

# **Behind the Desk: Encountering Shakespeare in South African Education**

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## **DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced

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## **Abstract**

While the place of Shakespeare in South Africa has never seriously seemed under threat, particularly outside of academia, the high school syllabus over the last two decades has told a different story. Where the teaching of Shakespeare's plays has been compulsory in the past, this has changed to such an extent that many schools, where English is taught as a First Additional Language, no longer offer Shakespeare to their learners. Of the plethora of reasons given why this is the case, this thesis is more interested in the role that certain encounters have played in such a shift. The two encounters under question are between the text and the learner, and the text and the contemporary South African context. The reason for this focus is because of the way in which the curriculum is used to articulate ideas about the nation and the subject. The process of constitution is then facilitated through the learner's encounter with the text in the classroom. This investigation stretches as far back as the inception of English studies in South Africa to education under apartheid, and concludes by analysing examinations emerging out of the postapartheid curriculum. By considering some of the contentious voices that have appropriated Shakespeare to their own end, the project considers how such spaces may be opened up within the current school curriculum. Such an undertaking would require a shift in approaches to teaching Shakespeare, allowing postapartheid learners to engage with a Shakespeare who engages with their context.

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**List of Acronyms:**

ANC- African National Congress

CAPS- Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

DBE- Department of Basic Education

FAL- First Additional Language

HL- Home Language

NP- National Party

## INTRODUCTION

In short skit from the British period sitcom *Blackadder*, Rowan Atkinson's character, Edmund Blackadder, bumps into Shakespeare (played by Colin Firth) while walking down a passage. When he realizes who he is, Blackadder takes out a blue ballpoint pen, and asks 'Shakespeare' for an autograph. On receiving the autograph, Blackadder suddenly punches 'Will' in the face and chastises him with the following words:

That's for the thousands of schoolboys and schoolgirls for the next four hundred years. Have you any idea how much suffering you're going to cause? Hours spent at school desks trying to find one joke in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Years wearing thick tights in school plays saying things like 'What ho my Lord?' and 'Oh look here comes Othello talking total [rubbish] as usual!

It is an entertaining moment, particularly when Blackadder complains about Kenneth Branagh's 'endless, uncut, four-hour version of *Hamlet*'. When 'Shakespeare' asks: 'who's Ken Branagh?' Blackadder quips, 'I'll tell him you said that, and I think, he'll be very hurt!' What makes Blackadder's reaction to meeting Shakespeare uncanny is that he really does reflect the response of many students who have been taught Shakespeare. Even casual conversations I have had with schoolchildren and university students reveal the ambivalence with which 'he' is met, which is to say, the simultaneous desire to ask for his autograph and to punch 'him' in the face. Blackadder's superimposition of a modern ballpoint pen with a seventeenth century script of *Macbeth* echoes in some way, the calls to make Shakespeare 'relevant' to modern readers and audiences, more than four hundred years since his death. The desire to bring 'Shakespeare' into the present, and to speak to contemporary contexts, permeates not only stage productions, but education as well, although with a unique set of complications. In my discussion, I take this ambivalence towards Shakespeare into consideration when thinking about the complicated place of Shakespeare in South Africa, and how he is still considered "usable" in the constitution of both nation and citizenship, even in a small way.

In postapartheid South Africa, the colonial history of English studies and Shakespeare presents an ongoing ambivalence. Pertinent questions of identity-construction, in a

postapartheid nation, carrying the burdens of a racially-divisive past, have lead to somewhat “schizophrenic” responses to Shakespeare, especially in education. These responses make it difficult to pin the identity of a South African Shakespeare down, or its place in South Africa. As an example: on one hand, there remains a long-standing tradition of staging Shakespeare at the Maynardville theatre in Cape Town, which caters for learners and the public, on the other the English literature syllabus has seen an exodus away from the teaching and examining Shakespeare in many South African schools.<sup>1</sup> Contradictions such as these leave me wondering about the investment that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and some schools have in continuing to offer Shakespeare, when many schools no longer choose to teach the plays. As I will suggest in chapter 3, the choice not to teach Shakespeare is sometimes as a result of logistical challenges rather than an anti-Shakespeare sentiment. My interest in the choices made for or against Shakespeare lies in the understanding that the school curriculum plays a role in how a country imagines itself to be, in the present and in the future. Therefore, the move away from teaching Shakespeare’s plays, which have an intricate history with South Africa, towards more modern plays is intrigues me and has motivates this study. Therefore, two main questions underpin the thesis: Firstly, how have past and present approaches to teaching Shakespeare in South Africa responded to the contexts within which they find themselves, if at all? Secondly, what impact might this response, have on the way in which Shakespeare has been used to articulate nation-building and citizenship for pupils (now called ‘learners’) in colonial, apartheid and postapartheid South Africa?

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<sup>1</sup> The website boasts that: ‘Thanks to the Maynardville Open-Air Theatre, hundreds of thousands of Cape school children have experienced their first taste of Shakespeare as it should be; as a live performance on stage. Generations of boys and girls discovered they could understand the Elizabethan language and found that the 400 year old plays could be as fresh and absorbing as any contemporary drama’ (sourced from <http://www.maynardville.co.za/pages/about.php>).

## **‘Encountering Shakespeare’**

To encapsulate my concerns, I have entitled the thesis: *Behind the Desk: Encountering Shakespeare in South African Education*. The second half of the title borrows from the title of Stephen Greenblatt’s book, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, published in 1988. The book was pivotal in re-configuring the relationship between a work of art, from the Renaissance in particular, and its context. Coining the term ‘social energy’, Greenblatt unpacks the negotiations that take place between the (Shakespearean) text and its site of production. He argues that, while it might seem so, the text is in fact not a stable entity that emerges from the artist’s mind, and that ‘it is impossible to take “the text itself” as the perfect, unsubstitutable, freestanding container of all its meanings’ (3). Such an understanding stems primarily from the nature of Renaissance theatre which relied on ‘collective creation’ (Greenblatt 4) by ‘address[ing] its audience collectively’ (5). It is this negotiation about which Greenblatt writes, between the fragmented text and its context, between the performance and the audience. Most importantly, he writes that it is an exchange because, ‘through its representational means, each play carries charges of social energy onto the stage; the stage in turn revises that energy and returns it to the audience’ (Greenblatt 6). I do, however, want to note two points of difference between Greenblatt’s project and mine which result in only a partial appropriation of the book’s title.

While Greenblatt’s title is useful in re-thinking and articulating the relationship between textual traces and the current context, I have chosen not to start with ‘Shakespeare’ in the title. This is so that the focus is firstly on the learners’ encounters with the Shakespearean text, and then subsequently the text’s encounter with the South African context. This is important because, as I will show, within the syllabus, Shakespeare’s texts are often considered coherent, incontestable sources of meaning. It is often the learner who is expected to be transformed from an encounter with the text, instead of the other way around. I therefore want to demonstrate that the plays are co-opted selectively in a larger political effort to constitute learners as subjects. The choice of the word ‘encounter’ is motivated by two things. Firstly, as with Blackadder’s chance meeting with Shakespeare in the above-mentioned clip, learners also meet Shakespeare somewhat unexpectedly, in the syllabus. The second ‘encounter’ relates to teaching approaches to Shakespeare and

different historical contexts, namely colonial, apartheid and postapartheid South Africa, where my discussion will be based. Therefore, while Greenblatt's interest is in understanding 'the negotiations through which works of art obtain and amplify such powerful energy' which is able to 'generate the illusion of life for centuries' (7), my interest is in a new set of negotiations between those texts and contemporary contexts, through education.

### **'Behind the Desk (in South African Education)'**

Finally, the locus of my investigation, captured in the phrase 'Behind the Desk', is the South African high school system. This is where, as Natasha Distiller has noted in *South Africa, Shakespeare, and Post-Colonial Culture*, most South Africans encounter Shakespeare. Because most learners do not go on to study Shakespeare at university level, it is therefore, useful to base such an investigation where the encounter between Shakespeare and the South African learner might be seen more clearly. The parameters my of discussion are also influenced by Gauri Viswanathan's appeal in *Masks of Conquest* that reading ought be seen as a 'situated activity whose ideas undergo some degree of transformation when filtered through the process of education' (17). Here she alerts us to the mediations that take place when the literary text is placed within the education system. While the aims for reading literature are to educate, certain 'political and historical realities that in fact affect and influence the process of education' (17) need to be taken in to consideration. This is a key reflection because, even where the social role of literature may take on interesting and complex versions, once the text is subsumed into the curriculum it becomes a subject to state policy. In emphasising 'Behind the desk' then, I am highlighting the influences that are unique to education and are not easily transposable to the social and even university-level encounters with Shakespeare.

As I will show in my discussion, the education system is an integral partner of the state in articulating a prescribed set of ideas about 'nation' and 'citizenship' to school learners. The school curriculum is designed to disseminate those ideas and gives us an appropriate context to analyse syllabus choices and how they are expected to fulfil curricular aims. It is

also a useful site to analyse the contextual changes that South Africa has undergone, if we begin with the assumption that changing governments express their social and political hopes through education. In this project, the curriculum will play an important role as I investigate whether or not English studies, and Shakespeare in particular, respond to contextual encounters.

### **Articulating Shakespeare's place in South Africa**

The four critical texts which precede my enquiry on the appropriation of Shakespeare in South Africa are: Martin Orkin's *Shakespeare Against South Africa*, published in 1987, David Johnson's *Shakespeare and South Africa*, published in 1996, Natasha Distiller's *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Culture*, and her most recent work, *Shakespeare and the Coconuts* published in 2012. All of them emerge in some way out of a critical time in South African history, whether it is on the precipice or an aftermath of social change. Orkin's book for instance was published at a time in South Africa when apartheid seemed to be at its peak, although the constant states of emergency betrayed the nervousness of a government losing its grip. The book also came eleven years after the Soweto uprising and other student protests around the country, where black pupils and students expressed dissatisfaction with the education system which they were subjected to. The uprising makes appearance in Orkin's reading of *Othello* as part of awareness of the importance of the time in which he writes. Further, Orkin justifies the importance of his project as a critical challenge to traditional approaches to Shakespeare in South Africa which ignored 'the emergence of new theories about literature ... from the late sixties on' (9). His positioning of Shakespeare *against* apartheid is relevant to the time of writing.

On the other hand, Johnson's *Shakespeare and South Africa* came into being in 1996, two years after South Africa's first democratic elections, and yet because his research began in 1989, the book suffers a certain "identity crisis". This forces Johnson to write an afterword in which he feels that the last chapter of the book holds a tone 'that in the post-election, post-apartheid South Africa sounds pious and anachronistic' (212). The obligation that Johnson seems to feel to adopt a less 'combative tone' (212) is somewhat symptomatic of

South Africa's young democracy. This is because, in the early 1990s, questions of the country's identity centered on finding the right response to the past while being optimistic about the future. Finally, despite his feeling that the concerns of his book may be somewhat dated, he concludes that 'there remains much to struggle *for*, much to be angry *about*, in the institutions and practices of English studies in post-1994 South Africa' (Johnson 212). Johnson is thus works to find political relevance for his project, even when larger social politics seem to render it less important than before.

Distiller's two works are imbued with postapartheid concerns, although her enquiry spans as far back as colonial education. By the time *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-colonial Culture* was published in 2005, South Africa had already passed the Truth and Reconciliation phase of the late 1990s, and eleven years into democracy, there were already signs of discontent. Many felt the failure of the transition as social inequality persisted.

Subsequently, *Shakespeare and the Coconuts* investigates identity-making efforts in a South Africa which displays a 'return to simplified and simplistic racialised discourse of us and them' (Distiller *Coconuts* 25). With only a little of the optimism of the transition into democracy and the euphoria of "Madiba magic" remaining in the country, Distiller's study is responding to pertinent questions, which are symptomatic of a country grappling with its democratic identity. Although all these studies emerge out of interesting contextual changes, Laurence Wright has sobering words for their ability to affect social change, despite the links they make to Shakespeare and South African politics. Wright sees a continuing place for Shakespeare in South Africa and concludes that, 'Shakespeare will probably remain part of the cultural manifold; he will be produced and discussed and appropriated and reviled, praised unthinkingly and damned without knowledge as ever ... but it will no longer be necessary to pretend that huge political issues are practically effected by the ways in which a small academic minority responds to one very important playwright' ('Introduction' 24). This knowledge has helped me to think carefully about the relevance of my own discussion. And although the place of Shakespeare in South Africa is diminishing, its persisting presence in the English syllabus suggests that these are still valid concerns to hold.

Therefore, although these critics tackle different sites where critical appropriations of Shakespeare have been developed and circulated, it is in education where they give the deepest consideration to the complicated intersection between literary criticism, pedagogy, and culture and identity-making. What I hope to offer in relation to these discussions is a closer analysis of how limited subject positions have been carefully articulated for school pupils, through the teaching of a humanist Shakespeare in South Africa. Initially, the closest to engage with the teaching of Shakespeare in South African high schools was Johnson. However his discussion, which promised to focus on ‘the syllabuses, school editions, and study aids produced for Shakespeare study in South African high schools’, tends to be preoccupied with literary criticism over pedagogy (Johnson 147). Distiller’s latest study, however, has narrowed this focus further by analysing the editions of some Shakespeare plays currently being studied in South Africa. And although her objective is not to not evaluate ‘how well these editions function in practice, as teaching tools’, we are still brought closer to texts that actually pass through the learners’ hands (*Coconuts* 99).

The proximity between text and learner should be seen as significant to thinking about the dissemination of ideas about citizenship, which the education department considers important. Distiller argues correctly that ‘many of the arguments about Shakespeare’s texts that circulate in the university system are difficult to import into the school classroom’ (*Coconuts* 99). Similarly, Johnson expresses a concern about the distance between theory and those who experience it. He concedes that, although *Shakespeare and South Africa* ‘stands as a long answer to those students, many of whom were Xhosa-speaking, who struggled to pass their examinations on the Shakespeare plays’, those students ‘are unlikely to buy and read the book’ (214). Therefore it is worth engaging with those resources that school learners, or at the very least, teachers, encounter and discuss in the classroom. The discrepancy mentioned by Johnson is one which limits the impact of an important study like Orkin’s *Shakespeare Against Apartheid* in the context out of which it emerges. Although his book written with the desire to create a space for an emergent ‘people’s Shakespeare’ (Orkin 184), and with the hope that the oppressed youth, ‘in Soweto and elsewhere in South Africa’ (Orkin 54), will find resonance in a Shakespeare that speaks to their plight, the book is in actually aimed at ‘undergraduate South African students... [and] critics and teachers of

Shakespeare' (Orkin 9). Further, apartheid laws ensured that those undergraduate students would most likely not be from Soweto.<sup>2</sup>

The heart of my discussion then lies in chapter 2, where I analyse the approaches to Shakespeare in the *CRUX* journal, and in chapter 3, where I engage with Grade 12 examination papers. The journal, whose first issue came out in 1968, was conceived with aim of making it accessible to 'all school libraries, both primary and high, as well as teachers who are responsible for teaching English language and literature [and] high-school pupils, teachers-in-training, and first-year students' (Editors 3). Although it would be hard to determine the success of that endeavour, the prevalence of articles by school teachers who write about practical ways of teaching Shakespeare, suggests that educators were exposed to the journal. Subsequently, *CRUX* then gives a helpful picture of what versions of Shakespeare some learners were exposed to in their schools. Additionally, my focus on examination papers in chapter 3 is inspired by Alan Sinfield's assertion in *Political Shakespeares* that, 'the system works most plainly through the examination system ... [where] the pupil is being persuaded to internalise success or failure with particular and relative cultural codes as an absolute judgement on her it his potential as a human being' (136). This is clearly a problematic notion, and as I will demonstrate, is a useful arena to reflect on the contradictions of the current curriculum in South Africa and its implementation in the classroom.

My reasons for taking this approach are twofold: firstly, in trying to diminish the gap between Shakespeare criticism and its reception, I hope to gain a clearer picture of the pedagogical approaches to Shakespeare in South African schools. This is to highlight the impact of the mediations necessitated by the schooling system on English studies, and particularly Shakespeare. Gauri Viswanathan's assertion that, 'to take account of [political and historical] realities is inevitably to see reading as a situated activity whose ideas undergo some degree of transformation when filtered through the process of education' (17), is integral to this discussion. It assists me in showing, even in a small way here, that

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<sup>2</sup> 'In 1959...the apartheid principle was extended to universities: henceforth "white" universities could no longer invoke their autonomy to admit qualified students of all colours. In practice this mostly affected the universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand, which accepted black students while maintaining "social segregation" in sporting and other social activities' (Welsh 65).

criticism itself is subject to transformation when framed by education policies, particularly those of an oppressive state such as apartheid. With this in mind, we need to look at Distiller's contention that, in South Africa, there existed a version of liberal humanism which 'helped make Shakespeare a tool of colonialism ... available to the colonised' (Distiller 50), as one problematised by the demands apartheid education. While both Distiller and Johnson recognise the appropriation of Shakespeare by black writers such as Sol Plaatje and Bloke Modisane, I see the subversive possibilities as primarily available *outside* of the apartheid schooling system, and even there it is under threatened.

The second reason for my focus on the influence of the education system stems from J. A. Mangan's warning in *Imperial Curriculum*. Here he notes that it is 'difficult, if not impossible, to assess the way in which the messages in school materials [were] transmitted by teachers... [in] word, manner and action [because] the curriculum proposed is a long way from the curriculum implemented' (Mangan 18). This difficulty is hard to circumvent, but I hope to show that liberal humanism's dependence on the discursive allocation of subjectivity, offers us the necessary tools to understand how the South African pupil might have been positioned as a subject, through the teaching of Shakespeare during apartheid. The limitations of this discursive identity-making are expanded on by Catherine Belsey in, *The Subject of Tragedy*. She notes that 'subjectivity [as] discursively produced ... is constrained by the range of subject-positions defined by the discourses in which the concrete individual participates' (5). These constraints, including historical distance, enforce on us a sense of having to 'work with what we've got'. Facing a similar challenge, Distiller allows that, 'while attempts to locate precisely the connections between historical subject and textual subject will always be vexed, it is difficult to speak about the discourses of and about *Drum* in ways that do not take into account the effects of these discourses on the identities of the writers' (151). The difficulty that Distiller laments is exacerbated further for my project which seeks to explore the constitution of pupils as subjects.

Therefore, while South African pupils' responses to Shakespeare are harder to recover than those of published black writers, they certainly existed in various forms. Perhaps the most obvious response is the outright rejection of Shakespeare in the syllabus, where the difficulty that pupils find in his works results in an aversion, despite the supposed 'universal'

values and relevance. Such reactions, while seen as almost 'blasphemous' by those who revere Shakespeare, should be seen as more complicated than they first appear, and may help us to understand something about the nature resistance within the education system.

### **Constituting the 'Nation' and the subject**

Throughout this discussion, the notions of 'nation', 'citizenship' and the 'subject' are considered to be contested spaces. What is of importance is how they are constituted in relation to each other, both by the state and by learner-subjects. To clarify, I turn for a moment to Chris Lorenz's essay 'Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History'. The essay appears in a collection from the Writing the Nation Series, entitled *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*. Lorenz argues that what makes these concepts of 'nation' and 'subject' contestable is that 'there are always equally plausible rival interpretations that ensure that consensus cannot be established' (30). Therefore one definition or interpretation cannot be privileged over another as the correct one. Of course governments constantly attempt to do this and education is one of the ways in which they disseminate preferred versions of 'nation' and 'subjecthood' while working to suppress resistance to those versions. Lorenz makes an important differentiation in explaining that these concepts are 'used as collective "codes of difference", both as *self*-representations of what social actors regard as their collective identities and as representations of collective identities *by others*, not least by states' (31). If we accept that these concepts as unstable, then two things are possible: firstly, we can be suspicious of the state and the curriculum's efforts to construct the idea of nation as coherent and uncontested. Secondly, we may also reflect on how self-construction is influenced by others, as I do, for example, when investigating Sol Plaatje's appropriation of Shakespeare to articulate his identity-construction. I will do this in contrast to others views which sought to position him as a subject. I will address the questions posed in this discussion over three chapters that address the development of English literary education and the teaching of Shakespeare during colonial, apartheid and postapartheid South Africa. While these chapters suggest a chronology, it is somewhat superficial as I am selective about the moments wherein my discussion takes place. The

chapters are shaped more around curricular changes, rather than a coherent and full historical account.

In chapter 1, entitled 'Colonial Encounters: Constituting a nation away from home', I explore the inception of English studies in South Africa and the function of English literature in the colonial context. This is an imperative discussion because it sets the foundation to understand curriculum selection and the manifestation of the state's hopes for social control. I argue that the class structures demarcated in England could not be transcribed directly on to the South African school system and had to adapt to the unique intersection between class and race. The result was that in the schooling system, which was run by missionaries, exposed black, Afrikaans and lower class English pupils to the same curriculum. My argument here is that, this complex mix encouraged the British to constitute themselves, not only as English, but as morally superior as well. The formation of British 'nation' within South Africa's borders simultaneously a drive towards conformity within the English in the colony. Finally, as a result of Christian humanist education, Shakespeare, set up as a representation of 'universal' values, became available for appropriation by different members of the missionary-educated class. This is why I have placed Nathaniel Merriman and Sol Plaatje's readings of Shakespeare's dramas up against each other: to show that even humanist approaches to Shakespeare which are set up as democratic, are subject to the problematic context of inequality in South Africa.

In chapter 2, my discussion picks up after the advent of apartheid in 1948, to engage with approaches to Shakespeare in the *CRUX* journal. The journal was conceptualised as a pedagogical hub where English educators could share ideas on how to improve the state of English in South Africa in the late 1960s and beyond. What the journal betrays however is a sense of urgency among the English community to constitute themselves as guardians of a literary tradition, headlined by Shakespeare. The inaugural editorial of the journal emphasises the importance on the preservation of English. Such a response was partly as a result of the pressure brought on by the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid policies which sought to protect and perpetuate Afrikaans culture. Therefore, calls for pupils to identify with Shakespeare's characters and world, were further a way to imagine nationhood that was removed from the reality of an apartheid context. I demonstrate this

by focusing on readings of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* in *CRUX* articles. The chapter concludes with a reflection on how those who are not constituted as part of the community imagined in the *CRUX* articles, took it on themselves to align with what they felt were the high ideals entrenched in Shakespeare. This discussion takes place under the topic, 'APARTHEID ENCOUNTERS: Whose Shakespeare is it?', to signify how Shakespeare could be used both to carry out state policies and to resist them.

Finally, in chapter 3, I spend time teasing out the implications of teaching a humanist and depoliticised Shakespeare in a nation which considers itself as democratic. It is not too surprising that approaches to teaching Shakespeare would not transform too drastically from colonialism to apartheid, as a result of the ongoing privilege of whiteness and Englishness. But within a state that considers itself to be a champion of human rights, and a protector of local cultural systems, it should be seen as problematic that, historical and other contextual encounters, are still not emphasized. My discussion in this regard centers on the examination of the only two Shakespeare plays on offer in the Grade 12 syllabus, namely *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. The current education system in South Africa has such that the differentiation between first and second language proficiency can no longer be articulated solely along racial lines. Thus, while the constitution of both the subject and community in apartheid syllabi was decidedly white, in postapartheid South Africa, class has proven to be a more effective marker than race. And even though Shakespeare occupies a much smaller space in the syllabus than it did previously, its continued presence suggests that it still manages to speak to larger curricular aims, not least of which is the desire for learners to be part of a 'global' community.

