-in-Corrections program by the California State Department of Corrections (CDC) tracked recidivism rates from 1980 to 1987 and found that Arts-in-Corrections (AiC) participants had a significantly higher percentage of favourable outcomes (88%) than the CDC total population for the same time periods (72.25%). This trend was sustained two years post release: 69.9% AiC versus 42% general (Shailor, 19). An essay by Lorraine Moller of 2003 comparing inmates who had participated in Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) with inmates from the general prison

¹⁹ Shakespeare behind Bars promo clip 2011. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xi1-6RIQ3U8>

²⁰ Shakespeare behind Bars promo clip 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwiUpIfp5jg>

population, demonstrated that the RTA group reported a higher level of positive coping, decreased anger levels, fewer infractions, and less time spent in disciplinary segregation.²¹

Prison Shakespeares Around the World

Before turning to the Australian case study, there are a number of ground-breaking and courageous prison theatre ventures around the world that warrant closer scrutiny. It comes as no surprise that the most prominent and long-lasting of these are located in the United States. According to recent statistics, since 2002 America has had the highest rate of incarceration in the world; a disproportionate number of those prisoners are young men of African-American descent.²² The often excessively long sentences indicate that a lot of offenders end up spending most of their lives in jail, desperate for whatever can bring meaning, hope, and purpose to an otherwise desolate existence.

While methodology, structures, and approaches vary, the emphasis of the greater number of arts ventures is firmly on making theatre. Virtually all prison arts practitioners who facilitate programs for the incarcerated declare unequivocally that their intent is not ‘therapy’ or ‘rehabilitation’. Curt Tofteland explains moreover ‘“Rehabilitation” is not a word I like to use, because if people came from

²¹ Lorraine Moller. ‘A Day in the Life of a Prison Theatre Program’. *The Drama Review* 47.1. (2003): 49-73.

²² Tyjen Tsai and Paola Scommegna. ‘U.S. Has World’s Highest Incarceration Rate’. Web. August 2012. <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2012/us-incarceration.aspx>.

poor or dysfunctional backgrounds, or off the street - where do they “rehabilitate” to, when they come out?’ (Shailor, 27). However, the creative freedom that drama practice provides, allows for multifaceted and deep exploration of important life issues. In the words of Brent Buell of Rehabilitation through the Arts (RTA):

RTA is not drama therapy. It is a program in theatre, incorporating all the various arts and educational pursuits that theatre demands. Even though there have been investigations to measure the effectiveness of RTA, RTA is not a ‘study’ or a social experiment. It is gloriously and solely rooted in that old Judy Garland/Mickey Rooney feeling of ‘let’s get a barn and do a show!’ (Shailor, 59)

Shakespeare makes it possible for anyone to enter a world of fantasy and imagination: Bottom the Weaver is transformed into the lover of the Fairy Queen and human beings considered to be ‘ne’er so vile’ (*Henry V*, 4.3.62) are able to metamorphose gloriously into ‘such stuff as dreams are made on’ (*The Tempest*, 4.1.156-157).

Michael Balfour in the introduction to *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice* (2004) attributes the inspiration to write his book solely to the prisoners he worked with:

Their stories have provoked insight, depression, self-analysis, politicisation, anger, fear, laughter, and a million other forms of emotion I never knew I

had. Their willingness (and sometimes the opposite) has forced me to consider and reconsider this thing we call theatre. (Balfour, VII).

In the chapter on Paul Heritage, who worked for many years in Brazilian prisons in a variety of contexts, from HIV/Aids programs to Human Rights performances and Shakespeare with juvenile prisoners, Balfour outlines what motivates himself and others like him:

It seems to me that these are essential faculties for working in any prison context in any country: Passion, surprise and doubt. Without passion we would not enter the gates again and again, without surprise we would not be responsive to what we meet, without doubt we would not stop to analyse the paradox of creative work in these systems of formalised power called a prison. (Balfour, 16)

These sentiments, undoubtedly, apply to one of the longest running and arguably highest profile prison programs, Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB) which arose out of a series of literature classes in 1991 called 'Books Behind Bars' within the Psychology Department at Luther Lockett Correctional Centre in Kentucky, USA. Curt L. Tofteland, at the time Artistic Director of the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival, was invited as guest lecturer and began to introduce Shakespeare into the course. A group sprang up who developed a real hunger to explore Shakespeare

through speaking the words and acting them out rather than merely reading the text. In the first year, 1995, the prisoner-participants performed *An Evening of Scenes from Shakespeare* before an external audience invited at their request.

In the years that followed, a methodology and a way of working as an ensemble evolved. SBB became a company of actors and grew into an independent program within the prison. Its usual time span encompasses nearly an entire year, with only a three-month hiatus during the summer, which is generally used by the ensemble to workshop and cast the new play chosen after the last year's performance, with rehearsals commencing as soon as the outside facilitator returns. Over the following nine months, the chosen play is then rehearsed two to three times a week and performed towards the end of May or June. In this way SBB has produced one play a year with Curt Tofteland as its Producing Artistic Director until 2008 when he moved to Michigan where he now runs a similar project. SBB continues with new facilitator, Matt Wallace, and in September 2013 commences its 19th season of Shakespeare. The inmate-actors were also given permission to tour their plays to other prisons, including women's detention facilities.

Filmmaker Hank Rogerson came across an article in *American Theatre* magazine on Tofteland's work and was intrigued. After visiting Luther Lockett for several days and watching their production of *Hamlet*, he was given permission to make a documentary. *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (2005) had tremendous impact when it

premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, where it received the Grand Jury Prize, won a further 40+ awards at various film festivals since then, and made stars out of a most unlikely bunch of actors. It also put prison theatre and the exceptional power of Shakespeare-in-Prison very firmly on the global map. Subsequently, the now highly respected Tofteland became a mentor to other prison artists like John Shailor, Laura Bates, and Marin Shakespeare, among others, and the program he founded became somewhat of a blueprint for others to emulate. A Fulbright Fellowship in 2011 enabled Tofteland to travel to Australia where, together with Rob Pensalfini he was co-facilitator of the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble's (QSE) Prison Project in 2011, and also directed its annual showcase production of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Jean Trounstone's program in a high-security women's prison in Massachusetts, likewise called *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (without awareness of Tofteland's work), also arose out of teaching literature. In her book *Shakespeare Behind Bars: One Teacher's Story of the Power of Drama in a Women's Prison* (2001), she recounts her more than ten years of working with incarcerated females with great candour and feelings of deep love for the women she worked with. Trounstone's reasons for using Shakespeare and selecting *The Merchant of Venice* as the first play to be staged, were that it dealt with love and law and had characters which both her students and audience would find interesting. Having shed her prejudices about 'women in prison being damaged goods' she started out in the belief that if her students could

tackle Shakespeare, it might equip them to deal with the difficulties of life in general, in or out of prison. Still, neither Trounstine nor her cast could have foreseen the changes that all of them would go through together on that first journey to opening night. Her book is emotionally affecting and makes compelling reading. It is a powerful testimony to the fact that art has the power to redeem lives even in the repressive environment of a tough prison: 'It was in their work that they revealed their deepest needs and secrets, their struggles with the system, devotion to and despair over children, rage at spouses, insights on survival, and relationships with one another' (Trounstine, 3). It took Jean Trounstine five years to write her book,

because the women touched me so deeply that it was difficult to find the words that would do them justice. [...] They seemed lost, with tragic lives, lives like those of Shakespeare's characters, with comic mishaps, and ironic endings. [...] The women of Framingham sought a way out, and their struggles gave them dignity. My heart went out to them, and as I wrote about our work, I could hear their voices, as actors and as women, speaking out of the darkness. (Trounstine 2, 3)

And, reading her book almost in one sitting, I could hear them, too.

Theatre director Agnes Wilcox, who had previously staged shows at mainstream venues like the Actor's Studio in New York and the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Centre in Connecticut, began her prison career when, as Artistic Director of the New Theatre in St Louis, she started an outreach program to take professional actors into prisons. Over time this transformed into the prisoners themselves turning to acting, and now that is what her company Prison Performing Arts is exclusively involved in. Since the year 2000 she has directed mainly Shakespeare but also other classical and contemporary writers in high-security male and female prisons. A 2002 broadcast on Ira Glass' iconic *This American Life* on National Public Radio of her production of *Hamlet – Act V* at Missouri Eastern Correctional Centre, a high security male prison, brought her nationwide attention. The broadcast is a compelling dramatisation and recounts in moving detail the way these men reached deep into their past lives and the crimes they committed to infuse the characters they portrayed with an intensity and truth that is not found anywhere else. Having listened to the broadcast several times, I agree with NPR's Jack Hitt who remarked that some prisoners displayed such extraordinary acting skills as would rival any skilled actor on the outside.²³

Jonathan Shailor's 'The Shakespeare Prison Project' at Racine Correctional Institution in Wisconsin is more overtly focused on the education and empowerment of prisoners, exploring new strategies to deal with emotional issues and non-violent

²³Hamlet: Act Five'. *This American Life*. National Public Radio, 9 August 2002. Web.

solutions to conflict. His 'Theatre of Empowerment' classes are based on the methodology invented by Brazilian theatre activist Augusto Boal, a method also employed in the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble's prison project in Australia, which I will discuss in Chapter II. Shailor wanted to do more than just teaching and he felt that Shakespeare was the ideal vehicle to use. Encouraged by Agnes Wilcox and Curt Tofteland, he started 'The Shakespeare Project' in 2004 and with a group of 17 prisoners performed *King Lear*, followed by *Othello*, *The Tempest* and *Julius Caesar*, as documented in his second book *Theatre of Empowerment: Prison, Performance and Possibility* (2012).

However, I am certain there can be no more inspiring example of a prison venture, in its effectiveness or emotional force, than the one described in the first chapter of Shailor's insightful book *Performing New Lives: Prison Theatre* (2011). It is a moving witness of the power of theatre, and Shakespeare, to resurrect the human spirit. The chapter 'To Know My Deed' by Laura Bates, (33) quite simply blew me away. 'Shakespeare-in-Shackles' is a program facilitated by Bates, an Associate Professor of English at Indiana State University and a Shakespeare specialist. She works with segregated prisoners in a Supermax unit at Wabash Valley Correctional Facility in Carlisle, Indiana. Seated in the middle of a corridor, surrounded by rows of single cells, Bates reads and discusses Shakespeare with eight solitary and shackled prisoners. Because these men are in isolation due to the extreme nature of their past crimes, violent behaviour in prison, and/or escape attempts, for them to

get to the area where the weekly 'group' discussions are held involves a complex security operation. In other words, you have to be very keen to participate to put up with such hassles; but there are always many more applications to join the group than Bates can accept. The program focuses mainly on Shakespeare's 'criminal' tragedies: *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Adaptations of the plays are written by the prisoners themselves who also collaborate in devising the program. 'At their insistence, our goal is to use Shakespearean analysis to challenge - and change - the faulty thinking patterns of even the most hardened criminals' (Bates qtd in Shailor, 33). The prisoners can only communicate with each other and Bates via slots in their cell doors. 'Surely', says Bates, 'it is the most absurd environment in which Shakespeare has ever been discussed, but the conversations are focused, engaged, and often intense' (Bates qtd in Shailor, 35).

Bates' most gifted student, Larry Newton, a 'lifer' without any prospect of parole, has over a period of many years, written a 130-page handbook entitled *Shakespearean Considerations: Connecting Literature to Life* to awaken the interest of his fellow inmates. The play adaptations are performed in the summer by other prisoners who are part of the more 'open' prison population. The performances are relayed via video link to the entire prison population of 2,200, including the segregated authors, with conversations and discussions added, so the whole prison is able to share the benefit of an introduction to Shakespeare. This is a truly remarkable outcome. Not only are these prisoners capable and dedicated enough to

discuss, devise, and re-create their own adaptations of Shakespeare's plays together, they do it in such a way that newcomers and staff can also understand and learn, and, via the video screenings, the whole prison gets to reap the benefits. Such an achievement under the most pernicious of circumstances is the most convincing evidence of the motivational and life-changing force of Shakespeare that I have come across in my research.

The Marin Shakespeare Company, a theatre company based in San Francisco, has been teaching acting classes in Shakespeare to prisoners in the notorious San Quentin State Prison since 2003 alongside its regular schedule of performances. From small beginnings with only five prisoner-actors performing scenes and speeches, it has matured to produce a full length play every year, tackling comedies like *Twelfth Night* in 2011, as well as tragedies including *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The plays are adapted by Marin Shakespeare's managing director, Lesley Currier and her husband, incorporating in the case of *Twelfth Night*, some contemporary pieces of pop music to energise and enliven proceedings. In addition, Marin Shakespeare supplies directors, choreographers, and actors, if needed, to support the inmates' efforts. Ten months of rehearsals culminate in a one-off performance to around 200 inmates and outside guests. When asked at a Q and A session by an audience member why Shakespeare was used and not a more contemporary or 'relatable' author, one of the prisoner-actors replied 'Shakespeare is about as relatable as one could hope for; everyone knows, or is, a version of these

characters, Shakespeare transcends all levels of life'.²⁴ Thus inspired, the men have since progressed to writing and performing their own autobiographical plays based on their experiences of working on *Hamlet*.

The newest player on the Shakespeare-in-Prison circuit in the U.S. is the Magenta Giraffe Theatre Company from Detroit. Founded in 2008 by alumni of Wayne State University's Department of Theatre, it operates with social justice firmly placed at the forefront, seeking to 'act' against apathy, violence, prejudice, and barriers to education through theatre productions, literacy projects, and other educational programs. In 2012 Magenta Giraffe commenced a Shakespeare prison project at the Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Modelled on the original Shakespeare Behind Bars program with founder Curt Tofteland guiding its initial steps, Magenta Giraffe aims to follow SBB's example in reducing recidivism rates significantly in their area. The first performance of scenes from a selection of Shakespeare's plays on 24 August 2012 went exceptionally well, with the audience being totally supportive of the performers, especially those women obviously overcoming challenges of nerves and anxiety. Buoyed by this success, the group has decided to move on to do a whole play. Three successful performances of *The Tempest*, were staged in June 2013, with more Shakespeare already in the planning stages.

²⁴ Ryan White. 'Finding a moment's freedom in prison performance'. *Marinscope Newspapers*. 10 August 2011. Web. http://www.marinscope.com/novato_advance/lifestyles_entertainment/article_aca762ea-7543-506c-aaf3-b4d82c388796.html. August 10

A very disturbing and negative example of prison theatre is recounted in the chapter by James Thompson in Balfour's book. In 'From the Stocks to the Stage' (Thompson qtd in Balfour, 57-76) Thompson describes the Texas Youth Commission's capital offender program which uses drama performance to shame and humiliate juvenile capital offenders. These are young people convicted of murder, attempted murder, and other serious crimes, who are forced to participate in re-staging their original offence in graphic detail, with the expectation that the anguish and pain this causes them will trigger profound remorse and lead to subsequent rehabilitation. Thompson documents that this is, in psychological terms alone, a dangerous practice and may be more damaging to the young person than produce a beneficial catharsis. He declares categorically: 'punishment is theatrical, but if theatre is punishment, I want nothing to do with it' (Thompson qtd in Balfour, 73). All prison arts workers would be in agreement with him on this; if prison theatre is manipulated into becoming part of the system of punishment, it loses its value as a creative tool and so removes the motivation and 'freedom' of inmates to confront their past safely and fearlessly and seek to work towards a new future.

In England, one courageous venture undertaken by the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1990s, though the inmates were not directly involved in the acting process, is worth including in this review, as it took place in a location where the complexities of Shakespeare's language might be thought to fall on

uncomprehending ears. However, Murray Cox's *Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor: The Performance of Tragedy in a Secure Psychiatric Hospital* (1992) speaks of a closeness that developed between the so-called criminally insane patients and the actors of the Royal Shakespeare Company who performed at Broadmoor, and the new dimension and heightened intensity it brought to their acting. The actors felt an overwhelming desire to perform with a greater sense of honesty and truthfulness, aware that this audience might be touched by the actions and emotions in a more immediate way. Performers and audience shared an intimacy and oneness probably not experienced anywhere else. One Broadmoor resident commented: 'having killed and abused ourselves, we are able to understand the madness and violence and the many ranges of emotions in Shakespeare's tragedies because it is close to our heart'; another said 'the thing that really struck me is how close we all are' (Cox, 155). The overall reaction was that 'the productions served to heighten consciousness in a dramatic way by bringing all those present into the one world of the theatre and, through Shakespeare, bringing everyone into contact in a very raw way with their extreme fears and fantasies' (Cox, 248).

