# The Stage and The Slammer

## An examination of Shakespeare in prison rehabilitation programs

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the goals of prison rehabilitation programs in which inmates study and perform Shakespeare's plays. By studying the expectations placed on Shakespeare within this context, the work comments on Shakespeare's position within society and the educational potential with which he is viewed both by academics and American audiences. The goals for rehabilitation, as set out by the directors of each program, include lessons of self-reflection, empathy, cultural literacy, performance, insight, teamwork, and playfulness. This thesis observes the ways in which Shakespeare's texts respond to these demands, and the consequences of these goals for inmate actors. The chapters focus specifically on *Measure for Measure* and *The Tempest*, the groups' current plays. The thesis also discusses the implications of teaching acting and performance to inmates and the rehabilitation effects of these practices.

The text is divided into two chapters, each focusing on an individual program and the inmate participants involved. More specifically, the chapters consist of narratives of the visits to each prison, in italic text, and analysis of the ideas presented during the narrative in normal text. While the directors of the programs and critics are called by their surnames, inmate participants are referred to by their first names to preserve their anonymity. The thesis does not aim to conclude with an assessment of the effectiveness of these programs—a subjective distinction that only the participants can decide. Instead, it is a presentation of the expectations held in American society of the benefits of studying Shakespeare.

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# Introduction: Desiring Shakespeare

At many points while writing this thesis, I have found myself wishing that I hated Shakespeare. I began with the desire to find a perspective distinct from those expressed in the millions of sources sitting on the shelves of the campus libraries. I wanted to think critically, to question the sustained and supposedly universal presence of Shakespeare both in the academy and in the minds of many Americans. I wanted to understand what readers and audiences of Shakespeare actually gain from studying and watching his plays. And I wanted to question my own penchant for the early modern playwright who lived from 1564 to 1616. Was it all arbitrary? Could Shakespeare's popularity just be about his canonical status? Were these 400-year old plays really teaching present-day Americans anything that they could apply to their own lives? In an attempt to address these questions I decided to turn to a unique site for Shakespearean study: prisons. It seemed significant to me that rehabilitators would choose Shakespeare as a source of insight for inmates locked up for charges ranging from drug offenses to rape and murder. Was this choice arbitrary as well, or was there something inherent about his works that could accomplish these goals of rehabilitation?

Fall of 2006 was a popular time for studying Shakespeare in Ann Arbor. The Royal Shakespeare Company did a three-week residency here, their only stop in the United States, and in addition to performances of *The Tempest*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Julius Caesar* there were educational events: interviews with Patrick Stewart and Harriet Walter, keynote lectures on the history of the RSC, exhibitions of sets, costumes, and historical images, and roundtable discussions led by professors from various disciplines discussing different aspects of the plays. I found myself situated between two

very different worlds of Shakespeare with somewhat similar goals. While on one hand the RSC exemplifies a classical theatre company keeping Shakespeare's works alive—staging them for the eyes of modern audiences—the prison programs that I visited are largely untrained amateur companies, trying to learn from the processes of reading and performance. But watching both caused me to ask the same question: why Shakespeare?

Jonathan Freedman, associate chair of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan, is one of the professors responsible for deciding what requirements English majors at the University must complete to graduate. Although these decisions affect the schedules of English majors, they also have canonical implications, as required classes reflect the knowledge of the next generation of literary critics, journalists, writers, and publishers. And although there is currently a pre-1600 distribution requirement, Freedman once remarked that the department had discussed instituting a requirement to ensure that all English majors would experience Shakespeare's plays. This proposal never went through; the administrators discovered that almost all students were opting to take Shakespeare classes on their own, making such a requirement unnecessary.

The demand for Shakespeare classes doesn't stop with just English majors. In Fall 2006 there were five courses offered which were solely about Shakespeare and at least four other courses where his works were incorporated into the syllabus. The most popular of these was English 367, an intermediate level Shakespeare lecture class with about 300 students, making it one of the largest the department offers. Taught by Ralph Williams, a prominent professor on campus known for captivating lectures, this class satisfies the pre-1600 requirement, making it appealing for students majoring within the

department. But the demand for the class stretched beyond this group, as about fifty percent of the students registered for the course were non-majors. A similar trend held true for English 407, a class on Shakespeare in Performance taught by a newer and lesser-known professor, where out of the 52 students about one half were non-majors. And in English 467, a class built around the visit from the RSC, eighty percent of the class, which had 32 students, were non-majors. These numbers mark the popularity that Shakespeare has, not just amongst English majors, but also within the greater university community. Other pre-1600 classes offered did not receive the same demand. Between two classes in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature there was only one non-major student.[1]

Why do students choose to study Shakespeare, and what do they learn from these classes? Shakespeare's popularity is not new. As Charles Frey points out in Experiencing Shakespeare, the playwright has a long history in America, despite his original dismissal because of the colonists' desires to remain unaffiliated with anything British.[2] Since then, Americans have viewed Shakespeare as a source of moral teachings. From classroom settings to quotes in presidential speeches, Shakespeare appears as "seemingly middle-road, middle class, timeless, universal, safe, and sane" (132).

Michael Bristol's Shakespeare's America America's Shakespeare also looks at the history of Shakespeare's importance within the American consciousness. He writes that the ethical or moral lessons Americans have found in Shakespeare over the nation's

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[1] This data comes from the registration records of the Department of English Language and Literature.

[2] Charles Frey, Experiencing Shakespeare (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 125-126. Hereafter cited in the text.

history are the result of an idealization of the European past within American history[3]—an association that gives Shakespeare an enduring reputation within high culture. As Bristol points out, an advertisement with Charlie the Tuna, who tries to recite Shakespeare to prove that he has "good taste," demonstrates how the playwright has become equated with an archetype for traditions of high culture (15). Bristol presents the neoconservative viewpoint that the process of teaching Shakespeare in schools is an effort at solidifying traditionalist views in the minds of students. But he also demonstrates how, in a text regarding the founding of America's constitution, John Adams manages to use Shakespeare for his own agenda, one that counters the ideals of the European past in favor of new American values (54). Bristol uses this example to question the creation and propagation of a literary tradition as a means of establishing culture. His writing provides a myriad of possibilities for explaining Shakespeare's contributions to our mindsets as Americans. Perhaps, then, students of Shakespeare, both in academia and prisons, are intrigued by precisely what Bristol questions: the Shakespearean tradition.

A great deal of scholarship claims that this tradition stems from a search for lessons in universal truth, teachings that will apply to present-day audiences just as we imagine they once applied to early modern audiences. Lawrence Levine writes of a change that occurred in perceptions of Shakespeare beginning in the mid-twentieth century, when Shakespeare was no longer considered a kind of "everyman" figure, but instead a member of what Levine refers to as "polite culture":

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[3] Michael Bristol, Shakespeare's America America's Shakespeare (New York: Routledge, 1990), 16. Hereafter cited in the text.