# 1. COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS: CONSTITUTING A NATION AWAY FROM HOME

## Representing conquest: approaches to literary education

I want to reflect for a moment on the role that English studies and the English text have been made to play in colonial conquest. Before I move to the historical projects undertaken by Gauri Viswanathan and David Johnson, I want to take into account two important readings, developed by Alan Sinfield and Ashcroft, et al, on the relationship between education and state policy. In the first, Alan Sinfield, who draws on cultural materialism in his essay, 'Give an Account of Shakespeare and Education, Showing Why You Think They are Effective and What You have Appreciated About Them. Support Your Comments with Precise References', notes that:

Any social order has to include the conditions for its own continuance, and capitalism and patriarchy do this partly through the education system. The positions in the production process which people are to occupy are an effect of the relations of production, but the preparing of people to occupy those positions is accomplished by the family, the media and education. (134)

Sinfield reveals two things here, firstly, that 'any social order' (134) puts into place contingencies, in this case human capital, in order to ensure its survival. Secondly, that it employs systems at its disposal, such as education, to articulate the terms of that longevity. More importantly, Sinfield gives us an indication of how a state relies on education, among other elements, to articulate the positions that its subjects must occupy within the system of production. The use of education for 'the preparing of people to occupy ... positions' (Sinfield 134) is vital for reflecting on the social role that colonial administrators envisioned for English literary education in the colonies. I want to turn now to an introduction written by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in the 1995 edition of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, for a moment.

The introduction by Ashcroft, et al precedes a collection of essays on postcolonialism and education, which the editors consider descriptive of the field. Although somewhat dated now, their discussion is important because it proposes ways of thinking about the unique place of English literary studies in colonial education. For example, they posit that:

As important as all education proved as a means of colonialist control, literary education had a particular valency. The brutality of colonial personnel was, through the deployment of literary texts in education, both converted to and justified by the implicit and explicit 'claims' to superiority of civilisation embodied/encoded through the 'fetish' of the English book ... It establishes the locally English or British as normative through critical claims to 'universality' of the values embodied in English literary texts, and it represents the colonised to themselves as inherently inferior beings- 'wild', 'barbarous', 'uncivilised'. Moreover, technologies of teaching strongly reinforced such textual representations. (Ashcroft, et al: 425-6)

What the writers suggest here is that literary education was employed by colonial administrators to disseminate certain values which were central in encouraging a level of compliancy from the colonised. Further, textual representations of the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised, as intrinsically unequal, worked to justify the presence of the English in the colonies. Also, given Sinfield's argument, representations of the coloniser and the colonised can be seen as ensuring the perpetuity of the British administration in the colonies. The reinforcement of these representations, through education, could continue to construct compliant subjects, of both the geographical and symbolic empire, for as long as literary texts continued to circulate. When looking at South Africa's historical context, however, we need deviate somewhat from the oppositional binary between, "wild", "barbarous", "uncivilised" locals, and civilised colonisers, described in Ashcroft, et al(426). Instead, as I will argue, this opposition is blurred into more complex representations as a result of the Christian humanism and missionary education in South Africa. This is an important connection to establish because it was this type of schooling which produced black writers such as Solomon T. Plaatje, who would later use Shakespeare, one of the

greatest symbols of Englishness, to establish himself discursively as a participant in a 'universal' culture.

The first study which contributes to my discussion, by "shifting the goalposts" of how we should interrogate the motivations of colonial British education policy, is Gauri Viswanathan's seminal work, *Masks of Conquest*. Although the book focuses on English education in India, which was informed by different political, literary and religious histories to those in South Africa, there are key overlaps in how British policymakers and administrators approached education in the two colonies. In her discussion, Viswanathan uncovers a complicated relationship between colonial objectives and colonial curricula. She articulates the link as 'the adaptation of the content of English literary education to the administrative and political imperatives of British rule; and ... [that] these imperatives in turn charged that content with a radically altered significance, enabling the humanistic ideals of enlightenment to coexist with and indeed even support education for social and political control' (Viswanathan 3). Therefore Viswanathan suggests that, instead of emerging out of a vacuum, the English curriculum in the colonies was often developed as a response to larger political and social catalysts, both real and imagined. Rather than working to fulfil colonial objectives because of their 'intrinsic' ability to civilise the 'native', the English syllabus actually had to be adapted based on the demands of its reception. As I will show below, Viswanathan argues that the reception of the English curriculum was not necessarily based on empirical evidence, but also stemmed from how colonial administrators imagined the colonised would respond to it. Viswanathan urges us to see that the position out of which 'British educational measures' were conceived, 'was a fragile one that it was the role of educational decisions to fortify, given the challenge posed by historical contingency and confrontation' (Viswanathan 10). While we might take that contestation for granted now, it is still worth acknowledging because of the interest that British administration had in representing itself as a coherent and stable entity which could not, or should not, be resisted.

The importance of Viswanathan's argument is that, once we acknowledge that the platform from which both colonised and colonists were represented was fragile, we then have recourse to challenge the discourse that was used to justify the teaching of English literature

in the colonies. As I have noted above, Viswanathan sees the tenuous relationship between policy and curriculum as stemming from a series of responses to real and imagined historical stimuli, or ‘historical contingenc[ies] and confrontation[s]’ (10). While the basis of my inquiry is on curricular responses to real historical contexts, it is important to note the emphasis that she places on the imagined ones, which effected extraordinary influence on curriculum developments. To elucidate, Viswanathan recounts that the introduction of English literature in India was a response to badly-behaved English coloniasl, and that, ‘the English text function[ed] as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state, becom[ing] a mask for economic exploitation, so successfully camouflaging the material activities of the colonizer’ (20). The words ‘surrogate’, ‘mask’ and ‘camouflag[e]’ suggest to us that English literary study was developed partially as a means to obscure the fragility of colonialism, which was constantly exposed by the actions of colonists. The supplementary role earmarked for the literary text ought to be seen as an implicit concession on the part of the state that, the attributes of ‘civility’ and ‘morality’ were not, in fact, intrinsic, but constructed as such. Subsequently, I want to conclude the discussion on Viswanathan by focusing on the point that, the representation of the ‘surrogate Englishman’ (Viswanathan 20) could not exist in isolation, and had to be placed in tandem with a kind of ‘surrogate native’.

According to Viswanathan, the development of English studies in nineteenth-century India betrayed the colonisers own apprehensions about the colonial encounter. She notes, for instance, that the fashioning of a more secular English syllabus, rather than an overtly Christian one which the missionaries demanded, was in anticipation of possible Indian resistance. More telling, however, is the realisation that, ‘in the absence of direct interaction with the indigenous population that characterized earlier administrations, the colonial subject was reduced to a conceptual category, an object emptied of all personal identity to accommodate the knowledge already established as being circulated about the “native Indian”’ (Viswanathan 11). Because of the combined fear of Indian resistance, and the need to justify colonial conquest on the basis of a ‘superior’ moral position, English administrators were happy to depend on pre-conceived notions of ‘natives’. We can conclude then that part of the English literary syllabus was designed to address this ‘object emptied of all personal identity’ (Viswanathan 11) and to reconfigure ‘natives’ as subjects of

the British Empire, based on who they were imagined to be, rather than who they were. This is why, in later chapters, I consider some of the encounters between Shakespeare and pupils to be based on an imagined subject position. Both apartheid and postapartheid curriculum policies in South Africa reflect the state's anticipation of how schoolchildren might be constituted as subjects, in relation to the 'nation', once they are in the education system.

Viswanathan's project demonstrates that a degree of wariness must be employed when engaging with the development of a discipline which was able to set up its own terms of representation. This is especially true where claims of 'universality' attempt to elevate English literary studies above the historical processes which, once contextualised, negate those claims. If we analyse the teaching of Shakespeare in apartheid and postapartheid South Africa, without interrogating how English studies developed in the country, we will find ourselves engaging with ideas about both the English and the colonised as if they were accurate, effectively perpetuating the problematic representations of both. As noted above, I want to deviate from this strict dichotomy, by noting that the colonisers were themselves subject to the representations which they sought to entrench. My argument, that the development of literary education sought to construct subjects compliant to colonial objectives, extends to British subjects in the colonies as well. In order to elaborate on how this construction affected both groups in South Africa, I turn to David Johnson's discussion in *Shakespeare and South Africa*, where he analyses both the social and educational roles of literature in the country.

### **The role of literature in constituting 'nation'**

In the chapter 'The Social Function of Literature: 1800-1850', Johnson expands on the social roles attached to literature by various stakeholders, which were set to 'prepare the way for the institutionalization of English literature as a subject in school and college curricula at the Cape Colony' (13). He distinguishes four positions, namely, the Missionary, Utilitarian, Romantic and Imperial positions. I will discuss them briefly to demonstrate how their aims informed not only the curriculum, but also the hierarchy of schools, particularly in the Cape.

Johnson records that the primary aim of missionary education was to ensure that 'new converts' (16) would be able to read the Bible. Where texts other than the Bible were taught, they were framed in a number of ways in order to encounter the 'potential subversiveness of literature' (Johnson 16). The three methods used were: 'framing the selection with stern moral commentaries; combining the fictional account with factual detail; and treating the literature as a vehicle for memory training' (17). These mediations betray a concern held by missionaries that literature taught without supervision has the potential to produce subjects who can subvert the very system which produces them. This idea can be traced back to Christian humanism which saw 'inequalities ... [as] the result of environment, climate, or lack of opportunity [and] missionary endeavour could overcome these disadvantages and liberate the full human potential in the individuals of all races and classes' (Johnson 15-16). This view is important to keep in mind because, as I will show later, mission schools were also affected by racist ideologies which circulated in South Africa. As appealing as it might seem, the notion that the colonised needed the intervention of missionaries in order to 'liberate [their] full human potential' (Johnson 16) is problematic in its paternalism. It remained however more benevolent than the utilitarian position which I will discuss next.

The main motivation behind utilitarian approaches to literature was a 'policy of Anglicization' (Johnson 23). Johnson writes that, 'in addition to enforcing the English language, the governors of the period deliberately undermined religious instruction in the schools ... by insisting upon the use of non-Calvinist texts in the schools' (23). The idea that English education could be utilised for 'social engineering' (Johnson 24) was influenced by class divisions, and aimed at protecting the 'ultimate rule of British rule in the Cape' (Johnson 26). It is worth noting that these two positions saw literary education as capable of instituting social change. Most telling, however, is the difference in how the missionaries and utilitarians articulated the place of the colonised within the education system. Johnson reports that, unlike the missionaries, 'officials and state educationalists ... drew on a scientific discourse to establish a racial hierarchy with certain definite limits set on African intellectual potential' (Johnson 29). This difference would manifest itself later in the tiered schooling system, which I will discuss later. I will also explore missionary education as the site of numerous contradictions between curricular aims and implementation. But before I

do so, I want to consider the last two positions that Johnson examines and their significance to my argument.

Although Johnson posits the existence of the romantic and imperial, or 'Thinking of England' positions (Johnson 34), they appear to be versions of each other rather than completely separate. The support for the romantic position is not substantial and Johnson cites only two sources to support it. But it remains worth mentioning as, according to Johnson, it was based on the notion that 'literature has the potential to produce social cohesion ... [and] that poetry promotes national improvement' (34). Both aims at unity and 'national improvement' (Johnson 34) are defined more explicitly in the imperial position. The importance of the imperial view lies in the fact that English literature was seen as key in the 'constitution of the nation' (34) in both Britain and in South Africa. This is because, according to Johnson, 'literature ... unsurprisingly played an important role in efforts to unite the local *English* community' (36) and in maintaining 'strong associations with "home"' (36). The desire for recreating a version of "home" in the colony prevailed in different spheres, going as far as to influence the structure of the school system in the Cape. Later in the chapter, I will investigate how some of the educated black and coloured elite also adopted this means of self-constitution, consequently forging their own links to Britain.

In the early nineteenth century, both black and white pupils were exposed to similar curricula, especially under missionary education, and this had an impact on how both groups identified themselves. However, I posit that proximity of different races in missionary schools would have placed pressure on the British in South Africa to align themselves more explicitly with British interests. Unlike segregated schools, in these classrooms, the obligation to "play coloniser" would be greater. Further, because 'English literature played an important internal role in cementing the unity of the English nation' (Johnson 35), I would like to suggest that the imperial approach to literature was a survival technique on the part of the English community in South Africa. Simultaneously, it could serve to discourage subversion within British ranks. This is to say that, in order to stand apart from both Boers and the colonised, a certain level of conformity would be required from the English colonists. As I will show at the beginning of chapter 2, this sense of nation-building became even more urgent with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. Ultimately,

establishing English identity outside of these constraints could undermine colonial efforts. Therefore, English literary education served as an ideal reminder of position that the English were to occupy within the colonies. I want to trace the motivation behind this investment in nationhood further.

In order to consider how British subjects were pressured to constitute themselves in accordance with their 'surrogate' identity in the colonies, I want to look for a moment Denis Lawton's, *Class, Culture and the Curriculum*. In the book, Lawson analyses the education system in nineteenth-century England, which produced administrators and policymakers who would go on to develop colonial education. The comparison between British and South African schools matters for two reasons: firstly, because English education found traction in the colonies, and its development was used as a case study in order to improve the British education system (Johnson 28). Secondly, the educational measures instituted by different administrators in the Cape reflected the education that they had received back in England, based on the class position that they occupied there. For example, Johnson notes that most of the missionaries came from the lower classes (15) and those who subscribed to utilitarian aims of education came primarily from the middle class (25). Lawton helps us to differentiate between the curricula that the two classes were exposed to, which ultimately influenced how those who went to the colonies would view colonial education. He reports that: '[T]he public school/grammar school tradition of education for leadership ... gave rise to a curriculum for "Christian gentlemen" who became the leaders of society--managers in industry at home, or district officers in the colonies. Those who were to fill such roles were seen as needing a particular kind of character training, and secondly, the kind of knowledge which would be an obvious badge of their exclusive rank' (Lawton 1). And similar to colonial education, elitist education was framed in relation to the lower classes:

[T]he elementary school tradition was especially intended to train the "lower orders". Elementary schools were designed to produce a labour force able to understand simple written instructions and capable of making elementary calculations-the skills necessary for a competent factory labour force. It was also important that the students be trained to be obedient and to have respect for the property of their betters. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a struggle to

make sure that the elementary education would not give the lower orders ideas above their station (Lawton 1-2).

In both systems, the focus was clearly on constituting subjects who would be qualified to occupy prescribed positions in society; one class as a 'labour force' (Lawton 1) and the other to rule and to develop strong moral values. A further implication, which carried over strongly in South African curricular objectives, was that, knowledge alone did not qualify one to be a 'leader of society' (Lawton 2), but that the development of character was equally important. But there is a discrepancy here. While the elite were trained for character development in order to lead, the lower classes were trained to accept their position in order to be led, they must be, 'obedient and [ ] have respect for the property of their betters' (Lawton 2). Both objectives, though seemingly divergent, were aimed at strengthening class divisions. This not only relates to preventing upward mobility, but also the development of a 'refined' character would also serve to discourage the elite from moving outside of the limits of their class, as they were required to maintain their position in order to keep the social order going.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, some of these elements that informed education in England reappeared in the development of English education in South Africa in interesting ways that, surprisingly, did not emulate class divisions perfectly. English literary education in the mission schools, in particular, seemed to disrupt the strict opposition between coloniser and colonised by making 'critical claims to "universality" of ... [moral] values (Ashcroft, et al 426). Thus, despite racist policies in South Africa, Christian humanist claims, along with a complicated intersection between class and race, opened up a space for the creation of educated black elite in South Africa. This happened in ways that were not possible in Britain. It was this educated class that sought to resist the limited subject positions prescribed by the colonial government using the very tools of its education system. To understand how this came to be, I want to discuss how the school system outlined by Lawton had to adapt to historical imperatives in South Africa.

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<sup>3</sup> Of course the Indian example of out of control Englishmen (Viswanathan 20) shows us that they did not necessarily adhere to this.

## Education for different classes and races

As it was in nineteenth-century England, education in South Africa was driven by the desire to 'teach people their place' (Johnson 56). Further, Johnson records that education played a regulatory role in order to emphasise and police class boundaries (56). Education, therefore, was used to reinforce and justify existing social relationships, and to discourage aspirations of upward mobility, in order to maintain social cohesion. The mechanics of this process are explained by Johnson who summarises the school hierarchy in colonial South Africa as follows:

the best category of schools, the first-class schools, were for the wealthy and taught a predominantly classical curriculum; the second-class schools catered for those Ross describes as "the superior ranks", and were more likely to teach a more modern curriculum; and finally, catering for the poor of both races at this stage, were the third-class mission schools, which provided an imperfect elementary education. (Johnson 66)

Class divisions are clearly emphasised here, but the conflation of race and class in the last category, and the immediate relegation of non-white races to the lowest category, are of particular interest to this project. The "lumping together" of black pupils into one class ignored existing hierarchies in an attempt to construct a new type of black subject. Viswanathan alludes to a similar process in India where 'the heterogeneity of Indian tradition, society, and culture was glided over in the rush to appropriate it to the pattern of European religious history' (Viswanathan 13). In his essay, 'Historical discourses, racist mythology and education in twentieth-century South Africa', Peter Kallaway clarifies the constitution of the third class schooling system, noting that, 'Afrikaners or Blacks were judged on the scale of "civilization" in terms of the extent to which they could speak English or adapt to the norms and standards of lower middle-class Victorian England' (196). It is quite revealing that English proficiency is conflated with 'civilisation'; cultural differences are used to regulate access to the English nation. Further, class structures are reconfigured to include race, because the colonial encounter necessitated the formation of new social hierarchies. This meant that those who were in the lower classes in England could occupy

higher ranks outside of it. Finally, I want to extend Johnson's assessment that, humanist notions were constructed unequally along race and class lines, by arguing that missionary schools, which were aimed at 'lower' classes and non-whites, complicated these restrictions. This happened by making aspects of English education earmarked for higher classes available to the lower tier education system. And at the end of this part of the discussion I hope to elaborate that the teaching of Shakespeare, as representative of ideal Englishness and humanness, was a part of those complications.

## **Missionary Education**

The incongruity between the articulation and implementation of the curriculum, argued by Kallaway, makes itself felt quite strongly in missionary education. Unlike in India, Christian missionaries in South Africa had a very strong influence on education and infused English literary studies with missionary aims. I have already used Johnson to show the prevalence of missionary influence on literary studies, but part of the discrepancy between policy aims and their execution is perhaps as a result of the internal contradictions between the missionary objectives and attitudes towards literature. My focus on missionary education, in this section, is motivated by the understanding that it was here where black pupils were likely to encounter English literary studies and Shakespeare. The contradictions which the black educated class of writer encountered played a role in their self-constitution as subjects.

In *Evangelicals and Culture* for instance, Doreen M. Rosman recounts that missionary views on the influence of literature on morality and spirituality varied from conservative to more liberal. The difference often hinged on how closely literature could be compared to biblical principles, and how well it could be harnessed towards proselytising. Rosman finds some of the justifications that evangelicals gave towards the study of classical texts unconvincing, and notes that in reality, 'they reveal the extent to which evangelicals accepted the assumptions of their day' (175). This might go some way in explaining why 'qualms were often overcome too when evangelicals turned their attention to the work of the major dramatists, most notably Shakespeare' (Rosman 176). There was no full consensus among

missionaries on the corrupting influence of literature, but there was an interesting elevation of Shakespeare above more 'mundane' and 'debased' forms such as the novel (Rosman 184). For some, 'rather than condemning, they sought to excuse Shakespeare: he had lived in a barbarous age; the most offensive passages were not original but had been forced upon him by the exigencies of theatrical productions' (177). Nathaniel Merriman's lectures, for instance, show some of the stronger affinities to Shakespeare in the concession that, 'Shakespeare's only blemish- his "coarse and abominable language" - could be overcome by recourse to Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare*' (Johnson 19). Opinions held on literature were thus not uniform, and where allowances were made for the 'greats', it was on condition that mediations took place, to make them more acceptable. Here we see how approaches to teaching literature revealed acceptable notions of (Christian) nationhood and the kind of (Christian) subjects which the missionaries hoped to produce.

To further this discussion, I will use the well-known Lovedale Missionary Institution (Lovedale) to exemplify the complicated nature of missionary education. Lovedale is an appropriate case study because according to Graham A. Duncan, 'Lovedale, as other mission education stations, [was] considered one of the prime loci for the inculcation of the values of western mission Christianity being the "pre-eminent centre of conversion and education in the Eastern Cape"' (63). The aim of education at the mission station was always the conversion of the 'natives' but adjacent to that, Duncan notes that from the beginning, and particularly under the leadership of Scottish Reverend William Govan, there was a demand for academic excellence (106). He continues that 'this was partly the result of Govan's own commitment to providing a democratic form of education in which black students would be required to achieve a level which was commensurate with their white co-learners' (Duncan 106).

This aim is interesting because, for the first time, we see the application of Matthew Arnold's democratic ideas on class mobility through education, to black education; although Johnson notes that Arnold himself did not include 'natives' in his vision (40). Additionally, 'Govan's hope was that achievement of appropriate levels of education would enable products of Lovedale to become integrated into white society' (Duncan 107). We should not forget that it was not a 'neutral' integration that was sought, but because Lovedale was

producing Christian teachers and ministers, educational success would lead to missionary work by its converted graduates. Thus, while the aim of colonial education was to 'teach people their place' (Johnson 56), missionary educationalists hoped to equip their students, both black and white, to occupy positions 'above' their class, through the 'civilising' power of (Christian) education. Later, this proved to be particularly irksome for the apartheid government in the mid-twentieth century, and those schools which were not closed down were placed under government control.

Opportunities to co-opt and regulate mission schools such as Lovedale under the colonial government did arise, but it seems that the implicitly coercive nature of education was not overlooked. Duncan records that that 'it is interesting that [Sir George] Grey did not aim at destroying the classical education<sup>4</sup> offered at Lovedale, for he recognised the need for a class of educated person whose primary allegiance would be to their white benefactors rather than to their own people' (118). Here we see the concern with the 'potentially subversive nature of imaginative literature' (Johnson 13) of education overridden by education's potential for producing pliable subjects. The result was obviously much more complicated and a number of this educated class used their education to resist colonial objectives (*Distiller Post-colonial*). The humanist, democratic and multi-racial values that, at least in theory, underpinned the establishment and running of this mission school in the nineteenth century, obscure the contradictions inherent in missionary education objectives, but as I will show below, not successfully.