'Raw' and 'extreme' also aptly describes the work of The Educational Shakespeare Company (ESC), a charitable organisation based in Northern Ireland, whose projects involve marginalised groups such as the homeless, youth-at-risk, offenders, and ex-offenders. In what is detailed on their website as 'pioneering film therapy', ESC used the grim and hostile environment of Maghaberry Prison in County

Antrim, Northern Ireland, to film an adaptation of *Macbeth*, called *Mickey B*, its cast and crew made up mainly of 'lifers', those prisoners serving very long sentences. In the 1970s and 1980s, Bobby Sands and ten other prisoners died on hunger strikes in Maghaberry in an attempt to attain political prisoner status. An extremely controversial project due to the ongoing tense political situation in the region and some of the prisoners' possible connections to terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, it attracted fierce criticism in the press and was only recently allowed to be screened to the public. In its defence, ex-prisoner Sam McClean stated 'this is the most important thing I've ever done. Jail can brutalise people. You can feel hopeless. This project meant something to everyone inside. For someone to say that we shouldn't be allowed to help ourselves in that way - it's crazy'. (McClean qtd in McDevitt, *The Guardian*). *Mickey B* has since garnered much international acclaim, with screenings taking place all over the world. Listed among its founding patrons are Michael Bogdanov, former director of the English Shakespeare Company, and the late Augusto Boal. ESC's new work-in-progress is *Prospero's Prison*, a contemporary version of *The Tempest*. Set to be filmed in the old Crumlin Road Gaol, now a museum, the cast and crew will be sourced from a community of *ex-offenders*. Set in post-conflict Northern Ireland, its themes of revenge versus reconciliation are no less pertinent and urgent now. In order to 'tackle many of society's social problems and trying to rebuild lives' (ESC website, accessed November 2011), the Educational Shakespeare Company has

found its own unique way of ensuring that the stories of the lost and despised have a chance to be heard and understood.

Probably the most successful, multifaceted, and ongoing enterprise that operates on a variety of levels and extends its creative outreach on a truly global scale, is the London Shakespeare Workout (LSW): Prison Project. Since its inception in 1997, the LSW: Prison Project has facilitated the interaction of more than 12,000 professional performers with over 9,000 offenders /ex-offenders. LSW produces workshops, theatrical and musical presentations in all sorts of locations, from the House of Lords to Pentonville Prison, from a small theatre in Norwich to the Royal Opera House. During the past fifteen years, the company has produced professional productions in theatres, arts centres, and educational institutions all over the world and joined forces with many other prison arts groups. Collaborating on a project with Arts-in-Corrections in 2008, executive director Bruce Wall and a couple of actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company together with inmates from the California Men's Colony facility, put on a musical celebration of the works of Shakespeare and other notable authors, along with original writings from the inmates for a four-night run. The event featured in a long write-up in the *L.A. Times* by journalist Diane Haithman, who commented in a later paragraph on what must be a spectacular achievement for anybody. One young offender, a 20-year-old former child actor in jail on an assault charge, through the LSW Prison Project was

offered a full scholarship to study at Oxford University and hopes his success will inspire others to persevere.²⁵

In February/March 2012, LSW achieved another first. At the Corradino Correctional Facility in Malta, a multinational group of young offenders, many of them first time Shakespeareans as well as first time thespians, staged a show for a four-night-run at a public theatre in Valletta. This turned out to be so successful, it was made into the very moving documentary 'When You Hear My Voice'. Among the many artists who have shared their skills with inmates on LSW prison projects are such luminaries as Peter Brook, Clair Bloom, Richard Dreyfus, Dame Janet Suzman, Al Pacino, and Kenneth Branagh. Renowned actress Gayle Hunnicutt is Chair of the Executive Committee and dedicates a large amount of her time to LSW's prison work. LSW's stellar reputation is reflected in the media, Michael Billington of *The Guardian* newspaper writes: 'LSW works at the highest level. What is most impressive is the commitment of the entire company and its rare passion for language'.²⁶

It is clear that Bruce Wall, actor, executive director and producer, is an exceptionally gifted, dedicated, and impassioned individual, forever instigating new projects, motivating supporters, actors and inmates to pursue what he insists everybody, even prisoners, are entitled to: 'the will to dream'. Presently in the

²⁵Diane Haithman. 'London Shakespeare Workout Prison Project puts the Bard behind bars'. *Los Angeles Times*. February 20, 2008. Web. <http://www.wvculture.org/arts/LATimes>.

²⁶ London Shakespeare Workout. <http://www.lswproductions.co.uk>. Web. 4 March 2013.

finishing stages is Wall's latest project, a documentary entitled 'Muse of Fire', due for release in late 2013 and featuring seven Oscar winners (Sir Ian McKellen, Dame Judi Dench, Ralph Fiennes, Sir Ben Kingsley, John Hurt, Jeremy Irons and Baz Luhrmann), with prison segments filmed in Belfast, Dublin and Berlin. 'The idea is to celebrate joy in friendship through the lens of Shakespeare's humility',²⁷ said Wall.

At the other end of the globe, in India, actor and director Hulagappa Kattimani has made it his mission in life to take Shakespeare into every major prison in the country. Since 1998 he has been directing numerous plays with the full support of government officials and the police, who approve these creative activities because they eliminate a lot of the anger-fuelled behaviour and depression that afflict inmates. The prisoners themselves treat Kattimani 'like a messiah come to redeem them'.²⁸ And, no wonder, as during productions he even lives in the jail like them, eating and sleeping in the same dark chambers, sometimes for several months. Throughout the rehearsal process, this devoted director talks patiently and in depth to each of the prisoners, goes extensively into the context and history of the play, the attributes of a character, the practicalities of making theatre, and makes time to debate questions of crime and punishment with the group. Actress Felicity Kendal, who grew up in India, visited Kattimani's actors in Mysore prison in May 2012 for a BBC documentary and spoke with awe of the 'absolute honesty, raw

²⁷ Ramona Depares. 'Theatre as prison therapy' *The Sunday Times*, Malta. 10 June, 2012. Web.

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120610/arts-entertainment/Theatre-as-prison-therapy>

²⁸ 'A hard act to follow'. *The Hindu*. October 1, 2000. <http://hindu.com/2000/10/01/stories/1301078d.htm>

emotion, and quite frankly, brilliant acting' by a convicted murderer who had mastered *King Lear* to a level of near perfection. She said, 'it puts a lot of us pretentious thespians to shame, he had in some way developed into that person who was in that anguish to be able to convey the words, the emotion, surrounded by his inmates. It was pure theatre'.²⁹

In South Africa, during the apartheid era, many ANC activists were incarcerated on the notorious Robben Island. In addition to other more brutal treatments meted out to the prisoners on a daily basis, literature was also forbidden. The only reading material allowed was the Bible. One of the prisoners, Sonny Venkatrathnam, had been sent a copy of Shakespeare's *Collected Works* by his wife, which was duly impounded by the prison authorities. However, Venkatrathnam managed to persuade a sympathetic warden to return the book to him insisting it was 'the Bible by William Shakespeare'. Being of the Hindu faith, Venkatrathnam then covered the book with Diwali cards and claimed it was a Hindu holy book to prevent re-confiscation by the authorities. It has been known as the Robben Island Bible ever since and became a major source of discussion and debate among the prisoners which included, among others, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Eddie Daniels. Before he was released in 1977, Sonny Venkatrathnam asked his fellow detainees to sign their names in the margins next to their favourite Shakespearean quote. Nelson Mandela's selection, tellingly, comes from *Julius Caesar*: 'Cowards die many

²⁹Felicity Kendal meets Indian prisoners doing Shakespeare'. *BBC News* – India. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-18036002>

times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once' (2.2.32-33). On a previous occasion, when he was facing execution, Mandela, in extremis, drew comfort from lines out of *Measure for Measure*: 'Be absolute for death; either death or life / Shall thereby be the sweeter' (3.1.5-6). Professor Ashwin Desai, of the University of South Africa in Durban, conducted interviews with many of the ex-detainees who signed, to discover how Shakespeare reflected their struggles and sustained their spirits during the long years in a brutal prison. His book *Reading Revolution: Shakespeare on Robben Island* (2012) bears witness to Shakespeare shining a light into the darkest prison and helping those forgotten by the world to stay alive. A new volume in the 'Shakespeare Now' series entitled *Hamlet's Dreams: The Robben Island Shakespeare* (2013) by David Schalkwyk, Professor of English at the University of Cape Town and researcher at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, expands on this theme. He examines in detail the pieces chosen by some individuals and hypothesises on why they chose them and looks at parallels between Shakespeare's writing and the experiences of prisoners in South African penal institutions.³⁰

Focusing mainly on incarcerated youth, The Independent Theatre Movement of South Africa (ITMSA), in January 2011 began its second year of an outreach program for young male offenders at Bonnytoun House, a juvenile detention centre in an upmarket suburb of Cape Town, South Africa - a country with an

³⁰ Philip Fisher. 'Hamlet's Dreams'. *British Theatre Guide*. 2013. Web. 26 July 2013. <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/hamlet-s-dreams-191-pages-8574>

incarceration rate of 1 in 300.³¹ The program is only a short one, consisting of a three-week crash course in speech and acting. A performance is staged inside the prison two or three times a year. Despite its short time-span, the program has impacted significantly on the boys and staff alike. Participants reported increased self-worth, the release of bottled up negative emotions or just plain joy at being real ‘actors’. The director of the detention centre admits to initial scepticism, but confirms that he has seen major changes take place as shy, sullen, violence-prone teenagers have become motivated to turn their lives around. Led by visionary director, Tauriq Jenkins, ITMSA has since gone one step further. For the first time in South African Theatre history, young offenders from the Ottery Youth Care Centre in Cape Town awaiting trial, have been permitted to perform their version of *Hamlet* outside the prison gates in a community hall to a public audience. When asked why classical theatre and why Shakespeare? Jenkins explains that he is particularly interested in how Shakespeare tackles the concept of judgment and how this then relates to young people who have already been judged and dismissed by society at large and failed by the system that is supposed to rehabilitate them. He asserts, moreover, that ‘Shakespeare is right for prison because of the Shakespearean antithesis of true and honest expression coming out of a symbolically dishonest space’.³² He describes *Hamlet* as being the perfect play for young men because it is terrifying in its difficulty and because it demands a kind of emotional vulnerability that especially incarcerated young men would not be able to

³¹Anders Kelto. ‘Bringing the Bard Behind Bars In South Africa. *NPR*, 4 January 2011. Web.

³²Colette Gordon. ‘Taking “Shakespeare Inside” Out’. <http://titania.folger.edu/blogs/sq/forum/?p=445>

show otherwise in a prison setting. Questioned about the future of the project, Jenkins insists he is in it for life and is continually trying to broaden his skills and vision to meet the ongoing challenges of prison theatre. He is keen to expand into the wider African Continent, believing that theatre through Shakespeare can heal; at the same time allowing the English language to lose its connotation as the language of the colonial oppressor.

It is not overstating the case that, sometimes, immersing oneself in Shakespeare can save one's life from the very pit of despair. Nowhere is this felt more strongly than in a situation where only thoughts are free. Anwar Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and current leader of Keadilan, the People's Justice Party, gave an exceptional opening address at the Brisbane World Shakespeare Congress in 2006, entitled 'Between Tyranny and Freedom : A Brief Voyage with the Bard' (Ibrahim qtd in Fotheringham, 21). The poignantly erudite Ibrahim described his years of incarceration in solitary confinement as analogous to suddenly finding himself part of the eternal struggle between good and evil, quoting from Dante's *Divine Comedy*: 'Midway upon the journey of my life I found myself in a dark wood, where the right way was lost' (21). Ibrahim was able to survive six years in prison with Shakespeare as his most intimate companion and chief source of comfort (23). 'In the stony silence of the night, when you have no one to talk to, Shakespeare's characters become more than mere dramatis personae. They speak to you and allow you to speak to them' (24). This freedom of mind and spirit came to

Ibrahim in the form of the Riverside Edition of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. It allowed him to escape the demons of the mental torture of solitude with Prospero, and harness his will to keep fighting against the injustices done to him in company with Mark Antony, Macbeth, or Hermione, even finding victory in defeat when reflecting on Lear and Cordelia's almost cheerful journey to impending doom: 'Come let's away to prison: / We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage' (*King Lear*, 5.3.9-10).

The premise of an essay by Philippa Kelly, 'How I May Compare This Prison Where I live unto the World: Shakespeare in a Changi Prison', is that Australian and British soldiers gained resilience and strength through poetry and Shakespeare 'while they had nothing to eat and waited to die'. Kelly discusses the poems composed by Australian and British soldiers in the hellish conditions of Changi prison during the Second World War and suggests:

The collection of poems is peppered with echoes of the classics, particularly Shakespeare and Keats. The snatches of Shakespeare are opaque and, indeed, the poets themselves may not have recognised their source. But they were undeniably important to these soldiers, who drew from them some kind of sustenance in their outpost of incarceration.³³

³³ Kelly, Philippa. 'How May I Compare This Prison Where I live Unto the World: Shakespeare in a Changi Prison'. *AUMLA* 95, (2001): 1-7. Web.

Even under such dire circumstances of privation and cruelty, Kelly asserts, Australian and British POWs somehow found the strength to encourage each other through reading and writing poetry. The collector of these poems, Sergeant David Griffin, finally decided to publish the poems he had kept hidden for 45 years. He prefaced the compilation with an extract from *Richard II*:

O, who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast? (*Richard II*, 1.3.257-60)

Maybe in no other place would these words ring true more harshly, and thus it seems not too far-fetched for Kelly to claim that, ‘and in reading through the poems some fifty-five years later, the ghost of Shakespeare can be perceived, a shadowy presence in a most unlikely place’.³⁴

Coming back to the U.S. and another remarkable project: ‘Shakespeare in the Courts’ which operates in Berkshire County, Massachusetts. This is a program for juvenile delinquents, where young offenders can, quite literally, be ‘sentenced to Shakespeare’. Devised by Kevin Coleman, Director of Education for Shakespeare and Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, in collaboration with a justice of the juvenile court, these teenagers instead of being locked up or doing community

³⁴Ibid

service, are taught to sing in Latin, dance to Elizabethan music and, after an initial lack of enthusiasm, over the 6-week course find themselves slowly succumbing to Shakespeare's magic. On performance day, the praise and applause they get for something they did well, is often for some of them the first time they have received approval for anything. Now in its thirteenth year, more than 200 youths have passed through the program which has achieved nationwide recognition, including an award from the White House in 2006 and, though considered somewhat controversial, it is slowly being taken up in other jurisdictions. It was this particular model of intervention that prompted the Executive Dean of Arts at the University of Queensland in 2005 to approach his colleague, Rob Pensalfini, about the possibility of starting a prison project in Australia.

When reflecting on why Shakespeare has this kind of impact, I am moved to consider that he was endowed with an unusual perspicacity in observing his fellow humans closely, thought about life deeply, and was able to use his talent as a writer to fashion compelling narratives that vividly and powerfully express the flaws and foibles, passions, desires, and infinite proclivities for good and evil that the mind can conceive or the heart is able to feel, which is why his work resonates so strongly in extreme situations by people dispossessed of liberty, life, and hope: prisoners. Prison arts workers are in the main very accomplished theatre professionals, directors, playwrights, and actors, who, in many instances, are also well-credentialed academics or teachers. Gifted with a peculiar empathy for the socially

marginalised, what motivates these individuals is that in theatre, and Shakespearean theatre in particular, dwells a strange magic that can transform lives. Despite the enormous difficulties involved in making theatre in detention, the miracle of watching individuals blossom and grow, who previously looked on themselves as 'lower than a snake's belly' (Charlebois qtd in Shailor, 268-269) is for prison artists irresistible, as is the discovery of genuine talent. It is of immeasurable significance to inmates that professionals want to come and interact with them, to awaken creativity and skills they never thought they possessed. Often participants speak of the 'freedom' of mind and spirit they find in a drama class, the joy of being in a different world for a few hours. It is worth mentioning at this point that the overriding comment by participants in prison programs anywhere in the world is how much they value the opportunity to 'act like human beings', to be treated like someone with feelings and emotions rather than some kind of beast best left to rot in a cage.