> He had become the possession of the educated portions of society who disseminated his plays for the enlightenment of the average folk who were to swallow him not for their entertainment but for their education, as a respite from—not as a normal part of—their usual cultural diet.[4]

Shakespeare's change in position from a source of inspiration for everyone to a form of education delivered from the cultural elite to the masses marks a decisive shift. In many ways this reflects the ideology behind prison programs, which provide examples of academics bringing the lessons of Shakespeare into the environment of underprivileged inmates.

Douglas Lanier's Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture responds to this idea. Lanier presents the work of Shakespeare as embodying two opposing concepts: on the one hand, the plays are considered to be akin to the Bible in their portrayal of fundamental truths; on the other hand, they can be crude or profane.[5] As a result of this dichotomy, Shakespeare has been used over time to satisfy any agenda. But what about some sort of "authentic" education from Shakespeare? What do students of Shakespeare gain from their knowledge of the plays? What happens when those supposed lessons and "truths" are brought to people under lock and key, existing in extreme circumstances? Can Shakespeare stand up to the prison context?

With these questions in mind, I visited two prison programs in Fall 2006 and Winter 2007. My position as an ethnographer of these populations had a considerable

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[4] Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 31. Hereafter cited in the text.
[5] Douglas Lanier, Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14. Hereafter cited in the text.

effect on the research done for this project[6]. It is important to note that while I attempted to make myself invisible during my visits, I could not deny the inherent differences between the pasts of the participants in these programs and my own personal history. Because I am a twenty-one-year-old woman, when I entered these environments the populations were inevitably aware of my presence. As an outsider, it was difficult for me to judge completely accurately the reality of these program populations. In addition, the observation periods for both programs were short; I spent only a few hours with each population, only one hour of which was dedicated to question-and-answer sessions. The directors of the programs were also present during these sessions, a factor that undoubtedly affected the participants' responses. I have tried to keep these factors in mind in analyzing the research materials that I collected during the visits.

Given these somewhat limited circumstances, I have attempted to portray these populations as accurately as possible. I have, for the most part, abstained from using the publications of other journalists and writers studying prison programs, as I cannot judge the contexts of that research. A couple of exceptions are the This American Life radio presentation of St. Louis, Missouri's Prison Performing Arts program and the New York Times's coverage of The Shakespeare Program in Racine, Wisconsin, where I used the published information to back up my own research. Other coverage of Shakespeare programs in prisons, including Jean Trounstine's Shakespeare Behind Bars,[7] helped me to contemplate the pertinent issues behind Shakespeare in prison rehabilitation, although they did not end up in the actual writing of the thesis.

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[6] Anthropological work done by Clifford Geertz on the difficulty of the outsider's gaze in ethnographic studies caused me to consider these implications.

[7] Jean Trounstine, Shakespeare Behind Bars (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

By looking at these prison programs, I hope to clarify some of the expectations that our society holds for the playwright and the ways in which those expectations are fulfilled through the study and performance of these plays. What follows represents case studies of two unique populations, linked together by their interest in Shakespeare and their desire to modify their current mindsets from a mentality of crime and punishment to something different. In examining Shakespeare's role in the processes of rehabilitation, these chapters consider the power of Shakespearean drama and its role in the education—or re-education—of a discrete segment of American society.

# Chapter One: Kentucky[8]

## Preparations

*Prior to my visit to Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in LaGrange, Kentucky, I have spent the evening with the parents and younger sister of a friend of mine. Over a meal of lasagna, her parents warn me about my visit the following day. Her father says, "Prison is full of big bad guys, luckily the half with guns are on your side." Her mother warns me not to go to the bathroom when I am in the prison, as this would leave me vulnerable and alone. We sit in their living room after dinner watching the World Series game on television that night, while their two golden retrievers sleep on the floor nearby. I realize that I have little idea of what to expect of my visit the following day. I have blanket feelings of fear and nervousness, but I am also aware both of my naïveté, and of my desire to engage myself with this community, to learn about them, and to learn from them.*

*I wake up in the morning and get dressed. I have selected the most unflattering sweater that I own, a Christmas gift from my grandmother a few years ago, and a baggy pair of wool pants. My hair is pulled back from my face in a bun, and I'm wearing my glasses. I take a picture of myself in the mirror before I leave the house. I look sterile, stripped of my personal style. I think of myself as a clean palette. I'm going to prison to be invisible, to see without being seen. But I cannot erase the preconceived notions of the society around me from my mind. I cannot forget the warnings of my friends and family.*

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[8] Unless otherwise cited, the information in this chapter comes from a visit to a rehearsal of the Shakespeare Behind Bars program on October 27, 2006. The visit consisted of an interview with Mr. Tofteland, an opportunity to sit in on the rehearsal, and a question and answer period with the participants. The text in italics documents my narrative of the visit, while the normal typeface contains analysis and discussion with the program's director.

*I cannot forget how very different this new environment will be from the comfort of the previous evening.*

*The Director of the Shakespeare Behind Bars program, Curt Tofteland, has sent me a list of rules for visitors. For instance you must be eighteen years of age to enter the prison, and head apparel is not permitted unless it is of a religious nature. These are just a couple of the many regulations. Yet when Tofteland picks me up at a Starbucks in Louisville on the day of my visit he is wearing a brown beret, which stays on as we enter the prison. He has the look of someone who lives thinking about the Renaissance period - his goatee, his thick square-framed glasses, his earth-tone clothes - he resembles a stereotypical high school English teacher. It occurs to me, as we cross through the metal detectors of the entrance and walk through the multiple sets of double doors, that Tofteland's outfit stands out even more in the sterility of the prison setting. All of the other men are wearing khakis and numbers.*

Shakespeare Behind Bars has been in operation at Luther Luckett, a medium-security prison, for eleven years. The program began as an exchange between troubled youths and prisoners; each group would read a book and then meet to exchange thoughts. It was meant to scare kids out of the life of crime by forcing them to recognize the intelligence of inmates suffering in the trap of imprisonment as a result of their mistakes. Now, without the youths and with Shakespeare, the prisoners of varying ages work together to put on a performance of a play and to prove their intellect to themselves.

This year those efforts are dedicated to *Measure for Measure*. They began rehearsing without Tofteland in May, memorizing their lines and gaining a basic understanding of the text, consisting of a comprehension of the general plot lines and

relationships between characters. When the director joins them in September the goal is to see "how deep we can go." A few inmates recite this phrase with him during a rehearsal: it is a motto. Now they begin working through the play line by line, analyzing Shakespeare's rich language in search of character motivations and themes. When I sit in on the rehearsal in late October all of the men are off-book and are deeply entrenched in the rehearsal process. They meet in the chapel in the afternoon a few days each week and rehearse scenes in preparation for the performance.