Firstly, missionary education relied on negative representations of the 'natives' in order to justify its presence in South Africa. Kallaway suggests, however, that this was not necessarily as a result of overt racism but rather 'more a manifestation of cultural chauvinism and religious bigotry' (13). The premise of cultural and religious superiority may explain why according to Peter Randall, 'although Lovedale was primarily an institution for blacks, the 30 or 40 white boarders were given preferential treatment [as] they filled the front benches in class, ate at the High Table, [and] were not expected to do menial work' (60). It is less

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<sup>4</sup> 'The form of education was offered at four levels. There was an elementary school which aimed to train teachers, a preparatory school which offered education in English literature, classics, science, Christian ethics and values, a college department for higher education in literature, science and philosophy and a theological school for training ministers' (Duncan 107).

surprising then, as I will demonstrate later, that critics like Reverend Nathaniel Merriman saw no place for the 'Calibans' of the world in Shakespeare's universality. Similarly, institutions which offered humanist education still treated their white and black students unequally. In true 'window-dressing' fashion, the black elite were in reality excluded from the very positions which they were trained to occupy. Duncan concludes that the result of such contradictions was the creation of a class of educated Africans who were disconnected from both their own people and English society. And yet it was this conflation of colonial educational policy and Christian liberalism that fostered a contentious space for voices such as Solomon T. Plaatje to emerge.

Black writers who came from these missionary schools were themselves burdened with the contradictions of a Christian humanist education; these were further complicated by the rise of what would soon be Afrikaans nationalism. In the essay 'Why They Fought: Black Cape Colonists and Imperial Wars, 1899-1918', Bill Nasson tries to grapple with the question: "Why did black South Africans retain their optimistic faith in the British imperial project, despite its palpably wounding betrayal of their tenuous rights and interests?" (55). Nasson surmises that the main reason for black allegiance towards the British was the extent to which the black and coloured elite identified themselves in relation to the Empire. It was not only an affinity towards all things British, but also a rejection of 'oppressive local forces beyond their control' (Nasson 55-56). This shows how close the link between nation and subject is, and some of the success of English education in South Africa, as a result of which 'the weight of this pro-British consensus [was] among the black elite. In scholarly literature, too, it [was] embedded as the most characteristic expression of black South African Empire sentiment' (Nasson 57).

The increasing conflict between English and Afrikaans-speaking whites in the turn of the twentieth century led to complex cultural identification for black and coloured people in the Cape. Nasson writes that:

Their increasingly open articulation of distrust or open hostility towards marginal, non-English whites characterized as "seditious Boers" or as "low," "unfit", or "dubious," not only affirmed their claim upon inclusion into a common home front

social and political order. Through sharing in the creation of domestic scapegoats, black patriots also hardened their self-definition of identity as a colonial "English" community, expressed through a micro-culture of urban and rural solidarities and forceful languages of external loyalty and Empire commitment. (Nasson 59)

The characteristics given to the Boers above echo those mentioned by Ashcroft, et al. discussed previously. While colonial education worked to position the colonised as uncivilised, in order to offer them an alternative value system and an opportunity for 'improvement', it is clear that some of the elite in the Cape truly assimilated this. As Nasson concludes above, they considered anti-British sentiment, adopted by the settlers, as grounds for exclusion from a 'universal' (English) community. Of course this distrust of the Boers was not only because they were against British rule, but that they held more explicit racist views. Thus, the black and coloured educated class had a greater investment in aligning their citizenship with the British nation. I am not quite convinced however that this is sufficient evidence of the success of colonial education in 'converting' the colonised to adopt English value systems. Rather, I see it is a product of the contradiction of an equally inclusive and exclusive 'universal' education, borne out of the desperation of historical imperatives. By this I mean that, such responses became, in part, a means for the black educated class to utilise the discursive tools at their disposal.

While the length of this discussion might seem inordinate for an analysis on the place and use of Shakespeare in South Africa, it is necessary. As I have noted in the introduction, the presence of Shakespeare in the South African cultural milieu cannot be separated from its entrance and assimilation through colonial education, a point which Distiller also makes (*Post-colonial*). And although Laurence Wright's observation, that studies on the history of Shakespeare cannot exclude performance and theatre history, is key I find myself needing to do just that. The value of Wright's contention of course is evident in the understanding that colonial Shakespeare existed in various forms. And as both he and Johnson show, Shakespeare became part of South African culture even before the formalisation of English studies. It would be problematic then to assume that classroom Shakespeare was removed from social and more casual appropriations of his plays. When it comes to historical records, however, we have more evidence of public engagements than we do of classroom ones.

And as I will discuss further in chapter 2, it is outside of the classroom where we have greater possibilities for resistance and reappropriations of Shakespeare. But as I have argued above, those who had the tools with which to challenge or adopt existing versions of Shakespeare were products of colonial education, whether they were staging and reviewing plays or translating them. I am thus establishing the importance of English studies and colonial education in influencing the articulation of both nationhood, and the subject position, for the educated classes in South Africa. In later chapters, I will reflect on how that position and influence changed as history demanded. But what can we make of the place of Shakespeare in the colonial project?

I am certainly not looking to pinpoint one 'real' version of colonial Shakespeare or to measure the extent to which his plays were used to speak for different racial and cultural groups in South Africa. What I hope to do, however, is to bring into conversation some of the different ways in which 'he' was co-opted and engaged with in articulating identity, in relation to the state, even if only by an elite few. It is why my discussion focuses primarily on the parameters of education, because its role in colonial contest is clearer than in the theatre for instance. But in the next and last section of this chapter, I want to step outside of those parameters to look at some of the social engagements with Shakespeare, undertaken by two writers who were influenced by Christian humanist education, namely Solomon T. Plaatje and Reverend Nathaniel Merriman.

### **Plaatje and Merriman: Whose Shakespeare is it?**

Much has been made about Plaatje's use of Shakespeare, so much so that Orkin, Johnson, Distiller all make use of him as an example of a thoughtful black response to Shakespeare. The availability of his works for analysis, alongside the absence of other substantial contributions during the early twentieth century, makes this focus on Plaatje possible. In *South Africa, Shakespeare, and Post-Colonial Culture*, Distiller summarises the various debates about Plaatje's identity, that result from his use of and veneration of Shakespeare, well. It seems to me that such questions reveal assumptions that are made about the nature of resistance, and what it should have looked like for the colonised. Distiller subsequently

points to the possibilities of ‘hold[ing] in view both Plaatje’s complicities in the system that helped to empower him, and his life-long resistance to its injustices [and] his work combines both these elements, and yet exceeds the sum of its parts’ (113). As I have discussed through Nasson in the previous section, social injustices in South Africa necessitated an alignment with British policies as a way of resistance. This, despite British lack of interest in early twentieth-century South Africa’s affairs, which showed that in practice, black writers only really had the ‘surrogate Englishman’ at their disposal. My focus in this section then, is not *what* Plaatje’s appropriation of Shakespeare said of his allegiances, but rather *how* he makes Shakespeare available to do a work of identity-making for himself and ‘his people’ (*Distiller Post-Colonial* 122). I do this in conversation with the lectures of Merriman, who did a similar work for the English community in Grahamstown in the mid-nineteenth century.

Both Plaatje and Merriman share an undisputed love for and unquestioning conviction of Shakespeare’s genius. Their greatest overlap is perhaps in positioning Shakespeare’s capacity to speak to all things human through his plays. I am particularly interested in how the two harness these characteristics for their own agendas in contrasting ways. I do not hope to summarise every aspect of these appropriations but will be selective about those which have a bearing on my discussion. Therefore I will focus on how Plaatje and Merriman analyse Shakespeare’s portrayal of the ‘other’ as well as how they articulate their own sense of community in relation to Shakespeare.

One of Plaatje’s most famous quotes is one found in his unpublished records. In it, he evokes the plea of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* to legitimate in some way the plight of the Bechuana in South Africa:

Hath not a Mochuana eyes? Hath he not hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?? Is not a Mochuana fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same summer and winter, as a whiteman is?? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest we will resemble you in that. (‘A South African’s Homage’ 7)

Similar to Shylock's effort to establish a place for himself in Venetian society, here Plaatje is pleading to be counted as human in a society that does not see him and the rest of the colonised as such. His historical positioning is clear in the substitution of 'a Mochuana' and 'whiteman' to speak directly to the South African situation. While he identifies as an 'other', his call for recognition is based on the shared characteristics that make the 'whiteman' human. Plaatje-cum-Shylock's argument betrays classic humanist motivations as the basis of the inclusion they desire is sameness, rather than difference. This is particularly important because Shakespeare is the means through which Plaatje articulates his hope that the colonised might find integration into a specific community.

As I have noted, both Plaatje and Merriman deal with representations of difference, although quite differently. In his first lecture 'On the Study of Shakespeare', delivered in 1857, Merriman tackles the place of what he calls 'the misshapen abortion Caliban' ('On the Study' 48). Before he elaborates on the significance of Caliban, Merriman first justifies his train of thought in this way:

the reason that I call your attention to this strange, degraded, unearthly monster, and carry you at once from Hamlet to Caliban, from the highest point of intellectual nature, to the most grovelling that a poet's imagination could strike out, is to exhibit to you, not the refreshing novelty of conception embodied in his strange language, but to ask you to contemplate for a moment one great moral purpose for which Shakspeare (sic) employs him. ('On the Study' 49)

Merriman does two things in this extract. Firstly he sets up a gap between representations of Hamlet as 'the highest point of intellectual nature' to 'the most grovelling that a poet's imagination could strike out' ('On the Study' 49). Therefore he assures the listeners that the two will not be discussed on equal terms as they do not have the same nature. Here, and earlier in the lecture, he clarifies that Caliban's degenerate nature is not a failure on Shakespeare's part, if anything it shows the height of his imaginative prowess by creating such an unimaginable creature. Secondly, Merriman elucidates that the purpose for the conception of Caliban is one that needs to be understood along moral (not historical or

socio-political) terms. Thus the audience is led to understand Caliban's depravity as stemming from moral failure rather than the effects of colonial oppression instituted by Prospero. What then does Merriman make of Caliban?

A lengthy quotation is necessary in order to highlight unpack Merriman's conclusions that follow. He argues that:

The Bard continues, skilfully to show us the hideous aspect which the low-lived and selfish vices of European civilization assume when placed as they are by his master hand side by side with this poor savage. Here we have in Caliban the embodiment of more hatred and more treachery than any will impute to the worst tribe of wild Kaffirs—more ingratitude and folly than they will charge upon the deluded Hottentot (though Caliban like them, excuses himself on the plea of having been cheated out of his land) here is more grovelling and unreclaimable barbarism than we usually ascribe to the Bushman, yet when he is purposely brought into comparison or contrast with the dissolute seaman and the drunken butler Trinculo and Stephano, with what a wonderful moral and poetic force does the loathsomeness of civilized vice exhibit itself to our eyes. ('A Study On' 49)

One concession that Merriman makes is that while Caliban is a 'poor savage' (49) he finds a little redemption when compared to 'the low-lived and selfish vices of human civilization' and 'loathsomeness of civilized vice' evident in the behaviour of Trinculo and Stephano ('A Study On' 49). Therefore he suggests that Caliban's moral deficiencies, although expected, may be seen in a slightly better light than when those who *ought* to be 'civilised' succumb to the same weaknesses which plague Caliban. My conclusion that Merriman ascribes intrinsic morality to 'European civilization' (49) emerges from his descriptions of Caliban and his comparisons to the colonised of South Africa as I will show below.

While Merriman might concede that Caliban is in fact more savage than examples of the colonised in South Africa, the fact is that he finds comparability between the two which would not extend to Hamlet for instance. He argues that, 'we have in Caliban the embodiment of more hatred and more treachery than any will impute to the worst tribe of

wild Kaffirs—more ingratitude and folly than they will charge upon the deluded Hottentot’ and that Caliban has ‘more grovelling and unreclaimable barbarism than we usually ascribe to the Bushman’ (‘A Study On’ 49). Merriman does not question the attribution of all these negative characteristics to indigenous South Africans, but suggests that they are ‘usually ascribe[d]’ by the ‘we’ which I will identify in a moment. He considers these characteristics to be ‘unreclaimable’ and hence intrinsic and hence easily paralleled to Caliban, who is himself colonised. It seems then that for Merriman and his listeners, whom Wright suggests shared these views, the colonised were to be somewhat pitied as they could not help themselves.<sup>5</sup> This representation of the other and its reading by Merriman is clearly a far cry from the one imagined by Plaatje. Both *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* are used to different effect, the former to claim access to a certain community, the latter to exclude the morally degenerate, although contesting to a certain degree, the nature of civilisation. It seems important then to explore how Plaatje and Merriman identify the two communities of which they speak.

In ‘A South African’s Homage’, Plaatje recounts how he first encountered Shakespeare at a performance of *Hamlet* in Kimberley in 1896. He notes his subsequent interest stemmed from the fact that ‘Intelligence in Africa is still carried from mouth to mouth by means of conversations’ (7). He writes that he not only read Shakespeare but because of the importance of oral storytelling, he would ‘always have a fresh story to tell’ (7). Plaatje continues that ‘the characters were so realistic’ not only to him but to his listeners such that he was asked ‘more than once to which of certain speculators, then operating round Kimberley, Shakespeare referred as Shylock’ (7). Thus a new, if temporary, sense of community was created through Plaatje’s telling of Shakespeare’s stories even in the ‘Chief’s court’ (Plaatje 8). His integration into the community of the black elite is recounted as follows: ‘All this gave me an appetite for more Shakespeare, and I found that many of the current quotations used by educated natives to embellish their speeches, which I had always taken for English proverbs, were culled from Shakespeare’s works’ (Plaatje 7).

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<sup>5</sup> Wright asserts that ‘Merriman’s lectures themselves are deeply derivative, and consciously so. They are intended to convey metropolitan learning to locals far removed from the hub of empire, to model the intellectual cultivation that dramatised and somehow ‘justified’ their presence in South Africa’ (Introduction to ‘On the Study’ 28).

And as a result: 'In the beginning of this century I became a journalist, and when called on to comment on things social, political, or military, I always found inspiration in one or other of Shakespeare's sayings' (8).

Plaatje suggests that he gained an increased sense of social mobility through his familiarity with Shakespeare's language, which allowed him, like the 'educated natives to embellish [his] speeches' (7) and to legitimate his social commentary. His proficiency equipped him to fashion his identity, not only in relation to his peers, but also to larger ideas of 'universal' humanity. His contention that, 'It is just possible that selfish patriotism is at the bottom of my admiration for Shakespeare' (Plaatje 8) does not necessarily relate to the South African nation as a whole. Rather he writes that, 'Shakespeare's dramas ... show that nobility and valour, like depravity and cowardice, are not the monopoly of any colour. Shakespeare lived over 300 years ago, but he appears to have had a keen grasp of human character' (Plaatje 8). Distiller surmises that 'Plaatje again uses Shakespeare to make a comment about what Africans share with Europeans. In this case, Shakespeare also becomes a commentator on racism. Thus Plaatje makes use of Shakespeare's familiar universal humanism to point to its failure in his "present age" (Distiller *Post-Colonial* 116). It is this democratic and non-racial Shakespeare that he feels an allegiance to, and by extension, a society which espouses the same values. The prominence of Shakespeare's linguistic influence is interestingly echoed by Merriman, but, as I will argue, there is a crucial difference.

In the same lecture, 'On the Study of Shakespeare', he describes how the 'countless profusion [of] Shakespeare's words and ideas have wrought themselves into our familiar discourse' (43). But I want to suggest that this 'our' which is the same as the 'we' which ascribes 'unreclaimable barbarism ... to the Bushman' (49) is quite different from the community claimed by Plaatje, both real and imagined. Merriman identifies that community as 'those who know the influence of language in the formation of character, will easily see how the best parts of the English character have been ministered to by Shakespeare's (sic) rich and noble usage of words' (43-44). In other words, this community is made up of the English, both in Britain and those in the South African colony, who can claim Shakespeare as 'a common inheritance' (Merriman 'Shakespeare, as Bearing on English History' 2).

Merriman also expresses a concern that without that inheritance, the English in South Africa

would be 'cut off from some of the most ennobling associations which belong to the cherished name of Englishman' ('Shakespeare, as Bearing on English History' 2). Through these lectures, Merriman exemplifies Johnson's assertion that representations of Shakespeare, evident in late nineteenth century South Africa, betrayed a concern with English identity and the preservation of English heritage. In what he as terms the 'imperial' or 'thinking of England position' (34), Johnson suggests that literature was seen as an integral in uniting British identity in the colonies. This version of Shakespeare is, however, much more exclusive than the one conceptualised by Plaatje.

It is difficult to reconcile the use of similar features of Shakespeare for two opposed political projects. Both obviously find resonance in a humanist Shakespeare but their different historical and social imperatives lead to different conceptions. Both Plaatje and Merriman are driven by class interests that are reflected in the curricular aims circulating in English literary studies, which I have discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Finally, efforts to articulate the boundaries of their imagined communities expose Plaatje and Merriman's desires to define themselves in relation to a 'universal' or English nation. Thus it is not only the state that seeks to define citizenship, but to an extent, through education, gives subjects the linguistic ability to do so for themselves. As I will show in the following chapter, the National Party (NP) victory in the 1948 which marked the beginning of apartheid elections, seriously contested the place of English in South Africa. This complicated these appropriations even further as English-speakers had a greater motivation to constitute a place which had previously been taken for granted.

## 2. APARTHEID ENCOUNTERS: Whose Shakespeare is it?

The growth of Afrikaner nationalism in early twentieth-century South Africa, along with increasing post-war tensions between English and Afrikaans-speakers, culminated in the ascension of the National Party (NP) in the 1948 elections. This victory was for the more conservative Afrikaans faction which sought to decrease Britain's influence in South Africa drastically (Welsh 4). The resulting institution of apartheid was particularly devastating for non-white South Africans, but it also marked a serious shift for place of the English language in South Africa. The government's desire for the increased use of Afrikaans in schools, among other reforms, also 'dramatically ended the period of English liberal influence over state policy' (Johnson 154). It is also important to note that during this stage, the apartheid state was heavily invested in constituting a new South African nation, and articulating citizenship more explicitly according to race. Therefore, bulk of my discussion in this chapter will consider how a journal such as *CRUX* worked in complicated ways to reconfigure a place for English, in a South Africa under new governance. The journal served as a way of strengthening English identity in the country, while simultaneously maintaining some links to Britain. The teaching of Shakespeare in particular allowed for the English to have a sort of dual citizenship, while enjoying the benefits of being white in South Africa.

In the latter half of this chapter, I will reflect on two voices that sought to re-appropriate Shakespeare in the 1950s, in efforts to expand the borders of a 'universal' community, to include them. This discussion will also include a case study of the Transkei Bantustan and its responses to Bantu Education and use of English language instruction, as a form of resisting state policy. The chronology of my discussion is deliberate so as to show that, in attempting to resist the oppressive and dehumanising policies of apartheid, the education system in the Transkei, in some way pre-empted the postapartheid curriculum policy, which I will analyse in the final chapter.

## Placing Shakespeare

Shakespeare has been made to occupy an ambiguous and at times duplicitous position in apartheid South Africa; duplicitous for the times 'he' was co-opted to speak simultaneously for 'universal' humanist values, and also the inhumane objectives of an oppressive state. In *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Culture*, Distiller has shown that this dual nature can be traced, partly, to the contradictions inherent in liberal humanism which adopts a 'universal' identity, while in fact being very provincial. This means that its arrival 'in South Africa with British liberals in the Cape' (Distiller *Post-Colonial* 77) has led to liberalism being almost synonymous with Englishness, primarily writing in English (77). Consequently, Distiller argues, the links that liberalism has to democratic ideals made it available for co-option in 'the founding of the ANC, and thence into struggle politics' (*Post-Colonial* 77). In South Africa, liberalism has drawn both supporters and detractors to itself. But despite what Isabel Hofmeyr identifies as a 'wide range of meaning which includes ideas of tendermindedness, paternalism' (42), what has given liberalism its 'street cred' is that 'it was marginalised by apartheid' (Distiller *Post-Colonial* 81). Like liberalism, Shakespeare has also been associated strongly with a particular form of 'ideal' Englishness. At the same time, the dissemination of Shakespearean themes and values as 'universal' has made his works available for appropriation by those with an investment in associating themselves with that universality. Herein enters the complex position of Shakespeare in South Africa.

Critical engagements with Shakespeare during apartheid have, according to Johnson, led to an over-simplified binary of 'English-liberal-Shakespeare and Afrikaans-racist-apartheid' (159). The 'English-liberal-Shakespeare' association can be traced back to the influence of what Distiller sees as the specific version of 'both humanism and liberalism ... [which] runs through the mission schools' humanist education policies' (*Post-Colonial* 77) in colonial education. Such a binary, which demonises Afrikaans by equating it with apartheid unquestioningly, ignores the ways in which liberal humanism which has been complicit with both colonialism and apartheid (Hofmeyr, Johnson, Distiller *Post-Colonial*). This complicity finds traction under the guise of a 'universal' value system, while simultaneously ignoring those who are excluded from that conception. In this chapter, I will argue that humanist approaches to Shakespeare discouraged pupils from challenging this complicity. Further,

because many of the articles which I will discuss show little to no engagement with the political situation in apartheid South Africa, I posit that: approaches to teaching Shakespeare, which efface the historical and political context by focusing on the pupil's interiority, limit the possibilities of resistance.

What is of interest to this discussion is that, while a humanist and 'universal' Shakespeare is problematic, it manages to disrupt the alleged opposition between liberalism and apartheid, by making itself available for use by both groups, in complicated ways. This duality is partly possible because as Hofmeyr recounts, liberal humanism in South Africa effectually moved 'progressively ... away from concerns with a non-racial franchise to a tacit acceptance of the fact that large numbers of Africans were to be excluded from access to the State' (Hofmeyr 42). Johnson clarifies further that in the English liberal camp, views opposing social inequality decreased 'as a result of conceding control of the state to Afrikaner Nationalism, South African literary critics of the 1950s made only very rare direct reference to politics' (155). The irony of the 1950s is that the decreased political engagement, suggested by Johnson, was in contrast to the appropriation of Shakespeare, by *Drum* writers, as a form of cultural and political resistance.

As I have noted before, it is difficult to account fully for the multiple faces of Shakespeare studies in South Africa, particularly under an oppressive system. The contradictions are numerous and the negotiations between politics and identity formation, complex. The temptation to substitute responses to the larger education system, for responses and appropriations of Shakespeare is great, and yet it must be resisted so as not to 'pretend that huge political issues are practically affected by the ways in which a small academic minority responds to one very important English playwright' as Laurence Wright has warned ('Introduction' 24). And yet there is room to reflect on the mediation of both curriculum policy and ideology through examining changing pedagogical approaches to this playwright. My analysis of discussions in the *CRUX* journal below offers the opportunity to consider what teachers read and wrote about how Shakespeare should be taught in apartheid South Africa. The circulation of that knowledge may tell us something about how pupils, belonging to a specific part of the population, were expected to negotiate their place and identity in South Africa.

## Articulating the *CRUX* of the matter

The importance of the *CRUX* journal to this discussion is its clarification of how some English educators saw the place of both English and Shakespeare in apartheid South Africa. The socio-historical events, which began to reconfigure the place of the English language and culture in South Africa, demanded a response from English-speakers who no longer held major British interest and support. As I will show below, English literary studies were subsequently endowed with the responsibility of protecting English identity in South Africa, and Shakespeare played a big role in those efforts. I consider the *CRUX* journal to be a response to the contestation of nationhood in the rapidly-changing cultural landscape under apartheid. But *CRUX* was not the only project of this nature; it was in fact predated by the still-running *English Studies in Africa* journal, inaugurated in 1958. While this journal has been driven primarily by contributors in the academy, taking up debates which were not possible at secondary school level, in many ways it had the similar mandate as that of *CRUX*.