The power of Shakespeare opens up a world of infinite promise and mystery. In a place without hope, you can be shown a second chance at life like Leontes, generate magic with Prospero, or reach into the darkness of ambition and evil in the company of Macbeth. Prisoner-participants are enabled to deal with the troubles in their own lives through performance, and can do so in the emotional safety of a Shakespearean character protected by the distance of historical time and place, in the company of facilitators who genuinely care about them.



Prisoner Mark as Valentine trying to persuade his best friend Proteus, QSE's Gavin Edwards, to join him in exploring the world. (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*)

CHAPTER II : THE QUEENSLAND SHAKESPEARE ENSEMBLE'S PRISON PROJECT - 2011

Canst Thou Remember

A Time Before We Came Unto This Cell?

(The Tempest, 1.2.38-39)

In the light of the proliferation of Shakespeare prison programs in various parts of the world, stretching from as far away as India, South Africa, and Malaysia, to the U.S., England, Ireland, and places in-between, it is perhaps surprising that only one such program exists and is ongoing in Australia today. Part of the reason may be that Shakespeare is still seen as the domain of a more select and well-educated minority, alongside a general indifference towards art and theatre as intrinsically valuable or, indeed, necessary, compared to cricket or football, especially in the consideration of financial rewards. Moreover, a prison sentence is intended and desired by the general populace to be a harsh punishment for often serious and vicious crimes; therefore the idea of engaging prisoners in the dramatic arts does not appear to loom large on anybody's radar, or funding allocations. Prison theatre artists themselves, as explained in Chapter I, are also on the whole rather rare creatures, who eschew overt publicity or the glamour of first night reviews and admiring audiences. Instead, they are motivated to show compassion and

commitment to largely despised, unloved (and maybe unlovable) human beings, while at the same time needing to possess extraordinary skills to motivate them to try something that may, on the face of it, appear a ridiculous concept: theatrical performance in a place of detention.

The nascence of the only prison program ever to take root in Australia came about by chance. Although the Bell Shakespeare Company had performed *Macbeth* in Mulawa Women's Prison in Western Sydney in 1997 and Philippa Kelly taught some Shakespeare classes in Mulawa and in Long Bay (a male detention centre) during 1996/1997, my research indicates that these were isolated efforts and until 2006 there appears to be no evidence that any other such endeavours took place.

The inaugural Australian Shakespeare prison program took place in 2006 at Borallon Correctional Centre, a high security prison for men at Ipswich, Queensland, featuring *The Tempest*, returned in 2009 with a production of *Julius Caesar*, and in 2010 staged *Macbeth*. Its lead facilitator from the start of the project was Rob Pensalfini from the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble.

Dr Pensalfini is a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and Drama at the University of Queensland. He holds a doctorate in theoretical linguistics and Australian Aboriginal languages from MIT, Boston, teaches drama performance, and is one of only seven people in Australia certified by Kristin Linklater to teach her world-

renowned Linklater voice training method. Dr Pensalfini has worked professionally for many years as an actor, director, teacher, and musician in the USA and Australia. He founded the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble (QSE) in 2001 and is still its Artistic Director as well as acting in, composing, and performing music for many of QSE's productions. Pensalfini also studied the methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed (T.O.), which forms part of QSE's prison program, with Brent Blair, Barbara Santos, and Julian Boal, son of founder Augusto Boal, in the U.S. and now runs annual Theatre of the Oppressed workshops at the University of Queensland. One reason why he must be considered a significant part of the select few artists and academics that work with the incarcerated, can be inferred from the ethos that permeates the artistic qualities of the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble:

Mean what you say and say what you mean.

Character is what happens when actor and text intersect.

QSE's Mantra: Passion; Precision; Presence.³⁵

The fourth prison project undertaken by the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble turned out to be the most problematic and challenging yet, due to the impending closure of Borallon prison and the relocation of inmates to a new facility in early January 2012. This resulted in such a high degree of prisoner movements, early releases, transferrals to other facilities, and overall physical and emotional

³⁵ Editor, 'Interview with Rob Pensalfini' (Interview 30). *Greenroom*. 13 August 2012. Web. <http://actorsgreenroom.net/archives/7074>

instability, that it became impossible to produce a whole play in 2011. As Pensalfini explained in a Radio National interview recorded at Borallon a week before the performance: ‘more than usual, over the three months of the program, we have had about 24 different prisoners through our doors and working with us, many of them have gone now’.³⁶

*The Strongest Voice Comes From The Heart*³⁷ - Borallon 2011

This chapter presents an intensive case study of the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble’s (QSE) prison program of 2011. It chronicles the journey that the facilitators and inmates undertook together and brings into focus the overall aim of the thesis: to shed some light on what makes Shakespeare so effective with individuals in detention.

More than a year has gone by since the end of Shakespeare-in-Prison 2011, but it is still hard to find the right words to do justice to these inmates who overcame the tag of being ‘girly’ because of doing drama, were courageous enough to tackle the unfamiliar language, committed themselves to the rigours of the rehearsal process, and then stayed the distance to bear witness to the ‘liberating’ power of Shakespeare. For two out of the three months’ duration of the project I learned, struggled, and persevered with them, played strange and sometimes ridiculous

³⁶‘Shakespeare in Prison’. *Breakfast*. ABC Radio National, Brisbane. 16 December 2011. Web. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/2011-12-16/3734476>.

³⁷Subtitle of the first Samoan feature film *The Orator*. Director Tusi Tamasese, October 2011.

games, laughed, cried (a lot), and shared thoughts and emotions I could never divulge to anyone on the outside. Often, the mostly very young men were frustratingly immature and silly, yet at other times they were intensely present, focused, and absolutely busting to get their lines down right. But they never failed to astonish and move me. This case study is a tribute to the sixteen men of Borallon jail who began their journey with us on September 26 and the ‘magnificent seven’ that remained to deliver an outstanding performance on December 15, 2011.³⁸

Borallon Correctional Centre was located (it is now closed) rather incongruously within a pretty bushland setting, surrounded by majestically tall eucalypts and ferny, golden wattle trees. Inside, the complex revealed neatly mown lawns and beautifully trimmed hedges framing gorgeous purple-flowering bougainvillea, accompanied by the warbling of numerous magpies. Nevertheless, it was a maximum security prison that exuded a distinct sense of oppression as soon as the razor wire came into view. I never totally lost the sense of uneasiness and desolation I felt whenever we approached the prison gates. Our team of facilitators consisted of Rob Pensalfini as Lead Facilitator; Gavin Edwards, an actor and musician with QSE; Emma Heard, a student at the University of Queensland completing her Honours degree in Public Health, also gifted with a talent for acting and improvisation; myself, who earlier in the year attended a week of intensive training in T.O. methodology as part of my research. This training is a mandatory

³⁸My participation in this case study had ethics clearance from the University of Sydney. The names of inmates have been changed to protect their anonymity.

requirement for QSE prison facilitators. It had proved to be such an emotional rollercoaster, challenging all kinds of prejudices and leading to amazing displays of inner bravery by all who took part that I was curious to see if something similar would happen in a prison setting. A special addition to this eclectic mix was American SBB founder Curt Tofteland, travelling in Australia on a Fulbright Senior Fellowship, and invited by Rob to be part of the project. Tofteland's vast experience of producing and directing Shakespeare in U.S. correctional facilities over seventeen years contributed some wonderful teaching, spirited rehearsals laced with moments of wicked humour, and great warmth and wisdom to the enterprise.

Borallon - Week 1

Very slowly, the men trickled into the rehearsal room we had been allocated next to the Chaplain's office that first Monday. They were predominantly Polynesian (Samoans, Tongans), a couple of indigenous Australians, one Vietnamese, and only two Caucasians, and of those two one was part-Malaysian. According to Rob this was somewhat unusual compared to past programs.³⁹ The Polynesians were rather huge and fierce-looking, but this appearance was immediately softened by their most brilliant, warm smiles. All of the men were young, early to mid-20s, only one or two of them slightly older, late 30s to early 40s, maybe. At the beginning when we shook hands, I was nervous, unsure of myself, and equally uncertain of how things would go, but at the same time excited and keen to start the work. For the

³⁹ Facilitators and participants in this case study are referred to by their first names only, as it is an essential part of the project that informality and genuine connections between all participants are established and maintained.

first time we gathered in a circle to ‘check-in’. The team of facilitators talked about how we were feeling and what our hopes were for the project. All the participants were asked to reveal something about themselves or why they had decided to join. It is worth mentioning at this point that the Shakespeare program is an independent and voluntary program. Though at times financially supported by the Department of Correctional Services, it does not form part of any ‘rehabilitative’ or ‘educational’ efforts mandated by Correctional Services as a prerequisite for inmates to gain early release. Consequently, it requires an enterprising spirit as well as a certain amount of personal bravery by inmates to participate in something a bit out-of-the-ordinary, even strange, perhaps, when there are no obvious benefits in terms of early release.

Rob explained the significance of beginning and ending each day of our visits gathered together in a circle and the importance of honesty and truth within the circle. Inside this space you became part of a community where everyone watched each other’s back, where you could laugh or cry and openly admit to feelings of fear, joy, or sadness. The circle was intended to be a place of safety; it could bear anything, support each person’s needs, and what was talked about in the circle remained in the circle. You could leave your prison persona at the door; here you were free to be yourself. Participants were asked to commit to this or they could leave without recriminations. This may seem a simplistic concept to the outside world, but it proved a powerful device in a prison environment where lies and

intrigues abound, no-one really trusts anyone, and the wrong loyalties or losing face can and do result in violent outcomes. Some of the inmates who decided to abandon the project, still returned from time to time to be part of the circle and continued to share their thoughts and emotions with us.

The circle also represented respect and rituals. The ritual of checking-in at the beginning of the day and checking-out at the end of the day created belonging and community and was mutually empowering and supportive. Anyone who on a particular day felt good and strong was asked to transmit their energy, their spiritual and emotional life force, to others who were feeling low and needed the extra power the circle could give. During a smoko break we got to know each other a little by sharing songs and stories. I talked about the Rugby World Cup, the prowess of the New Zealand team, the All Blacks, and my love of the haka, which gained me instant acceptance by the men. To further break the ice, we started to play some T.O. games, such as the 30-second life story: we split into pairs and were given a few minutes to tell each other details of our lives that we deemed important or meaningful. After absorbing and memorising as much information as possible, each person then silently performed what he remembered of his partner's life. This subtle device of instantly re-enacting someone's history imparted significant value and dignity to the person concerned, visibly demonstrated by exclamations of joy and awe. The underlying purpose here was to initiate the process of making thoughts and feelings visible, the creation of pictures in the mind, aligning images

with words. After some initial reluctance, everybody got into the spirit of the game, connections were made, and by the end of the day everybody hugged everybody exuberantly. In just a few hours we had become a 'band of brothers' (*Henry V*, 4.3.60). It was that simple and that complicated. In a short space of time we had formed a bond, aware in the back of our minds that fairly soon those fragile ties were going to be severed again. Would Shakespeare and our efforts be sufficient to make a lasting difference after we had moved on? But, on this day, we left feeling exhilarated and confident.

On the second day everything was different again; some inmates who had been very enthusiastic on the first day did not return, new people joined, and these comings and goings would turn out to be the 'routine' for this project. After a couple of warm-up exercises, the men asked us to come and watch them rehearse hakas and dances in the prison gym for the following day's Long Termers' Day (a family day for inmates who had been inside more than 10 years). Proud to be invited, we watched, awestruck; the intensity and power of the different kinds of hakas (Samoan, Fijian, Maori) interspersed with the gracefulness of Aboriginal music and dance was fascinating and deeply moving. The performance demonstrated a dynamic and nuanced intermingling of light and shade: when one haka receded, the indigenous dancers moved forward with delicate, fluid movements, at once mesmerising and evocative. We were told later on that such interaction of diverse tribes and cultures would never take place on the outside; here in prison it had simply evolved

naturally. Inspired by what he had witnessed, Curt challenged the group: 'we know you have talent and you have passion. Now make theatre the way you do the haka'.

And so we began to tackle Shakespeare. First up, Hamlet's speech to the players, 'Speake the Speech, I pray you, as I pronounc'd it to you - trippingly on the tongue' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.1-14). Curt used the First Folio version, as he preferred the kind of text that Shakespeare himself might have worked with in his day without modern emendations and embellishments. For our novice thespians that was hard going, they had to wrestle with an arcane form of English, coupled with limited literacy and reading skills, and virtually no prior exposure to Shakespeare for most of them. The speech itself was not exactly an easy text to grasp with its many historical and religious allusions and metaphors. Curt interpreted and analysed fragments of text, word by word and line by line with endless patience and good humour, explaining more problematic expressions, how and why Shakespeare uses the specific words he does, and making it as easy as he could for participants to understand. As such understanding grew, the desire to learn more increased in equal measure. Many in the group voiced their astonishment at the beauty and richness of Shakespeare's vernacular. I think they also found the 'bizarre language' an interesting challenge.

Three of the prisoners turned out to be natural actors. One of them, Tom, the only older man, possibly in his early 40s, on his first reading of Hamlet's speech had the inflections and intonations just right; the clarity of his delivery was excellent.

Without having the time or the opportunity to inquire into someone's background, it is of course impossible to arrive at a clear analysis as to whether there is such a thing as innate acting or performance skills, but I believe I saw evidence of this with our men.

As part of my research I attended a symposium on 14 January 2012 entitled '181 Regent Street: Addressing Black Theatre', at Carriageworks performance space, Redfern, an event that took place in conjunction with the Festival of Sydney's indigenous program. One of the seminars centred on how performance happens, the problems and challenges of being an indigenous performer and the likelihood of the existence of intuitive or instinctive performance ability. An intense discussion led by actor Ernie Dingo, including actors, directors and writers such as Katharine Brisbane, Bob Maza, Wesley Enoch, Lillian Crombie, Justine Saunders, and Jack Davis, formed the consensus that there appears to be something in the nature of indigenous actors that somehow elicits strikingly brilliant performances despite curtailed rehearsals due to all sorts of difficulties such as racism, drug, alcohol and domestic problems. Aboriginal actors seemed to have a 'knowing' way of acting, while their western counterparts generally needed to learn the processes first in order to come to performance (comment noted January 14, 2012). Even though such claims cannot be verified and are problematic to define in analytical terms, I think they should not be discounted either.

Day 3 held more surprises, as the men who had been performing on Long Termers' Day arrived at rehearsal looking spectacular, their faces decorated with intricate tribal tattoos, on a massive high from the sheer physicality of their performance. Rob and Curt decided to use that energy to introduce two more speeches, the long monologue from *Richard II*, 'I have bin studying how to compare this prison where I live unto the world' (5.5.1-41), and 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow' from *Macbeth* (5.5.9-27). Both speeches resonated strongly with our group, a sentiment that was intensified when Curt shared some of his teaching by delving into four fundamental life questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I love?
3. How shall I live, knowing I am going to die?
4. What is my gift to the family of man?

I was sure these men had never been asked to think about life in this way before and saw that they were visibly moved. Their immediate reaction was quite strange; one by one they spoke about how much it meant to them that we made them feel so welcome and valued. Then, in an unusual show of emotion, they shared their thoughts and feelings about the people they cared for. I believe the men were genuinely touched to be considered important enough to have such questions discussed with them.

Thursday, Day 4. On arrival at the jail we were told that the rehearsal space had been changed to the Visitors Area. No notice or explanation was given. It filtered down to us later at a debrief session with our Liaison Officer that some of the guards thought our participants were having too much fun and believed the program gave them licence to muck-up and misbehave. They wanted us all under closer supervision (and surveillance, as the Visitors area was equipped with security cameras). Most of the group did not attend as they would have had to be strip-searched in order to access the restricted space, so it was a small and somewhat glum contingent that assembled. The mood lightened when two of the men who had written a song for Rob's birthday that day, sang and played it for him to his surprise and delight. Tom, the inmate, who the day before had stirred us by reciting Hamlet so perfectly, again astonished everyone when he produced several sheets of paper where he had written detailed reflections on the Richard II speech. His cellmate had to read them as he did not trust himself to get through it without being overcome with emotion.

