

Institution: Liverpool Hope University
Unit of Assessment: D29
Title of case study: Is Shakespeare Good for Us?
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study looks at the research of Dr William Rossiter, who was a Senior Lecturer in English Literature, specializing in late medieval and early modern literature. The mandatory study of Shakespeare at GCSE and A-level presupposes a moral virtue inherent in studying Shakespeare's works, and Dr Rossiter sought to establish whether this moral virtue exists and to identify what it consists of. For the project called 'Shakespeare for Schools', he gave a series of lectures and workshops on the topic in 2013, primarily but not exclusively aimed at school students. Local A-level students from a varied demographic were invited to attend a lecture and workshop on Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies or sonnets, depending on the texts they were studying, followed by a further seminar three months later, with a view to enhancing their knowledge of the early modern ethical principles that underpin those texts. The general public were also invited to a lecture on the themes of time and quality of life in Shakespeare's sonnets delivered on the anniversary of his birth/death (23 April 2013), as part of the opening night of Liverpool City Council's <i>In Other Words</i> literary festival. The impact of the events lies in the effect of the university-level analysis of Shakespeare's works and the moral code they foster, or are seen to foster, upon groups approaching Shakespeare from outside of academia. This impact initiative sought to (a) emphasize the accessibility of Shakespeare and early modern studies, (b) identify the ways in which Shakespearean ethics affect everyday ethical decisions, (c) interrogate the mandatory teaching of Shakespeare in UK schools, wherein his works are taught as part of the GCSE English syllabus and at A-level, and (d) encourage local students to apply to university by introducing them to university-level research.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning research for the case study is based on two separate yet interrelated analyses carried out by Dr Rossiter. The first is an analysis of the theoretical and functional relationships between literature and ethics as those relationships have been formulated and reformulated from the classical period, for example in the works of Plato and Aristotle, to the present day, for example in the contemporary novel. This first analysis emphasised the view that as ethical codes change in accordance with socio-historical shifts, so do the ways in which literature reflects and reinforces or interrogates those codes. This analysis ultimately draws upon historically divergent reader-theories to establish the fact that literature does continue to have an ethical function, but the moral force of literature is not universal – rather, it is personalized in accordance with the socio-historically determined disposition of the individual reader or audience.</p> <p>The second analysis is an examination of the ethics of Renaissance humanism. Renaissance humanism is dependent upon the moral force of literary rhetoric to lead the reader or audience to self-willed virtue - to active virtue as opposed to the mere understanding of good and evil. This analysis shows how Renaissance authors such as Giovanni Boccaccio, Francesco Petrarca, Sir Philip Sidney and Ben Jonson all propounded the view that literature can make us better people. These authors, responding to Plato and Aristotle, argued that literature has the conceptual force of philosophy and the illustrative function of history without the limits of either, teaching as it does through delight. As such, Renaissance humanists taught that readers should look to Latin and Greek classics for delightful moral guidance. The analysis concludes with a discussion of how Shakespeare queries the basic humanist principle in <i>Titus Andronicus</i>, in which the literature of antiquity is used as a means of perfecting murder and rape.</p> <p>Elements of both of these analyses were delivered at Liverpool Hope University's Foundation Hour on 10 March 2010 as part of a session entitled <i>Literature and Ethics</i>. Following this session these analyses were thoroughly refined and subsequently published.</p>

This research into the ethical impact of literature, with its core focus on the moral principles of Renaissance humanism, directly informs both the lectures and workshops of the case study. Selections from the primary texts — for example those by Sidney and Jonson — are used in the lecture slides and in the handouts for the breakout seminars/workshops. The central tenets of the two analyses are likewise the underlying principles of each lecture and seminar/workshop.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Battles, Paul (ed.) *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London, Buffalo, NY, and Ontario: Broadview, 2012), p. 257.

Egan, Gabriel, *et al.*, 'VI: Shakespeare', *Year's Work in English Studies*, 91 (2012), p. 482.