In the introduction of the first issue of *English Studies in Africa* for instance, the purpose for its establishment is said to be, '[to] serve the English language on [the African] Continent, and to promote the study of the best English literature, wherever it is written. A great tradition in the hands of a minority group, as the English-speaking people happen to be in Africa, must give tangible evidence of the will of the group to survive' (Partridge quoted in Johnson 235). The journal is invested with the responsibility of not only ensuring the survival of a literary tradition, but seemingly of its proprietors as well. It is of course ironic that Partridge renders the presence of English-speakers in Africa as coincidental, a minority who 'happen to be' (235), when that presence was a result of colonial conquest. He uses their service to the English language to carve out a place for English-speakers as those who have been entrusted with an almost sacred duty to ensure its survival on the entire continent. What is not clarified, in this extract at least, is what it is about 'the best' (Partridge in Johnson 235) of English literature that enables the preservation of Englishness. The answer might be found in the establishment of the *CRUX* journal, almost ten years later in 1967.

The opening paragraphs of *CRUX*'s first editorial, express a similar aim: the 'need to revitalize the teaching of English at all levels ... a need felt not only in this country [South Africa] but everywhere English forms part of a curriculum' (2). This objective outlines a local project but one whose influence is expected to be far-reaching. But it is in the discussion of the teaching of literature that the importance of English literature is revealed:

As for the teaching of literature imaginatively and effectively, it is still one of the surest means by which the aesthetic and other values forming the fabric of our Western cultural heritage may be implanted and propagated. It is an enduring shield against the levelling influences subtly being exercised by the mass media of our time and the iniquitous processes of dehumanization unobtrusively at work in our ranks. Although the standard of teaching English has dropped to an alarming level as a result of the persistent shortage of adequately trained teachers, there is still a good sprinkling of outstanding English teachers over the length and the breadth of the land. (Editors 2)

There are a number of things to consider here as symptomatic of efforts at imagining an English community during the 1960s and 1970s. Firstly, the link between English literature and English identity is established as deriving from the, 'aesthetic and other values forming the fabric of our Western cultural heritage' (Editors 2). This might explain why Partridge considers 'the study of the best English literature' (235) to be pivotal in perpetuating English culture in Africa. Further, as the journal is also aimed at 'school libraries, both primary ... [and] high school pupils, teachers-in-training, and first-year students' (Editors 4), the notion that 'cultural heritage may be implanted and propagated' (Editors 3) suggests that teaching is an exercise of transference and replication. Both verbs imply that the recipients of literary education in particular are viewed as 'fertile ground' in which English values and culture may be planted. Also, through a process of 'propagation', pupils would not only receive, but reproduce and sustain that heritage.

Thus it seems that the editors of *CRUX* view the fact that 'English has been allowed to deteriorate' (Editors 1), as a cultural threat, and adopt war terminology to articulate a need for an intervention. They consider the teaching of literature to be 'an enduring *shield*

against the levelling influences ... at work in [their] *ranks*' (emphasis mine, 2). These influences include technological advancements which are seen as threatening the place of the teacher and their relationship with the student. The assumption is that it is through the teacher that said 'aesthetic and other values' (Editors 2) may be transmitted. Not all teachers are given the responsibility to act as cultural guardians, however, but only the 'good sprinkling of outstanding English teachers ... [and] sound core of professors and lecturers' who's commitment to reviving English teaching will compensate for the gap left by the 'shortage of adequately trained teachers' (Editors 3).<sup>6</sup> These educators are set up as trusty soldiers who, through their contributions to *CRUX*, will help improve the state of English education in the country.

The editorial also seeks to justify both its existence and the improvement of English education along socio-economic terms. It positions English as an integral medium in the production process by emphasising its importance for good communication, the contrary which would 'set in a motion a chain-reaction of bungling, mismanagement and waste' (Editors 2). Adjacent to this is the global position of 'a world language, that is, a proven medium of communication at international level' (Editors 2). Therefore, English is established as both globally and locally relevant and it would seem to be to the detriment of the country not to improve the quality of teaching. But contextual issues permeate this discussion in interesting ways, which expose the sensitive politics of apartheid South Africa. While the focus in the editorial is on the revitalisation of English education, reference is made four times to the importance of the project for Afrikaans as well. Other indigenous languages are, however, completely ignored. Interestingly, while English is construed as a 'world language' (Editors 1) and 'one of the richest cultures in the world' (Editors 1), the progression Afrikaans is limited to 'indigenous growth and flowering' (Editors 1). The editorial therefore suggests that English in South Africa continues to hold links which transcend national borders, enjoying a global position which Afrikaans cannot. But it is in the subsequent statement, which takes social inequality in apartheid society for granted, where the contradictions of this effort to improve English studies are evident. These

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<sup>6</sup> There is a subtle accusation here of the government's failure to fulfil its administrative role in training teachers adequately and maintaining the 'standard' of English studies in the country.

contradictions are also a good place to reflect on the complicated place of Shakespeare in mid to late twentieth-century South Africa.

The rallying point of this editorial is found in this assertion:

English is, as far as we are concerned in this country, far more than the mother tongue of a large section of our nation ... it remains for all of us – Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking – a window upon the world, an infallible medium in our international dealings in trade, research, education, diplomacy, tourism, sport and the like. Being, besides, one of our two official languages, it places us in a much stronger and more advantageous position than those nations which have to acquire English laboriously as a foreign language for international communication. (Editors 2)

The idea of 'nation' is evoked throughout in order to create a sense of community between the readers of, and contributors to, *CRUX*. The implication is that it is not only the language, but the journal itself, which will help facilitate links to an international community. It soon becomes clear however that the sense of camaraderie created by the possessive pronouns 'us' and 'our' throughout the editorial is, however, not inclusive of all South African citizens. Only English and Afrikaans speakers are mentioned as belonging to the nation which can 'draw upon the resources of one of the richest cultures in the world' (Editors 2). In reality, those whose mother tongue is neither English nor Afrikaans are excluded from this conception of citizenship. To deny them the advantages of international communication is to ensure that they stay domesticated, as policies of mother tongue instruction and separate development hoped to do. Later in the chapter, I will discuss how the idea of 'nation' was further contested and fragmented by the creation of Bantustans during apartheid, and the resulting complications of defining citizenship. I argue then, that the place of Shakespeare became even more complicated within the overtly racist policies of the apartheid state. Their dissemination was most explicit in high school education and the differentiation of syllabi through the establishment of Bantu education. Central to my argument is that in the early days of *CRUX*, which sought to protect English interests, most educators adopted a depoliticised approach to the teaching of Shakespeare which could

ignore the contextual turmoil. But as I will show, such approaches remained susceptible to the political atmosphere out of which they emerged.

## **Shakespeare and the pupil**

In this section of the chapter, I will explore some of the encounters that white pupils had, or were expected to have with Shakespeare in South African high schools. Once again, I will be highly selective by focusing on two types of *CRUX* articles. The first set of articles is made up of both theoretical and empirical reflections on teaching Shakespeare during apartheid. The second set is clustered around readings of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The focus on these two plays is to create a certain congruency with the current postapartheid syllabus where the two Shakespeare plays on offer in the final year of schooling are *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. This parallel will also allow me to make some tangible conclusions on the responses to socio-political contexts at the end of my discussion. My discussion then considers how, through *CRUX*, schoolchildren were exposed to a prescribed set of notions of the nation and subjectivity. I will also reflect on how the terms of the pupils' encounter with Shakespeare were articulated, either explicitly or through literary analysis of Shakespeare's dramas.

In his paper, "Approaches to the Teaching of Shakespeare", published in 1978, A. Brimer reflects on the success of teaching Shakespeare and its impact outside of the classroom. Recounting a meeting with a young hitchhiking university student, who was not well-disposed towards Shakespeare, Brimer makes the following observation,

He was a cut above the average South African teenager, a Wits [University of Witwatersrand] music student on holiday with his guitar. When he found out that I was an English teacher he wanted to know if we were still teaching all that "guff", by which he meant Shakespeare, had not liked him, had not gained anything from him, and wanted nothing more to do with him. Shakespeare and he lived in different worlds, and my hitch-hiker was determined that they would never again meet. Yet he was an intelligent youngster. One can only assume that the inarticulate,

unintelligent majority like Shakespeare even less. And that is not Shakespeare's fault, but ours. (41)

Brimer's frustration is palpable. Here is a seemingly well-rounded, and articulate university student, with a clear appreciation of the arts who, as a 'cut above the average South African teenager' (41), would be the best kind of product that a humanist education system would hope for. And yet, his conclusion on Shakespeare, one of the 'stalwarts' of 'one of the richest cultures in the world' (Ed 2) is that it is all 'guff' (Brimer 41). It is an almost irreconcilable contradiction to Brimer that this white, male, educated student might place himself in opposition to Shakespeare, and do so eloquently too. He ultimately places the blame on English teachers who fail to facilitate a love of Shakespeare in pupils. Brimer seems to begrudge the fact that the student expresses his dislike so well, and concludes, rather disturbingly, that, 'the inarticulate, unintelligent majority like Shakespeare even less' (41). I want to note that the reasons stated by the student for his aversion to Shakespeare should not necessarily be seen as a reflection of the student's expectations of Shakespeare, but rather as a revelation of curricular aims that work to position the pupil discursively in relation to a humanist Shakespeare.

The student's response challenges some of the aims of teaching Shakespeare, summarised by Brimer, as 'find[ing] a way of making ... pupils relate to the plays and like them, and see them as personally relevant to themselves for it is the startling depth of Shakespeare's relevance that recommends him to us and is the reason for our prescribing his works at all' (42). While these aims mirror the student's objections almost directly, they also show a preoccupation with pre-empting a pupil's response to Shakespeare. The word 'making' alludes to an intervention that teachers must undertake in order clarify Shakespeare's relevance to the pupils' lives; to make Shakespeare appealing. In Brimer's view, mediation is not aimed at the text but at the pupil, it is the pupil who must be re-positioned in order to appreciate 'the startling depth of Shakespeare' (Brimer 42). Brimer's assertion demonstrates his reliance on the text as the source of meaning, and that to access that meaning, or after an encounter with the Shakespearean text, the pupil must undergo a form of positive transformation. I have divided this part of the discussion into two, namely, 'Understanding Shakespeare, understanding the self' and 'Living in Shakespeare's world'.

The first part investigates how ideas about the pupil's interiority are the basis of this expected transformation; therefore, if teachers (and the state) can access the pupil's thoughts, emotions, and sense of self, through Shakespeare, they will be able to suggest ways of being. The second part focuses on the historical parallels drawn between apartheid South Africa and 'Shakespeare's world' as a way of articulating ideas of nationhood.

## **Understanding Shakespeare, understanding self**

In the anecdote above, Brimer seems to suggest that due to botched teaching, the Wits youngster did not understand Shakespeare. What he sees to be a contradiction, namely, an articulate 'intelligent youngster' (Brimer 41) who dislikes Shakespeare, is perhaps a result of the idea that when a learner is able to understand Shakespeare, they will have an understanding of themselves. To help me understand the prevalence of this idea within the *CRUX* articles, I want to note Catherine Belsey's discussion on 'construction of a history of the subject in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (ix) in *The Subject of Tragedy* briefly. Her discussion is helpful in tracing how the characteristics, attributed to the human subject in drama, have been adopted in some *CRUX* articles which deal with the imagined pupil. Most important is how 'liberal humanism [locates] agency and meaning in the unified human subject ... [while] proclaiming the existence of an interiority, the inalienable and unalterable property of the individual, which precedes and determines speech and action' (Belsey 33-4). This belief which locates 'agency and meaning in the unified human subject' is prevalent in the *CRUX* articles and I will demonstrate how it encourages the pupil to take their social position for granted and as elevated above politics.

Belsey alerts us that, 'this interiority, this consciousness which is also being, defines the humanist subject, the author and origin of meaning and choice (35). An important part of this process is the effacement of contextual influences on identity-construction as well as how incoherent and fragmented that interiority really is. Thus, when the subject is set up as 'the author and origin of meaning' (Belsey 35), it becomes difficult to challenge and resist the subject position. Further, as Alan Sinfield has warned, there is an interest in humanist education in presenting texts as 'self-contained and coherent entities' (138). Consequently,

Sinfield suggests that when the pupil encounters Shakespeare, to contravene the 'prescribed range of possibilities [of meaning] ... requires a repudiation of the authority of Shakespeare or the examiners, often both' (139).

In a paper entitled 'Answering Examination Questions on Shakespeare', presented at the Schools' Programme of the Shakespeare Festival in 1976, A. Lemmer poses and answers the question, 'Why study literature?' thus:

Perhaps it would be well to start by justifying the study of literature. What can literature do for you? Well, it is not magic; it offers no solution to life's ultimate mysteries. It will not make you 'happy' – no in the sense claimed for deodorants, coca-cola, toothpastes or a trip to Capri. But the good book can enlarge you, make your interior life more interesting and meaningful, help to make you aware of the perennial questions: 'Who am I?', 'Why am I here?' or 'How to be'. (31)

Lemmer sets the role of literature up in an interesting way by contrasting it to consumer products that might have a much closer 'relation' to the pupils' lives, and he questions the emotional gratification which advertisements promise. By limiting the scope of the usefulness of literature in an almost self-deprecating way, that 'it is not magic; it offers no solution to life's ultimate mysteries' (Lemmer 31), he suggests that whatever notion of what literature *can* do hereafter, can be trusted. Thus inherent in the assertion that literature can 'help to make you aware of the perennial questions: 'Who am I?', 'Why am I here?' or 'How to be' (Lemmer 31) is an implication that, while it cannot solve life's questions, it can help the pupil to ask them. This, he says, is primarily through bringing the pupil into contact with the 'superior mind ... [of] the literary artist [who] ... questions and re-examines conventions to which we mindlessly conform' (Lemmer 31). The result of such an encounter he concludes is that 'the good book can enlarge you, make your interior life more interesting and meaningful' (Lemmer 31). Therefore, while like commercial products mentioned above, literature can be consumed, its effects are supposedly evident in the 'interior life' (Lemmer 31). This idea which Lemmer espouses is derived from a long history rooted in humanist education.

Tracing the history of liberal education in 'A Redefinition of Liberal and Humanistic Education', Nimrod Aloni writes that the idea of self-improvement, through literature, stems from liberal education developed during the Renaissance. He notes that it was during this time that 'humanism reached self-awareness, and liberal education developed a theme that was to become central in all future forms of classical liberal education: education through direct engagement with the "great books"' (Aloni 91). He continues that the tradition predates 'Arnold, Babbitt and Hutchins, who set forth the idea that "no man was considered educated unless he was acquainted with the masterpieces of his tradition"' (Hutchins quoted in Aloni 91). This is why, I imagine, Brimer could not reconcile his hitchhiker's resolve that he had learnt nothing from Shakespeare, when he was clearly well-educated. In this light, Brimer's conclusion that, 'One can only assume that the inarticulate, unintelligent majority like Shakespeare even less' (41), is telling. He seems to suggest that only those who are 'intelligent' are capable of appreciating and liking Shakespeare. This differentiation of levels of intelligence is particularly problematic for apartheid South Africa because where all spheres of life were complicated by racial discrimination. Since the apartheid government viewed non-whites as capable of only the lowest forms of labour, citing a diminished intellectual capacity, Brimer's dismissal of an 'unintelligent majority' needs to be considered carefully within its political context. This is an important lens to read both Brimer and Lemmer's suggestion that Shakespeare is integral in constituting the pupil as an English subject who has a degree of political freedom in the world.

In an interesting example, two papers published in 1973 issues of *CRUX* demonstrate the link which they see between interiority and agency. In the two discussions, the supposed existence of a coherent interior life is used to justify Romeo's actions in *Romeo and Juliet*, to different conclusions. In a two-part discussion of the play, the second of which was published in February of that year, Regina Smit writes that, 'Although Romeo contends with a force outside of himself and never actually with himself, so that the tragedy lies in his adverse circumstance, he is also in a sense the master of his fate' (56). She then credits his impulsiveness as the catalyst of a series of events which move the plot of the play along rapidly. Smit appears to suggest here that Romeo's lack of clear internal reflection is actually problematic, as it leads to reckless behaviour, because the choices that she focuses on are all negative: '(a) his quick marriage, (b) the killing of Tybalt, (c) the buying of poison, his

suicide on perceiving that Juliet is “dead” (56). While she concedes that ‘the tragedy of the play lies in his adverse circumstance’, Smit contrasts him with Juliet’s own response to circumstances (56). Therefore, ‘while Romeo hardly ever has a conflict within himself, Juliet experiences one after hearing of Tybalt’s death and Romeo’s banishment’ (Smit 57).

Smit then positions Juliet as more level-headed than Romeo, who lives ‘in a dream-world’ (56), because of her capacity for introspection, although she is never established as the mistress of her own fate. I will return to this last point when analysing some of the representation of Juliet and Desdemona in *CRUX*. For Smit then, it seems that the ability to act socially is inextricably linked to the existence of a coherent interiority. Below, I will analyse a paper that reads Romeo quite differently and yet it is informed by the same notions of a humanist subject.

In the May 1973 article, ‘Love and War in “Romeo and Juliet”’, Jean Marquard ascribes a more complicated relationship between social processes and individual action. Marquard argues for a Romeo who is aware of his psychological struggle and uses it in his self-construction of manliness in Venetian society:

Romeo’s anguished sense of conflict is similar, in many respects, to Hamlet’s indecision. He is like Hamlet too in his occasional outbreaks of intense emotion, during which he takes a psychological refuge from a wholly stupid world in savage outpourings of grief and rage ... What is demonstrated by his behaviour in this scene is that manly courage and self-control is not given – not something automatically and naturally endowed – but rather that it involves bitter moral struggle ... Shakespeare makes him earn the heroic dimension. (23, 24)

The scene to which Marquard refers to is Act 3 Scene iii where Romeo laments his banishment from Venice and its implications for his relationship with Juliet. Unlike Smit, Marquard seems to have more sympathy for the tragedy of Romeo, and goes as far as to compare him with Shakespeare’s most psychologically-tortured character Hamlet. Further, she considers his propensity to emotional outbursts to be an important factor in his construction of identity. The ongoing self-conflict, through which he retreats from a ‘wholly

stupid world' (Marquard 23), is said to be rewarded with both 'manly courage' (Marquard 23) and later earns Romeo 'the heroic dimension' (Marquard 24). In making a connection between internal struggles and the development of character, Marquard elevates this process above social and political influences somewhat, by framing it as a 'psychological refuge' (23). Thus, Marquard suggests that the expression of intense emotion becomes an escape for Romeo. Ultimately, while Smit and Marquard disagree on Romeo's capacity for emotional and internal struggle, they both consider it a primary factor in the construction of the subject. To exemplify how the notion of a unified subject was articulated to pupils, I want to engage with a paper that focuses on the teaching of *Othello*.

In 'On teaching *Othello*', J. A. Kearney, notes that 'it is of crucial importance that pupils are *initially* exposed to the play as a whole ... [and that] at the outset be *entirely* free from the bookish-apparatus of editor's introductions or the ever-accumulating textual notes' (55). Kearney continues, saying that there is a danger in teaching the play to the pupils before exposing them to audiovisual productions because 'the teacher will unwittingly impose his interpretation before the pupils have sufficient chance for a response that is detached from the relationship with that teacher' (56). And finally, Kearney justifies his preference for a performance approach to Shakespeare by writing that, 'teachers will more easily be able to motivate pupils to develop an intimate relationship with the text ... encouraging pupils to support their arguments or suggestions with tangible evidence ... [until] they find satisfaction in producing objective support for their arguments' (57). Kearney's suggestion of an 'intimate relationship' (Kearney 57) between the pupil and text, where the former relies on the text to affirm the value of their judgement, is a problematic one. Firstly, there is an assumption that a correct and unmediated reading of the text may be recovered from watching the plays before reading them. Secondly, because both teacher and editorial interventions are seen as an imposition, it seems that pupils are being encouraged to view critical and political readings as detracting from the 'purity' of the text. For such intimacy, suggested by Kearney to be possible, one would need to rely once again on the unassailable interior of the learner which can produce meaning without the influence of external and political factors.

The impact of such a decontextualised approach, particularly within an oppressive state, is explored by Orkin. He writes that these approaches which circulate within an education system which 'works to legitimate the present South African social order ... [a] system which not only deprives students of an awareness of alternatives, but their very capacity to analyse ... is severely limited' (10). I am not suggesting here Kearney's assertion was explicitly aiding state aims, the prominence of the text and the subject as sources of meaning is characteristic of humanism, rather, I am emphasising the importance of considering the social impact for South African pupils during apartheid. I now want to explore a slightly different set of implications of relying on liberal humanism definition of the subject to note that the pupil-subject is gendered in implicit ways.

## **Educating girls**

It is not coincidental that Aloni explains that “no *man* was considered educated unless he was acquainted with the masterpieces of his tradition” (emphasis mine; Hutchins quoted in Aloni 91). It is the man of humanism, the man who is the coherent subject, who is represented as both the source and destination of meaning. Belsey asserts that while ‘the subject of liberal humanism claims to be the unified, autonomous author of his or her own choices (moral, electoral and consumer), and the source and origin of speech. Women in Britain for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not fully any of those things’ (149). Education played an important role in entrenching the precarious position of women in society while representing men as autonomous subjects. Writing on ‘The Influence of Humanism on the Education of Boys and Girls in Tudor England’, Alice T. Friedman elucidates the differentiation of the mid-sixteenth century humanist curriculum for boys and girls. She notes that, ‘Even in this highly literate group, women were often taught only basic reading and writing, while their husbands, fathers and sons not only acquired specialized skills but gained access to a world from which the uneducated were permanently barred’ (Friedman 57). Subsequently, classical literature became one of the significant sites of differentiation to facilitate gender and class privilege. Friedman records that further education was aimed at providing and limiting access to different spaces for boys. On the one hand, classical education was aimed at their advancement (58) but on the

other, there was an 'insistence on the removal of boys from the weakening influence of the female dominated household that' (Friedman 59). The division of public and private spaces is divided along gender lines here, but as I will discuss below, class played an important role.

The conflation of gender and class was inconsistent in this education system and had important implications for agency. Friedman notes for instance that 'Like yeomen, tradesmen, and craftsmen, women of all classes were largely excluded from the new learning by a combination of ideological and economic forces' (59). Lower and working class men are grouped together with women of upper classes, to be excluded from not only the same education as upper class men, but the agency that it supposedly enabled. Thus the ability of women to make decisions outside of the home and family space was severely limited. Where it was possible, Belsey asserts that 'the price women pay for finding a place is their exclusion from the political ... [and] once the family is outside politics, the power relations within the family are excluded from political analysis' (193). This exposition of early humanism is important in helping us to understand how the political participation of women might be represented in Shakespeare's plays and pedagogical approaches. In my discussion on readings of Desdemona and Juliet in *CRUX*, I will show how this exclusion of women from the political space persists, even in different forms. Allowance must be made however for the development of both humanism and the education system in England to which women eventually had access.