Using the momentum gained by this sharing and the fact that we found ourselves in an uncomfortable and hostile space, Rob initiated some exercises of 'Image Theatre', which took the form of a series of living tableaux depicting a situation being changed from 'oppression' to 'liberation'. Image Theatre is considered to be a very effective tool in the T.O. arsenal because it demonstrates the possibility of transformation of an oppressive or violent situation into a desired outcome: release,

joy, love, and community. Performed in silence, the image is gradually changed from a negative to a positive one. The group found this an excellent thing to do; one participant remarked that because we were physically 'acting out' different scenarios, he could actually see a situation change before his eyes and so was able to explore different ways of reacting. Another said 'most of the programs here are on paper, this program is about "doing", I learn much more this way'. Someone else commented 'Yesterday was quite mad, me and my cellie [cell-mate] talked about the circle and Shakespeare long into the night'.

The basic methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed was devised by Brazilian artist, activist, and Member of Parliament, Augusto Boal, in the early 1970s. Boal considered the medium of theatre a vital tool in the fight against political and societal oppression wherever it was made manifest: in the home, on the street, in politics, and, of course, in prison. He himself was imprisoned and tortured for his defiant stance against an oppressive regime. 'In my cell', said Boal, 'I sought myself out and I asked: who am I?' (Boal, *Aesthetics*, 109). He began to think about alternative ways of living, in- and outside of prison and developed techniques that could be learned and adapted during the time the body is confined, to retrain and transform the mind. Through theatre, he sought to equip people with new and better life skills to re-take their place in society upon release.

In a later paragraph Boal wrote:

In the Theatre of the Oppressed the citizen, in the present, thinks about their past and invents their future. The stage of the theatre – like the cell or the prison yard – can be a place of study, of appraisal, and theatre can be the language of this search for the self. Prison can be a time of reflection, a space of learning, a place of discoveries. Prisoners need to comprehend what they have done and what they have to do, and they need to rehearse ways of living in society. The medium which can best fulfil this task of teaching by concrete life examples, by acts and actions, is the theatre. (Boal, *Aesthetics*, 109-110)

He then devised various types of games and exercises to open up dramatic options, guided by a ‘Joker’ or ‘Facilitator’, although Boal preferred the term ‘Difficultator’, as the objective of any T.O. exercise is to work with participants on a variety of often complex solutions to whatever rupture in their life needs to be dealt with. To achieve this goal, the ‘Facilitator or Difficultator’ must avoid easy or clichéd answers. In any case, for the incarcerated there are often no interventions or solutions possible; however, through T.O. practices, alternative approaches can at least be explored. To enable authentic, truthful emotions to emerge, it is essential that participants create images solely derived from their own lives, as well as bear witness to others’ experiences, thus enabling the development of a range of

possibilities for transformation and growth. In the case of the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble's prison program, Pensalfini explains that

T.O. techniques introduce participants to dramatic practice as self-expression and self-exploration. [...] Through T.O. games and modules, community and confidence are built. The necessity of collaborative creation becomes apparent. Participants learn about one another on a deep human level and begin to look out for each other, in and out of the rehearsal room. (Pensalfini 2011, 8)

Incarcerated populations are confined not merely in a physically limited space, but likewise bound by the strictures and structures of a system that often does not make sense and are further constrained within their own inmate-contrived hierarchy. T.O. loosens inhibitions, encourages emotional bravery and opens up ways of looking at resolving conflict through non-violent means. In the guise of a game, the responses of individuals tend to be more spontaneous and instinctive than the entrenched and somewhat guarded reactions normally disclosed to the world, which tend to be conditioned by upbringing or education. Thus, hidden truths or long buried negative emotions may begin to surface and can be dealt with. Similarly, T.O. can be used to create an environment of acceptance and tolerance, where success is not the end game. Failure is allowed and, moreover, celebrated. The emphasis rests firmly on the individual to effect transformation and change.

T.O. is not about achieving the outcomes or results facilitators may wish to see, the objective is to give the incarcerated a voice, in the spirit of the principles laid down by Boal, a 'setting free' from the inside, or as Curt Tofteland puts it: 'the nobility lies in the attempt, the journey a participant makes, and the epiphanies he could arrive at' (Tofteland, personal communication, 2011). This does not mean a great drama performance is not desired; as a matter of fact, it tends to be an almost natural outcome when an individual is encouraged and supported in their creative endeavours. More important, however, is the re-awakening of nearly non-existent self-love and self-esteem.

The fusion of T.O. and Shakespeare, whose writing encompasses virtually the whole spectrum of the human condition, is particularly dynamic because Shakespeare's characters are not one-dimensional or consist of formulaic heroes or villains. His creations are multifaceted and complex because that is what he observed in the people of his time, human beings as they were then and as they are now, representing a flawed creation. Pensalfini again: 'Shakespeare's work embraces and encourages a multiplicity and diversity of perspectives. It increases our capacity to manage the complexity of the world by not reducing it to simple principles and symbols' (Pensalfini, 2007,2). In the plays of Shakespeare, prisoner-participants are able to find an abundance of characters that reflect what is going on in their own lives. Participant Mark said in the ABC Radio National interview recorded at Borallon: 'in here we've got so many situations and problems and him

[Shakespeare], in a lot of his plays, there are problems and problem solving, how something bad could turn into good. Even though he's dead, we're still learning a lot of things from him'. Inside the safety of the character they have chosen to take on, participants are able to delve into the troubles in their own lives without revealing themselves on a personal level, and can do so confidently.

Friday, Day 5 - more surprises. Mark apologised to the group for not attending yesterday: 'my pride got in the way; I was aggro to a guard and was not allowed to come. I am really sorry, everybody'. In a place where not losing face is vital, such an admission required a lot of courage and left a lasting impression on the rest of the group. Curt seized this opportunity to talk about making right decisions in prison: 'be a willow, not an oak. When a storm comes, the oak will break, whereas the willow will just bend itself to whatever direction it needs to go'. What he meant is, that in prison you cannot fight the power of the system, it will always be stronger than you are, but if you can find a way of avoiding conflict, you will survive prison with more dignity and without additional punishment, because it is your anger and pride that make you obstinate and inflexible.

The warm-up exercises afterwards were particularly raucous and the positive mood engendered by Mark's apology also noticeably enlivened the T.O. games. The rehearsal continued, previously learned speeches were reviewed and possible scenes discussed. The team offered the group a number of Shakespearean characters they

might like to take on. Needless to say, everyone wanted to play a tough guy, warrior, or villain. Mark, a particularly striking-looking young man, despite his initial reluctance, was persuaded to play a 'lover' and this turned out to be an inspired choice.

Rob explained the importance of using your own voice when speaking Shakespeare, not some phoney English accent or other mannerisms picked up from film or television. Here he reflects Linklater's teaching which is based on the premise that voice and language are an integral part of the whole body, not just the head, to communicate the body's bigger passions and emotions as they did in Shakespeare's time where a more orally expressive culture prevailed (Linklater, 4). In the modern era, as a result of the development of new technologies as well as the evolution of different societal norms, we have been conditioned to restrain our emotions along with our voices. But it is the uniqueness of an individual's delivery, when he applies his whole self completely, that can renew and invigorate a text and imbue it with new significance and meaning. Therefore, there is no right or wrong way to speak or act Shakespeare; it is the individual's personal truth resonating from deep within his body and soul that creates the true magic of theatre.

We had been allowed to bring a 'live' rose into Borallon, thorns and all; for the closing check-out it was used to help the group visualise negative and positive character traits: 'my rose is ... / my thorn is ...'. This elicited some very frank

responses. Mark, again, was quite willing to admit his failings 'I am loving and passionate, but pride is my enemy'.

A review of the first and only full week of Shakespeare at Borallon confirmed the truism that in prison nothing happens in a hurry. Prison systems and protocols seemed designed to frustrate our efforts at creating a cohesive troupe of performers. Often inmates' names were inexplicably left off attendance lists thereby preventing their participation, our rehearsal times clashed with other courses mandatory for parole applications despite administrators having had the rehearsal schedule well before the start of the program, or sudden random strip-searches were ordered before attendance at the Shakespeare Group was allowed. At times, such indignities prevented our participants from coming which held up progress, which then led to frustration, which then led to participants only turning up intermittently. Added to that, the men were simply not equipped with the educational tools to help them progress faster. Being such a young group, attention spans were short, there was a lot of time-wasting and mucking around, with everything and anything, however innocent, in some way sexualised. This inevitably meant that the development of Shakespearean text work proved to be a slow and painstaking process, requiring endless patience by all, especially the two lead facilitators. These irritations though, were alleviated time and time again by numerous expressions of friendship and gratitude from the men and promises to work harder on their lines before the next rehearsal.

Borallon – Week 2

Monday, 3 October. The mood we encountered at the beginning of the second week was altogether different from the enthusiasm of the first week. There were frequent interruptions by prison staff, participants came and went, in and out of the rehearsal room, continuously. Among the general restlessness, nobody could find focus and there was little cohesion in the circle. This would turn out to be the pattern for the remainder of the project. News of the impending closure of the prison filtered through the inmate population on a daily basis and early releases or rumours of early releases created an overall ‘why bother’ attitude among the group that made it difficult to persevere with any consistency. Tom, our best Shakespearean and only ‘elder’ was released at the end of that week. I had to return to Sydney, apprehensive of what I would come back to in November.

Exits and Entrances.

Among the vagaries and uncertainties of making theatre in prison, there were nevertheless victories: one memorable day, everybody was already present outside the rehearsal space rather than taking ages, drifting in ever so slowly. This was immediately negated as we were then kept waiting while an impromptu security inspection involving sniffer dogs took place, making everybody feel tense and uptight again. One day, Mark and Chas were prevented from coming to rehearsal because of yet more problems with an officer, but because they absolutely did not

want to miss Shakespeare, they found a way to sneak in some time later. We did not ask how they managed this, but the incident provided an ideal opportunity for the introduction of 'Forum Theatre', another Boalian concept: an act of oppression or repression is re-enacted as closely as possible to how it occurred in that person's life. After the initial performance, members of the audience are asked if they would like to enter the scene and act out a different scenario or solution, thus changing them from spectators into 'spect-actors'. There can be as many variations as time allows, with the original participants or 'protagonists' choosing the outcome of the conflict that most reflects the kind of resolution they would like to see. Such an outcome will largely be impossible to realise in detention or confinement, however, Forum Theatre can demonstrate that a transformation from a negative to a positive situation is attainable, if other actions are taken or different behaviours brought into play. In our case, there was not enough time to tease out more detailed changes in attitude and behaviour, but the two guys involved at least understood where they fell short and what they needed to think about.

Progress was also made on the Shakespeare front with Macbeth's 'Tomorrow' speech beginning to take a firm hold in the participants' minds. Suddenly, everybody wanted to act that speech. We facilitators were asked to lead by example. Rob, Curt, and Gavin, as trained actors and experienced Shakespeareans performed to rapturous applause, with the immediate effect that all then went for it, no holds

barred, any fear of failure having disappeared. It was a fantastic feeling to be in the middle of so much enthusiasm and excitement.

Philippa Kelly in her essay 'Teaching Shakespeare in locked facilities' cites Linklater's conviction that Shakespeare can indeed touch people of all backgrounds and walks of life:

This happens not when they read Shakespeare, not when they hear Shakespeare, but when they *speak* the words themselves. They speak the words and hear their stories told, recognising that their experiences are part of the fabric of human experience. The words make them part of society when they had felt themselves to be apart from it. (Kelly, *Teaching Shakespeare*, 32)

Judge Paul Perachi, founder of Shakespeare in the Courts in the U.S., believes that Shakespeare has a special kind of 'inexplicable magic' when it comes to corrections (Scott-Douglass, 5). And, after taking part in the QSE Prison Project of 2011, I think he is absolutely right. Once the relatively minor hurdle of dealing with the strange-sounding language of the First Folio was overcome, our prisoner-participants developed a kind of zeal and eagerness to engage with Shakespeare that is hard to describe in analytical terms. I concur with the way Pensalfini expressed it in the Radio National interview:

I find these guys get Shakespeare on a much more visceral level and in a more immediate way than many people that are not incarcerated [...] the appeal lies in the bigness and boldness. Shakespeare invites us to be ourselves on the largest scale and in the biggest way we can, the passions are enormous, the situations are complex and difficult, and the guys get that.⁴⁰

I am moved to speculate that precisely this lack of formal indoctrination into how Shakespeare should be understood or acted, allowed for the kind of freedom and enthusiasm displayed by our participants combined with the obvious thrill of mastering the prestigious ‘Bard’.

During my absence, the project came perilously close to imploding. As the timeline for the prison shutdown became fixed to the end of December, ever-increasing numbers of inmate-participants were released or transferred out to other facilities. The tragic death-in-custody of a 26-year-old Aboriginal man at Borallon in early October 2011 resulted in the Koori participants in our group being too distressed to continue. Words seemed inadequate in the face of such a tragedy; but it was tough for the team not to be able to help. Nobody wanted to talk about it in or outside the circle; for the men it was just part of prison life.

⁴⁰‘Shakespeare in Prison’. *Breakfast*. ABC Radio National, Brisbane. 16 December 2011. Web. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/2011-12-16/3734476>

Determinedly, the facilitators continued to work on putting a show together. Various plays were considered, monologues and dialogues put up for discussion, different scenarios tried out. But this, too, became a rather fluid concept. One by one, parts of *The Tempest*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello* were considered or discarded as participants continued to drop out. It was a miracle when, at last, some sort of program began to take shape. However, as I rejoined the team on a hot and humid November day, yet another stuff-up had to be dealt with: someone in the group had smashed furniture, defaced walls and chairs, and removed objects from one of our two rehearsal rooms. As punishment we lost the use of a room and were relegated to a non-air-conditioned space. Nobody owned up, leaving Curt, especially, angry and frustrated. He also felt that T.O., its ethos and methodology, rather than providing the glue that bound the group together, was simply not working.

With just over three weeks to go until the final performance, I wondered whether the whole project was irrevocably headed for disaster. Of the original sixteen inmates we had met at the beginning, only four were still with us and morale was not good. Hence, what transpired in the remaining few weeks was nothing short of miraculous: a new inmate who joined at this late stage was assigned a small portion of Richard II's prison speech, because the others were familiar with it by now and could help him along. He rose to the challenge magnificently and made the part his own, imbuing the character with the strength of his personality. The way he projected the lines to suit the timbre of his voice was exceptional and totally

believable. Micky, the youngest person in the group who had been absent for nearly two months, suddenly decided he *did* want to be in the show. Due to time pressure, we gave him also a section of the Richard II speech and, despite often refusing to put any serious effort into it, he found a way of performing that felt real to him, and he did it faultlessly.

Mark, who was rapidly turning into our star performer, had been rehearsing scenes from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, that is, when he felt like it, as pride and laziness continued to bedevil him. Added to that, bad luck dogged any attempt at consistency of his rehearsal process. His first scene partner was suddenly released, but new collaborator, Sando, turned out to be the perfect Proteus to his Valentine. Sparks were beginning to fly as the wordplay developed and grew in intensity. In the meantime, Rob had been coaching the group in some Linklater voice warm-ups and basic voice training routines to combat nerves and help with projection and clarity. Of course, tongue-twisters like ‘She slits a slitted sheet’ and ‘Six cocky sock cutters cockily cutting socks’ were immediately transmogrified into something quite unspeakable. In the meantime, Chas, a previously very shy young man, was steadily gaining in confidence as Cassius in a dialogue from *Julius Caesar*, with Sean, a lanky, strong-minded young man, the only Caucasian in the group now, playing Brutus. After admitting that he initially thought theatre was ‘a bit girly’, Sean later talked about the sessions as being the rock in his week: ‘there is Shakespeare and I look forward to it every week. I haven’t missed a week since I

started'. Mark and Sando had also been busy writing songs they wanted to play between the set scenes. Among them were love songs as well as hymns of a rare grace that seemed to express such a longing for forgiveness, redemption, acceptance and love, they frequently moved me to tears.

The highlight at this juncture was Sando's version of 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow'. His interpretation of loss, grief, and the death of self was evocative, dreamlike and surreal. In a succession of slow and instinctive movements Sando was able to manifest a presence that seemed to embody the futility and worthlessness of a life of violence. He possessed the kind of intuitive skills many a professional actor on the outside stage would envy. Moreover, his example of dedication, hard work, and commitment began to transform him into a leader and role model for the rest of the group.