Rossiter, William T., and Steve Brie, 'Introduction: "Distinct but Separate?"', in *Literature and Ethics: from the Green Knight to the Dark Knight*, eds. Steve Brie and William T. Rossiter, Liverpool Hope University Studies in Ethics Vol. 3 (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), pp. 1-16.

Rossiter, William T., 'Literature, History and the Moral High Ground: The Ethics of Renaissance Humanism', in Brie and Rossiter (eds), *Literature and Ethics*, pp. 31-52.

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'Rossiter's essay traces a history of the ethics of Literature from the key figures of Humanism (Petrarch, in particular) - themselves concerned with the disagreements between Aristotelian and Platonic thinking about the morality of poetry - to provide a challenging backdrop to Shakespeare's drama. *Titus Andronicus* itself has often been received by scholars in moralized terms because of its explicit and gruesome violence, so it is particularly edifying to see how Rossiter draws out the difficulties and paradoxes of forms of "moral reading" that take place in the play. Rossiter's excellent, diachronic reading of writers' thoughts on the morality of literature provides a rich and engaging history of an issue that - now as much as at any point in literary history - remains both vexing and vital.'

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In September 2012 Rossiter composed a list of all the local schools which offer A-level English, including contact emails of A-level English tutors where possible. He contacted all of these schools and tutors asking if they would be willing or interested in bringing their students to a university lecture and seminar/workshop on the subject of Shakespeare. Following this initial contact he was able to create a shortlist of interested parties, and then used that shortlist to compile a list of Shakespeare texts being studied at those schools. Rossiter was thus able to write each lecture in accordance with the texts being studied by those students in attendance. For example, for the lecture on Shakespearean comedy on 28th February the schools in attendance were South Sefton Sixth Form College (40 students), Belvedere Academy (40 students) and Range High School (25 students), and the texts being studied by each were *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. The lecture was thus based on these comedies. Following the lecture there were four seminars on each of the aforementioned plays, so that each group of students could focus upon the text they are studying relative to the information received and knowledge gained via the lecture. Some of these seminars were taught by colleagues in the English Department at Hope.

Likewise, for the Shakespearean tragedy lecture on 25th February, the schools in attendance were Gateacre C.C. School (15 students), St Margaret's Academy (27 students) and Litherland High School (11 students), and the texts being studied by each were *Oedipus Rex*, *King Lear* and

Impact case study (REF3b)

Macbeth. Again, the lecture discussed all three plays before the seminars focused on specific plays relative to specific groups of A-level students, and colleagues from Hope contributed to the seminars.

The seminar discussions were triggered by a handout which emphasised the moral good of literature via excerpts from the texts discussed in the underpinning research, and concluded with a questionnaire comprised of the following questions:

1. How informative and/or interesting did you find the lecture?
2. How informative and/or interesting did you find the seminar?
3. Do you think the event has enhanced your understanding of Shakespeare, and specifically the area of Shakespeare you are studying?
4. Do you think the lecture and seminar discussion will aid you in your exams and essays in any way?
5. What improvements would you suggest to the structure and/or content of the events?
6. What future events would you like to see (for example, on specific texts)?
7. Any Other Comments

The various responses to these questions can be divided roughly into three themes: (i) impact effecting changes in behaviour, attitude and understanding, (ii) practical impact upon the student's own written work, and (iii) the impact of experiencing university-level education.

In relation to (i) participants disclosed that ideas which previously seemed unclear or complicated are now much clearer following the events they attended, and that their understanding and focus had developed significantly; in particular they were now aware of 'other points which aren't taught in school' (questionnaire response). In relation to (ii) participants noted that they now had new information concerning the origins of dramatic conventions and discovered a wealth of new terminology which could be utilized in their writing. In relation to (iii) the overwhelming response was enjoyment, and a sense of accessibility.