The result of this increased access has, according to Alan Sinfield, led to a slightly more complex representation of women in literary studies. Employing a cultural materialist approach to analyse the examination of Shakespeare in mid to late twentieth century British education, Sinfield argues that 'whilst Literature is made to operate on a mode of exclusion in respect of class, it disadvantages girls by including them' (136). His contention is not that girls are included in the teaching of literature, but rather the circulation of certain problematic representations. He notes that there is 'an internalisation of dominant notions of the kinds of things girls should do ... first, most of the texts studied reinforce the gender stereotyping which lead girls to these texts ... second, girls are condemned to a relatively low position in the job market. [And] official reports assume that women will be essentially housewives or unskilled' (Sinfield 136, 137). There is clearly a link to earlier conceptions of

the place of women within the set of examinations that Sinfield argues, although he notes that the 'other side of the coin' is that female pupils are disadvantaged by being exposed to these representations. The bearing that Sinfield has on this part of the discussion will be limited to his first point on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, and how they play out or are challenged in the *CRUX* journal.

An example of gender stereotyping is evident in Smit's discussion of *Romeo and Juliet* for instance. She establishes the two lovers' tragedy and heroism on two different bases: Romeo on the basis of his actions despite the challenge of external circumstances, and Juliet on the grounds of her "tenderness and delicacy" (57). Although both are faced with the social and familial obstacles that prevent their union, Romeo and Juliet are shown as having different levels of agency. Of course this is true for the play, but what is revealing is how Smit posits that, even with the lack of internal conflict that would make him a tragic hero, Romeo is able to be 'master of his own fate' (56) in ways that Juliet cannot. To make her argument, Smit alludes to Schegel who notes that 'Shakespeare combines Juliet's sweetness and dignity of her manners with her passionate violence' (57). This binary is important in showing that representations of gender take on a complicated form. This is to say, while Juliet is said to hold a 'sweetness and dignity' (Smit 57), alongside 'passionate violence' (Smit 57), the violence would actually be problematised. Sinfield explains this by quoting Sue Sharpe who argues that "women are portrayed as being passive and ineffectual, and taking action only for personal or destructive reasons" (quoted in Sinfield 137). As I will show here and in chapter 3, where action is shown as possible for Juliet and Desdemona, it is often framed as problematic and with limited political significance.

Mary Gardener's discussion on Desdemona in 'Some Notes on *Othello*' exemplifies this in an interesting way. She reports that one of the issues that teachers and pupils have had with the play is that 'so many people find Desdemona unconvincing – particularly the change from her spirited defence of her elopement to her apparent passivity in the play' (Gardener 37). To deal with this contradiction and pupils' questions such as 'Why does she [Desdemona] not fight back?' (Gardener 39), Gardner focuses on the social and political position that Desdemona is forced to occupy. She notes that when the setting moves to Cyprus, it is 'important because it places Desdemona in an isolated and vulnerable position.

She has given up everything familiar for Othello's sake – family, relations, friends, customs – and he seems, suddenly and inexplicably, to reject her – Who can she turn to? There is only Emilia' (Gardner 39). Gardner then goes on to argue that none of 'Shakespeare's [other] heroines ... [are] at the crucial moment so alone' (39). All the things that Gardner lists as left behind allude in some way to the domestic sphere. It seems then that Desdemona is portrayed as vulnerable when entering the political, and male-dominated, space. Thus her desire to be close to Othello, while rejecting the family space where she supposedly belongs, makes her even more susceptible to the wiles of both Emilia and Iago. Despite this problematic division of the private and public spaces, Gardner's discussion is useful in challenging the view that Desdemona is 'unconvincing, submissive [and] feeble' (39). The import of this discussion is not in challenging representations of gender stereotypes in *CRUX* articles, but to show how pupils are co-opted in that process by being encouraged to relate to Shakespeare's characters. This is a concern which I take up below.

### **Performing character**

A report by P.B. Holman, on a 1966 school production of *Macbeth*, staged at St. Alban's college, an all-boys' school in Pretoria, reveals some interesting connections made between pupils' characters and those in Shakespearean drama. Holman writes that *Macbeth* was chosen 'so that the boys would not find any great difficulty in identifying themselves with the characters', and that 'the casting was remarkably easy ... the producer simply weighed, say, the character of Macduff against the list of boys who offered themselves and chose one according to his assessment of that boy's "real" character and personality' (Holman 17). This interchangeability between 'character' as a representation of, firstly, a set of values and qualities, and secondly, a representation of persons, is pivotal in attempts to make Shakespeare 'relevant'. It is a connection that once again lays claim to the pupil's interiority, and as noted previously, does so by seeing the pupil as a coherent, unified subject.

Elsewhere, Brimer goes as far as to encourage teachers to teach their pupils to 'recognise the characters as living people, and to identify them among their peers' (44). Elizabeth M. Knights elaborates that 'the sadness of every and any parting in our own lives is reflected in Cassius's and Brutus's moving farewell to each other' (18). On these terms, the text

(Shakespeare) becomes the medium through which 'humanness' is mediated, shared and measured.

This link between dramatic characters and the pupils' characters works to encourage students to adopt the 'universal' worldview of certain characters and to reject those that are seen as undesirable. This is partly done by encouraging the learners to 'recognise the characters as living people' instead of fictional ones (Brimer 44), in order to bring them closer to the pupils' experience. The concern with authenticity is reflected further in Holman's account of a school production, urging that: 'at all costs theatrical artificiality was to be avoided; but it was not long before it was discovered that no matter how ingenious one might be there was nothing that looked as much like a stone as stone itself. So stone it was, and we all dived for the do-it-yourself manual in the library' (18). Holman construes an 'authenticity' which he equates to a version of masculinity. This means that in order for the boys to avoid 'theatrical artificiality', they were to take matters (and themselves) into their own hands, literally, through a 'do-it-yourself manual' (18). Associations between Shakespeare and manhood have, according to Johnson, long been in circulation and not only because of access to education, but also as repositories of the types of men pupils are encouraged to be, or not to be. He notes a shift in late nineteenth century English editions of *Hamlet* where 'student encounters with Shakespeare were no longer simply examinations to be passed; they were love affairs to be relished. They were not, however, affairs to be undertaken by the faint-hearted. Shakespeare's plays were read as lessons in manliness' (Johnson 60).

Similarly, Holman's justification for staging *Macbeth*, besides being prescribed in that year, is that 'it is the ideal Shakespeare for schoolboys to perform' (17). He does not elaborate on why this is, although he does concede that the boys did not share his enthusiasm. When they eventually did, it was for reasons other than Shakespeare. Holman records for instance that, 'once the sky was darkened with the arrows of Malcom's army and cries of anguish were heard from the defenders of Dunsinane ... [the producers] had no difficulty in swelling the ranks of the soldiers, so that [they] ended up with a cast of more than a hundred' (17). His conclusion is that, 'it is Shakespeare, rather than any "with-it" playwright, who is likely to draw the youngsters' (Holman 17), and herein lies the most important contradiction.

Within the space of a single sentence, Holman argues that it is the ‘Shakespeare-ness’ of it all that attracts the boys to the production, nullifying his previous point that it was the excitement of fighting scenes in rehearsal that were the main attraction. There is no real evidence that it was *Shakespeare* that the children were interested in and this contradiction shows an intense desire to ‘sell’ Shakespeare and to use him to justify a dramatic choice that had initially been received with ‘certain disappointment’ (Holman 17). Besides teaching pupils to identify with and learn from Shakespeare’s characters, there is an interesting and equal desire to find relevance in Shakespeare’s world, as exemplified in H. H. E Peacock’s ‘The Approach to Shakespeare’ which I will discuss in the next section.

### **Living in Shakespeare’s world**

The construction of community around ‘universal’ values in Shakespeare is often accompanied by allusions made between Shakespeare’s world and ‘ours’. Whether it is in Jan Knot’s *Shakespeare, our Contemporary*, or Orkin’s *Shakespeare Against Apartheid*, the temptation to equate Elizabethan society with modern society is tempting. By contrast, Distiller has argued repeatedly that there is nothing intrinsic about Shakespeare that avails him to speak about contemporary issues. She is adamant that such parallels between Shakespeare and ‘us’ always need to be seen as constructions and that, especially in a country like South Africa, the historical contingencies which brought ‘Shakespeare’ here can never be ignored. As I have shown above, the interest extends into relating Shakespearean characters to real life or in this case the lives of pupils. In this section, I will compare two articles that make socio-political and historical comparisons between Shakespeare’s world and South Africa. The first, by H. H. E. Peacock results in the effacement of the oppressive reality of apartheid South Africa by focusing on white experience. The second article, published in 1990, works to draw such overt links to *Othello* and a rapidly changing South Africa that it raises a different set of complications by almost negating the play’s importance altogether.

In the first issue of *CRUX*, H.H.E. Peacock expresses a deep concern with the importance of history in the study of Shakespeare. His argument is that pupils, so far removed from

Shakespeare's time, will never truly grasp his work until immersed in the context that informed him. Most revealing, however, is Peacock's assertion that 'more important than the external conditions of the Londoner of that time were his thoughts and ideas' (19). In privileging 'thoughts and ideas' over 'external conditions', Peacock acknowledges that the latter may be hard to relate to in apartheid society, or any for the matter, but the less tangible 'thoughts and ideas' are within the realm of replication as they are recorded both in history and by implication, in Shakespeare's plays.

Historical parallels are drawn of course, and hinged on the collective pronoun 'our' to make a distinction, which I will return to. Peacock argues that 'His [Shakespeare] was, like our own time, a revolutionary age ... it was an age of turmoil' (19) and that 'fear of insurrection and revolt colours much of Shakespeare's writing, and we in our age, conditioned as we are to a fear of communism, may perhaps more easily understand this underlying concern' (20).

While these contextual links are made, they work to frame the more important task which is for the 'student [to] ... try to understand [Shakespeare's] thought and experience, and to know what was his scale of values' (Peacock 18) and 'should make an effort to think along Elizabethan lines' (Peacock 19). To understand these values, of course, is ultimately to adopt them. While Peacock makes a move away from universalising the 'scale of values' (19) and attributes to them a clear historical and English identity, his argument still works to elevate the student-subject above politics, certainly those of their own time.

Peacock's argument that, 'fear of insurrection and revolt colours much of Shakespeare's writing, and we in our age, conditioned as we are to a fear of communism, may perhaps more easily understand this underlying concern' (20), betrays various interests at stake that need preservation. His reference to 'a fear of communism' (Peacock 20) allows us to conclude that the 'our' and 'we' which he refers to are not inclusive of all South Africans but only those who would place themselves as opposed to communism which had come to be equated with parties such as the ANC. The 'concern' of which he speaks is a primarily a white concern, one to which white students will be privy. It seems to me, then, that black and white pupils would not be expected to relate to Elizabethan society, and subsequently to Shakespeare, in the same ways. Johnson quotes D. N. Young who 'concedes that "Bantu pupils find great difficulty in seeing London society as it was [since] their own experience of

life is far removed from all this” (quoted in Johnson 170). Young is enthusiastic in establishing the role of teachers in overcoming this hurdle, but implied in his assertion is the fact that white, English-speaking pupils do not suffer the same cultural distance. Peacock’s paper however shows just how much work needs to be done to bridge the gap, even for ‘modern’ English-speakers. But in his world, the ability to ‘think along Elizabethan lines’ (19) is not open to communists and the like who represent the turmoil rather than the stability of the age. Ultimately, there are at least two things at stake here, ‘culture’ and preferred subjectivities; both of them are regulated discursively primarily through the focus on Shakespeare’s language in teaching as well as the process of examinations.

Despite being an ‘age of turmoil’ (Peacock 19), Peacock also notes that Elizabethan age was also one characterized by ‘men and women who lived within [a feudal] form of society and fulfilled their solemn obligations to one another’ (21). Both class divisions and social order are emphasized, their combined result ‘[giving] society a sense of stability’ (Peacock 21). In first establishing similarities between sixteenth-century England and twentieth century South Africa, then articulating ‘well-defined social classes’ (21) as accepted, Peacock erases complicated and alternative histories in one impressive sweep. Interestingly, he commandeers Shakespeare as a supporter of these social values to denote ‘certain basic laws of life, and to break them brings consequences’ (Peacock 22). Through this historical approach to Shakespeare, the student is left to a focus on Elizabethan politics that obfuscate real South African ones. I find Peacock’s reading of Shakespeare to be a surprisingly close to Orkin’s albeit, more conservative, nineteen years later. Orkin’s cultural materialist leanings compel him to ask that ‘when we examine the text and when we examine those moments of parallel that may prove fruitful both for our reading of the play and for our awareness of our own particular context’ (20). While Orkin seeks to attack power structures in apartheid South Africa more aggressively, Peacock’s analysis calls for conformity, but only to a privileged class. Hence he imagines the South African pupil as autonomous, only if accepting of approved ways of thinking while contributing to social stability.

Peacock’s comparison is coloured by a political detachment that ignores the reality on an unequal and racist South Africa. In a fascinating opposition, a 1990 article written by Daphne Ffolliott undertakes a similar project of comparing Shakespeare’s world to South

Africa, although with a much more deliberate political agenda. The date is important because the South Africa of 1990 is very different from that of Peacock's, as apartheid's grip was weakening after the states of emergencies of the 1980s. In the article entitled 'Introductory assignments for group discussions on *Othello*', Ffolliott offers examples of ways in which teachers can facilitate discussions on the plays. The questions refer to various addenda that contain quotations or extracts from newspapers from South Africa and abroad. All of the extracts are made to relate to the themes in *Othello* in some way. In one question, pupils are asked to read six quotations which relate to love and jealousy, before being asked to consider the following: 'You are a male prefect in Std 10 and you have been "taking out" a Std 8 girl for the past 6 months. One of your best friends tells you during an away match in another town that this same girl has been going out on certain occasions with one your fellow prefects. Discuss your probable reaction and course of action' (Ffolliott 16). This question is aimed at being 'relevant' on two fronts, firstly to the pupils, by basing the action in a school setting, secondly in isolating 'jealousy' as a universal emotion. In this question, pupils are invited to walk in *Othello*'s 'shoes' as it were, by trying to extract what is supposedly fundamentally human emotion, in this case, jealousy, to motivate their 'probable action and course of action' (Ffolliott 16). However in order to draw parallels between *Othello* and the student's lives, the question completely ignores the contextual issues that inform the play.

The main approach of these questions is to ask the pupils to occupy position which will allow them to react to certain external imperatives. In a different discussion for instance, the pupils are asked to read a newspaper article about two black men who were forced to leave a 'whites only' park in Johannesburg (Ffolliott 19). The pupils are then told to: 'Discuss your reaction to reading the ... report from each of the following points of view: (i) a Black man, (ii) a White racist, (iii) a White non-racist' (Ffolliott 18). The invitation to respond to the story as different characters allows pupils to explore different subject positions. There is a similar, albeit more problematic, discussion later in the paper. As a further response to quotations about race, these two questions are asked: 'Do you think there might be a set of characteristics common to Black people, "Coloured" people, Indians? (Discuss each separately). See if you can draw up a list of characteristics that you think are common to ALL people?' (Ffolliott 19). While the aim seems to be to lead to pupils to an understanding that

there are common human characteristics shared by South Africans regardless of race, the strategy is quite dangerous. Firstly it is not clear why white people are excluded from the initial question, as if they cannot be brought under scrutiny as easily. Secondly, the racial division and attribution of characteristics according to race opens up the possibilities for racist characterisation, adopted from South African society. The question does not leave the pupils room to disagree that there are characteristics defined only along race. The most problematic part of this paper's approach of course is that, in an effort to find relevance with the world of the play, it has completely lifted thematic elements away from the text.

This decontextualisation occurs to such an extent that none of the questions ever lead back to the play, even though aim of the article is framed as such. In an analysis on a school production of *Othello*, which adapts the play and sets it in a high school, Kearney contends 'the belief that, in order to make Shakespeare's play comprehensible and meaningful to high-school pupils, they need to be able to identify themselves with his characters via the spectacle of fellow high-school pupils in corresponding situations' (58). Kearney raises a valid contention here that problematises the reliance on the pupil's interiority, which as I have shown, results in an attempt to find similarities with Shakespeare's characters, rather than conducting meaningful literary analysis. The basis of Kearney's contention is that overly reductive adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, not only insult the pupils' ability to be imaginative and relate to unfamiliar situations, but also tamper with the depth of meaning by over-simplifying the language. Kearney envisions a careful approach: 'encouraging our pupils to be sensitive and alert to the issues that emerge from the play' (60). The ideal case for Kearney is one where '[Teachers] will be flexible enough to allow within the ambit of discussion anything which a *pupil* seriously consider relevant; but also flexible enough to be able to steer misguided or eccentric suggestions back towards the actuality of the play' (62). This conception is problematic in as far as it positions both the learner and the text as the sources of uncontested meaning. The curtailing of 'misguided and eccentric suggestions' (Kearney 62) also needs to be challenged because it assumes that there are correct readings of the play, and it limits the range within which pupils may ascribe meaning. But what Kearney does offer is an opportunity to rethink the very limitations which are prescribed, by allowing pupils to engage with the play according to their understanding of the world. Therefore in this last section of the chapter, I want to explore some of the actual responses

to the place of English and Shakespeare in apartheid South Africa in marginalized spaces, by those who are not represented in the community formulated by the *CRUX* articles.

### **Responses: Transkei and nation-building**

In the last section of this chapter, I will explore the more complex appropriations of the English language, and of Shakespeare, as a means to articulate political agency. I will do this in two ways, firstly, by tracing the development of education in the Transkei, one of the apartheid government's Bantustans. I see some of the key decisions made by education administrators, such as insisting on the use of English as a medium of instruction, as modes of resisting state policy. Also, because Bantustans were aimed at fragmenting South Africa into different 'states', any self-constitution that emerged from those spaces can be seen as complicating notions of nation and subjecthood in South Africa. When those who are denied citizenship in their own country, depend on their own constructions of collective identity, it creates a "Russian doll effect" of a nation within a nation. Secondly, as I have done in chapter 1, I will end off by reflecting on the re-appropriations of Shakespeare outside of the schooling system. Therefore I will consider how some *Drum* writers turned to Shakespeare to claim certain subject positions, contrary to those conferred by an oppressive state. But to complicate the binary that might constitute the *Drum* writers' project as 'black resistance' further, I will close off with two extracts from Afrikaans writers who felt that they could also use Shakespeare in ways that did not imply sympathy with apartheid.

S. V. S. Ngubentombi's *Education in the Republic of Transkei*, published in 1988, gives a useful example of the interplay between education policy and curriculum, and how it was received by those for whom it was designed. His book offers a historical and critical account of education development in the republic of Transkei, and hopes to 'serve as a valuable textbook for use in particular in the colleges of education and at the university in the preparation and proviso of teachers' (preface). While Ngubentombi justifies the future usefulness of the book for training teachers, its historical placement suggests that this second function became somewhat obsolete because within six years of the book's publication, democratic elections took place, and the Transkei was subsumed as part of the

Republic of South Africa; the Transkei would no longer be in charge of its own education.<sup>7</sup> But Ngubentombi still offers much in terms of historical overview and responses to Bantu Education and language policies in particular. In the following section I am going to highlight three responses to educational developments that not only exposed the fragility of the apartheid government's dependence on 'intrinsic' and essentialised values, but also how these responses complicated the place of English in South Africa during apartheid.

The establishment of Bantustans, was as a result of the state's desire that: 'there will not be one black man with South African citizenship ... Every black man in South Africa will eventually be accommodated in some independent new state in this honourable way and there will no longer be an obligation on this parliament to accommodate those people politically' (CP Mulder quoted in Welsh 70). The lack of successful implementation of these "nation states" (Welsh 71) does not negate the fact that the apartheid government sought to discriminate citizenship along gendered, racial and geographic lines. The Transkei's education system offers an interesting case study because, once the Bantustan gained 'independence' from the republic, its limited autonomy afforded a degree of control over the development of education. Although, 'as the largest single African reserve within the Union of South Africa [it] became the testing ground for the bold experiment to demonstrate separate development' (Ngubentombi 22), its responses to curricular policy, not least of which was the move away from Bantu education, makes the Transkei a useful focal point. Naturally, the result of this focus is that we do not have a clear overall picture of education development and responses in South Africa; the segregation of the country into Bantustans ensured that the nation would always be fragmented. But the Transkei case study offer us an example of what forms of self-definition and identity-formation might have entailed, in relation to an oppressive state, and what avenues of resistance were available to black South Africans. As I have suggested already through Viswanathan, the development of the curriculum needs to be viewed not only through explicit government policy, but also as one that had to adapt to pressures and responses outside of official state channels. The strongly utilitarian aims which underpinned segregated education,

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<sup>7</sup> The Republic of Transkei had gained independence from South Africa in 1976 after being established as a Bantustan under the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 (Welsh 81) and was part of the government's separate development policy.

encapsulated in the oft-quoted words of Hendrik Verwoed who stated that, 'There is no place for him [“the Bantu”] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour' (Chapman quoted in Distiller 156), cannot be assumed as stemming directly from attitudes of the ruling class without challenge.

The state's desire for black South Africans to occupy only the lowest forms of labour had to contend with the reality of the demands of production. It was an unrealistic objective and in 1972, 'the government gave in to pressure from business to improve the Bantu Education system to meet business's need for a better trained black workforce'.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, more schools were built in more urban townships like Soweto, shifting the focus from the Bantustans. Although reformation was superficial, an interesting trend emerged:

An increase in secondary school attendance had a significant effect on youth culture. Previously, many young people spent the time between leaving primary school and obtaining a job (if they were lucky) in gangs, which generally lacked any political consciousness. But now secondary school students were developing their own. In 1969 the black South African Student Organization (SASO) was formed. Though Bantu Education was designed to deprive Africans and isolate them from 'subversive' ideas, indignation at being given such 'gutter' education became a major focus for resistance, most notably in the 1976 Soweto uprising.<sup>9</sup>

While the resulting decrease in school attendance was an outright protest against state policy and the quality of education, a more complicated response led to a similar outcome in the Republic of Transkei. The high drop-out rate from primary schooling is one that is reflected by Ngubentombi's account as well (21) but for different reasons in the rural Transkei. He notes that, 'there would always be a strong resistance by the majority of the communities to sacrificing tribal benefits such as the traditional services of the young members at home and in the community as a whole in herding stock, tilling the lands and cultivating crops' (28).

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<sup>8</sup> (<http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/bantu-education-policy>)

<sup>9</sup> (<http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/bantu-education-policy>)

The most well-known, and probably most publicised, resistance to Bantu Education was that of 16 June 1976 in Soweto where school pupils protested against the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction. The spirit of protest and resistance spread throughout the country and the event is considered one of the most pivotal in the struggle against apartheid. But the march itself was a climax to an ongoing dissatisfaction with the education system tailored for black pupils in the country. Resistance towards Bantu education began from its inception and particularly after the recommendations made by the Eiselen Commission report in 1951 (Ngubentombi 17). Ngubentombi records that the greatest grievance was towards the language of instruction (19), and that 'so great was the opposition towards the use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction in black education that its actual introduction, when the time came for the implementation ... [it] never went beyond the primary school' (20). Mother-tongue instruction was not a new policy and had already been implemented in colonial education, but the apartheid government sought to increase it up until secondary school level so that all subjects, except for 'foreign languages' (*Report of the Commission on Native Education* quoted in Ngubentombi 20) would be taught in the mother-tongue. Concurrent to this was the drive to 'establish the authority of Afrikaans, both as language and as medium of instruction, in the latter case by the enforcement of dual-medium (English and Afrikaans) policies at secondary school level' (Hartshorne 32). The response from the Transkeian Department of Education was that 'the choice of English as medium was unanimous' (Ngubentombi 24). Ngubentombi notes two reasons for the perspectives towards language policy: the first was the anticipated isolation that would result between African groups as a result of mother-tongue instruction and the second was that, 'the African language was undeveloped and had not reached the stage when it could be used in all circumstances to put across the ideas found in the Western World' (24). Such curriculum choices also helped to establish English as a tool of resistance and self-expression, and created an atmosphere that made it possible for black writers to use both the language as well as Shakespeare to fashion new identities for themselves.