Clashes with other programs our actors had to attend to improve their chances to make parole, meant that for the final two weeks Shakespeare Group rehearsals had to be moved to early mornings instead of the usual afternoons. More changes, more uncertainties; we were down to seven participants now. However, those seven developed a singular determination to make the show the best it could be – less than two weeks before the day. And word seemed to have got out: a local reporter from ABC Radio attended the rehearsal one week before the performance. She took part in our circle games, interviewed facilitators and performers; the latter, of

course, revelled in the extra attention and redoubled their creative efforts. She came back to see the performance and about eight minutes of it was broadcast on nationwide radio the following day⁴¹ with the resulting feedback uniformly positive and encouraging.

Very slowly, the show was building into something workable. Mark and Sando continued into improve and were hilarious in *Two Gentleman of Verona*, even though Mark continued to turn up late or did not bother to learn his lines. With talent and charisma in abundance, when he put his mind to it the results were well worth it. On the whole, as it was getting closer to show-time, excitement among the group began to gain momentum. Then Mark, at the very last minute, decided he wanted to add Richard II's speech to his ever-growing repertoire. He did and the outcome was remarkable. His 'Richard' matured into the type of performance resonant of the oratory culture of his native Samoa, as represented in *The Orator*, the first ever Samoan feature film released, coincidentally, in early October. I wanted to gain some insight into Polynesian culture, to try to understand some behaviours a little bit better, so I attended a screening and saw Mark's performance reflected in the proudly confident style of the leading orator of the tribe. Mark was extra-motivated now as he expected his family and some of the elders to come to the show, and he desperately wanted them to see a different side of him. During smoko breaks, several of our inmate-actors talked about how much they had come to

⁴¹'Shakespeare in Prison'. *Breakfast*. ABC Radio National, Brisbane. 16 December 2011. Web. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/2011-12-16/3734476>.

appreciate Shakespeare. One participant said in his dry, laconic way ‘Shakespeare wrote a lot of beautiful stuff’, another commented ‘Shakespeare wrote about real human beings who had, feelings, faults - who stuffed up like we all do’.

Friday, 9 December 2011, and another disaster headed our way. Sando was transferred to a Remand Centre less than a week out from the performance, which just ripped the heart out of the show. The energetic and funny *Two Gentlemen of Verona* scenes that had begun to fuse together really well, were thrown into limbo. Gavin from the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble took over as Proteus, but had no time to learn his lines properly, so the dynamics of the physical and verbal jousting between two close friends was lost. The centrepiece of the show, Sando’s brilliant rendition of ‘Tomorrow and Tomorrow’ would never now be seen by anyone, nor his hard work and perseverance appreciated by a wider audience. It was simply heartbreaking. Everybody felt his loss deeply and a pervasive mood of sadness hung in the room. Eventually, though with some reluctance and a lot of coaxing from the team, as the saying goes, even in jail the show must go on!

We had finally arrived at the first rehearsal in the prison gymnasium where the performance would take place. The space, an indoor basketball court, was a cavernous area with an extremely high ceiling where the sound of voices bounced off the walls, echoed around the room, or simply vanished into the ether. Two doors at the back led to a weight training room and other prisoners came and went, came

and went, in and out, all the time. The noise from the heavy metal 'pump-up' music was deafening. It was a tremendous challenge to sharpen up a performance in such an environment, but actors and facilitators vowed to make it work no matter what. Some of the men who had left the program, came back to offer their help setting up and share in the circle with us, including our Aboriginal participants who were glad to be part of the group again despite their obvious grief. Other prisoners volunteered to help with whatever we needed. Shakespeare fever had caught the prison and I am sure the other inmates wanted, in some way, to be part of our vibrant and closely connected group. We managed to have a run-through of the whole show right through to the final bow. Without a fuss, in place of the much-missed Sando, Mark instinctively took on the mantle of the elder of our acting troupe at about 24 years of age, and turned out to be a natural leader.

Monday, December 12. We had come to the last week of the project and costume day. It was no mean feat to bring a whole lot of costumes, props and curtains into a maximum security facility and no small achievement either to actually get permission for the inmates to wear costumes. The men, needless to say, were thrilled to get out of their prison clothes. 'Does my bum look big in this?' was the question I was asked at least a dozen times by young men who had had no-one admire them for anything, least of all their looks, for a long time and were enjoying themselves immensely. The costumes were not particularly glamorous, various cloaks of red, purple and gold for the three Richards, loose linen pants for Valentine

and Proteus, a vaguely military looking white suit with green lapels for Brutus / Othello, a velvet cloak for Cassius, and army fatigues for Iago, but the transformation it achieved was wonderful to see. The first run-through went smoothly; the costumes added that extra bit of real theatre and helped to anchor the characters in the mindset of the group. Everyone was focused and working hard.

On Wednesday, the heaviest blow fell. News was relayed to us that none of the families of the prison-performers were allowed to attend the show. It later transpired that our cultural liaison officer had fallen foul of the deputy director, who decided to put her in her place by cancelling her request for the attendance of the families, thereby punishing our performers. In prison, there is often no rhyme or reason for a lot of the decisions that are made. But to be seen to do something positive and different by close family and friends had been the major incentive for some participants to join the Shakespeare program. The desire to be seen by their loved ones in a new light, to be recognised for achieving something worthwhile and shake off some of the shame of being identified only with their crimes was palpable and urgent. For Mark this was particularly awful. Many members of his extended family were travelling from quite some distance to see him perform, and being denied this chance was a bitter disappointment. To his great credit, he never gave in to despair or considered quitting.

Performance Day, 15 December 2011. A sombre mood prevailed because of the issue with the families. Despite this it became a day of small and large miracles: several heavy theatre blacks (curtains), two rather large bamboo poles, a couple of flats (wooden dividers), an iron, and other potentially risky implements made it into the prison gym without a hitch and were set up by numerous helpers. A makeshift-theatre was constructed and made ready for the final run-through, which in true theatre tradition was confusion and mayhem. Everybody was beset by bouts of stage-fright, apprehension, and insecurity; voices dropped to barely above a whisper, general chaos ensued, and it took the combined forces of Curt and Rob to keep the show on track. Calm returned as the circle gathered for the last time in its entirety. Curt, who was leaving immediately after the show, made his exit fittingly with Prospero's farewell, 'Now my charms are all o'erthrown / And what strength I have 's mine own, / Which is most faint' (*The Tempest*, epilogue, 1-3). Lastly, the actors were urged to just enjoy themselves and forget about everything else.

The audience began to file in. Without the prisoners' families, the audience consisted mainly of other inmates, QSE actors, former facilitators, a few local journalists, prison staff and administrators, and various invited guests. Tempers frayed because of the long delay to the start of the show, as all outside visitors, for whatever reason, had to have their identification checked and re-checked. Then, our men got ready for what would be, for most, their only time in front of an audience: four Samoans, one Sudanese, one Vietnamese, and one Caucasian prisoner acted

the words of an English playwright written over four hundred years ago, which in the course of a few short weeks had come to take on meaning in their lives. And, as it happens sometimes in the theatre, there was magic: the show was flawless and quite exceptional.

To start, Micky and Manu the first two Richards, took to the stage. Both delivered their lines clearly, succinctly, and with just the right amount of pathos: hands outstretched, sweeping out towards the walls on 'I have been studying how to compare this prison' – then pointing at their chests - 'Where *I* live unto the world'- gesturing towards the audience and the world beyond, which they were cut off from. Nowhere else, I believe, would the truth of this sound quite so real. Next, Rob gave a short précis of *Othello*, followed by a haunting love song beautifully sung by Mark. Then Sean and Chas took to the 'stage' in the scene where Othello has just parted from Desdemona and Iago seizes his chance to slyly and maliciously begin to sow the seeds of doubt in Othello's mind:

OTHELLO:

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.

IAGO:

My noble lord ...

OTHELLO:

What dost thou say, Iago?

IAGO:

Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady,
Know of your love?

OTHELLO:

He did from first to last: why dost though ask?

IAGO:

But for a satisfaction of my thought; no further harm.

(Othello, 3.3.90-97)

The dialogue flowed beautifully, well articulated, recited loud and clear; the audience leant forward attentively so as not to miss a word. This was followed by the scenes from *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In the first one, young Valentine says goodbye to his closest friend, Proteus, chiding him somewhat dismissively for being so love-struck that it keeps him stuck at home, thus missing out on exploring the world with his best friend. In the second half, the tables are turned as it is Valentine who has so completely fallen in love it consumes his entire being, leading to some of Shakespeare's most gorgeous lines, delivered with great panache by Mark:

Not for the world: why, man, she is mine own,
And I as rich in having such a jewel
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearls,
The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold.

(Two Gentlemen of Verona, 2.4.166-169)



QSE actor Gavin Edwards as Proteus and inmate Mark as Valentine in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Borallon, 15 December 2011

Nobody could take their eyes off Mark, he was magnificent. Known to be a hard, violent young man, he was acting the Shakespearean lover with great passion and a lot of style. This was followed by a song of such intense longing for all the life and love missed out on while inside, it almost hurt to listen. It was rendered superbly by Wayne, tough guy and haka-leader, sharing delicate harmonies with another talented songwriter who was too shy to perform solo, but really wanted to be in the show. The last scene was introduced from *Julius Caesar*, the fraught encounter between two old friends and warriors, Brutus and Cassius. Long-lasting bonds of friendship forged through adversity and murder, at one time close and unbreakable, now almost severed by false accusations and hot temper. The angry exchange was delivered with great intensity by Sean and Chas, all shyness and hesitation gone.

Lastly, Mark stepped out again as Richard II, tall, straight and regal, black hair gleaming, his eyes flashing with pride. A purple cape flung around his broad shoulders, he delivered his monologue with such fervour that the audience held its collective breath. The applause seemed to go on forever as the actors took their bows and were led off by Mark, totally in control, but clearly very elated. The Question and Answer session afterwards was a tremendous success. We, as facilitators, could not have *prepared* a better script for it. Inmates, who three months ago did not say more than 'Ok', 'Yeah', or 'I'm fine' spoke passionately about what Shakespeare meant to them and answered questions from members of the audience in such an eloquent manner, it was truly astonishing. Micky: 'Shakespeare writes language

that I think is really beautiful'. Mark talked about how he understood King Richard, who was once a king but through his own misdeeds lost everything 'because that's what happened to me. I was a football player, I was famous, I had it all, but because of my crime I lost everything'. Most revealing though were Sean's comments: 'I had a run-in with a guard only two days ago; before Shakespeare I would have been angry and aggressive, now I had words that I could say to him'.



Facilitator Emma Heard with inmates Michael (left) and Sean (right) at the Q and A session after the performance. Borallon, 15 December 2011.

Mary McKenzie, Senior Psychologist and former Offender Throughcare Manager at Borallon, who had been actively involved in the three previous Shakespeare prison projects and has seen the positive effect the program has had in the past, wrote in an email after the show:

The performance yesterday was brilliant, to your credit, and the prisoners and facilitators. As I have been a big part of this project over the years, it actually brought tears to my eyes watching it at Borallon for the last time. It was moving and words can't really express how I felt yesterday.⁴²

The next day, at the post-show debrief and goodbye in the circle, our actors strongly affirmed how much more positive they felt about the future. They spoke of their desire to live in the outside world again and fervently expressed their hope for redemption and forgiveness. All of them confirmed that participating in the Shakespeare program had significantly changed them as people and the way they thought and felt about themselves and life as a whole. There was only one way to leave our friends at Borallon and Rob echoed all our feelings in this (slightly amended) version of the St Crispian's Day speech:

⁴² Email to Project Manager, Anne Pensalfini, 16 December 2011.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in C-block, now abed,
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here.

(Henry V, 3.60-65)

We hugged fiercely one more time and walked out together, talking like old friends about Shakespeare, Christmas, and the prison move in the New Year. Then, with a laugh and a last wave 'goodbye', the prison gates shut behind us forever.

In the normal course of a QSE prison program, at least one, sometimes two, follow-up visits are arranged, to check how past participants are doing, to garner further feedback, and keep the connection alive. Because of the upheavals of the prison relocation, only a brief visit was possible this time, therefore, any longer-term impact could not be ascertained.

*How I May Compare This Prison Where I Live Unto The World*⁴³

When comparing the Australian prison project to other global models, there is one overriding sentiment that is unfailingly mentioned in all of them, the respect and admiration prison-participants have for the artists / facilitators that come to work with them. In her epilogue to *Shakespeare Inside*, Amy Scott-Douglass contends that ‘in a world where you’re identified by a number, lined up and counted three times a day [...] being part of a Shakespeare group can help you remember that you’re a person’ (Scott-Douglass, 129). In the QSE case, during interviews with prisoner-participants conducted by facilitator Emma Heard, the men stated emphatically ‘there is no judgment here, nothing. You give and get given respect. From the onset we were not treated like criminals, but people who are capable of good and great things’ (Heard, 13).

Another factor that figures prominently in a many prison programs is the kind of kinship or bond that inmates sense they have with Shakespeare, the way his words resonate at the most profound level, and the familiarity his characters assume in relation to their own lives. Curt Tofteland has often mentioned that for any given circumstance in his participants’ lives, he can turn to one or more scenes in a Shakespeare play and find its mirror. A participant in *Shakespeare Unplugged* at Mountjoy Prison in Ireland said, ‘Shakespeare does not hide anything but goes

⁴³ *Richard II*, 5.5.1-2

straight to the heart of the matter, his words are strong and expressive, and when you're acting it you realise "this is me, this has happened to me and it gets inside you"'.⁴⁴ During a series of pioneering performances at Broadmoor Psychiatric Hospital in the 1980s, psychiatrist Alice Theilgaard claimed that 'Shakespeare's profound grasp of the human predicament is matched by his unequalled capacity to express what needs to be said' (Theilgaard qtd in Cox, 163). This kind of realism facilitates for the incarcerated person an exploration of the parallel worlds of offender and victim while concealed inside the anonymity of a character. Under the guise of story and metaphor, hard truths about oneself can emerge, be articulated, and faced up to with honesty and courage.

The personal connectedness to Shakespeare that many participants feel, also leads to increased emotional bravery in performance, coupled with the joy of wrestling with a language that challenges and motivates, as Joe, also from *Shakespeare Unplugged*, discovered: 'I got this speech Shakespeare wrote about a storm in *The Winter's Tale* and the first time I said it, I got a rush of blood to the head. I was like a man possessed; the words were doing all the work'.⁴⁵ In addition, the thrill of mastering the prestigious 'Bard' resurrects and magnifies lost self-esteem and self-worth to a degree that Judge Paul Perachi calls 'magic' and Cecily Berry refers to as Shakespeare's 'mystique' (Berry qtd in Cox, 193). Peter, a first-time actor in Jonathan Shailor's *Shakespeare Prison Project*, who acted, took part in composing

⁴⁴ Helen Hunt. 'Working with Shakespeare in an Irish Prison'. 2007. Web. <http://www.penandclink.com/Shakespeare.pdf>

⁴⁵ Ibid

the music score, and played in the band, proudly proclaimed that the program gave him his first chance to say, with pride, 'this is who I am'.⁴⁶

Conclusions on the Borallon Case Study

In the 21st Century we are often ill at ease when expressing emotions and passions with our voices. One only needs to consider the often irrational levels of fear that speaking in a public forum generates, or the undue emphasis that is placed on being 'in control'. It is simply 'uncool' to show too much excitement or passionate engagement. As promulgated by Descartes, our voices have been conditioned to emanate primarily from the head and face, not from deeper inside the body, because there resides the danger of unstable and unrestrained emotions. We do not like to show our feelings; the prevailing norms of post-modern times require us to 'to chill', in other words to express only the sentiments that our so-called civilised society can or wants to engage with. Linklater posits 'that voice and language belong to the whole body rather than the head alone and that the function of the voice is to reveal the self' (Linklater, 4). Shakespeare's works were created in an era of violence and volatility, derived from the conventions of an age when life was brutal and short, but lived vigorously. John Bell, in a recent lecture, contended that Shakespeare's audience may not have understood every turn of phrase, but they would have understood the passions. And they would have been accustomed to all manner of

⁴⁶ <http://shakespeareprisonproject.blogspot.com.au>. Accessed 19 September 2012

performances in the public arena, some of them cruel ones, as executions were a frequent public spectacle and death was omnipresent. 'Most people read their bible daily and many believed in heaven, hell, angels, demons, and witches, and all things fantastical' (Bell, Keynote Address at ANZSA Conference, Perth, 2012). Shakespeare's language reflects this; it is audacious and full-blooded and thus provides the impetus for a more physical, emotional, and spiritual communication.