*Measure for Measure* seems an appropriate selection for a group of inmates. Much of the play takes place in a prison, and the characters deal with issues of law, justice, and incarceration throughout the drama. In Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor, an account of a series of performances of Shakespearean tragedies done by the RSC at a secure psychiatric hospital in England, Mike Snelgrove, the actor playing Angelo, speaks of the insights that he gained about the play from performing in the institutionalized setting:

> As I stood at the end of a corridor waiting for the play to start, and just looked out through an iron door into the courtyard, I suddenly just thought, God, you know this is what being in prison is like, I hadn't registered that before. It's awful. Thinking outside is "there" and I am "here". Liberty has gone. It gave the play and some of its themes a resonance. You say the words about being in prison, or sending people to prison, which Angelo does a lot. He sends everybody to prison. But until you stand there and look out

> through a barred door you don't actually appreciate what losing your liberty means.[9]

**Entrances**

*There are twelve men present. They arrange the chairs in a square in the middle of the chapel and sit down, talking amongst themselves as other participants wander in. They don't seem surprised by my presence, and it's not surprising; this group has received a great deal of media coverage, including a full-length documentary, and they are used to visitors. They are all different ages, and once they begin talking about the play I become aware of the even greater diversity in education level. Racially, the white inmates greatly outnumber the blacks, but Tofteland assures me that it is a coincidence that fewer black inmates came to the rehearsal on that day. Still, the black participants sit away from the others, and participate far less in the rehearsal. One of them says nothing at all, and toward the end of the rehearsal he will stand up and exit the room. He does not seem to be a part of their community.*

*Tofteland begins the meeting by bringing up the question of the final performance date. They must decide as a group when they will be ready to perform the play. Some of the inmates have expressed a desire to perform in December — one likes the idea of a holiday performance — and many of the more experienced inmates feel that they will be ready to perform at that early date. But it is clear from the conversation that not all of them agree — some of the newer participants have taken on significant roles and feel that they won't be ready in time for a holiday performance. The casting for Shakespeare Behind Bars is done entirely by the participants. After reading through the play, they*

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[9] Murray Cox, ed., Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1992), 99.

*have chosen the roles that they want to play on their own. The process allows for the inmates to take control, and therefore to have ownership over the decisions that are made.*

*Spending just a few hours with these men changes my perspective on prisoners entirely. The nervousness that I feel crossing through the security check subsides as I grow comfortable in the environment of the rehearsal. The men joke around with each other and with Tofteland. During the discussion of the final performance date one of the inmates expresses his desire to perform the show when his grandmother comes to visit. She lives in Colorado and it has been years since he has seen her.*

*"Do you need a group hug?" the inmate sitting next to him asks.*

*He is joking, of course, and they all laugh. But it occurs to me that the men are in effect giving one another a group hug as they work together on this project. And though they laugh at this pop-therapy exercise, their laughter solidifies the community.*

The most notable characteristic of this group is how close they are as a community. Despite their differences and the impersonal and harsh prison environment of fenced-in spaces and numbered uniforms, these men have made themselves into a support group and are learning to put the community before individual concerns. This is visible in the casting choices for this year's performance. Many of the more experienced participants, some of whom have been working with Tofteland since the beginning, have taken on smaller roles to allow the new guys to learn more from the process. They are part of an ensemble; the program is no longer about their personal wishes but instead about how they will get the most out of the play as a group.

Interestingly, this characteristic links Shakespeare Behind Bars with more traditional acting groups from the early modern period, including Shakespeare's own company. As James Shapiro points out, Shakespeare's plays were always written with his company, the Chamberlain's Men, in mind. Additionally, when the company moved to the Globe Theater the investors in the construction were five actor-sharers, with Shakespeare included. They were the first actors in history to cover the costs, and reap the benefits, of their acting company. As Shapiro writes, "The degree of trust and of mutual understanding (all the more important in a company that dispensed with a director) was extraordinary."[10]

The Royal Shakespeare Company also follows this model of cooperation, in that they work as an ensemble, rotating roles amongst the many talented actors within the company. The RSC website describes the motives for this format, as the company allows audiences to see the actors in many different types of roles while the more inexperienced actors receive training[11]. But this standard for acting companies is rare within the entertainment industry today. As a recent New York Times article about Oscar nominations points out, there are no Oscar awards given for total cast performance in a movie. Despite the popularity of Oscar-winning ensemble films such as Crash (2004) and Traffic (2000), where many different equally important plot lines are overlapped to create a performance in which there is no lead role, nominations are still only given to

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[10] James Shapiro, A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 6.
[11] "About the RSC (December 2006)," http://www.rsc.org.uk/aboutthersc/AboutTheRSC.aspx.

individual actors[12]. In a way, the type of cooperation that I witnessed in Shakespeare Behind Bars's community, though rare in the acting community, is analogous to the practices of Shakespeare's company.

But, as always, rehearsals are a struggle. The experienced participants want to hurry up the process and don't see the benefit of waiting until April. In the car ride to Luckett, Tofteland has explained this dilemma: "It's about the group agenda, not the individual agenda," he says. "And you're dealing with egocentric, narcissistic personalities. Their whole lives they're thinking, 'How does this affect me?' That's part of the habilitation process."

Tofteland's use of the term "habilitation" rather than "rehabilitation" is deliberate. He explains that inmates come from environments in which they never had a chance to learn these lessons in the first place. For many it is not a matter of *returning* to an earlier state of emotional and psychological stability, but finding a way to create that stability for the first time.[13]

**Dialogue**

*When the discussion begins Larry is one of the first to speak. A skinny guy of average height, he appears relatively young in the group's age range and is new to the program. He has taken the role of Isabella. In his own words, he's been "acting for years — acting like an idiot," but this year will mark his first time on stage with Shakespeare Behind Bars. Larry says he knows he could perform in December, but he's*

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[12] Mark Olsen, "All Together Now: When the Cast is the Real Star," New York Times (14 January 2007).

[13] I will continue to use the term "rehabilitation" unless quoting Tofteland. While I agree with the notion behind Tofteland's term, I do not feel that it necessarily applies to all inmate participants and therefore find "rehabilitation" to be a more overarching term.