Similar to the *CRUX* editors, the Transkeian education administrators as well as parents, found English to be an important component in the formation and articulation of identity. It was not only for the constitution of individuals, however, also to create a sense of

nationhood; a communal identity that would resist the apartheid government's attempts at separate development and limiting black agency. In *Shakespeare and the Coconuts*, Distiller surmises that, 'If English has always been a language of personal power as well as an aspirational language, its status as such was exacerbated by apartheid policies of "retribalisation" and Bantu Education, which made it clear that education in the vernacular was intended to be second-rate (31). Welsh tells us that while the Bantustans were conceived as 'a device for deflecting people's aspirations away from political rights in a unified South Africa, the Bantustans were a palpable failure – even more, they undoubtedly strengthened popular commitment to resistance' (326).

### **Shakespeare the *Drum-er*. Shakespeare the Afrikaner**

As in my discussion of Sol Plaatje in the previous chapter, I do not want to frame the *Drum* writers' appropriation of Shakespeare only as part of a tradition of black resistance, but as part of multiple dissenting voices. This is why I have paired these appropriations up with that of an Afrikaans critic. Interestingly, the use of Shakespeare as resistance here is not only aimed at an oppressive state, but also at those in the English community who claimed exclusive ownership of Shakespeare. This contention may not even have been about 'owning' Shakespeare, but more about access to using a cultural icon in order to justify a larger cause. Therefore, Distiller argues that in using Shakespeare to write about their world, Bloke Modisane and his contemporaries were also in a process of constituting their identity (*Post-colonial* 151); they were positioning themselves as citizens of an imagined nation. In doing so they were also resisting construction by the state and, as I argue, English liberals.

Distiller asserts that in using Shakespeare to describe his experience of Sophiatown, 'for Modisane Shakespeare's texts become a conduit for the expression of distress, as well as for the signifying in a suitable register the effect of extreme and sustained violence on himself and others of his community' (*Post-colonial* 165). In this way, Modisane does two things, firstly he draws links with Shakespeare to speak about his world, assuming that there is a connection to be made. Secondly, he reconstitutes a sense of community for himself and

those around him, although the common point in this case is violent. In a similar way to Peacock, who acknowledges the violence of his time, Modisane considers Shakespeare useful for articulating his experience of violence. But what emerges here is that, Modisane is inviting a new audience into his narrative. While his contemporaries in Sophiatown might understand the experience of violence and oppression as he does, when he decides to use Shakespeare, he reaches out to a different community which, while it may not understand Sophiatown, will understand Shakespeare.

When Johnson introduces Christina van Heyningen, a Shakespeare critic, who responds to the problematic liberal-apartheid binary mentioned previously, he seems to present her as “Afrikaans as they come”. He notes that she is ‘the daughter of an Afrikaans civil servant who fought the English in the Anglo-Boer War, and an Anglican mother descended from the 1820 settlers’ (Johnson 159), almost as if to suggest that there is nothing in her lineage to draw her to Shakespeare ‘naturally’. Johnson records Van Heyningen’s view in this way:

‘For van Heyningen, however, the unspoken exclusion of Afrikaans and the Afrikaner people in [English liberal politics] needed addressing. She argued that apartheid and Afrikaner were not the same thing, and attempted to challenge the construction of the Afrikaner as the negative term in the opposition between apartheid and Shakespeare’ (Johnson 160). ‘In an article on “Afrikaans Translations of Shakespeare”, Van Heyningen makes similar appeals to a nobler Afrikaans soul, one that has the capacity to transcend the limits of petty nationalism and to commune with High Art. She dismisses in the first place the need for Afrikaners to read translations of Shakespeare, as they should understand enough in English to appreciate the original’ (Johnson 160).

Van Heyningen’s ‘appeal[] to a nobler Afrikaans soul, one that has the capacity to transcend the limits of petty nationalism and to commune with High Art’ (Johnson 160) shows the same dependence on the subject’s interiority as many of the *CRUX* articles. She hopes that through this encounter, Afrikaner nationalism, which in some cases was antagonistic towards English culture, will set aside its divisive nature and identify itself with ‘High Art’. In doing so, she effaces the politics which inform ‘High Art’, represented by Shakespeare,

which are used to justify nationalist sentiments, although English ones. Finally, in noting that Afrikaners need to be able to enjoy Shakespeare without translation, van Heyningen rejects the mediation of translation in order to maintain the elevated quality that she attributes to Shakespeare. Finally, it is interesting that in 'proving' her liberal humanist affiliation in this way, she hopes to resist the association made between Afrikaners and complicity with apartheid.

Clearly, both Modisane and van Heyningen find Shakespeare useful, not only in constituting their position, but legitimating it as well. It is not explicit why they might find Shakespeare more useful than any other playwright, but the construction of Shakespeare as a writer who deals with 'universal' issues seems to be at the heart of this articulation. Despite the historical contradictions of appropriating Shakespeare, in a time when dissenting voices were silenced in violent ways, it seems a useful measure to speak through the voice of a playwright who has played an important role in the constitution of nation in South Africa. Because many *CRUX* articles do not seem to conceive of a community that includes Modisane, and to a degree van Heyningen's, voices it is necessary for them to constitute their own ideas of nation and as subjects of the nation of their imagination. In the following chapter, the divisions between class and race in the curriculum are not as explicit. The next part of my enquiry, tackles the challenges of teaching Shakespeare in an integrated curriculum which has a greater investment in constituting a united society.

### **3. POSTAPARTHEID ENCOUNTERS: A new Nation, A new Subject**

This final chapter brings to bear questions about the place of Shakespeare in postapartheid South African schools. As I have done in previous chapters, I look to the socio-political environment out of which the South African curriculum arises, in order to explore whether efforts are made to respond to, and engage with that context. The underpinning question is: how does the teaching, or more accurately, examination of Shakespeare in South African schools reflect the many changes which the country has undergone? I hope to look at what the pedagogical approaches to this playwright, and to an extent, English literary studies, might tell us about how the Department of Basic Education (DBE) conceives the place of learners as citizens of a democratic country. The bulk of my discussion will be based on *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the two Shakespearean plays which have been on offer in the Grade 12 syllabus since 2008. By focusing on examination papers, I hope to extend Distiller's assertion that 'editorial work done [in Shakespeare editions] helps to elucidate how old interpretations of Shakespeare remain entrenched in schools' (*Coconuts* 105), under different conditions. While she has analysed editorial mediations, I analyse examinations which partially reflect classroom teaching through the careful selection of passages and themes from the set texts. These selections may point to what the DBE considers to be the most important aspects of the syllabus, and as I will show through curriculum policy, efforts towards nation-building.

In the course of the transition from apartheid to postapartheid South Africa, the exchange of power between the ruling Nationalist Party (NP) and the ANC triggered a flurry of legislative reforms, including the South African Schools Act of 1996. Passed in an effort to 'amend and repeal certain laws relating to schools' (1), the main aims of the Act are articulated in the Preamble as follows:

Whereas this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and

intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State. (1)

Entrenched in the Act is the overwhelming desire to counter the institutional effects of apartheid and colonialism, in education and society, through ‘the development of all ... people’s talents and capabilities [and to] advance the democratic transformation of society’ (Schools Act 1). The yearning for a single education system and curriculum, as opposed to the divisive one, is accompanied by an overarching need for the ‘democratic transformation of society’ (Schools Act 1). The government’s assumption of a causal relationship between education and social transformation is important for understanding curricular developments that would follow. This is because the Schools Act has since influenced all education policies and, by extension, syllabus choices in South Africa since 1996.

At its inception, the Schools Act reflected the political verve and optimism of the mid-1990s, immortalised in various iconic images used to symbolise a united and multicultural society.<sup>10</sup> But the transition to postapartheid South Africa, hampered as it was with endless negotiations between the old and the new, could not obfuscate the fragility of a new democratic state and the crippling legacies of South Africa’s past. As such, Elizabeth Lickindorf notes that the democratic accomplishment that ‘ha[d] consigned the past system of education’ (1) was more of a hope than reality. In “The What? Why? And How? Of Teaching English Literature in Southern Africa”, she writes: ‘Teachers of “English Literature” in South Africa in the 1990s inherit all the upheavals of revolution. Conflicting ideologies, reduced budgets and serious doubts about the “practicality” and “relevance” of syllabuses ... [and] fundamental problems of definition and purpose underlie the entire debate’ (119). The preoccupation with purpose and relevance, revealed by Lickindorf, was in no way exclusive to the English syllabus and related to the education system as a whole, stemming

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<sup>10</sup> Some of the iconic images range include that of then president Nelson Mandela and Springbok captain Francois Pienaar at the Rugby World Cup in 1995 to photographs of voters during the 1994 elections and in social discourse, the popularisation of the term ‘Rainbow Nation’ by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

from questions of identity in the 'new' South Africa. And as I will show later in the chapter, the 'redress of past injustices in educational provision ... [to] advance the democratic transformation of society' (1), was integral in the conceptualisation of a postapartheid nation.

Beyond the transition era, we are now plagued by complex questions about nation, identity and culture, where 'race, nationality, class and gender politics are all being deployed in ... struggles over what "we" should be' (Distiller *Coconuts* 101). Of course it is problematic even to assume that we are 'beyond' a transition as the term 'postapartheid' carries within it a number of contradictions by suggesting a clear end to apartheid and its legacy. In order to challenge what seems to be a misnomer, 'neo-apartheid' has been used by some to acknowledge 'many of the systematic and ideological structures of apartheid [that] remain intact' (Distiller *Post-Colonial* 9). While it is useful to suggest a 'new' form of apartheid to describe the ongoing effects of apartheid, the word does not quite express the class and race interface in South Africa today sufficiently. This is especially true where the institutional structures of apartheid have been eradicated. Other efforts have been made to define present-day South Africa. The editors of the book *SA Lit beyond 2000*, for instance, move from the overtly political implication of 'neo' towards a 'subjective, experiential terrain, the terrain of literary expression [where] *then* is distinct from its counterpart *now* [and] even the *now* requires its own gradations' (Chapman, Lenta viii). They acknowledge that even the phrase 'beyond 2000', which they have used to denote a new literary age in South Africa, is arbitrary at best. The chronology merely helps them to demarcate the literature that emerges within that time frame, and which is characterised by similar concerns. It is this arbitrary *now* in which I am trying to position my discussion, as hard to define as it might be, both historically and ideologically. Consequently, I continue to use the term postapartheid in my discussion.<sup>11</sup>

This doubly 'post' and 'neo' age, out of which the current South African curriculum emerges, is one where the democratic ideals of a Rainbow Nation have decidedly faded. Speaking of this reality, Distiller identifies 'current tendencies to return to simplified and simplistic

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<sup>11</sup> Other descriptions of contemporary South Africa include 'post-anti-apartheid', (Kruger 35), 'post-transitional' (Flockemann 21) and (Narunsky-Laden 63) and even 'post-postapartheid' (Chapman, Lenta viii).

racialised discourse of us and them' (*Coconuts* 25). It is a sentiment parodied by South African cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro (Zapiro). In a 2000 cartoon, he represents the Rainbow Nation as comprising of two solid colours, black and white, above which is a sign: 'The black and white nation'. Standing below the rainbow is a young child and an old man who says to the former, 'and then one day it changed back, and we realised the Rainbow Nation was just a temporary illusion' (Sowetan 2000). By representing two generations and both the 'old' and 'new' South Africa, Zapiro is clearly sceptical of the veracity of the phrase. Both Distiller and Zapiro critique the failure of the idea of a new nation, noting a socio-political return to the oppressive divisions of the past in South Africa.

They are certainly not alone in doing so. In the introduction to *The Shakespearean International Yearbook : Special section, South African Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century*, Laurence Wright reflects on the cultural implications of what he terms, 'a new era of complex opposition politics' (24). Writing in 2009, he concludes that, 'The clearly defined ideological horizon of apartheid culpability has become irrecoverably blurred, class, race and gender conflict assume new guises, new shadings, as we settle into the new order of which is much less certain than it was in the first ten years of democracy' (Wright 'Introduction' 24). The first aspect which can be seen as obscuring the 'clearly defined ideological horizon of apartheid culpability' (Wright 'Introduction' 24), is that racialised discourse and racism continue to circulate within the official framework of democracy. It is much harder to identify as it lacks legislative support key to apartheid governance. Interestingly, while Distiller is explicit in noting a return to the simplistic apartheid characterisations of race, Wright sees them as 'assum[ing] new guises' ('Introduction' 24). Nevertheless, a contradiction exists between the lofty ideals of the South African constitution and Schools' Act, and the lived reality of South African learners. My main question in this chapter then, a question which is carried throughout the thesis, is: Are these social contradictions manifested in English literary studies, and teaching of Shakespeare? My discussion will focus on the possible implications on the curricular objectives to shape the learners as citizens of postapartheid South Africa through the teaching and examination of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

## *Othello*

In the introduction to *Shakespeare and national culture*, John J. Joughin posits that ‘the formation of a national culture is dependent upon, and often invokes, a particular version of the past which it would either reaffirm or deny’ (1). He continues that ‘at the moment of its emergence, nationhood articulates a double movement. Not just a sense of beginning, but also a sense of returning and beginning over again’ (Joughin 1). Joughin’s conception of nation suggests a certain loop between past and present, although he does not tell us whether the place of ‘beginning again’ is always the same, and what the conditions might be for this back and forth progression. His conclusions echo those of Distiller, Zapiro and Wright, who consider postapartheid South Africa to be in a similar state of progression. If we accept this characteristic as symptomatic of ‘the formation of a national culture’ (Joughin 1) it helps us to understand some of the ways in which South Africa works to articulate nation-building. One example, which I have already mentioned, is the attempt to define South Africa in ways that claim a certain political stance towards apartheid. Whether termed post- or neo-apartheid, there is a discursive compulsion to separate the democratic nation from the apartheid state remains present.

Joughin’s greatest contribution to the discussion however is the assertion that:

Paradoxically, the symbology of a nation’s idealise construction and its imagined community is often secured by its very intangibility. It follows that although the nation is an entity against which the individuals define themselves it often simultaneously resists definition itself, even as its abstract necessity is likely to be reinforced by an altogether more substantial apparatus of uniformity- passport, green card, border guard, etc. (2)

In chapter 2, I have already discussed the possibilities that cultural symbols, like the ‘apparatus of uniformity’ (Joughin 2), offered for creating an imagined community among English teachers. Unlike the tangible examples that Joughin makes above, the ‘universal’ values and morals transmitted through teaching Shakespeare are as intangible as the characteristics of ‘universal’ nationhood which they attempt to create. By this I mean that

Shakespeare is used to articulate a nation within a nation. I will elaborate on this below. While I do not hope to define the type of nationhood and citizenship imagined by the Department of Basic Education through literary education fully, I am interested in how their borders are articulated, implicitly and explicitly. Finally, I will extend Joughin's notion that 'although the nation is an entity against which the individuals define themselves it often simultaneously resists definition itself' (2) by exploring how the examination questions frame Othello's self-definition in relation to the state.

In the February/March 2011 Paper II, the desire for true citizenship in relation to the state, is alluded to as the motivation behind Othello's actions. Learners are given the following extract, and then asked to discuss 'how this final speech provides a reason for Othello's suicide' (21):

OTHELLO. Set you down this:

And say besides that in Alleppo once  
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk  
Beat a Venetian and traduced the State,  
I took by the throat the circumcised dog –  
And smote him thus'. (VI.ii.361-365)

The model answer is given in the memorandum as: 'The Turks are the enemies of Venice. Othello, as a loyal defender of Venetian civilisation, once killed a Turk who attacked it. In killing himself, he is once again that true Venetian, and the enemy he kills is himself – a man who has been the enemy of what Venice stands for' (HL March Memo 2011 16). In the response, self-negation is seen as a way of reuniting with the state, or divesting difference in order to conform to the moral order. By saying that 'in killing himself, he is once again that *true Venetian*', the memorandum suggests that Othello's suicide is a necessary part of social harmony and enactment of appropriate citizenship (emphasis mine; HL March Memo 2011 16). The conflict within Othello lies in his dual citizenship as a member of a privileged class, and as a racial 'other'. In the examination, the two aspects of his identity are further constituted along moral lines where Othello is defined as having the 'potential for both good and evil' (HL March Memo 15). The importance of the subject's self-definition in relation to

the state is revealed in this question. I see the emphasis on Othello becoming a 'true Venetian' as the DBE's subtle articulation of its own notions of 'true' citizenship where social harmony is achieved through self-negation and conformity. For the learners, this negation is obviously not suicide, but it is to define themselves according to a prescribed set of identities defined by the DBE in the curriculum. These will be discussed a little later.

But I want to suggest that Othello's allegiance is not merely to the state as an entity but to those class-based markers that have bought him his citizenship. His desire to be remembered (re-remembered?) discursively in his final speech:

OTHELLO. I have done the state some service, and they know't.  
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am. (VI.ii.348-351)

He seeks to be remembered 'in ... letters' (line 349) as one who '[did] the state some service' (line 348). He feels he has earned his citizenship, even after he betrayed it. Sandra Young elaborates on this further in 'Imagining Alterity and Belonging on the English stage in an Age of Expansion: a Reading of *Othello*':

The dying Othello's parting attempt to construct an identity that will last into posterity through securing his story ("Set you down this") sees him producing another narrative in which he appears, again, to be imagining himself in the third person by offering himself as an object of a narrative, an object to be consumed within a cultural economy that produces adventure tales to secure heroes and consolidate a world rendered ever more complex as a result of the increasing cultural and economic exchange. (27)

In a way, Othello kills one version of himself in order to live again by 'construct[ing] an identity that will last into posterity through securing his story' (Young 27). His story does indeed last long enough to be read by learners in postapartheid South Africa, as Othello is

redefined as a citizen of a global cultural 'state', as one of Shakespeare's most iconic characters.

What I have shown here is one of the possible ways in which the relationship between the subject, Othello, and state might be read from the DBE's model answer. But the implications of this relationship are never alluded to explicitly. The examination paper's focus remains not only on the text as the source of meaning, but it also obscures the state's pressures on the subject's identity-construction, by highlighting individual agency instead. Further, as I will show, the potential for political action is represented unequally along gender lines between Othello and Desdemona. To frame this discussion, I turn back to Sinfield who explores the material processes that influence the dissemination of literature in schools. As I have elaborated in chapter 2, he stresses that for girls in particular, 'most of the studies reinforce the gender stereotyping which lead girls to these texts—"women are portrayed as being passive and ineffectual, and taking action only for personal or destructive reasons"' (Sharpe quoted in Sinfield 136-137). In the previous chapter I illustrated through Mary Gardener's reading of Desdemona that the syllabus still saw the most appropriate place for Desdemona as outside of the political space. The discrepancy between how Othello and Desdemona's actions are judged, persists into the current syllabus. I am especially interested in the implications of how that difference is presented to the learners.

A hypothesis is set up for discussion in the HL March 2011 essay question: 'Both Iago and Desdemona are responsible for the downfall of Othello. Discuss the extent to which you agree with this statement' (19). Firstly, the limitations for the learner's response are inherent in the phrase: 'the extent to which you *agree*' (emphasis mine; 19) hence not soliciting the learner's actual opinion, but the degree to which they adopt the given premise. Sinfield has shown that such questions are neither hypothetical nor neutral, but assert a dominant point view which learners are encouraged to adopt. The reward for conformity is evident in the memorandum (which learners have access to on the DBE website archives) where Othello is said to be like 'most of *us*' (HL March 2011 Memo 15). The learner's agreement subsequently grants them entrance into a shared and 'universal' humanity, through concurring that Othello's humanity is indeed "ours". This makes the task of disagreeing doubly difficult. Not only would the learner have to challenge the cause of

Othello's downfall, but the fact that the DBE makes such an assumption to begin with. It would seem then that the path of least resistance is to agree, almost without question. The possibility for challenging the parameters within which Iago and Desdemona's subjectivities are articulated is greatly reduced.

Let us look at these parameters which I have mentioned. Already it is evident that the influences on Othello are limited to the realm of human action; his flaws are human and he is susceptible to human influences. This allows for answers such as: 'Othello, like most of us, has the potential for both good and evil' (HL March Memo 2011 15). A shared humanity is invoked, with which the learners are expected to sympathise. Further, by suggesting that the blame might lie primarily with Iago and Desdemona, the question presents Othello's downfall as stemming both from internal conflict and outside influences. When establishing Iago's role for instance, the memorandum notes that: 'Playing on Othello's insecurities, he poisons the general's mind against his wife [and] Iago manipulates Othello into becoming more like him' (15). This leaves little room to explore the racial and social inequalities at play because Othello is simply set up as a coherent subject, susceptible to human weaknesses. Desdemona on the other hand, is shown as much more elusive. But before I proceed to a discussion on Desdemona, I want to reflect on how the links to the shared humanity with Othello (and others) are extended in the phrasing of the examination questions. This is to show how learners are invited to become temporary citizens of a 'universal' community within prescribed moral borders.

One of the contextual questions in the HL March 2010 Paper II asks the learners the following: 'At this point in the play, do you feel pity for Othello? Justify your response' (21). The point in question is the moment in Act IV, Scene I, when Iago instigates Othello to kill both Cassio and Desdemona for their alleged infidelity. In the scene, Othello is conflicted by the knowledge of Desdemona's love and the doubt planted by Iago. The learners are then asked to respond to Othello's dilemma according to their understanding of the play up to this point. But this response is a mediated one, framed carefully by the diction. Learners are not asked how they feel, or what they think of Othello, but whether they pity him or not. This is a leading question which places the learner on the defensive by having to 'Justify [their] response' (HL March 2010 P2 21). The need to offer justification means that it is not

only Othello who is on trial, but the learners and their value systems as well. Their ability to feel pity for Othello, or not, will be based on what they deem as redeemable moral attributes in a character, or so we might think. Sinfield suggests that there is something else happening in this scenario that attempts to facilitate the 'internalisation of dominant notions' (136), or as Orkin argues, collusion with an oppressive state. Sinfield's assertion is that 'the pupil is being persuaded to internalise success or failure with particular and relative cultural codes as an absolute judgement on her or his potential as a human being' (136). Sinfield's mode of analysis offers a useful model to consider the implications of this positioning for the learners. I now want to return to how Desdemona's place is portrayed in the DBE examinations.