Making theatre is the representation of the physical act of speaking with your whole body, or at least it should be, and therefore it naturally provokes a somatic response. This is, I believe, the reason why theatre works so well with incarcerated populations, and Shakespearean theatre in particular, because so many of the educational and other offender programs are book-based, didactic, and inflexible. The expansive and multidimensional world of Shakespeare declaims, teases, cajoles, rages, and sometimes shouts in the most vibrant and colourful language that engages, stirs, and disturbs with a realism and depth that has the ability to reach the core of human beings who have lost touch with the inner part of themselves and suddenly rediscover their humanity.

From my personal experience of, and reflections on the 2011 project, I feel that one of the reasons our Polynesian and indigenous inmates performed with such fantastic results despite the enormous difficulties during the process, is that these cultures are still cognisant of and maintain a more recent connection with their

vibrant oral heritage and performance traditions. Because of this, perhaps instinctively, they react more spontaneously to the robustness of Shakespeare's language, as they are able to assimilate it to their own performance cultures.

The methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed, whether it can effect cohesion among a group of incarcerated men, depends, in my opinion, considerably on the maturity of the participants and the experience and ability of the facilitators to effectively communicate its basic methodology. I do, however, firmly believe that T.O. is an extremely valuable tool to introduce shy or less educated participants to the practice of visualisation of the spoken word and the development of dramatic skills. Additionally, the fusion of T.O. and Shakespeare proved an inherently successful combination as T.O. practices facilitated the break-through of the initial barrier of awkwardness and embarrassment and formed a natural stepping stone to the introduction of drama practice and Shakespearean text work. Inasmuch as it is desirable or, indeed, necessary that the actor with his/her entire body and soul forges the character he/she portrays on stage and so infuses it with their own personal truth, T.O. equally requires protagonists to be wholly present, physically adventurous, and honest. Events recreated during Image and Forum Theatre exercises must be experiences from participants' own life, not invention or fantasy. Thus realistic situations are created that can lead to the exploration of 'real' solutions to genuine problems, where opportunities may arise to explore a number of alternative solutions. Interaction during T.O. games allows participants to

contribute liberally whatever they are willing to share. By such sharing they are enabled to progress from feelings of shame and guilt to self-realisation and healing, or, at least they can begin to think about such processes. David Mamet tells us 'it is not that great art reveals a great truth but that it stills a conflict – by *airing* rather than rationalising it' (Mamet, 46).

The following poem was placed at the front of the QSE facilitators' booklet which our Operations Manager, Anne Pensalfini, handed to us apprentice facilitators on Induction Day at Borallon, a few days before the start of the project. Almost simplistic in its wording, it makes an unequivocal statement for the need of change to the rehabilitative strategies in the correctional system and, in a way, presents a compelling case for the necessity of artistic endeavours. The author is a retired judge from an obscure Mid-West town in the U.S.A., Judge Dennis A. Challeen, who in his time on the bench, challenged and changed many of the entrenched attitudes to imprisonment and the treatment of offenders.

A POEM

We want them to have self-worth

So we destroy their self-worth.

We want them to be responsible

So we take away their responsibility.

We want them to be a part of our community

So we isolate them from our community.

We want them to be positive and constructive

So we degrade them and make them useless.

We want them to be non-violent

So we put them where there is violence all around them.

We want them to be kind and loving people

So we subject them to hate and cruelty.

We want them to quit being the tough guy

So we put them where the tough guy is respected.

We want them to quit hanging around the losers

So we put all the losers in the state under one roof.

We want them to quit exploiting us

So we put them where they can exploit each other.

We want them to take control of their own lives

their own problems, and quit being a parasite.

So we make them totally dependent upon us.

Positives and Negatives

Brent Buell of Rehabilitation Through the Arts, speaks of theatre as life-changing and because its personal growth component is *implicit* not explicit, there are no boundaries to restrict how or what personal growth may eventuate.

Rather, the actor or other participant in theatre finds that the life questions, the emotional challenges, simply present themselves and that he or she can explore new solutions and answers by themselves or with the assistance of the director [facilitator] or their prison colleagues. (Buell qtd in Shailor, 275)

Augusto Boal takes this further. During the performance of a play created by prison guards in which some of them played the role of prisoners, a guard suddenly became aware of the humiliation he inflicted on the prisoners in his charge: 'He [the guard] saw the situation and saw himself in that situation - that is theatre : seeing oneself seeing, observing oneself doing' (Boal, *Aesthetics*, 117). In other words, not only offenders can come to an understanding of the consequences of their actions. The reason why Shakespeare is so eminently successful in a prison context lies in the infinite variety of characters and circumstances that can be explored. Laura Bates, like Brent Buell, insists that Shakespeare allows prisoners to examine and change their lives more successfully than other programs 'precisely because Shakespeare encourages an *indirect* examination of their own character' (Bates qtd in Shailor, 271).

It would, of course, be facile to think that theatre or Shakespeare can solve the problems of the prison system or whatever is wrong with your life, inside or outside a detention facility. Shakespeare is not a 'fixer' and drama is not an easy option. In the words of prisoner-actor Danny (of Agnes Wilcox's Prison Performing Arts group) 'Crime is easy. Shakespeare is hard' (Trounstine, 246). But, being part of a Shakespeare group can make you do your time easier and with more dignity and return you to the streets, your community, your family - a better human being.

Of crucial importance in this context is stability. Programs need to be ongoing and theatre artists need to be willing to commit to the long term. I believe it causes a lot of mental and emotional pain to go into a detention facility once, establish a community, give inmates a taste of the restorative power of hope that theatre can produce, then leave them to go back to the same old prison routine with unfulfilled expectations and, worse, broken trust. A comparative example from *Caesar Must Die*: the prisoner playing Cassius had already served twenty years of an indefinite sentence. After some months of being an integral part of the acting team and following the euphoria of the final performance, as he was locked back into his solitary cell, he said sadly, 'I've never given it much thought before, but now that I know art, this cell has turned into a prison'.

Long after the successful final performance and last sharing in the circle on 16 December 2011, I am still concerned about how our 'band of brothers' are doing.

Have any of them kept in touch with each other and are they still interested in Shakespeare after they were moved out of Borallon into the new facility, where no real access for follow-up and debrief was possible? Though Rob Pensalfini told me that they have all been released now, I often think of them and hope they are alright. The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble prison program remains the only theatre-in-prison program in Australia and, despite four successful years, still experiences considerable difficulties to raise sufficient funds. The fifth QSE prison project finally got off and running in June 2013 after a delay of a year and a half. Rob and Anne Pensalfini have on previous occasions used their own money to ensure continuity, and the vagaries of grant applications that succeed one year but not the next, in the past threatened to derail any prospect of a reliable continuum for inmate-participants to look forward to. Now the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble organisation is trying to develop a funding model that will guarantee the program's viability into the future.

Another limiting factor in the development of QSE's and other possible theatre-in-prison endeavours is the issue of constant mobility between detention centres, which is the norm in Australia. This is done mainly to prevent gang activity and the formation of ethnic factions. However, it also prevents older inmates from related tribal groups to act as mentors to younger people and inhibits any artistic collaboration or mentoring, making it hard to form cohesive teams and keep prison arts projects going. And, when supportive prison staff members leave, it is hard to

establish new contacts who are interested to motivate inmates to volunteer for the Shakespeare program, as such participation does not contribute towards parole considerations. Added to this, the generally shorter sentences in Australian jails denote a more limited time frame and thus pose greater difficulties to explore a play in-depth, as opposed to the American *Shakespeare Behind Bars* organisation, which usually can spend about nine months to put a production together. Thus, the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble's Prison Project has to-date remained the only prison theatre program in Australia.

CHAPTER III : WILLPOWER AND THE POWER OF 'WILL'- PRISON SHAKESPEARES ON SCREEN AND STAGE

Correction and instruction must both work

'Ere this rude beast will profit

(Measure for Measure, 3.1.300-301)

This chapter seeks to expand on what has only briefly been touched in preceding chapters. It purposes to offer a more comprehensive examination of some exceptional Shakespeare prison projects: the Educational Shakespeare Company's *Mickey B*; the Taviani Brothers' *Caesar Must Die*; the documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars*; and two striking examples from the London Shakespeare Workout Company's Prison Project. The cases described are recent Shakespeare prison ventures that have resulted in major achievements and were of special artistic and social merit for the participants as well as the wider community. I will then make comparisons with the Borallon case study of 2011 to assess how the Australian program fits into the larger global framework of Shakespeare-in-Prison.

To begin with, some reflections on the prison arts workers, who, often on a volunteer basis, commit to making theatre with the incarcerated over many months and years. In all of the cases I examined, no matter where in the world they took

place; one thing is true without exception: prison artists and facilitators are imbued with a boundless passion for making theatre. They show a single-minded determination to bring out the best in their participants, combined with seemingly limitless compassion and a steely resolve to overcome the trickiest problems and negotiate the steepest bureaucratic hurdles patiently. The generosity of heart and mind of these individuals is astonishing, as is their courage and tenacity. All have referred to Shakespeare as their most valuable resource. Evidence of their work demonstrates that willpower and the power of 'Will' can effect lasting transformation on both sides of the prison walls and, indeed, change lives.

Mickey B - Maghaberry Prison, Northern Ireland

The Educational Shakespeare Company's adaptation of *Macbeth* is the first case under scrutiny, because the making of it represents such an extraordinary achievement. *Mickey B* is the first feature ever filmed entirely in a maximum security facility, with serving prisoners acting in all of the parts. Sam McClean, who played Duncan, and Jason Thompson (Lady Macbeth/Ladyboy) also wrote the screen adaptation together with the ESC's artistic director Tom Magill. *Mickey B* represents a daring piece of film-making when it locates one of Shakespeare's darkest plays inside Northern Ireland's most notorious detention facility: Maghaberry, in County Antrim. It comprises a cast and crew of the most recalcitrant, non-conformist prisoners serving life or very long prison sentences.

An accompanying documentary provides the back-story of how the production progressed and describes the astonishing effect it had on everybody involved.

Senior prison officer and liaison between the ESC, participants, and prison management, John Davies, initially expressed grave doubts about murderers playing murderers or hardline prisoners unleashing their inner demons through portraying violent acts. Sam McClean, when he wrote the first draft, also did not think these men ever could or would complete such an ambitious undertaking. But, probably, the fact that nobody believed they could do it was one of the major factors that made the project succeed. These inmates shared a lived experience of the cyclical nature of violence; the phrase ‘what’s done cannot be undone’ was repeated ominously in key scenes throughout the film. The screenplay, written in prison slang and delivered in Northern Irish vernacular, brought *Macbeth* chillingly up-to-date and its violence claustrophobically close to home. Most of these men had grown up on the streets of Belfast during the Troubles and were only too familiar with hostility and bloodshed.

However, the trust that Tom Magill and fellow filmmaker Simon Wood placed in their chosen cast, coupled with an uncompromising insistence on the excellence of the finished movie, produced remarkable results. Davy Conway, who played Mickey B, confessed that he saw a side of himself he never knew about before and wondered

‘what else do I not know that I can do’.⁴⁷ He spoke with absolute certainty that his life would be changed through being in the film: ‘I think we should be encouraged to put our backs into this film and make many more films [...] I think this is going to have a life-changing effect on me, believe it or not’.⁴⁸ Another participant, Jimmy McAvoy, commented that Protestants and Catholics had worked side by side on the film without the slightest problem, something that would have been totally impossible only a few years ago. Teamwork mattered, attitude did not. There were disagreements and heated arguments, but everybody stayed committed and strove together to get it right.

The groundwork had been carefully laid by a slow building-up of relationships and trust between the ESC, prison authorities, and one prisoner in particular, Sam McClean (Duncan). Tom Magill had been teaching drama classes at Maghaberry since 2003, and McClean had already made a couple of successful short films while in jail, both of which won awards. In 2005 he was asked to write the screenplay for a prison adaptation of *Macbeth*. It was the singular conviction of Tom Magill that *Macbeth* was the perfect play for a prison setting as it uncompromisingly shows the repercussions of committing acts of violence. Magill firmly believes that *anybody* can turn his life around: ‘Everybody has the capacity to change and that’s what I believe fundamentally, and I think theatre and film-making is an opportunity to

⁴⁷ ‘Category A Mickey B’. (This is a separate 26-minute documentary accompanying the film of *Mickey B*)

⁴⁸ Ibid

give people the chance to change'.⁴⁹ Magill is an ex-prisoner himself, whose life of violence was transformed after reading John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and finding compassion for his enemy (an IRA inmate in the cell next to him) while incarcerated.⁵⁰ After his release he was able to gain a B.A. (Hons) in Drama and Theatre and an M.A. in Cultural Studies and now uses his skills and experience to effect change through drama with prisoners, ex-prisoners, and other marginalised communities.

Prisoners were not persuaded into a covert rehabilitative scheme or otherwise manipulated to participate. David Mamet, commenting on the nature and purpose of drama in *Three Uses of the Knife* (1998), asserts that our impulse to make art can be perverted to oppress and enslave in the guise of wanting to 'help, teach, and correct' which assumes a falsely superior morality (Mamet, 27). Prisoners instinctively sense this and reject such attempts. During the making of *Mickey B*, all participants were aware that each one of them needed to give their best to make the film a success: cast, crew, film-makers, prison staff – all were of equal value. It validated the prisoners' human worth and gave them the will to stick with the experiment. Journalist Johnny McDevitt wrote in *The Guardian*:

ESC's statement of purpose is to dispel the stigma that, no matter what, 'prisoner' is an indelible identity. With further projects in the pipeline, ESC is

⁴⁹ 'Category A Mickey B'.

⁵⁰ 'Tom Magill – the back story'. *Vimeo*. <http://vimeo.com/60446023>. February 25, 2013.

endeavouring to imbue those detained at Her Majesty's Service with the simple notion – an actor is always an actor.⁵¹

John Davies, the hard-line disciplinarian, now asserts he would love to do a project like this again, because 'even if we get one prisoner that's participating in this play who decides to go on the straight and narrow, that's good, it's one less victim'.⁵²

There are many strands that can be drawn from this project, but some stand out: the remarkable persistence and tenacity shown by men who were known to be non-conformist and recalcitrant and had never collaborated in anything, let alone a project that required 10-hour shooting days over a 5-week period. In the documentary *Category A, Mickey B*, the enthusiasm and willingness of these untrained and mostly illiterate prisoners to learn skills such as camerawork, continuity, set building, and to develop these skills despite inherent frustrations were clearly apparent. Prisoner Davy Conway (Mickey B) panicked at one point: 'I'm not prepared for it, I didn't get enough time to learn my lines [...] I'm not a professional actor, it's hard trying to act professional when you're not [...] I'm a prisoner'.⁵³ Sam McClean, during the setting up and filming of the murder scene, had to spend over two hours lying motionless (as Duncan's corpse) on a bed in a freezing cell while the scene was set up. Pat, another inmate without any prior

⁵¹ Johnny McDevitt. 'The Bard behind Bars'. *The Guardian*, 9 January, 2009. Web. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jan/09/macbeth-northern-ireland-prison>.

⁵² 'Category A Mickey B'.

⁵³ 'Category A Mickey B'.

technical ability, was able to give a detailed explanation of what a job in ‘continuity’ involved and spoke of his joy doing it. All declared their lives had changed through their involvement in *Mickey B* and for some this has reaped significant benefits: McClean now works for ESC as a development officer, Anthony Hagens (Seyton/Satan), apart from learning how to operate the documentary camera, is now producing artworks that are much in demand. Others have started on educational activities; all of them found a common purpose that helped them bond and re-socialise. And they hope that the wider recognition of *Mickey B* will communicate to others that violence is never a solution.