*not sure how deep his understanding of his role would be. Tofteland reminds them that the program is about the process and not the final product.*

*"We're not trying to become an acting company," Tofteland says. "This program has never been about performance."*

John Barton's Playing Shakespeare offers insights into the differences between rehearsal and performance. Barton presents transcripts of nine workshops done by the RSC, which were presented on London Weekend Television in 1984. The book provides readers with a glimpse of the kind of work that is done in rehearsal, as a means of offering insight into acting Shakespeare. The importance of process, on which Tofteland focuses, is highlighted here as well. In a dialogue with Barton, Ian McKellen, an actor with the company, stresses its significance:

> Have you been struck, watching your actors work at a conversational level in this studio with the cameras very close, how speeches have taken on a life that you haven't heard before? You may recognise it because you sit in the rehearsal-room close to the actors and you are used to that conversational level. But it's so rare in the theatre—even in the small theatres where we sometimes work—to get that intimacy in which the audience can catch the breath being inhaled before it is exhaled on the line, and feel the excitement and certainty that what is happening is for real. The voice is wonderfully communicated but it isn't projected. The

> force behind it isn't exaggerated; there's nothing getting in the way.[14]

As an actor, McKellen has noticed the difference between speaking the lines as conversation and as performance. Barton also notices the difference between rehearsal and performance later in the text: "In rehearsal we open ourselves to as many possibilities as we can but in performance we have to define and be specific. Whatever we put in must lead to something else being left out" (190). The process of rehearsal involves exploration through the text and an understanding of the many layers of interpretation that lie within. In a performance, however, the actor must select from among those interpretative choices. Tofteland's concentration on process over product gives the participants of the program the opportunity to fully explore the play.

*Next, the question of touring comes up. After a few successful years of the program, Tofteland managed to get permission to take the show on the road, and now the group tours to other prisons in the surrounding area. Leonard, an inmate who has participated in Shakespeare Behind Bars for seven years, suggests that the trees will be in bloom in April, making that a better time to go on tour. They joke about the time that Hal got carsick in the bus, and I realize that this is their one chance to leave the prison gates. The program is their opportunity for mobility. While the desire for this mobility on the part of the inmates is certainly understandable, I wonder if escaping the prison boundaries, if only temporarily, could have rehabilitating effects on the participants.*

*In the end they all agree that performing in April is the better option. Hal agrees. He has been involved in Shakespeare Behind Bars since the beginning but dropped out*

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[14] John Barton, Playing Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1984), 185. Hereafter cited in the text.

*for a year and a half because of a disagreement with Tofteland over the importance of a good performance. Their references to the argument do not reveal much of its nature, but it is easy to see how an actor interested in making the best performance possible would quickly become frustrated with some of the more therapeutic aspects of the rehearsals. The director, for instance, does not give any blocking directions to the actors, but instead encourages them to move their bodies as they feel their characters would. Tofteland's refusal to manipulate the staging requires a great deal of trust in the actor. Still, while this practice encourages the prisoners to get into the mindsets of their characters, because it does not necessarily lead to the most graceful blocking for the performance, I can understand why a participant who wanted to perfect the presentation of the play would dispute this policy.*

*Tofteland calls the situations where someone drops out of the program "vacations"; he says that once you become a member of Shakespeare Behind Bars you are always a member. As a result, participants don't have to lose their pride when they decide to return to the program after a hiatus. The discussion regarding the date of this year's performance shows evidence for Hal's change in perspective since his "vacation." While he was clearly initially in favor of a performance in December, he says that he now agrees with Larry and the others. Tofteland jokes that their initial reactions were self-centered.*

*"What about me?" he shrieks jokingly, poking fun at them. They all laugh.*

Just watching the men work out the logistics for their performance makes it abundantly clear that they are learning valuable lessons by participating in this program. Tofteland says that the main concept of Shakespeare Behind Bars is to create an

environment antithetical to the prison experience. He explains to me that prisons are built around rules. In order to train law-breakers to respect authority, prisons create a system of rules that they must follow. They have hours in which they have to eat, places they must be, and mandated rehabilitation programs they must attend. A prisoner who follows the rules is deemed a good inmate and has a better chance of making parole.

Much of this prison philosophy of mandated rules is necessary for security reasons. Kelsey Kauffman's Prison Officers and Their World describes the case of Walpole, a maximum-security prison, between 1976 and 1980, a particularly violent time in American prisons. Noting the difficulties that prison officers face in doing their demanding jobs Kauffman writes, "Prison officials are expected to punish, deter, isolate, and rehabilitate offenders while at the same time maintaining order and inmate productivity."[15] Without the rules that Tofteland speaks against, prisons would become places of great chaos and violence. Kauffman's example of Walpole demonstrates what occurs when officers lose control over the inmates: the walls of the prison become covered in excrement, violent crimes are committed against other inmates and officers, and rats and insects roam free over the trashed yard (81). Still, while these rules may be necessary to stabilizing incarceration, Tofteland argues that the system teaches prisoners very little about being a successful member of society.

Instead of creating more rules with his program, Tofteland has based Shakespeare Behind Bars on a system of values. The program is not mandatory, and inmates do not receive college credit for their participation. It doesn't count toward parole either. Any inmate who participates in Shakespeare Behind Bars does so by his own volition and

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[15] Kelsey Kauffman, Prison Officers and Their World (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 45. Hereafter cited in the text.

must find time to memorize lines and rehearse within the tight schedules of coursework, mandated programs, and prison jobs. Many of the participants work together in the print shop, and they make references to their busy schedules. Since Tofteland understands that inmates must miss some rehearsals, instead of implementing a rule that would define an unacceptable number of absences, he says that the participants should adhere to the values that they share, one of which is to make the program a priority. If an inmate is busy with work and has missed many rehearsals, another participant will be his understudy so that the rehearsals can continue.

But the distinction between a rule and a value presents a blurry line. While both would be principles of conduct for the group, there does seem to be an inherent difference between the two terms. The value system is not ordained by the authority figures above them but is a group of accepted ideals on which they have decided. In addition, the distinction between a rule and a value becomes clear in the case of a prisoner who does not follow the ordained behavior principles: he would have to be punished in some way. However, a prisoner could make a mistake and deviate from the values established by the group while still holding those values as ideals in his mind. By referring to the organizing principles of the program as values instead of rules, the group becomes aware of the importance of holding their own values in life instead of simply following rules for the sake of the authority above them.

Despite this education in values, my skepticism regarding the choice of Shakespeare remains. Clearly, participating in Shakespeare Behind Bars does have benefits for the inmates, such as the sense of community and learning to work together, but are these the results of the work done with Shakespeare or of the cooperative

organizational factors described above? I continue to search for ways in which the process of interacting with the play brings these prisoners to a higher level of rehabilitation.

**Goals**

As Tofteland describes the program, its first goal—and the most prominent from my observations—is to encourage the participants to engage in self-reflection. During the first years of the program Tofteland worked with a therapist who facilitated dialogue on the psychological difficulties that the prisoners faced as these came up in discussions and rehearsals of the text. Although there is no longer a therapist volunteer involved, the rehearsal continues to double as a group therapy session. The men all come from different backgrounds and have been convicted of a variety of crimes, but they share the desire to contemplate those backgrounds and crimes and their effects on the prisoners' mental stability. Through a process of self-reflection the prisoners begin to understand the origins and emergence of their impulses toward crime, and begin to understand how to avoid those impulses in the future. They must come to terms with what they've done as they create their own code of values.