It is implied in some of the examination papers that, in order to establish any form of agency, Desdemona has to overcome forces that are beyond human action. Firstly, it is said that 'Desdemona can be seen as representing the finer possibilities of human nature' (HL March Memo 2011 15). Thus she is elevated to a symbol of noble humanity as opposed to the flawed nature of Othello. Her character is represented as 'universal' in a different way; she is what learners, female ones especially, should aspire to be. In another example, the learners are faced with the following essay question: 'Desdemona is an innocent. She is a wife and woman caught up in a world of deception and lies. Critically discuss this view of Desdemona' (HL March 2010 Paper II 19). Here Desdemona is 'caught up in a world' (19), a social rip tide so to say and seemingly with little opportunity for agency. In order to define herself, she must overcome a whole '*world* of deception and lies' (emphasis mine; HL March 2010 19). Her subjectivity is further reduced to the home space and is not in relation to the state; she is a wife before she is a citizen. Desdemona, as a woman, is elevated above moral reproach and simultaneously is given little to no social agency that stands in contradiction to her "innocence". There are, however, interesting alternative readings of Desdemona, albeit it in parentheses.

Immediately after we are told that Desdemona represents 'the finer possibilities of human nature', a comment appears in brackets: 'not everybody agrees that she is flawless morally – some have a problem with her deceiving of her father and/or her lying about what has happened to the handkerchief' (HL March Memo 2011 17). Desdemona's capacity for

deception is relegated to an aside. Interestingly, the same act of defiance is reinscribed under different terms in the HL March 2013 memorandum as a 'show [of] bravery ... when she elopes and when she stands up to her father' (18). The weight of support of her alleged 'flawless [morality]' (HL March Memo 2011 17) effectually places suspicion on the veracity of the opinions of those who disagree with this premise.

Where Desdemona's acts of resistance are examined, they are established as problematic, unlike Othello's actions which are seen as tragic. The only other time where a more complex Desdemona is portrayed is in the HL March 2013 memorandum: 'When Desdemona is first introduced (in Venice), she is assertive and bold. She is a woman who dares to go after what she wants and shows bravery. We see this when she elopes and when she stands up to her father ... This assertiveness is lost when she later becomes a passive victim of Othello's anger' (18). The extract is in response to the 2013 essay question: 'Emilia and Desdemona can be held accountable for their own deaths. In an essay of 400–450 words (2–2½ pages), critically discuss the extent to which you agree with the above statement' (HL March P2 19). The characterisation of Desdemona as an 'assertive and bold ... woman who *dares* to go after what she wants and shows bravery' is lauded as a positive one in the word 'dare' (emphasis mine, HL Memo 2013 18). The suggestion is that she is not completely powerless and undertakes self-definition in marrying against her father's wishes. However, further down the memorandum, we are reminded of how limited that assertion really is.

We are told that '[m]ost of her actions reveal her love for Othello – these account for her spineless acceptance of his abuse' and that '[t]he traditional subordination of women in Shakespeare's society would in part also account for Desdemona's [sic] failure to fight back in a way we would expect from a spirited woman of our own day' (18). Finally, the memorandum concludes that '[Desdemona] remains a loyal wife to the end, but her loyalty under the circumstances is misplaced because it interferes with her taking responsibility for her own life' (18). This answer is fraught with contradictions. On the one hand it is a harsh indictment of Desdemona's 'spineless acceptance of [Othello's] abuse' which 'interferes with her taking responsibility for her own life'. On the other hand, the social processes which limited the exercise of that responsibility are highlighted as the 'traditional subordination of women in Shakespeare's society' are spliced with the value systems of 'our

own day' (18). Judged by both contemporary and supposedly Shakespearean standards, it seems that Desdemona cannot win; she is held liable for her own death. Her capacity for action is seen as both problematic and always within the limitations of her love for Othello, even when it is admired.

I want to conclude this section by returning to Othello's efforts at self-definition. While a link is made by the DBE between Othello's desire to reunite himself with the state and his suicide (HL March Memo 2011 16), as far as race is concerned, its institutional influence on his self-perception is not addressed. In the extract below, learners are asked to 'Suggest why Othello mentions his colour when referring to his name' in relation to:

OTHELLO. My name, that was as fresh  
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black  
As mine own face. (III.iii.391-393)

The memorandum then states:

Othello thinks that one of the reasons Desdemona has betrayed him is that she prefers someone of her own race. He feels that she despises his blackness. He thinks that being cuckolded undermines his reputation/good name/identity and, since he associates his colour/race with failure and being despised, he links the two (HL March Memo 2011 16).

The point made here about Othello's internal conflict, as a result of his race, is a useful one. Sandra Young elaborates on this struggle, writing that, 'Othello occupies an ambiguous position: though a racially-marked foreigner, a "Moor", he masters the codes and values of his adopted society ... but not to be fully convinced, himself, of his right to belong, as subject' (23). Indeed the lack of conviction is evident in Othello's lament that his name, 'is now begrimed in black' (III.iii.392) unlike his face which has always been so. By stating that '[Othello] associates his colour/race with failure' (March Memo 2011 16) the social influence on that association is not acknowledged. The memorandum suggests that the view belongs to Othello's, without linking it to Iago's earlier assertion for instance:

IAGO. She did deceive her father, marrying you,  
And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks  
She loved them most. (III.iii.210-212)

Iago's assertion that Othello and Desdemona's union is against 'whereto ... in all things nature tends' (III.iii.236) suggests a social agreement of what is 'natural', or natural desire, which is always prone to return to equilibrium when the balance is upset. The interface between class and race, which allows Othello to negotiate Venetian society with relative ease, is also absent and is overly simplified by the DBE into racial discrimination.

Subsequently, the way in which this interface might play out in the learners' world does not seem to have much place in the examinations. This is not to say that teachers and learners do not engage with postapartheid responses to Shakespeare, but that if they do, they do not seem to translate into their final encounter with Shakespeare in high school. In a later reflection on policy objectives, I will demonstrate the importance that the DBE places on context and reflect on how Shakespeare seems to be positioned in a complex way within those aims. As I have shown in the previous chapters, there is a history to the cultural investment in presenting Shakespeare as elevated above politics. Unlike the in *Othello* questions, this approach is more prominent in the examination of *Romeo and Juliet*.

### ***Romeo and Juliet***

The examinations questions on *Othello* analysed above reveal links between nationhood and citizenship that could, with more careful reading, create interesting encounters with Shakespeare for postapartheid learners. But responses to our current context are obscured in the *Romeo and Juliet* questions in the First Additional Language papers (FAL). To an extent, this discrepancy lies in the different politics of the two plays which speak to and about the constitution of 'nation' and subjectivity. And so in the examination of *Romeo and Juliet* we see a greater dependence on a 'depoliticised' Shakespeare. The question that come closest to acknowledging the importance of context in reading the play is found in the FAL March 2011 Paper II, and is phrased as follows:

The themes explored in the play, *Romeo and Juliet*, are as relevant today as they were when the play was written.

Do you agree? Discuss your views, referring to characters and incidents in the play.

In your answer, you may discuss the following ideas, among others:

- The themes explored in the play
- Why these themes were relevant in Shakespeare's time
- Whether these themes are still relevant today. (17)

At first glance, this question seems to respond in some way to the need for a politicised reading of Shakespeare. Orkin has articulated this need, for instance, by noting that both educators and students 'should be ready to notice those moments of parallel that may prove fruitful ... for our awareness of our own particular context' (20). In a similar way then, the question tries to find some parallels between 'today' and 'when the play was written' (FAL March 2011 17). While the attempt to draw a contextual link is encouraging, as the question tries to create a space where learners might engage with the play in relation to their lived experience, the extent of that link is however superficial. My discussion will focus on how the notions of 'universal' themes and 'relevance' are used to advocate a humanist Shakespeare. Subsequently, I demonstrate how, as Distiller emphasises, 'old interpretations of Shakespeare remain entrenched in schools' (*Coconuts* 105) at least in some respects. This will be done by analysing the questions' emphasis on the themes and their 'relevance'.

The focus on thematic aspects of the play and gestures to a possible link to the current context, in the question above, show a move away from some approaches to teaching Shakespeare during apartheid. Johnson observes that the 1973 syllabus showed very little change from that of the 1950s, 'for second-language [now FAL] English speakers, the emphasis was far more strongly on memory-type questions ... the nature of [Shakespeare's] relationship both to his own context and to the South Africa of the 1970s was assumed to be of no concern to teacher and students' (200). Even within the postapartheid syllabus used before 2008, the focus remained on contextual questions and it was only with the introduction of the National Senior Certificate (NSC), and Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS), that the essay section in Paper II was introduced. This format allows for both

teachers and learners to consider broader contextual and thematic issues that are not possible in the short questions. However, this opportunity which could allow learners to treat both the text's authority and dissemination as contested spaces is negated by the DBE's reliance on universal themes. The suggestion is that the relevance of 'the themes explored in ... *Romeo and Juliet*' (FAL March 2011 Paper II 17) lies neither in postapartheid South African 'today' nor in Elizabethan England; rather it lies in the ability for 'man' or culture to stay the same.

The selection of themes in the memorandum is evidence of this: 'Themes such as love, friendship, hatred, revenge, family honour, reconciliation and fate are universal' (FAL March 2011 Memo 15). The emphasis is that the themes in the play are not subject to historical and cultural contingencies, but universal. Under the theme 'Parental Love' for instance, the memorandum elaborates that, 'the Capulets arrange the marriage with Paris out of love for Juliet' (March 2011 15). The oversimplification of 'parental love' stands in contradiction to Capulet's assertion to Paris that: 'My will to her consent is but a part. / And, she agreed, within her scope of choice/ Lies my consent and fair according voice' (I.II.17-19).

When it seems that Juliet will not submit to social expectation, the tenor of Capulet's aim changes and he declares: 'Sir Paris, I will make a desperate tender/ Of my child's love. I think she will be ruled/ In all respects by me. Nay, more, I doubt it not' (III.IV.13-16). Both the commercial motivations that necessitated marriage between Juliet and Paris, as well as Juliet's limited choice in finding her own husband, are ignored. The cultural and economic pressures within which she finds herself are reduced to 'parental love'. As a result both themes, namely 'family honour' and 'hatred' are reduced to the familial space and not linked to their larger impact in Verona. The 'honour' that leads to 'Tybalt's challenge to Romeo after the Capulets' ball, and the deaths that result from it' (FAL March 2011 Memo 15) are not problematised, they are simply accepted as a 'normative political ... morality' (Distiller *Coconuts* 116). Later in the chapter, I will elaborate on how learners are encouraged to respond to this scenario.

This same 'parental love' theme is dealt with differently in another paper, in a manner that reveals the problematic 'reinscription of authority' (*Coconuts* 116) noted by Distiller. In the question: 'Why do Juliet's parents arrange a marriage for her with Paris?' (FAL November

2012 15), and whether that arrangement is justified, parental love is no longer the motivation. The three reasons given are:

Capulet believes it will take her mind off Tybalt's death/stop her mourning.

Paris is an eligible bachelor/rich/handsome/everything a woman could want/a nobleman/has asked for her hand in marriage.

It was customary for parents to arrange marriages for their children. (FAL November 2010 Memo 15)

There is a subtle acknowledgement here that the customary requirements which Juliet must fulfil are part of the economic exchanges between the males in her life. Paris' social standing is also closely linked to his eligibility. This is clear in Capulet's assertion that if Juliet rejects Paris' hand, he will disown her: 'If you be mine, I'll give you to my friend./ If not, hang! Beg! Starve! Beg in the streets!/ For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee!' (III.V.203-205). Juliet's resistance of her father's wishes would have social implications in a society with such a clear hierarchy; as a disobedient daughter, she would lose her privileged class position. To reduce the theme simply to 'parental love' allows the DBE to frame it as 'universal' and above socio-economic and cultural motivations. In this way, there is no need to consider how the same story might play out differently in different contexts.

To drive the point home, Distiller argues that 'what is being reproduced in at least some schools is the belief that Shakespeare is universal because he can be made relevant' (*Post-Colonial* 244). This means that cultural and historical specificity are sacrificed at the altar of 'relevance'. Distiller also notes that 'this attempt to make the play "relevant"... encode[s] the potential to use the play, and Shakespeare's authority, to rehearse a defensive politics in the name of a universal standard of values' (Distiller *Post-Colonial* 238). As I have argued previously, in an explicitly repressive state like apartheid, the consequences of this seemingly ahistorical and apolitical approach can be particularly devastating. The pretence of 'universal' values under such conditions is really the crowding out of oppositional politics and resistance, in favour of the normative. Whether the context is completely ignored or 'whitewashed' in the name of 'universal' values, the tendency to produce simplistic links, in order to allude to relevance, is largely unproblematised in some of the Grade 12

examination questions. Therefore, if the curriculum during apartheid was used explicitly to carry out discrimination along racial lines, for instance, how might the continued teaching of a decontextualised and ‘universal’ Shakespeare play out in a society that prides itself in democracy? I will explore the possibilities, as presented in the examination papers, below.

My argument here is that the invocation of Shakespeare’s ‘relevance’ plays a role in the DBE’s conception of nation-building, and to emulate the performance of citizenship for the learner-subject. Interestingly, that relevance is articulated differently for Shakespeare from John Kani’s *Nothing but the Truth*. For example, in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) which gives subject guidelines, one of the DBE’s main aims is for ‘the curriculum [to] promote[ ] knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives’ (5). On the question of ‘culture and tradition’ (FAL November 2010 Paper II 22) for instance, the learners are required to discuss the character’s views on both, in *Nothing but the Truth*. The two are defined as:

Culture: The customs and beliefs, way of life and social organisation of a particular country/group.

Tradition: A belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people, i.e. the things people do to put their culture into practice. (FAL November 2010 Memo 18)

Both definitions rely on specificity of locale and community, with tradition being the expression of culture. The result is that both the play and the DBE feel comfortable in using the term ‘African culture and tradition’ (Memo 18), without questioning the parameters of the phrase. What this shows is that the examiners are engaging with a more ‘local’ version of culture and its expression, and that it might find itself in conflict with other (‘Western’) forms of culture; a conflict which is central to the play. Ironically, this play also deals with issues of family feuds (between the main character, Siphosiso, and his brother), hatred (towards the apartheid state), reconciliation (between Siphosiso and his niece as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and parental love (Themba wishes for his London-born daughter to marry a South African). None of them are ever pegged as universal, however, but firmly grounded in a South African context; their ‘relevance’ is framed as unmistakably ‘local’. In

*Romeo and Juliet* however, similar themes are conveyed as decidedly 'global', by being constructed as 'universal' and 'linked to many human emotions' (FAL March 2011 Memo 15), despite the specific context of 'common practice' (18) in Verona and 'Shakespeare's time' (15).

By setting Shakespeare's plays and themes up as 'universal' and relevant, the DBE takes problematic approach to Shakespeare which has been challenged in the academy and in this discussion. This approach is further exemplified in the March 2011 Memorandum which invites learners to discuss whether the aforementioned themes in *Romeo and Juliet* are still relevant today. There are two possible answers given:

Yes. People still experience the emotions of love, hatred and desire for revenge today. Many believe in the role of fate in our lives as well as in reconciliation.

OR

No. People today are not interested in emotions/do not allow themselves to be ruled by their emotions. They are more focused on their careers/making money. Many do not believe in fate at all. (15)

The basis of agreement or disagreement is surprisingly the same; it is on whether or not people experience emotions similarly, collectively and without difference. By this I mean that the memorandum reveals the influence of humanist views, such as those of Matthew Arnold, on literature and the subject, in a way similar to educators in the *CRUX* journal. Writing of Shakespearean characters for instance, Matthew Arnold insists that 'they are made of the stuff we find within ourselves and within the persons who surround them' (20). In making such a direct correlation between the characters in the plays and 'us', Arnold assumes that the plays are able to portray something 'intrinsically' human, which the reader of English literature can identify with. Therefore when the DBE claims that the themes in *Romeo and Juliet* are relevant or irrelevant because, 'People still experience the emotions of love, hatred and desire for revenge today' (FAL March 2011 Memorandum 15), they are claiming not only a certain type of humanness, but also that it is unchanging and uniform. And even if 'People today...do not allow themselves to be ruled by their emotions' (FAL March 2011 Memorandum 15) they are still represented as coherent subjects who have control over their social position, effacing the socio-political influences on their subjectivity.

In doing so, the DBE lays claim to an imagined global citizenship where emotions are experienced and shared equally.

This insistence on teaching a 'universal' Shakespeare has been received in different ways by South African critics, shown to have complex effects (real or imagined) on the idea of the nation. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, many English educators who wrote for the *CRUX* journal had a serious investment in this version of Shakespeare, and its ability to rally cultural aspirations. Speaking of 'traditional' approaches to Shakespeare during apartheid, Orkin argues that ultimately 'the student is encouraged to believe that his/her identity is independent of social process and does not involve, for instance, the particular position he or she occupies in the established system of domination or subordination...[and] reinforces in students the tendency to submission' (10). In *White Mythologies*, Robert Young feels equally strongly that, 'Every time a literary critic claims a universal, ethical, moral, or emotional instance in a piece of English literature, he or she colludes in the violence of the colonial legacy in which the European value or truth is defined as the universal one' (quoted in Johnson 40). Both critics identify a tendency to negate difference as a way of creating a sense of community among interested parties, and the oppression that results towards those who are not given access to this community has also been noted.

In South Africa, in particular, the discrimination between different races exposed how limited this prescription of universality was, and how its social advantages were earmarked for an elite few. Further, as Robert Young notes, the cultural and moral values espoused are in fact English. But I am not fully convinced by the vilification of universalism as a full participant in colonial or apartheid objectives, as suggested by Orkin and Young. My reservations stem from the blurred lines that characterise postapartheid society where discrimination can no longer be defined along racial lines alone. In slight contrast to Orkin and Young, Distiller speaks of a more complex relationship between humanism and human rights, as she does in *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Culture* (66). She views Plaatje and the *Drum* writers' appropriations of Shakespeare as a way of writing 'into being a South African Shakespeare who is humanist, liberal, and resistant to processes of colonialism and oppression' (*Post-Colonial* 101). Additionally, she sees it as a way to find some relevance in South Africa and to articulate alternative subjectivities, to those

entrenched by oppressive regimes. These writers were able to claim those very 'universal, ethical, moral, or emotional instance[s] in ... piece[s] of English literature' which Robert Young is against, as an act of defiance and self-definition.

In *Shakespeare and the Coconuts*, Distiller seems to embrace the notion of Shakespeare's 'relevance' a little more than she does in *South Africa, Shakespeare and Post-Colonial Culture*, although within a limited framework. She elaborates on its usefulness for postapartheid culture by conceding that 'all knowledge is relevant to all people, and for that reason alone Shakespeare belongs to us as 'he' does to anyone else...[and] has cultural capital that Africans are entitled to as anyone else' (7). In making this connection, she alerts us to the danger of overly-determined binaries that do not allow any engagement with Shakespeare, simply because of 'his' colonial history. Her position might partly explain why the DBE has an investment not only in 'valuing indigenous language systems' (CAPS 6) but also in 'being sensitive to global imperatives' (5). While this right to knowledge might elucidate some of the motivations behind education policy, what it does not explain is the classroom experience and increasing move away from teaching Shakespeare in South African schools.

While I do not hope to cover the gamut of reasons behind this shift, it is worth exploring some of the complex ways in which learners view the social implications of proficiency in English. Where the apartheid syllabus was determined exclusively along racial lines, the postapartheid first language syllabus (now called Home Language) in particular, yields a more complicated set of class politics, even if they are influenced by past racial divisions. By this I mean that, while expressions of nation and ideal citizenship were constituted racially during apartheid, they are now more complicated. As a result, even previous anti-apartheid efforts, such as those of the *Drum* writers who used Shakespeare to resist dehumanisation by the state, can no longer circulate with the same ease in postapartheid South Africa. I would like to suggest here, and further in the chapter, that the increased move away from Shakespeare is a possible response to emerging and fragmented notions of citizenship in a democratic nation.

## **A new kind of English, a new kind of subject.**

The link between citizenship and education is clarified in one of the curricular objectives in the CAPS as ‘equipping learners ... with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country’ (6). It is unclear how ‘self-fulfilment’ is defined and how its role in citizenship is understood, but the desire for learners to perform citizenship as products of a carefully structured curriculum is evident. I argue here that literary studies play a pivotal role in the dissemination of ‘values’, and ultimately fashioning learner-identity, while offering the linguistic tools to articulate subjectivity within a larger postapartheid and global discourse on identity.

As the examinations show, Shakespeare continues to function within this project, not only as representative of what the DBE wants learners to know and emulate, but also of the teachers perceptions on the plays’ ability to fulfil curricular aims. In an attempt to explain why the majority of First Additional Language (FAL) learners are no longer taught Shakespeare, subject adviser Paris Senwamadi is quoted, in a 2011 *TimesLive* article, as saying that: ‘People have a perception that Shakespeare is very difficult. Even educators are encouraging pupils to study short stories like *Nothing but the Truth*. They are running away from Shakespeare’. It is further reported that:

Fhatuwani Rasikhanya, head of the department of languages at Mbilwi Secondary in Limpopo, said only 12 out of his 380 matric pupils were studying Shakespeare.

“Shakespeare is interesting, but the language is very strange to the pupils, and the majority struggle to understand it.” He said Shakespeare also had to be taught in detail, which took up a lot of time. “Unfortunately, we are not offering Shakespeare in grade 12 (to First Additional Language pupils). We have to speed up the process and finish the syllabus on time.”

These two educators state three main reasons why Shakespeare is not seen as a viable choice, namely, the perception that he is ‘difficult’, the unfamiliarity of the language, and the time constraints that do not allow for detailed teaching. These reasons have been stated repeatedly for First Additional (second language) learners, even in the apartheid syllabi and

have obviously carried over to the postapartheid classroom experience. While not elaborated on here, the scope of Shakespeare's difficulty has been cited as ranging from historical and cultural distance to challenges with language. Insufficient teaching time means that teachers cannot do the necessary work to make Shakespeare more 'accessible' to the learners. While these reasons are clearly pragmatic and articulate the choice that teachers have to make between ensuring that their learners pass examination, and fulfilling curricular aims, they are equally ideological in nature and suggest a certain clash with the more idealistic policy aims. I am going to look at the difference between Home Language and First Additional Language approaches to literary studies, to elaborate on this argument. I want to step back a little and draw from Es'kia Mphahlele's polemical article, published in 1984, about what he viewed to be the place of English in South Africa in the 1980s and beyond.

Es'kia Mphahlele's somewhat prophetic 'Prometheus in Chains: The Fate of English in South Africa' offers an intriguing view on the place of English in South Africa. The paper uses an allegory to expand on the role that the English language has played socially and what Mphahlele views to be its place in a post-colonial society. Mphahlele's equation of colonial languages with Prometheus' fire already carries within it connotations of the positive and transformative role Mphahlele envisions for English, in the hands of the previously colonised. But what he suggests is not only a fire that transforms on contact, but is itself transformed through appropriation, as a means of articulating 'African' sensibilities. Writing in 1984, Mphahlele argues especially for English as a 'weapon of protest and a means of extending Caliban's nationalism towards political independence and later Pan-African unity' (90). Moving away from the notion of that the use of English is a 'quest for self-knowledge ... [and through translation] a way of re-interpreting ourselves' (94) Mphahlele calls for a more assertive stand wherein 'the black man ... has vested interests in English as a unifying force ... [which is] therefore tied up in the black man's effort to liberate himself' (103). His final plea is for the unchaining of Prometheus from 'the oppressive and unimaginative official structures that are serving and jointly create English syllabuses and massive language and literature programmes [and to] allow for abundant creativity and freedom of the intellect and spirit, while at the same time working towards proficiency' (104).