Caesar Must Die - Rebibbia Prison, Italy

Caesar Must Die (2012) chronicles the making of a Shakespeare play in a maximum security jail, with the dual focus of filming an adaptation of *Julius Caesar* and delivering a live performance in the prison theatre. Its participants, like those of *Mickey B* are long-serving prisoners: murderers, mafia strongmen, and drug dealers. In *Mickey B*, an accompanying documentary supplies extensive background on the participants, details of the production process, and other extraneous information. *Caesar Must Die* dramatises chiefly the (wonderfully comical) auditioning process, rehearsals, and parts of the actual performance before an invited public. During the auditioning process, the respective prisoner’s name, crime, and length of sentence were revealed on a story-board above him. Some of

the men had acted before as Rebibbia built up a history of drama performances. Prominent Italian film-makers, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, attended one of these performances, a version of Dante's tale of the doomed lovers Paolo and Francesca. The brothers were motivated to make a film with these prisoners by the emotion they could feel emanating from the stage. Vittorio Taviani explained, he felt the pain and hopelessness that an incarcerated life engenders and wanted to explore the meaning of art in such an environment. 'These were well-directed productions', says Vittorio Taviani, 'and we wondered: what does working in the theatre mean to these delinquents? [...] what is the true meaning of art in this circumstance?'⁵⁴ They chose *Julius Caesar* because of the play's historical connection to Italy, its emphasis on political ambition, betrayal, assassination, and references to 'men of honour', an obvious link to many of the inmates' mafia affiliations. In their collaboration with theatre director Fabio Cavalli, particular attention was given to the auditioning process. The resultant hand-picked ensemble staged an immensely passionate rendition of *Julius Caesar*, with the entire prison population being involved as extras in crowd scenes. The watching prison guards, on occasion, even allowed extra time to complete scene rehearsals. When Caesar's murder was filmed, according to Vittorio Taviani, 'these prisoners collaborated with such great passion that when we shot that sequence, the murder of Julius Caesar, the whole jail knew and in the other sections a silence fell over everyone'.⁵⁵ One emotionally charged scene was

⁵⁴Maria Garcia. 'Shakespeare Unchained: Taviani Brothers' 'Caesar Must Die' applauds a prison theatre company'. http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content_display/news-and-features/features/movies/e3i3704ac91beb74f3ca1f0cfbe052154d9

⁵⁵ Ibid

repeated at the beginning and end of the film: the distraught Brutus pleads with his soldiers to help him commit suicide but only the fourth, Strato, finally obliges him to die an honourable death.

BRUTUS:

I prithee, Strato, stay thou by thy lord.

Thou art a fellow of a good respect.

Thy life hath had some smatch of honour in it.

Hold then my sword, and turn away thy face

While I do run upon it. Wilt thou, Strato?

(Julius Caesar, 5.5.44-48)

As in the Maghaberry example, the prisoner-actors were asked to speak in their own, mainly Southern-Italian dialects, which prompted Cosimo Rega (Cassius) to remark, smilingly ‘it seems as if this Shakespeare was walking the streets of my town, Naples’.⁵⁶

It was clearly apparent that Shakespeare brought strong feelings to the surface, more than at any of the previous productions at Rebibbia. The prisoners playing Caesar and Decius almost came to blows at one point as long-held personal resentments suddenly erupted, but managed to resolve their antagonism quickly and rehearsals continued. The visible on-screen anguish clearly revealed that

⁵⁶ *Caesar Must Die [Cesare Deve Morire]*, Dir. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Palace Films, 2012.

cathartic revelations and inner struggles did come at a price. *Caesar Must Die* did not end with the rapturous applause of the enthusiastic audience, but instead lingered on the sadness of the actors returning to their solitary cells after their brief release into the world of art.

What is significant here, too, as was the case in *Mickey B*, is the almost palpable hunger of the inmates to find an outlet for the complicated emotions they are unable to express in a prison situation. During the filming of the assassination scene, the Tavianis exhorted their cast ‘now you have to find within yourself the instinct to kill’,⁵⁷ realising immediately afterwards the incongruousness of such a remark. The actors replied ‘It’s ok. We are here to express what is inside ourselves and to purge ourselves’.⁵⁸ Although Cosimo Rega (Cassius) at the end of the movie laments sorrowfully that since he has known art he has become more acutely aware of his loss of freedom, he has also come to know hope: in June 2012 he launched his autobiography *Sumino o’ Falco – Autobiography of a Lifer*’ (2013). He founded the Society of Incarcerated Actors and is anticipating after more than 30 years of incarceration, that he may soon be granted parole. Salvatore Striano (Brutus), who was paroled in 2006, returned voluntarily to prison after five years to play Brutus and support his former ‘colleagues’.

⁵⁷ Maria Garcia. *Shakespeare Unchained: Taviani Brothers’ ‘Caesar Must Die’ applauds a prison theatre company*. http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content_display/news-and-features/features/movies/e3i3704ac91beb74f3ca1f0cfbe052154d9

⁵⁸ Ibid

Shakespeare Behind Bars - Luther Lockett Prison, Kentucky U.S.

Shakespeare Behind Bars is considered to be one of the earliest ongoing prison ventures and the prototype for a number of prison programs in America.

The multi-award winning documentary made in 2006 differs from *Mickey B* and *Caesar Must Die* in that it focuses not on the actual performance but the rehearsal process and the personal journeys of discovery that individuals make. The power of SBB, the documentary, and by inference the program, lies in the insightful way it depicts the prisoners' daily lives and lays bare the pain and emotional baggage they are carrying and are unable to find release for – except for their participation in *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. It strongly argues the anguish and shame felt by these offenders who have decades, or in some instances, their whole lives to serve behind bars. Thus, veracity is the main protagonist here. For instance, Leonard Ford who initially plays Antonio in SBB's adaptation of *The Tempest*, somewhat cynically deliberates on the philosophy of forgiveness, convinced that 'you forgive someone because it benefits you' but later insists 'if there is no forgiveness in the world, then there is this moral anarchy; there would be no order'.⁵⁹ During a spell in solitary confinement his attention is caught by the last lines of Prospero's speech: 'As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free' (*The Tempest*, 5.1.19-20). It becomes apparent that as a multiple sex offender serving a 50-year

⁵⁹ *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. Dir. Hank Rogerson. Philomath Films, 2005. DVD.

sentence, the 'indulgence' he tearfully desires may not be granted for a long time; however, he desperately seeks a chance to make amends and through Shakespeare has found a way to reveal what he most longs for.

Another member of the group, 'Big G', Jerry Guenther, likens his character, Caliban, to the inexperienced, primitive, out-of-control youth he was when got caught up in a shoot-out with police, one of whom he ended up killing. Jerry has trouble now connecting to the monster within, which leads to an intense discussion on the intrinsic nature of 'what is a human being?' and how someone though considered to be a monster can still hurt or feel pain. That it is this kind of pain that fuels Caliban's anger is a sentiment these men understand all too well.

In this way the characters in *The Tempest* are examined and connected to the stories that led to the incarceration of the actors portraying them. What is intriguing and sometimes disturbing about SBB are the links that participants make to their own family histories, which often are histories of abuse and neglect combined with the sad fact that such dysfunctional lives inextricably lead to the kinds of tragedies that end in a prison sentence. Guenther came to the realisation that acting in a play means inhabiting a character truthfully, as opposed to 'putting on an act' which is what everybody in prison does to survive. Finding the truth inside their chosen characters is challenging and scary, but it enables the men to

explore their past and their crimes and what may be learned from such investigations.

The most significant epiphany, however, occurs during the rehearsal of the scene where Ariel entreats Prospero to choose mercy over vengeance. Under Curt Tofteland's guidance, the group is struck by the honesty in Shakespeare's words:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance ...

(The Tempest, 5.1.25-28)

That the only true freedom lies in forgoing the desire for revenge, is not an easy concept for them to grasp. It triggers Hal (Prospero) to open up with searing frankness about himself, his homosexuality, and how the repression of his true nature and the constant wrestling with guilt and shame compelled him to murder his wife. 'So I had this tension between who I was showing to the world I was and this deep, dark, uncontrollable monster secret. I had gotten to the point in my life where I believed God had given up on me and I was going to hell'.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. Dir. Hank Rogerson. Philomath Films, 2005. DVD.

The scene of the first encounter between Ferdinand and Miranda prompts Red, the bisexual inmate who is playing Miranda to think about what it might be like to be a young girl, to fall in love, have feelings of tenderness. Tensions surface between participants as insecurities rise to the fore and need to be dealt because many underlying problems stemming from the past have become mixed up in the present. The candid way that SBB participants talk about their conflicting emotions and sincere attempts to understand the underlying motivations for their crimes, leads one to the realisation that these men are no longer 'ordinary' prisoners; being part of *Shakespeare Behind Bars* has altered their thinking considerably. Shakespeare's influence is clearly evidenced in the closing observations by Red (Miranda) and Hal (Prospero). 'Playing Miranda has helped me deal with some of the things that were inside of me that needed to be developed, needed to come out',⁶¹ says Red quietly, while Hal speaks of how playing Prospero has helped him to understand and forgive himself, but admits it is not enough to grant him peace in his soul: 'this can't be it, this can't be what my life is all about and what my actions have caused', he sobs.⁶²

More than its success, what is made visible in *Shakespeare Behind Bars* are its limitations, even its failures. Several participants, confident of making parole, were deferred for another stretch of five or ten years. One of the new members, a young man called Rick (Antonio, no. 2), apart from his love for Shakespeare confesses his utter desolation at having to serve two life sentences without any chance of parole.

⁶¹ *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. Dir. Hank Rogerson. Philomath Films, 2005

⁶² *Ibid*

He later committed suicide. Red was paroled in 2008, did fine for a while then got into trouble again and is back in prison for another twenty years. Leonard Ford's parole was deferred for another ten years in 2008; after which he fell into a deep depression and left SBB. Amy Scott-Douglass observed after spending time with SBB's actors: 'These men know only too well that Shakespeare is not a cure-all for the challenges they face. [...] Shakespeare can't bring your victim back to life. Shakespeare can't make your sister visit you. Shakespeare can't make the parole board grant you release' (Scott-Douglass, 128-129). 'But', states Leonard Ford, 'the quality of my life externally is pretty abysmal, but internally it's very powerful and very beautiful to me' (Scott-Douglass, 122).

Blacking Iago -The Dream Factory, Brixton Prison, England

The Dream Factory is the first professional drama school located inside an adult prison, HMP Brixton, England. It was founded in 2004 by Bruce Wall of the London Shakespeare Workout Company. Wall believes that Shakespeare can play an active role in prisoner rehabilitation and insists that every human being has the right to dream, that the language of Shakespeare is the birthright of everyone and not a privilege accessed only by the chosen few: 'For people stripped of a vote, their societal voice, the idea that they can *own* Shakespeare, that they can *feel* Shakespeare, is absolutely palpable'.⁶³ The Dream Factory curriculum consists of a

⁶³ 'Othello in Brixton'. *The Culture Show*. BBC2. 12 December, 2012. Web. www.youtube.com/watch?v=61ChRCPgKSw. Uploaded by The Bespoke Film Company, London.

year-long vocational arts course that takes in drama, film-making, creative writing, music, and movement. A unique part of the program is that professional performers such as Branagh, Walter, Kline, Pacino, Spacey, and dynamic RSC voice coach Cicely Berry, come in to work alongside the young offenders to teach them dialogue, sonnet- and script writing, as well as Shakespearean metre and style. Participants are encouraged to write their own compositions and thus 'own' Shakespeare on a more personal level.

One of the first productions staged by the Dream Factory at HMP Brixton was a 90-minute adaptation of *Othello* called *Blacking Iago*, featuring a West Indian Othello and an African Iago, which allowed for some specific inter-racial explorations. As in any detention facility, logistical difficulties severely restricted rehearsal time. The cast had barely two weeks to prepare for the show. Some of LSW's professional actors worked alongside the inmates and coached them in interpretation and dialogue. Despite the time constraints, on performance night, without a set, dressed in standard prison issue of blue shirts and grey trousers, the combined ensemble of prisoners, ex-prisoners, and professionals, acted so convincingly that some of the invited audience of about 100 were moved to tears.

Since those early days of 2005 / 2006, *Blacking Iago* has also been touring to regular playhouses in parts of the U.K. There is wholehearted support for the drama school

by the prison governor since it steers young inmates away from the nefarious activities they would otherwise get into as a result of the endless boredom.

Ex-inmate Fabian adds,

there are a lot of emotions in his [Shakespeare's] plays and I think that people in prisons are very emotional people. And they don't know how to let it out, and let it out in the wrong way - and that's why they end up in here. I think performing arts inside a prison can help.⁶⁴

Dream Factory 'alumni' have already achieved considerable success in the outside world: Fabian Spencer (Iago) has been signed by a large theatrical agency and Darren Raymond, who played Othello, was offered a major contract with the Canadian Stratford Festival. All in all, twenty of the core members of the first Dream Factory programme have gained Equity cards, many have continued professional training and become working actors.

When You Hear My Voice - LSW at Y.O.U.R.S. Corradino, Malta

Another of the London Shakespeare Workout prison projects, and a very unusual one, was initiated at a conference of European prison educators in Malta in September 2011. Bruce Wall had been invited to demonstrate his drama therapy

⁶⁴ *Othello in Brixton*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=61ChRCPgKSw. Dec 12, 2012 - Uploaded by TheBespokeFilmCo

practices during a workshop with inmates from YOURS (Young Offenders Unit Rehabilitation Services) at the Corradino Correctional Facility in Malta and sensed these guys were somehow ‘different’. Though Wall has undertaken workshops in many prisons around the world, he wanted to go back to Malta and work with this particular group. ‘Why? For me, it will always be primarily due to the determined commitment of the young men. Never have I ever worked inside such a committed team’, he said.⁶⁵ He duly returned to Corradino in February 2012. Assisted by the open-hearted and courageous Director of Operations, Joanne Battistino, who actively encouraged this venture and gave unstinting support to Wall, a multi-media performance was put together that enveloped all the various nationalities represented at YOURS at the time (a couple of English lads, an Estonian, a Spaniard, a Portuguese, a couple of Americans, an Ethiopian, and a few Maltese prisoners).

Renowned Shakespearean actress, Harriet Walter, travelled to Malta to conduct masterclasses and was very impressed by the raw talent she encountered. A video clip from the rehearsals and first performance revealed some of the break-throughs the young inmates had made. Mark Bennett (from the U.K.) reflected:

I found something within myself I never knew I had. The words I say on stage really connect to me. Shakespeare *is* addictive. He gave me and all

⁶⁵ Bruce Wall. ‘When you hear their voice’. *Arts Professional*. Blog, 21 May 2012. Web. <http://www.artspromotional.co.uk/blog/circleinteractive/when-you-hear-their-voice>

those in prison with me, a voice to communicate our feelings, from the stage to people we have never met, was something amazing. It has opened my heart and my mind, and if I could do drama outside, my future.⁶⁶

A young Estonian, Aulis Zopp, initially rejected the whole idea. 'My personality and Shakespeare don't match, it makes no sense' he said, but gave it a try anyway. At first he could not come to grips with the script, the words did not mean anything until one line suddenly struck him: 'don't make your thoughts your prisons' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 5.2.180). Aulis had never understood that other prisons than a physical one existed or that you could be imprisoned in your own head by the (negative) thoughts that hold you captive. After the first night's performance, he was euphoric: 'you see the respect of the audience; they take you not as a prisoner, but as an actor. Shakespeare has indeed freed my thoughts'.⁶⁷

Apart from Shakespeare, the show presented a multi-layered, eclectic mix of literature from Anne Boleyn, Tennessee Williams, Noel Coward and Elizabeth I, as well as the inmates' own writing accompanied by an original music score. Supported by professional Maltese actors and English actress, Laura Pitt-Pulford, the young prisoners, whose ages ranged from 18 – 23, rose to the challenge with alacrity. The two-hour show was staged at the St James Cavalier Theatre in the town of Valletta

⁶⁶ Kristina Chetcuti, 'Shakespeare opened my heart, my mind, my future'. *The Sunday Times, Malta*. <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120408/local/-Shakespeare-opened-my-heart>. Embedded film clip (7.25 mins)

⁶⁷ Ibid

over four nights to maximise its performative potential. It played to packed houses every night, under the watchful eyes of police and prison staff, but the general consensus among the cast was that nobody ever thought of absconding, because on that stage, together, is where they wanted to be. Standing ovations testified to the brilliance of the acting; the audience evidently felt the commitment of the novice actors to deliver the best possible show they were capable of, every night. *Times of Malta* journalist, Paul Xuereb, commented: ‘I envied the young woman who spoke from the audience at the end of the showing, saying she had seen all four performances’ and, adding his own praise, ‘it is they whose disciplined choral acting, and the marvellously focused acting of some of them go straight to the heart and not just the mind’.⁶⁸ André Delicata, also from the *Times of Malta*, wrote enthusiastically: ‘To say that it was a professional piece of the highest degree is a mere truism, for the performance was so much more than that’.⁶⁹ A 45-minute documentary was made of the whole show to serve as a global template for what is possible, given hope, determination, and the will to dream. It premiered at St James Cavalier’s Theatre in June 2012.