Is this trajectory very different from that of the average citizen? How do people set up their own codes of values? There are laws, which the government has decided are the rules of the game, well established in American history. And then there are social norms: values that we are taught as young children, or which we supposedly inherently know. The backgrounds of these prisoners are certainly distinct from the average university student, but it shouldn't be taken for granted that we all work to create emotional and psychological stability. Does Shakespeare help everyone with this?

Perhaps these participants are just behind in the process of gaining these values because they have been excluded from society as a result of their criminal lifestyles. Living in prison, an area segregated from the rest of society, these men cannot learn from their law-abiding peers. But does it follow that they instead must turn to Shakespeare?

Many rehabilitation programs across the country have inmates write their own narratives or works of drama to encourage them to contemplate their pasts. But this system poses a problem for an inmate who lacks the emotional vocabulary to even begin to consider the psychological ramifications of his own interiority. In a way, all reading practices can accomplish this for an engaged reader. Arguably, if literature is at all effective, it is capable of offering exemplary solutions to the mental predicaments of the reader. Tofteland believes that Shakespeare's plays are especially effective in offering that vocabulary to participants. He tells me that Shakespeare was the first author to portray the inner characteristics of the personalities in his plays, through the use of soliloquy. Certainly, from time immemorial, critics and high school English teachers have commented on Shakespeare's understanding of "the human condition." And Harold Bloom's immensely popular Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human goes so far as to argue that Shakespeare invented the concept of personality. By creating deep characters with intricate motivations and thoughts, Shakespeare has given us a definition of what it means to be human. Speaking of *Measure for Measure*, Bloom writes:

> In *Measure for Measure*, everyone is an abyss of inwardness, but since Shakespeare takes care to keep each character quite opaque, we are frustrated at being denied an entry into anyone's consciousness. This has the singular effect of giving us a play

> without any minor characters: Barnardine's somehow is as large a role as the Duke's or Isabella's.[16]

The moment of a soliloquy gives the audience and the actors an opportunity to witness the thoughts of the character speaking. Instead of remaining lost in thoughts of their own predicaments, the inmates witness good examples of other characters reflecting. In the act of interpreting the interiority of the characters, to which the inmates can relate, they engage in self-reflection.

But any reader familiar with Shakespeare will soon realize that not all of his characters' interiorities would provide a positive example for someone already inclined, given his past history, to engage in criminal activity. One might think of Richard III, Macbeth, or Iago. Yet Shakespeare's insistence upon creating 360-degree characters that do not fit into the easy categories of good and evil means that even his villains have complex interiorities in need of self-reflection.

Angelo is an example of that complexity. The prisoners interpret Angelo as a victim, placed into his situation by forces that he cannot control. While he acts villainously, he also explains the motives of his actions to the audience in understandable and rational ways. The soliloquy at the opening of 2.4 is a good example of this. As Catherine Belsey points out, Angelo is a figure that represents the "infinite redeemability of men," for he is considered a worthy husband once he has repented his errors at the end of the play.[17]

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[16] Harold Bloom, Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 361-362. Hereafter cited in the text.
[17] Catherine Belsey, The Subject of Tragedy (London: Routledge, 1985), 170.

As the inmates choose their own roles, there are often instances in which they find similarities between their situations and the tribulations of the lives of the characters. In the documentary Shakespeare Behind Bars, one of the inmates, Ron, feels contempt for playing Miranda in the company's performance of *The Tempest*. He says the character was "put on (him)," and he is apparently enraged that he must play the role of the woman. But he realizes during one rehearsal that he and Miranda are actually quite similar. As they are rehearsing 1.2, Ron begins to talk about how old he was when he found out who his father was, and audiences are able to see a moment of self-reflection in his attempts to understand Miranda's character, who is also learning of her past.[18] A similar situation (described later) occurs during my visit as well.

The next value that Tofteland wishes to impart to the participants is empathy. This process relates to the previously mentioned problem of the prisoners' desire to think only of themselves. After a life of self-reliance and therefore a lack of consideration for the concerns of others, many ex-convicts find it difficult to feel empathy for others—one possible explanation for the crimes that they have committed. Through the cooperative nature of the program, Tofteland tries to encourage the inmates to get out of themselves and feel empathy. The director also argues that Shakespeare's plays are especially fitted for accomplishing this goal. He cites the variety of complex characters within each play as a good source for establishing the faculty of empathy.

"In Shakespeare there are characters that share the same convict philosophy (as the prisoners), but there are also bigger human beings — forgiving, redeemable, transforming. They get to see people that are like them in real life and the people that

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[18] Shakespeare Behind Bars. Dir. Hank Rogerson. DVD. Shout Factory, 2006.

they want to be," Tofteland says. As it applies to *Measure for Measure*, Tofteland's idea is that prisoners will recognize the bad intentions of Angelo when they see his proposition to Isabella, but will be moved by Isabella's virtue in avoiding his proposition. But Shakespeare's characters are never that simple. These two characters, like those in many of Shakespeare's plays, are not perfect villains or heroes. Some interpretations of these two roles actually find similarities between them. As Laurie Maguire writes:

> Isabella assumes she would endanger her soul but her theology here is a bit dodgy. No Christian authority would condemn her for sacrificing her virginity to save a life... Here, perhaps is a link between Isabella and Angelo—they are both morally extreme. Isabella views God as a traffic warden, handing out parking tickets with no consideration of extenuating circumstances—rather like an Angelo, in fact.[19]

This is not to say that Maguire's interpretation of the characters is correct, or that the prisoners interpret their characters incorrectly. But Shakespeare's characters are not two-dimensional, and Tofteland's stark division of good and evil doesn't seem to hold up to such complex roles.

*While Tofteland's discussion during the drive to the prison is all about values and "habilitation" lessons learned from the text, the hours that pass during the rehearsal don't seem that different from any other amateur rehearsal of Shakespeare that I've seen. Tofteland doesn't ask the participants therapeutic questions like, "How does this scene*

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[19] Laurie Maguire, When There's a Will There's a Way (New York: Perigee, 2006), 67-68. Hereafter cited in the text.