In conflating, a 'Prospero [who] taught us his language' (Mphahlele 89) and an 'African Prometheus ... [and the] fire he stole to bring to us, against the will of the gods' (Mphahlele 90) and ascribing to English a malleability and liberating characteristic, Mphahlele glosses over the more violent means that enforced colonial languages in African colonies. It also appears that the potential for discursive identity-formation is only really extended to 'the black *man* ... [in his effort] to liberate *himself*' (emphasis mine; Mphahlele 103). The irony in equating English with fire, and its emancipatory possibilities for the subject, is that in a number of 'African' cultures, fire is closely linked to the home space. As a site for cooking as well as gathering the family, the woman's domain if one will, it seems doubly-injurious to exclude women from Mphahlele's vision of a black subject who uses language for 'self-knowledge ... [and] re-interpret[ation]' (94). Even in the face of these contradictions, it seems that despite his articulation of the conflict that arises within African "Calibans" 'towards the language [they] have appropriated and its culture' (Mphahlele 93) for self-definition, Mphahlele could not have foreseen the degree of ambivalence toward English proficiency in postapartheid South Africa.

This ambivalence is recorded in Carolyn McKinney's empirical study on identity and language among black South African youth. In her paper entitled, "'If I speak English, does it make me less black in any way?'" she analyses the 'role language plays in constructing youth identities that are in flux in desegregated suburban schools in South Africa' (6). McKinney discovers that speaking English, and with a certain accent, in postapartheid South Africa, has social implications that relate to class and race. Further that, 'speaking ... a variety of fluent English which approximates to a variety of White South African English (including the key audibility aspect of accent) is ... a form of cultural capital, or more precisely linguistic capital' (10). However this capital is shown to be both desired and despised by black learners, at the schools where interviews were conducted, especially when 'linguistic capital' is gained at the expense of African languages.<sup>12</sup> Proficiency in English is consequently a 'double-edged sword' among those black learners.

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<sup>12</sup> Black learners who speak English with a certain (white) accent or do not speak an African language are often referred to as 'coconuts' or accused of trying to 'be white'. There is a cultural identification often attached to the kind of English spoken. (McKinney)

McKinney's conclusions about the associations made between the use of language, cultural fidelity and social mobility among postapartheid learners are useful in re-thinking the place of English in South Africa. We are forced to move away from the assumption that proficiency is always either aspired to, or reviled. She shows us that both views coexist and are more or less prominent under different social pressures. The weakness of the study for me, however, lies in the focus on black learners only, almost as if the ambivalence of performing race and switching between proficiencies is best understood through 'blackness'. While the conflict presented by language use might have more impact in the lives of black learners because of divisive policies of the past, the, perhaps unintended, by-product of such a focus is assuming that white learners have a less complicated relationship with language. And yet McKinney writes that, 'Given the nature of white hegemony in the economy and the broader cultural environment, it is not surprising that varieties of English spoken by white people have come to define the standard for how English should be spoken' (10). Surely such a position would warrant a discussion on how white learners choose to define themselves in relation to the place of English and other proficiencies in circulation in South African schools. The assertion then that the study investigates the 'role language plays in constructing youth identities that are in flux in desegregated suburban schools in South Africa' (6) does not show adequately that the focus is on black identity-making.

One of the areas in which the complex relation to English in South Africa manifests itself in the curriculum is in the re-definition of language levels: the previously termed 'first language' is now 'Home Language' and 'second language' is 'First Additional Language'. McKinney's assertion that 'apartheid linguistic ideology ... attempted to separate and divide people according to ethnicity matched up with language' (10) is relevant both for the language of instruction as well as the level at which English and Afrikaans could be taken in school. Black pupils during apartheid were only able to take English at second language level, ensuring the perpetuation of an oppressive class structure.<sup>13</sup> Efforts to counter the problematic racialisation of class positions in postapartheid South Africa hence included the dissolution of those boundaries, and to give black students access to former 'model C'

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<sup>13</sup> Afrikaans pupils also took English as a second language but in different education systems and so it was not the same syllabus.

schools, as well as first language English. As such, 'first language' English no longer equates primarily with white English-speakers and 'second language' with black pupils. The associations certainly remain, as shown in McKinney's paper, where there is an 'echoing [of] the prestige attached to White South African English (WSAE) ... and the simultaneous stigmatisation of Black South African English' (14). Differentiating the aim of Home Language from First Additional may suggest to us why *Othello* is seen as an appropriate text for the former and *Romeo and Juliet* offered in the latter. The simplistic division of a 'white' and 'black' syllabus is no longer valid and we need to find careful ways of thinking about the teaching of Shakespeare in a postapartheid syllabus.

Further, the idea of a Home Language holds within it the contradictions which I have mentioned above by complicating the ownership of a language, and to degree, culture, particularly as it pertains to English. As I have noted through McKinney previously, the reality in schools is that 'English has become increasingly hegemonic in the postapartheid era' (10) despite government aims to 'protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages' (Schools Act 1). English's hegemony is often established in opposition to the desired advancement of other languages as well as its global usage, and as recorded by Distiller (2012), its local history. Administratively, it is the language of choice such that both the Schools Act of 1996, and the various policies and circulars responsible for communicating syllabi and the curriculum, are in English. But as I have noted above, the idea of English as a 'home' language accommodates a number of interesting ideas. The word moves with it both issues of language, and often by extension, culture, from the public into the private space. While I am not suggesting that the two spaces, public and private, are clearly demarcated or oppositional, I propose that 'home' suggests a certain conflation of the two, the home and the school.

As defined by the DBE, instead of 'the the language first acquired by learners', Home Language now denotes the 'language proficiency that reflects the mastery of interpersonal communication skills required in social situations and the cognitive academic skills essential for learning across the curriculum' (8). The writers of the CAPS acknowledge that the reconfiguration of 'home' is based on the reality that 'many South African schools do not offer the Home Languages of some or all of the enrolled learners but rather have one or two

languages offered at Home Language level' (8). In a way, 'Prometheus' fire' is brought into the home space as black learners may now also claim proficiency in English as their 'Home Language'. But I see the most important issues between language use and class mobility to be evident in the definition of the First Additional Language.

The role of is based on the DBE's assumption that 'learners do not necessarily have any knowledge of the language when they arrive at school ... [but that] by the time learners enter Grade 10, they should be reasonably proficient ... with regard to both interpersonal and cognitive academic skills' (CAPS 8). Both levels require that the learner be able to use the given language to communicate both socially and within their classroom experience, although to different degrees. It is this comparison that might help us to trace some of the motivations which inform responses in McKinney's study, and to understand the manner in which the DBE seeks to equip learners to negotiate the world. The assumption is that learners will find 'real-world' usefulness in the language but there is an interesting class differentiation which emerges; one based on proficiency rather than race. Home Language learners are trained to 'reflect the mastery of interpersonal communication skills required in social situations' (8) and those taught first additional 'should be reasonably proficient ... with regard to both interpersonal and cognitive academic skills' (9) although even in grade 10, near the end of their school career, 'the reality is that many learners still cannot communicate well in their Additional Language' (9). This reality already puts learners who take English as a First Additional Language at a disadvantage when it comes to studying Shakespeare, as the difficulty of the language is exacerbated.

South Africa's history of the interplay between race and class has ensured for example that 'township learners [have] little access to good proficiency in English' (McKinney 11). Further, the different proficiencies extend well into the teaching of literature, determining both pedagogical approaches and examination. The differentiation matters because of the way in which the history of teaching literature in South Africa has been earmarked for specific of cultural and socio-political ends. The relevance of my discussion lies in the currency that the two language proficiencies carry in the course of identity-construction. Home Language for example is said to be a 'level [which] also provides learners with a literary, aesthetic and imaginative ability that will provide them with the ability to recreate, imagine and empower

their understandings of the world they live in' (CAPS 9). In contrast, First Additional Language learners are expected to 'use their Additional Language and their imagination to find out more about themselves and the world around them. This will enable them to express their experiences and findings about the world orally and in writing' (CAPS 9). There is a clear differentiation here between how the two learners will experience the world and articulate themselves within it discursively. The Home Language learner is equipped with the creative opportunities of language which come with a level of agency as they 'empower their understandings of the world they live in' (CAPS 9). But I argue that it is not only the world which they are allowed to 'recreate' and 'imagine' but their own identity and place in that world. And most importantly, the curriculum gives learners the tools to articulate their subject positions.

For First Additional Language learners however, the language is to be used to perform a more external function, to record the world around them. As they set out to 'find out about themselves' (CAPS 9), ultimately, they will be able to 'express their experiences and findings about the world', (CAPS 9) but not to create or recreate it necessarily. There is of course no conceivable reason why all South African learners have to rely on English proficiency as part of forming their identity, but the ability to do so or not, does have an impact on their participation as citizens. The learners' potential for class and social mobility is in many ways linked to their proficiency.<sup>14</sup> This differentiation may explain the discrepancy evident in the English Paper II memoranda on how learners are expected to approach the question. There is a disclaimer in the Home Language memorandum which states that encourages the examination markers to 'allow for answers that are different, original and show evidence of critical thought and interpretation' (March 2011 HL Memo 15); it does not appear in the First Additional Language memoranda. Further, provision is made for the possible answers of 'more astute (or better taught) candidates (15). By inference, the Home Language is expected to give scope for original and 'critical thought and interpretation' (15) of the literature on offer. And so, while both levels encounter Shakespeare, it is a substantially different one that they meet.<sup>15</sup> The ambivalence of a postapartheid syllabus is that while such characteristics divided between Home Language and First Additional Language would

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<sup>14</sup> McKinney quote

<sup>15</sup> While *Romeo and Juliet* is taught to FAL learners in Grade 12, it is taught in HL in Grade 9.

have been divided along racial lines and used to support racist conclusions, they are more likely to work along a class spectrum in contemporary South Africa, in more complicated ways.

The question might arise, why focus on education policy and examinations when they are an incomplete representation of classroom practice and learners' encounters with Shakespeare? The answer is quite simple: policies such as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) allow us to trace the motivations behind syllabus choices that schools make, although not conclusively. Secondly, the examinations under discussion in this chapter are national and allow for a degree of generalisation when speaking about what learners are faced with in their final year of school. While the presence of Shakespeare in the examination is not reflective of the number of learners that study the plays, it still tells us that in some way the plays are expected to fulfil policy aims. And finally, unlike an analysis of the set texts or even classroom teaching, the examination process forces the DBE to make selections from the syllabus that will in some way be reflective of what they want Grade 12 learners to know. This is to say, examinations partially reflect what the DBE deems most important for the learners to pass in order to 'provid[e] access to higher education', 'facilitat[e] the transition from education systems to the workplace', 'provid[e] employers with a sufficient profile of learner proficiencies' and finally, to equip them for 'meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country' (CAPS 6).

What we can conclude from the discussion above is that Shakespeare does not occupy the same place within the two language levels. Humanist notions of a 'universal' Shakespeare, one who is relevant for all time, are evident in both the *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* questions. Despite the challenges that have been levelled at this approach, the high school syllabus continues to rely on this version of Shakespeare. This is partly because of the glaring absence of the contextual pressures which postapartheid learners are subject to and are constantly negotiating, even when questions are asked about whether 'themes are still relevant today' (FAL March 2011 Paper II 17). That 'today' is a vague one with little historical or even geographic specificity. The link between this Shakespeare and DBE aims for a curriculum that 'promotes knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives' (CAPS 5). Is Shakespeare a representation of the global in the English syllabus?

If the answer is yes, then the widespread choice away from Shakespeare to John Kani's *Nothing but the Truth* complicates that position. Is such a move a sign that teachers and schools favour local over global knowledge systems? This question is hard to answer with conviction.

Firstly as it was suggested in the *Timeslive* article, the decision not to teach Shakespeare is often a pragmatic one. Secondly, Distiller (*Coconuts*) argues convincingly that the binary is superficial because in many ways we have a South African Shakespeare, despite his colonial history. Thirdly, if we assume that not teaching Shakespeare is a move towards the 'local', then what are we to make of the choice made *for* Shakespeare in the Home Language syllabus? Such a choice cannot be explained along racial lines. Unlike some of the *CRUX* articles, it is not merely an attempt at preserving English culture when the schools are racially mixed. But it is in how the learners are expected to use their language level of choice that we see the different versions of Shakespeare. Where the Home Language proficiency is to help the learners imagine and create their world, as I have note above, the First Additional Language is primarily to help them 'get by'. The role of the chosen literature then is not expected to play out in the same way for the learners in their discursive construction of identity. Practically, this carries out in the same way for all the languages. This means then that Xhosa-speaking learners who take isiXhosa at Home Language and English at First Additional Language level and English-speaking learners, who take English as a Home Language and isiXhosa as a First Additional Language, are expected to utilise the two languages quite differently as South African citizens. But it is the very complex history of English in the country, and the social capital that it is seen to offer, that makes this discussion on Shakespeare worth some consideration.

## CONCLUSION

In the 'Rustenburg Times', the official school newsletter for Rustenburg Girls' High School in Cape Town, one of the learners reviews her experience of a 2010 *Romeo and Juliet* production, staged by the University of Cape Town (UCT) Drama School, in this way:

Seeing and hearing the Old English words acted out for real made it easier to understand and gave them more meaning than simply reading in class. The actors, who were university students, were very energetic and their costumes were amazing. The set was simple but effective with one balcony and a staircase. Watching the play made the story-line of two teenagers falling in love, getting married and then finally dying for each other, seem more believable. (Denny 2)

This review is quite challenges a number of assumptions. On the one hand, the learner affirms teachers' concerns that Shakespeare should not be taught because of the difficulty of language. This concern was raised in the *CRUX* journal as far back as 1981 when Chris Morton made 'A Case Against Shakespeare'. His article set off a flurry of defences of Shakespeare, perhaps even on the basis of the provocative title alone. Morton's main contention in the paper is that Shakespeare was never intended for the classroom setting, but for performance. In doing so he also raises the importance of framing Shakespeare historically rather than attempting a simplified transcription into modern English. Lauren Denny's concerns in the review above seem to run parallel to Morton's assertions. She credits 'seeing and hearing the Old English words acted out', alongside staging elements as having more meaning than 'simply reading in class (Denny 2). But I am more intrigued by the last point that she makes which hints more to what she expects out of Shakespeare than anything else.

Instead of affirming Shakespeare's 'relevance', Denny seems to be more interested in the feasibility of the plot; whether or not Shakespeare tells a believable story. As a teenager,

she finds that: 'watching the play made the story-line of two teenagers falling in love, getting married and then finally dying for each other, seem more believable' (Denny 2). This observation tells me that we are missing something when articulating the learner's encounter with Shakespeare. Much like Brimer's disillusioned hitchhiker in chapter 2, who felt that 'Shakespeare and he lived in different worlds' (Brimer 41), this learner feels a distance from Shakespeare that is at least partially breached in the theatre. It would be futile to try and speculate all the reasons for her scepticism without conferring with her, but I suspect that a combination of history and context play a role. Orkin has already stressed the need to read Shakespeare's plays not only historically, but also as 'an element within the larger canvas of our time' (13). I will not rehash the full argument here but the importance of pedagogical approaches, which engage with the learners' context, cannot be emphasised enough. Certainly as I have demonstrated in chapter 2, while looking at Ffolliott's discussion on *Othello*, there is a danger of going too far in the opposite direction and losing the literary aspect of the play altogether. Distiller has also noted that the importance of contextual analysis is often obscured by the tendency of 'privileging the Shakespearean signifier as universally human' (*Coconuts* 121).

An argument may be levelled that, to expect such nuanced readings from learners may be too much, especially while they are learning the terminology with which to speak about dramatic texts. The DBE also seems reluctant about the place for more complex interpretations by claiming that 'Literary interpretation is essentially a university-level activity, and learners in this phase do not have to learn this advanced level of interpretation' (CAPS 17). They do not give a reason why this undefined activity need only be undertaken beyond secondary education. If, for the purposes of the thesis, more careful reading of Shakespeare in the classroom and examination would include engagement with the context in which they are read, it seems to me that this would work towards fulfilling policy aims. My contention here is not that facilitating such encounters would characterise a 'correct' way of reading Shakespeare; in fact I am inclined in the opposite direction. My question is why such a project, of offering a politicised Shakespeare, circulating within a uniquely postapartheid context, is not framed as a desirable approach within schools. To exemplify, I want to assume for a moment, for the sake of argument, that Lauren Denny does not find the story of *Romeo and Juliet* believable, because they are teenagers who get married. This

is reasonable for a Grade 9 pupil living in an urban area like Cape Town. But a recent story in the news relating to a man who has been sentenced to 22 year in prison for *ukuthwala*,<sup>16</sup> suggests that Denny's response to the play is not universal.

For the 14 year old girl in the news who was kidnapped and forcefully married, with the permission of her family, as part of a tradition of *ukuthwalwa*, the concept of getting married as a teenager, while under horrifying circumstances, is not foreign. She, or someone familiar with the culture, might have a greater understanding of teenagers getting married, particularly Capulet's insistence that Juliet marry Paris. Without oversimplifying the cultural links, the point I am making here is that there is value in letting learners engage with the plays in ways that reflect their unique contexts. If this takes place in the classrooms already, it is certainly not reflected in the examinations. Subsequently, the insistence on teaching a 'universal' Shakespeare in the classroom is doubly problematic as it limits the possibilities for resistance as well as construction of identities for the learners. Both Plaatje and Modisane's appropriations for instance, were only really possible outside of the schooling system. Surely within a postapartheid schooling system, which prides itself in fixing past wrongs, contentious readings of Shakespeare, and the nation and citizenship, should have a place 'behind the desk'. To illustrate how I have come to this conviction, I want to reflect on the main conclusions in this discussion.

There are two key aspects of Greenblatt's theory of social energy exchange which have a bearing on how we might re-think the relationship between the learner and the text in the classroom. First is his assertion that 'theatre historians have challenged the whole notion of the text as the central, stable locus of theatrical meaning. There are textual traces-a bewildering mass of them- but it is impossible to take the 'text itself' as the perfect unsubstitutable, freestanding container of all its meanings' (Greenblatt 3). There is a lot at stake in this discussion, in this case, the learner's ability to constitute themselves as citizens of a democratic country, and to articulate their subjectivity. Therefore when either the learner or the text are set up as 'freestanding container[s] of all meanings' (Greenblatt 3)

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<sup>16</sup> Sourced from <http://citizen.co.za/127952/gender-group-welcomes-ukuthwala-sentence/>  
*Ukuthwalwa* is a practice 'which is associated with some African traditions, involves the kidnapping of women and under-aged girls, and leads to forced marriage'. In this story, the girls grandmother received money for her granddaughter and forced her to return to her 'husband' when she escaped.

this leads to the effacement of contextual influences and historical processes on how meaning is made. Thus, as Orkin has noted, such an approach, inherent in the teaching of 'universal', values does not give the student room to question 'the particular position he or she occupies in the established system of domination and subordination' (10). If we return to Sinfield's assertion then, we can conclude that the education system prepares subjects to occupy certain positions in society, but also ensures that they do not challenge that place. Ashcroft, et al. have suggested that in literary studies, the text, as the repository of meaning, was used to represent the relationship between coloniser and colonised as a result of intrinsic and natural characteristics in both groups (425-6).

In my discussion on the Grade 12 examinations I have also shown the subtle ways in which examination papers articulate the opinions which learners should adopt, in relation to Shakespeare's plays, and ultimately, their world. The memoranda reveal that instead of soliciting the learner's actual opinion, the examination papers favour prescribed ideas about themes and characters which are often termed 'universal' or intrinsically 'human'. I want to suggest here that perhaps South Africa has a special investment in characterising certain value systems and themes in the plays as 'universal'. The dehumanising colonial and apartheid systems ensured that only a few members of society were privy to the most basic human rights, and worked hard to exclude those it deemed as less than human. The formation of Bantustans during apartheid for instance, as a part of the 'separate development' policy sought to fragment the state and to re-configure the parameters of the South African nation. The education system also became a point of disseminating divisive ideas about both nationhood and the subject. In one example, Johnson established that in the 1950s, 'the new syllabus [Bantu Education] showed a dilution of the "standards" established for white schools [and] English teaching made adjustments to suit the demands of the different racially constituted education departments' (170). Johnson then continues that in one example, while *Antony and Cleopatra* was being examined in white schools, a question that appeared in the black syllabus paper was as follows: 'A neighbour's goats are constantly breaking into your garden. You have told him about this, but he does nothing. Write a letter of complaint to the headman of your location' (170).

The question's aims are utilitarian in an incredibly demeaning manner. The pupil's negotiation of class structures is reduced to deferring to the 'headman of the location' (170). And while one cannot assert that studying Shakespeare signifies higher quality education, without perpetuating a problematic set of assumptions, the effects of a question such as this one, would have been devastating black pupils during apartheid. To return to Greenblatt's statement above that it is 'theatre historians [who] have challenged' the stability of the text as the source of meaning (3), I am led to the second aspect on which I hinge my final discussion. Greenblatt emphasises that 'the theatre manifestly addresses its audience as a collectivity. The model is not, as with the nineteenth-century novel, the individual reader who withdraws from the public world of affairs to the privacy of the hearth, but the crowd that gathers together in the public play space' (Greenblatt 5). In this study, I am attracted to the collective nature of the theatre, and its ability for a more obvious exchange between the performance (text) and the audience (reader). I feel that it is in this relationship that we might take away something useful for the encounter between Shakespeare and the South African context, as well as Shakespeare and the learner.

This is not to suggest that learners put on Shakespeare plays, or go watch productions, even when resources do not allow. Rather, I am interested in the process of collective creation which relaxes the boundaries between the text and the learner allowing for greater social exchange. I suspect that this may happen in classrooms already, through discussions, but it is never translated into the examinations. I am not able to work out the mechanics of how this might be done, in this thesis, and my limited knowledge of pedagogy in South Africa limits me further. This is an area in which further research could be done. An important aspect of this of course is to engage with school learners in a sustained way, to discover how they view their encounter with Shakespeare. Denny's review above suggests that the learners' views are likely to divert from current curricular aims. That being said, I am not suggesting that curriculum aims and examination question have a direct effect on how learners constitute their identity and articulate their place in the world. McKinney's work with South African learners has shown that it is a much more complex process which is affected by a myriad of contextual issues. Therefore the cultural capital that proficiency in English carries, rather than being an assured place at the top of the linguistic food chain, forces learners to negotiate different aspects of their lives in complicated ways. For example

the inability to speak one's home language has been shown to be a problem in rural areas and townships (McKinney) even when high proficiency and the 'right' accent is allowed for a different position in multiracial schools. My own experience has taught me this.

Shakespeare seems to have no place in this process, at least not explicitly.

The importance of thinking along the lines of collective creation is encapsulated by Jan Kott who asserts that, 'Shakespeare has always been influenced by those who interpret him ... we have a kind of double dialectical relationship- the changing times and the changing images of Shakespeare' (Quoted in Eslom 12). It seems to me that while the curriculum, past and present, seeks to transform learners through an encounter with texts, it does not always consider that those texts themselves undergo a degree of transformation. Plaatje, Modisane and even van Heyningen have shown that that transformation will take place even outside of official school borders. Learners should surely be made active participants in the process of constituting themselves as citizens and in constructing ideas about their country in interesting and alternative ways. These ways will hopefully filter all the way into the examination of the texts that they encounter.

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