Wall rejects the inmates’ assertion that he had changed their lives, saying instead that ‘Shakespeare and their own determination had. They had themselves become

⁶⁸ Paul Xuereb. ‘Straight to the heart’. *The Sunday Times of Malta*. 12 February 2012. Web. <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120212/arts-entertainment/Straight-to-the-heart>

⁶⁹ André Delicata. ‘Raising men to the divine’. *The Times of Malta*. 15 February 2012. Web. <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120215/arts-entertainment/Raising-men-to-the-divine>

engaged'.⁷⁰ Not only that, but the kind of theatre these young men produced was deemed by audiences as well as critics to be an outstanding work of art and was lauded as such. Wall claims 'the reality of their detailed and skilful hunger is not often felt in our theatre' and insists: 'it [theatre] must be dangerous; it must breathe adversity'. He has a point here. Wall did not make it easy for them; he did not simply create a diversion from the boredom and frustration of prison life. He challenged the group in no uncertain terms that 'they needed to be, "better than good". They had after all to change minds'.⁷¹ These young men had something to prove and they did. As a result, Operations Manager, Joanne Battistino, is now making drama classes for young offenders a permanent fixture at Corradino, a move backed by the Ministry for Home Affairs.

The great motivational force of Bruce Wall: child actor, Cambridge Don, and LSW's founder, links both LSW examples and shines through every endeavour that LSW: The Prison Project has undertaken since its inception in 1997. With great humility, energy and passion for what Shakespeare, language, and literature can do in the most dismal places of incarceration, he reinforces its core mission: 'LSW seeks to employ the works of Shakespeare and other major dramatic, cinematic, musical writers and thinkers as a tool towards effective interaction in order to promote

⁷⁰ Bruce Wall. 'When you hear their voice'. *Arts Professional*. Blog, 21 May 2012. Web. <http://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/blog/circleinteractive/when-you-hear-their-voice>

⁷¹ Ibid

confidence through the will to dream for all'.⁷² Wall appears to be blessed with the ability to recognise latent talent seemingly anywhere, combined with a limitless zeal to nurture and bring it to fruition. He overcomes and even appears to thrive on the vagaries of making theatre in prisons. He is uncompromising in that he wants to achieve the best possible performance outcomes with the inmates he works with and they respond to his challenge in equal measure. *Blacking Iago* demonstrates that excellence in performance can be attained even within a drastically short time frame, while *When You Hear My Voice* brings out the combined strength of supportive teamwork by young offenders, local professionals, and LSW actors all united in one creative body to produce brilliant acting and gripping performances. The vocational and educational benefits derived by the inmates appear, in this context, almost incidental.

The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble Prison Project- Borallon 2011

The foregoing projects demonstrate the kind of impact that Shakespearean theatre in prison possesses along with positive outcomes that last for years beyond incarceration. This may not be as strongly evident in the Borallon study, which forms the nucleus of my thesis, due to the particular circumstances of the 2011 project, such as the imminent closure of the prison, the youth of the participants,

⁷² Kristina Chetcuti, 'Shakespeare opened my heart, my mind, my future'. *The Sunday Times, Malta*. 8 April, 2012. Web. <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120408/local/-Shakespeare-opened-my-heart>. Embedded film clip (7.25 mins)

and the insufficient funding that stymied the staging of an entire play, more fully described in Chapter II. There are, however, several factors that link *Mickey B*, *Caesar Must Die*, *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, *Othello in Brixton*, and *When You Hear My Voice*, to the Borallon study of 2011 and this section will shed some light on these commonalities.

This M.A. research project, which involved the scrutiny of a great deal of materials from all over the world, attributes the ongoing success of prison theatre programs substantially to the dedication and commitment of the founders and facilitators: arts workers, actors, directors, and teachers who are able to elicit from inmate-participants the (in)credible performances that are being achieved. Despite the necessity to contend with consistently erratic funding, logistical problems, and the demands of prison infrastructures, prison arts workers unilaterally assert that they thrive on the challenges of making theatre in adversity. As Wall previously stated, theatre often thrives best in adverse and challenging conditions'.⁷³ And, through taking risks in the pursuit of art, corrosive behaviours can be channelled along other, nonviolent, paths. Magill speaks of the effect filming *Mickey B* had on the inmates taking part:

⁷³ Bruce Wall. 'When you hear their voice'. *Arts Professional*. Blog, 21 May 2012. Web. <http://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/blog/circleinteractive/when-you-hear-their-voice>

Since we begun doing this production, there hasn't been one major incident in terms of violence associated with this group of prisoners and that is an indicator of the success and benefits of this type of work.⁷⁴

In a conversation with Rob Pensalfini who in June 2013 was finally able to embark on QSE's fifth prison project at the new prison in Gatton, having had to negotiate a completely new and different set of circumstances, unfamiliar prison administrators, and locational difficulties, I asked what keeps motivating him now and he said:

Despite the increasing challenges, what keeps me coming back is the faces, voices, bodies of the men, how they are during and after our sessions, and during and after the final performance. There is a tangible transformation that takes place, and I don't want to argue about how long-lasting it is, or what permanent changes may or may not take place - what I see is people living into a possible way of being, of holding themselves, of communicating, of being in the world, that is outside their day to day experience in the prison. As has been reported by so many practitioners, there is an increase in presence, in engagement with self, others, and the world, and a compassion for self and others that is largely foreign to that setting.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *'Category A Mickey B'*.

⁷⁵ Email from Rob Pensalfini, 13 August 2013.

What is also a factor in most projects and this was definitely the case in Borallon where our participants were mainly young offenders: in the beginning everybody treated the idea of making theatre as some sort of a game, an adventure, maybe a bit of a diversion from the prison routine, definitely not as anything to be taken too seriously. Equally, all drama programs share a similar approach, beginning with various ice-breakers, games, dances, and vocal exercises. A lot of these practices take place inside a circle, which is an essential component, I believe, especially at the start of a project. Within a circle, participants and facilitators are almost forced to make eye contact and so become familiar with each other more quickly, while the circular space tends to reinforce the perception of a contained, safe environment. At Borallon, Augusto Boal's theatre games were utilised, a methodology also employed by ESC's Tom Magill. These games are derived from the arsenal of *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 2000) and have the dual purpose of energising the body and preparing participants who may be anti-social or shy for drama practice. Boal explains 'the theatrical experience should begin not with something alien to the people (theatrical techniques that are taught or imposed) but with the *bodies* of those who agree to participate in the experiment' (Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 127).

Often, what inspires a prison theatre venture and greatly aids its success, is the alignment of the chosen play with a location or setting that suits its historical purpose. For instance Maghaberry, a forbidding, claustrophobic, fortress-like

structure, is eerily suited to an adaptation of *Macbeth*, as is Rebibbia Prison outside Rome to a re-staging of *Julius Caesar*. This, by inference, extends to creating a vernacular matched to a cultural and societal specificity, enabling participants to inhabit their characters more fully and making Shakespeare's language appear less arcane or intimidating. For instance, in the case of *Mickey B*, the strong Northern Irish accents and prison slang combined with building on well-known imagery, produced a chilling version of the Scottish play that all who worked on it could relate to and, since its global DVD release, audiences all over the world have done, too. The same premise applies to the adaptation of *Julius Caesar*. Theatre director Fabio Cavalli insisted that the actors speak in their native Southern Italian dialects (Neapolitan, Calabrian, Sicilian), possibly wanting to dispel the notion that such accents are a sign of low intellect or are spoken by the criminal classes only. Sometimes, this creates a peculiar connection with Shakespeare. Rebibbia inmate Cosimo Rega, who played Cassius, during a scene rehearsal mistakenly uttered 'Naples' instead of Rome where *Julius Caesar* is located, corrected himself, then remarked, smilingly, 'seems like this Shakespeare was walking the streets of my own city, Naples'.

In the case of the Borallon Shakespeare Group, members were presented with a selection of scenes and characters they might want to explore. Giving participants the freedom to choose in an environment where they have no voice and no choice, acts as a liberator to awaken, or re-awaken creativity in human beings with low

self-esteem. There was also a hesitancy about how to ‘speak’ Shakespeare. Rob Pensalfini talked about the importance of just being yourself, using your own voice, as every person’s interpretation has different qualities, how the same speech can be recited in many different intonations and that it is the uniqueness of an individual’s presentation which mattered. He assured the group that ‘there is no right or wrong way to speak Shakespeare’ (personal observation, 2011). This allowed participants to bring their own ethnicity and identity to a character and develop it until it felt ‘right’ for them to bring it to life. A major component of the Borallon group were Pacific Islanders with a strong oral tradition going back many generations who, after overcoming initial shyness, revelled in being able to perform physically and did so very naturally with strong, fluid gestures and proud bearing.

The flexibility of Shakespeare permits all kinds of permutations: LSW’s *Blacking Iago* in HMP Brixton presented two black actors in the principal roles, whereas in the Borallon group, a statuesque Ethiopian prisoner declaimed part of *Richard II*’s prison speech in a kind of ‘kingly’ manner entirely suited to his personality. The willpower of the actor using *his* body and *his* voice effects the transformation into the Shakespearean character, despite whatever the physical differences are.

Shakespeare paints with words on the broad canvas of humanity and human emotions are the colours he uses. It is almost impossible, therefore, to remain untouched by the Shakespeare experience, especially in a prison setting where a lot

of diverse and highly emotional people are confined together at close quarters. The teamwork and inclusiveness that is fostered during the collaboration on a film or play eliminates loneliness, re-socialises inmates, and helps to build bridges across cultures and religious divides. Jimmy McAvoy, a prison actor in *Mickey B* explains ‘there’s Catholics and there’s Protestants which ten years ago would never have mixed. Now we’re all getting on as happy as Larry [...] and it’s doing very very good for morale in the prison’.⁷⁶

During the Borallon project, the Shakespeare Group cohered into a kind of special collective that at times rehearsed together outside the limited rehearsal periods and, over time came to be respected by other prisoners as well as prison staff. On one occasion when there was a ‘lock-down’ (an incident in prison considered a security risk requiring inmates to be locked into their cells until the situation is resolved), the prison officers left our men until last to be locked-down so we could continue to rehearse for a while longer. Emma Heard, a researcher and co-facilitator at Borallon 2011, noted in her Honours thesis that ‘participants built bonding relationships with each other’ and that ‘participants developed a range of resources [...] which assisted with the initiation and maintenance of new supportive relationships, inside and outside prison’ (Heard, 2012).

⁷⁶ ‘Category A Mickey B’.

There is, of course, the considerable prestige of 'doing Shakespeare' that fuels enthusiasm, combined with the desire to make the impossible possible, realising the dream, overcoming challenges and sticking with something to make it a success. For many of the inmates that is something they have never been able to do. The fractured (and sometimes fractious) undertaking that QSE's Borallon project 2011 turned out to be, nevertheless resulted in a performance that everybody took great pride in. Towards the end of the program, many other inmates in the general prison population wanted to become involved and were keen to help set up or assist in some way. At the farewell and debrief on December 16, one day after the performance, the men demonstrated via some Boalian Image Theatre tableaux, wordlessly but clearly their hopes and desires for life after prison in a much more positive way than before they embarked on the program.

The last, but a crucial point, relates to the impact of the audience, whose presence at live performances immeasurably validates the efforts of prison-actors. When the audience believes in the character on-stage and shows appreciation for the performance, it is then the prisoner is transformed into an actor. Often, especially in the case of younger inmates, this is the first time any of them have ever been applauded for something they have done well. Borallon participants surveyed by Heard claimed that performing 'on stage' was greatly reaffirming for them. Prisoner F: 'The performance. To see the visitors', the audience's, reactions to what we have done, what we are doing. To see we are not bad people' (Heard, 13). It is part of the

desire for redemption to have an audience see prisoners as more than their crime, to be worthy of applause, and to be recognised for their talents. Applause serves as the formal (or not so formal) recognition of their achievement and contributes fundamentally towards renewal of self-esteem, awakening of hope, and possible change.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent times, prison arts and Shakespeare-in-Prison programs have attained a certain amount of popularity due to the involvement of high profile actors, well-credentialed academics, and award-winning film productions. However, despite statistical and other evidence that education and arts programs reduce aggressive behaviour, lower recidivism, and achieve better coping mechanisms for inmates, on the whole, arts and drama in prison are not generally popular or pressing subjects, much less ones that attract a great deal of funding. Apart from having to deal with the ever-changing rules and regulations of the correctional system, prison arts practitioners are forever struggling to keep their programs afloat for another season. Often programs are suspended for a while because of financial constraints or are shut down altogether due to changes in the law or the relocation of sympathetic prison administrators. Those that are able to survive, find ways to dig in deeper and persevere. Arts programs in detention facilities continue to evolve and renew.

Time and again the question is asked of prison facilitators: Why do you care about these prisoners? Or the comment is made that their crimes do not warrant access to education, let alone theatre, or, indeed, Shakespeare. Davies, the hardline officer on duty at Maghaberry during the filming of *Mickey B*, replied categorically: 'If only one person who participated in this film goes on the straight and narrow upon

release, it's worth it, because it means one less victim'. Shakespeare professor Laura Bates, in her latest book *Shakespeare Saved My Life: Ten Years in Solitary with the Bard* affirms that she cares very much about the 'worst-of-the-worst', but, she continues,

I also care about you and me. Most of these guys will be on the street one day, and when they move in next door to you or enrol in one of my classes on campus, I want them to be less violent than they were when they came to prison. She further states: 'If Shakespeare saves the life of a violent criminal, through rehabilitation, then he saves the lives of potential future victims'.
(Bates, 179)

Her assertion was confirmed by the prisoners themselves. Several of her Shakespeare-in-Shackles students when asked 'Can Shakespeare save lives?' and 'Has Shakespeare saved a *victim's* life?' replied without hesitation:

There is a large portion of that population – the murder population – that only need a slight influence to do different. Not necessarily good versus bad, but they may see a new approach for whatever it is that they're after. So, yeah, absolutely (Prisoner 1); Shakespeare saved my life (Prisoner 2); Yes. For sure, it's saved one other person (Prisoner 3); At least two (Prisoner 4).
(Bates, 181)

If I were to summarise the responses from the inmates of the Shakespeare project at Borallon 2011, it would be under the title *Shakespeare has given Me Hope*. At the Question and Answer session in front of an audience that included Borallon prison director, Scott McNairn, every single one of the men spoke eloquently about how the program had influenced their thinking and behaviour. Most powerful was Sean's testimony. He spoke about a disagreement he had with an officer only two days ago and instead of being aggressive, he was able to react differently: 'I now had words that I could say to him'. The day after the performance, during the last circle meeting of facilitators and participants, everybody in the group declared they had been changed by their involvement in the project, expressed more hope in the future, and a great desire to redeem themselves. Additionally, as stated in Emma Heard's paper:

Participants highlighted how the QSE Prison Project had facilitated the development of positive social networks in the form of bonding, bridging, and linking relationships which provided emotional and informational support.

(Heard, 8)

Because they were genuinely valued by us, their self-value had increased also; because they were able to act Shakespeare, they felt more confident to do more with their lives on the outside.

This thesis has presented a number of wide-ranging subjects where Shakespeare has impacted significantly on human life: from business, education, youth culture and entertainment to self-help and psychotherapy. Shakespeare's writing has been called upon to assist, guide, and influence the ability of people to deal with the difficulties of the world as it is today. This effect is greatly intensified in the bleak confines of a prison and this is the case because 'there are no heroes or villains in Shakespeare. [...] He gives us human beings, in all their beautiful flawed complexity'.⁷⁷ Acting out Shakespeare is acting out the truth he enables to be found. It is this premise that is paramount to Shakespeare's success with incarcerated populations: it allows the freeing of oneself from the 'real' prison, the inner prison of negative and self-destructive thoughts, so that change and transformation can take place.

Amy Scott-Douglass confirms this in her epilogue to *Shakespeare Inside* (2007):

For these inmates and others like them, Shakespeare is much more than a welcome distraction from the tedium, deprivation and dangers of prison life. Shakespeare is a creative, social and spiritual life force; a vital and necessary reminder that, no matter what, we are all human beings. (Scott-Douglass, 129)

⁷⁷ Rob Pensalfini, Keynote address to ETAQ State Conference, 2007, p. 15.

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