*make you feel?" but instead does what you would expect of a director of a theater troupe: he directs.*

**The Scene**

*They begin reading at Act 3, scene 1, line 53. Larry and Prichard, the inmates playing Isabella and Claudio, position themselves in the center of the square while the other inmates surround them and watch.*

*"Now, sister, what's the comfort?" Prichard begins.*

*Tofteland immediately interrupts. "'Comfort'. When you say the word, what are you looking for?" He waits a moment for the men to think about the line. "You're looking for some good news." Prichard internalizes this instruction, reciting the word over and over again. I wonder if this kind of coaching occurs often during the rehearsal process. Perhaps the actors do not have as much control over their own interpretations as Tofteland says.*

*"Comfort, comfort, comfort, comfort." He begins again, this time separating his words more and placing more emphasis on the end of the line.*

*"Why, as all comforts are, most good, most good indeed." Larry, as Isabella, is stalling. She doesn't want to tell her brother that the only way she can get him out of his death sentence as a result of his sexual activity is to perform the unspeakable - to give up her virginity. She presents the situation as if Angelo were sending Claudio as an ambassador to heaven, instead of simply putting him to death. But as an actor, Larry doesn't sound convincing; he isn't actively involved in the words he recites.*

*"Sell it to him!" Tofteland yells at his actor. "It would be like if I came in and said you're being shipped," he says. "Where's the least desirable place you'd like to go in*

*this state?" The men murmur the name of another prison. "They desire you to go to Eddieville and be an ambassador. That's what you're being told." There is silence in the room as the men contemplate this. "I'm talking intensity. You have to sell it to him. You have to make this sound desirable." Larry begins again, and this time his lines sound persuasive. It no longer sounds as if he is simply reading text off of the page; he speaks the lines as an actor would. He is beginning to "be" the character.*

Although Tofteland doesn't discuss it as a goal of the program, it is clear that these men are also learning to act. This aspect of the program causes me to think about the effects of teaching former professional liars how to act. Over time, philosophers and religious fanatics have discussed the amoral implications of the falsities of literary and theatrical representations. In Plato's Republic, Socrates argues that representation, in the form of poetry and theater, appeals to the emotional and therefore irrational aspect of the human mind. In addition, Plato states that poetry and representation is too far removed from the true nature of the world and should not be permitted in the ideal republic.[20] Jonas Barish discusses Plato's initiation of a phenomenon he calls "The Antitheatrical Prejudice," which continues to this day. During Shakespeare's time the Puritans published pamphlets speaking out against theaters such as The Globe. Their complaints were mostly based on the dangers of men playing women and focused especially on the boy actor's capability of arousing desire in the audience. But also present in their arguments were Platonic notions against the mimesis of theater. Barish presents an argument given by Puritans of the time, who felt that people should only act out the selves that God bequeathed them. "Players are evil because they try to substitute a self of

[20] Plato, "The Republic," in The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

their own contriving for the one given them by God."[21] While these judgments on drama may seem extreme to modern ears, Barish points out that prejudice of antitheatricality persist today. While epithets from most arts are used as positive descriptors—an epic struggle, a lyric beauty—terms derived from theater are almost always negative—theatrical, melodramatic, stagey, putting on an act, making a scene—(1). Acting is, in effect, lying, and I wonder how much training in this practice is recommendable for this group of tried criminals.

But while Plato and Barish have presented arguments of antitheatricality, there have also been arguments on the other side. In response to Plato's discussion of mimesis, Aristotle argues that catharsis is a positive effect of theater.[22] And Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors*, (1612) a defense of the theater written in three books, "one on the antiquity of actors, one on their dignity, and a third on their 'true' quality" (Barish 117-118), addresses Shakespeare's theater more directly. The conflict in teaching performance skills to criminals is more pertinent in the chapter on Wisconsin, as performance is one of the main goals of that program. Tofteland clearly tries to avoid this problem by making Shakespeare Behind Bars more about process than performance, but it is impossible to ignore the training in acting that the inmates receive during each rehearsal.

While Shakespeare manages to encompass notions of high and low culture in America's cultural eye, his traditional association with high art leads to expectations of the plays' level of difficulty. The prisoners must struggle with the language of the plays

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[21] Jonas Barish, The Antitheatrical Prejudice (Berkley: University of California, 1981), 93. Hereafter cited in the text.
[22] Aristotle, "Poetics," in The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

more than they would if they were writing their own works or rehearsing more modern material, and they must stand up to the cultural expectations of performing plays that have been studied repeatedly over the past three centuries.

"People think you need a PhD to understand Shakespeare," Tofteland says, explaining the phenomenon of what he calls "Shakes-fear." "Well, listen. Shakespeare wrote for an illiterate society. He was a great storyteller." But Tofteland actually cites a myth when he says that Shakespeare's own culture was illiterate. While many refer to his elementary schooling and the lack of education among his audiences, Andrew Gurr's Playgoing in Shakespeare's London asserts that early modern audiences were more literate than once believed. Although there are very few accounts of playgoing from the early modern period, the few remaining, along with the meta-textual moments in the plays, indicate a greater level of understanding than that of the infamous groundlings, the supposedly simple spectators watching with their eyes and not their ears.[23]

Tofteland also speaks of generations of high school students, whose teachers were forced to introduce them to *Romeo and Juliet*, and who weren't led to the plays in an accessible way. Between the complicated language and the cultural expectations associated with the plays, Shakespeare presents an obstacle to the prisoners during each rehearsal: to get over the cultural hype. Al Pacino's Looking for Richard has tackled this issue directly.

The film not only presents a group of American actors attempting to put on a production of *Richard III*, but also discusses the impression of Shakespeare within American society. As Pacino and his crew walk through the streets of New York, they

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[23] Andrew Gurr, Playgoing in Shakespeare's London (3d ed, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 102-142.

encounter people, all of whom know who Shakespeare is but none of whom know a thing about *Richard III*. In speaking with American actors, who feel that they are less able to perform Shakespeare than English actors, Pacino seems to be confronting this arbitrary "Shakes-fear." Yet as the story of *Richard III* unravels for film audiences, Pacino also has historical and literary critics explain the plot. It seems that Pacino is, on the one hand, attempting to show that everyone is capable of understanding Shakespeare; while, on the other hand, sensing that audiences need critical analysis and explanation to comprehend the drama. Frederick Kimble, an actor in Pacino's crew, points out this hypocrisy when he yells at Pacino for wanting to consult with a scholar about the relationship between Richard and Anne in the play:

> You know more than any fucking scholar at Columbia or Harvard! This is ridiculous! Because you are making this entire documentary to show that actors truly are the possessors of a tradition, the proud inheritors of the understanding of Shakespeare for Christ's sake... Why does the scholar get to speak into the camera?[24]

The next scene shows scholar Emrys James, a Cambridge don, staring into the camera, admitting that he doesn't know anything about the relationship between Richard and Anne. After this moment of realization, Pacino depends less on critical analysis and instead allows the story to unfold without commentary, letting both audience and actors interpret for themselves.

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[24] Looking for Richard. Dir. Al Pacino. Videocassette. Twentieth Century Fox, 1996.

Shakespeare's plays are not simple works of theater, and even if they were it would be nearly impossible to accomplish all that Tofteland's program requires of them. The plays demand a certain literacy, and once the men accomplish the task of interpreting these works, they find a new form of self-confidence. This is another goal of the program. "The guys discover that they have an intellect, a thirst and a hunger for knowledge. They are not just the pieces of shit that their parents or their foster parents or street brothers and sisters told them they are."

In later discussion after the rehearsal, the inmates affirm the success of this process. They say that working with Shakespeare has caused them to hold themselves to a higher standard, both in rehearsal and out in the yard.

"We're raising the bar," one inmate says.

Hal agrees, saying that he has noticed much improvement over the years of his participation in the program. "I look back at the documentary and think, gosh, the things I know now. The understanding I have now."