Following the initial lectures and seminars, a follow-up series was organized, whereby Dr Rossiter travelled to the schools to provide lectures and seminars to A-level students in a familiar environment. These events took place in early July and involved Range High School in Formby, South Sefton Sixth Form College in Litherland, and Bellerive FCJ Catholic College in Toxteth (Princes Park) – Bellerive hadn't attended the original lectures but gladly took part in July. Again the response was overwhelmingly positive, in particular from students who had attended the lecture series as AS-level students, and had now taken their exams, and were preparing for A2-level texts. At Range High School the session was on *The Merchant of Venice*, at South Sefton the text studied was *Macbeth* (for students who had attended the *Measure for Measure* sessions previously) and at Bellerive the session was on *Macbeth* also. The sessions were again measured by means of a questionnaire which added the following questions to those already listed:

- Has the seminar affected your view of studying English Literature at University? If so, how?
- Do you think studying Shakespeare is 'good for us'? If so, how?

Questionnaires were completed by 26 students at South Sefton Sixth Form College on 2 July and by 8 students at Bellerive Catholic High School on 4 July. Approximately 20 students attended the follow-up session at Range High School on 1 July.

The responses showed a shift from not considering English at university to definitely considering it. This is significant in that certain of the areas in which the schools are situated, such as Litherland and Toxteth (Princes Park), are some of the most deprived in the UK. According to the Litherland Ward Profile for 2012 '53.2% (5,781) of Litherland residents live in areas in the most deprived 10% nationally'. According to the Princes Park Ward Profile, shockingly, '93.6% of the ward falls into the most deprived 5% nationally', and 'Three fifths of the ward (60.1%) is in the most deprived 1% of areas nationally', which is five times the city-wide average. For students from these areas to now be considering studying English at university-level is a sign of the efficacy of the project.

The responses also highlighted areas students and teachers would like to see covered by future events, whilst the preliminary contacts also produced a list of schools which have no A-level departments, but would be interested in GCSE-level events. Both of these factors will be crucial in sustaining the involvement of the English Department with local schools, and maintaining the relationships between the university and the local schools over the coming years.

The public lecture in the case study was given on the opening night of Liverpool City Council's *In Other Words* Literary Festival (23 April-19 May), which took place across a series of venues in the city of Liverpool. The A-level schools who attended the earlier lectures were invited to this event, and to the wider series of lectures of which this was part (which Rossiter helped to organize). There was significant public turnout for the series. The event was advertised in the *Liverpool Echo* newspaper, online, and via a leafleting campaign targeting key venues in the city. The event was focused on why we still read Shakespeare, given that it took place on the anniversary of his birth and death, in conjunction with other literary-themed events in and around the city. This lecture was the first in a series of five public lectures given at Liverpool Hope by members and affiliates of the English Department, thereby highlighting the wider culture of public dissemination of research at Liverpool Hope, and its success has led to the organization of a follow-up series (drawing on a list of interested parties who provided contact details following the first series) to take place in 2013-14. As with the 'Shakespeare for Schools' project, the intention is to maintain these relationships, and the groundwork for this has now been successfully undertaken.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

<http://www.hope.ac.uk/shakespeareforschools/>

<http://www.hope.ac.uk/inotherwords/>

<http://www.itsliverpool.com/culture/in-other-words/events/>

<http://www.sefton.gov.uk/pdf/Litherland%20Ward%20Profile.pdf>

<http://liverpool.gov.uk/media/121041/princespark.pdf>

Testimony from teachers from participating local schools:

Dr Sandra Mornington, Assistant Head of English Faculty, Range High School:

'Feedback from students was extremely positive; they felt engaged and challenged by the content and reassured (about what lies ahead in HE) by your delivery and manner. [...] We look forward to working with you again and would be keen to participate in any future activities.'

Ms. Rachael Burke, Head of English, Litherland High School:

'[The event was] very interesting and informal, which put the students at ease [...] Really enjoyable.'

Dr Kim Wallace, Assistant Principal, South Sefton Sixth Form College:

'Excellent [lecture] [...] a creative approach to the play [in the seminar].'

Mr. Phil Christoffer, English Teacher, Gateacre C.C. High School:

'Lecture was great! Interesting and thought-provoking and pitched at a suitably challenging level. [...] The seminar leader encouraged a very quiet group enthusiastically and with sense of encouraging involvement. [...] [The event as a whole was] fantastic! Clarified and explained key issues.'