While self-confidence is an established ideal for the average citizen, the prison environment seems to be built around breaking down this confidence, which, in convicts, has led them to lives of crime by putting their own desires before the establishment of the law. Prisons attempt to dehumanize inmates by giving them numbers and forcing them to follow a myriad of rules, instead of encouraging them to make their own value judgments. But the goals of rehabilitation programs such as Shakespeare Behind Bars differ from the standardizing processes of prison life.

Tofteland and I discuss Michael Bristol's presentation of the neoconservative argument about the interaction between American culture and Shakespeare. I mention in

particular Bristol's notion that the importance of Shakespeare in our society marks an idealization of the traditions of history, and because of that, students of Shakespeare, in effect, learn to respect the authority of the established cultural past (Bristol). Yet the goal of this program is antithetical to that concept, as the self-confidence gained during the study of Shakespeare leads the prisoners to realize their own capabilities of analysis. Tofteland relates this process to learning how to read in that the prisoners now have the confidence to interpret without assistance. He says that the goal of this rehabilitation program is not to create a citizen who automatically agrees with the society around him, but to create one who can constructively disagree with the establishment without going outside of its system of laws. While the neoconservatives hold that studying Shakespeare is a process of paying tribute to the credits of western achievement, the program encourages the inmates to think outside of the literary tradition and instead interpret on their own.

*Does Shakespeare help to accomplish these goals? As Larry and Prichard work through their lines, the men surrounding them contribute their ideas about character motivation and themes within the play, and the gradual process gives them a more complete understanding of the text with the hopes of bringing them closer to their goals of rehabilitation. In the reading of 3.1, the men pick up on the distinction between "perpetual durance" (3.1.66) and "perpetual honor" (3.1.76) in the decision that Claudio must make between his freedom and death. Hal questions the actual definition of perpetual durance, and Tofteland looks it up in a dictionary of Shakespearean terms.*

*"Durance: confinement, imprisonment, incarceration."*

*"Life without the possibility of parole," Hal says.*

*The men connect instantly with what's at stake here for Claudio's character. His decision lies between death and the fear of the unknown after that death, and freedom, a luxury inextricably connected with bringing shame to his sister. Tofteland points out that Claudio is ignorant as Prichard recites his lines:*

> *The weariest and most loathed worldly life*
>
> *That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment*
>
> *Can lay on nature is a paradise*
>
> *To what we fear of death. (3.1.128-131)*

*The director says that Claudio doesn't understand the feeling of being in such pain that death seems to be a welcomed comfort.*

*"There will be people in this audience who have sat with loved ones who have begged for death because the pain was so terrible that they just wanted to be released," he says. Some of the men agree with this idea, recounting stories of the death of their loved ones. But it isn't until the discussion after the rehearsal that the men open up about their own experiences with this feeling.*

*"If I didn't wake up tomorrow, that would be okay. We've all thought that," one of the men says.*

*They see Claudio as a character that doesn't want to disappoint someone that he loves, but one who is also unavoidably selfish and naive.*

*"When you're with the person that you love the most, you know that they see all the good things you are. They see you as being a better person than you believe yourself to be. They don't know you in your darkest moments," Hal says. Although he only briefly refers to his crime during my visit, I know from the documentary that Hal has been*

*imprisoned for murdering his wife. Although I can't be sure, I imagine that he is referring to her in this moment.*

*This consideration of the differences between an "inner" character and an external facade shows up again as the rehearsal continues. Isabella's description of Angelo prompts the discussion:*

> *This outward-sainted deputy,*
> *Whose settled visage and deliberate word*
> *Nips youth i' th' head, and follies doth enew*
> *As falcon doth the fowl, is yet a devil;*
> *His filth within being cast, he would appear*
> *A pond as deep as hell. (3.1.88-93)*

*Angelo's dual nature is understandable to these men, who are learning to reflect on the differences between the shields that they have held up to the external world and their hidden selves. Angelo is an intriguing character for them to contemplate; in a previous rehearsal that Tofteland refers to during my visit, Leonard has come to a realization that since Angelo is a sex offender of sorts, a character study of his motivations and actions could be useful as an activity for sex offenders in the prison. His idea is to stage a performance of a variety of Angelo's appearances for an audience of sex offenders to encourage a discussion about what occurs in these scenes.*

*Leonard helps to explain one line of thought that Claudio feels upon hearing of Angelo's proposition. He says that Claudio obviously does not share Isabella's feelings about the sanctity of sex, as he has engaged in premarital relations with his betrothed, but he still feels protective of the virginity of his sister.*

*"If my sister just told me that the guy next door had tried to defile her, or that she had been raped, I would be like, 'What?!' Any average non-deviant human being would look at this and go, 'My god!'" he says. Although I know, from the documentary, that Leonard is a sex offender, he makes no references to his own crime. But his comment reveals that he sees a distinction between himself and the average person that he mentions.*

*But Boris, one of the participants who has barely participated at all in the rehearsal, disagrees. Though he doesn't stand up for his view in front of the other men, it is clear that he believes there are individuals in the world who would not be outraged by the unwanted sexual advances toward a close family member. He seems to be pointing out that not everyone is an "average non-deviant human being."*[25]

*As the rehearsal continues, Larry is again having difficulty connecting with his lines. He explains Angelo's proposition to Claudio without emotion and, as always, Tofteland insists that he go back and put more force on the potential sacrifice of her virginity.*

*"Let's just say it's a step away for me," Larry says and laughs. They all find his inability to convince Claudio that he doesn't want to lose his virginity to be some kind of indicator of Larry's own sexual experience in life. But Larry is not Larry right now, and he must go back and repeat his lines as Isabella, the novice nun. This time it is clear that Larry is really in character.*

*"Dost thou think, Claudio, If I would yield him my* virginity*—" He emphasizes the last word of the line.*

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[25] I don't know what Boris's crime was.

*Silence fills the room. Larry can't remember his next line.*

*"That's what happens!" the men yell. "'Cause you connected!"*

*It's a clear example of the lesson of empathy that Tofteland spoke about earlier. Larry recognizes his differences from the attributes of his character, but for that one moment he is able to place himself in her shoes.*

*As the scene continues Isabella realizes that her brother's desire for life is greater than his consideration for her honor. The men dispute the exact moment of this epiphany and decide on Isabella's "Alas, alas." (3.1.131) At that moment, Larry begins to build up anger in his recitation. It shows in his next line.*

*"Oh you beast, O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch!" He is yelling at Prichard, the words spitting out of his mouth like venom. He stops the scene.*

*"I don't want to be angry," he says. "It's an unsafe place for me right now." Larry is physically discomfited by the strength of the lines he's just said. The other men encourage him to explore those feelings of anger within the safe circle of the group, to put the emotion into the words of the play. Larry seems to understand their point, but he is obviously still uncomfortable with the anger inside of him that has been called up by Isabella's anger at Claudio.*

*"I don't get angry often, but when I do it's pretty extreme," he reflects.*

Tofteland says that, as the men work through the text of the plays, this kind of emotional exploration happens often. I have witnessed it in the documentary, when Ron discovers the similarities between his life's history and that of Miranda, and now, again, when acting out the role of anger has startled Larry. Tofteland's advice to Larry is to "put it into the word." He feels that Shakespeare is a good source for rehabilitation because of

the distance that it allows prisoners. The plays provide them with situations that are similar to their own lives, but they are written in a heightened language, which gives the prisoners a sense of distance and, therefore, a position of comfort. By taking on other roles in the defamiliarized language of iambic pentameter, the actors are free to explore their own motivations.

"When you're exploring [your interior life] through an aesthetic you can feel safety in exploring it," Tofteland says. "To reflect on your own behavior, on your own past."

Hal describes this as learning an emotional vocabulary. He says that psychological services are limited at Luther Luckett, but participating in Shakespeare Behind Bars has taught him the language with which to identify and then discuss his feelings. Because of its "foreign" attributes, Shakespeare provides a security that prisoners wouldn't feel if they were performing their own theatrical works. Instead of exploring their own thoughts, a seemingly daunting task, they work toward understanding the motivations of characters from another time, who speak a different idiom. Along the way, they pick up an emotional vocabulary and some insights into their own interiorities.

"It's a strange vocabulary that we don't necessarily use on a day to day basis, but it helps us to connect," Hal says. His point is that they are able to reach towards the fundamental truths of the play through the language in which it is written.

*Ron, who plays the Duke, cannot make it to the rehearsal because he has to work at the print shop, and so the rehearsal ends just before his entrance at line 150, shortly after Isabella has shown her anger at her brother. I realize that in the past two hours the group has only rehearsed 100 lines of text. At this point, Tofteland turns to me, and I ask*

*the participants questions about their experiences with the program. I ask them what, if any, obstacles they've come up against. The men respond with complaints of the lack of space and time for their rehearsals. Hal describes rehearsing in the janitor's closet, which is next to the gymnasium. While they work through their lines they must compete with the sounds of basketballs bouncing and music playing. Other participants speak of the stereotypes that they've heard from the other inmates, and from some prison guards. They say that some think they are weird, or homosexuals. Others think they are too privileged. They say that there is a perception on the yard that participants in Shakespeare Behind Bars think they are better than everyone else in the prison.*

*"You don't want to be an inmate in jail," one of the participants says. "You want to be a convict." The men must keep up their macho shows of strength in the yard as they learn to do away with this facade in rehearsals.*

*Leonard says these obstacles are a test for participants. "Everyone in here has confronted or overcome something in order to do this. There's always something that scares you, that normally in your everyday life you could avoid for the rest of your life. But the people here choose to identify what it is that scares them; they choose to look at it. That's an obstacle for people and I find that most overcome it," he says.*

*Hal also speaks about facing the obstacles within himself. "I had to be perfect to be loved by God, to be loved by my family—these were my ideas. The greatest gift in Shakespeare has been allowing me to recognize my character flaws and accept them and embrace them." He has noticed that all of Shakespeare's characters have these flaws as well. He claims it is one of the reasons that Tofteland has focused the program on Shakespeare.*

At this point in the discussion it becomes clear to me how each member of the group represents a stage in the rehabilitation process. While Larry is beginning to empathize with Isabella's problem and reflect about his own issues with anger, Hal is able to speak about the ways in which the program has changed his mindset over the years and how he has grown as a result. The other participants fall between these stages, each of them changing at different speeds but all of them growing together. Another old-timer in the program who goes by the name of G comments on this process. "We become a family. This is the safest place in the world to me. To face my fears, to release my tensions."

*But the men cannot depend on the safe environment of the rehearsal for their rehabilitation. "We can never forget that we have khakis on," Hal says, referring to the prisoner's uniform. "We have to be very conscious of what we do." The other inmates agree. It doesn't matter how far they come from being institutionalized. At the end of the rehearsal they must leave this comfort zone and go back out onto the yard with the rest of the prison community.*

**Exits**

And then there is the question of their potential release. I wonder how the lessons and values that they seem to be learning will help them once they are sent back out into the streets. One way to explore this question is to look at recidivism rates. An Internet search for recidivism rates by state pulls up surprisingly high numbers. The highest rate of recidivism in 2005 was in California, where 66 percent of prisoners released from prison return because of their inability to avoid a life of crime. The lowest rates were in

Texas, where 26 percent of prisoners return.[26] According to the Kentucky Department of Corrections website's recidivism report, the rate in 2000 for the state was 27.5 percent. Tofteland attributed this lower number to the myriad of rehabilitation programs in the prison system in Kentucky. This is debatable. Either way, it is hard to argue with Shakespeare Behind Bars's recidivism rates; in the eleven years of the program's existence not one member has been sent back to prison after his release.

"Each guy that goes out now is even more resolved to not come back," Tofteland says. "They don't want to disappoint the family." By entering the community of Shakespeare Behind Bars, the participants introduce other people into their lives that they must answer to when they make mistakes. Once they are released, Tofteland says, the men remember their friends who are still back at Luther Luckett, and they don't take their opportunity of freedom for granted.

While Tofteland and I discuss the ultimate goal of rehabilitation, I wonder how the specific lessons of self-confidence and empathy, which they've learned in the prison setting, can be applied to the real world outside.

"Prison is the real world," Tofteland responds. "Prison's just a microcosm. If they can navigate the prison in an honorable way then it prepares (them) to navigate on the outside."

Hal speaks of his own personal goals for his post-incarceration life. "It's not just good enough to live a good life on your own. I struggle with what it is that I can do as a tribute to her," he says, referring to his dead wife. Perhaps he finds solace in Mariana's conclusion:

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[26] Ryan Fischer, "Are California's Recidivism Rates Really the Highest in the Nation?." UCIrvine Center for Evidence-based Corrections Bulletin 1(2005): 1-5.

They say best men are molded out of faults,

And for the most, become much more the better

For being a little bad; so may my husband. (5.1.437-39)

# Chapter Two: Wisconsin[27]

## Preparations

*Now I drive west, instead of south, and the ground covered in snow marks the time that has passed since my earlier trip to Kentucky. A lot has changed. I no longer feel the nervous energy of not knowing what to expect. I haven't had a lot of time to think about this trip. The Wisconsin Department of Corrections originally turned down my research proposal, canceling the planned visit in December at the last minute, and after a series of written letters and phone calls we have managed to pull together another date to visit. I have twenty-four hours to get ready. I run around town buying tapes for the tape recorder, submitting forms for funding, printing maps off of the Internet, and explaining my absence to professors. There is no time to prepare emotionally. But in many ways I don't feel the need. I have been to prison. I know how this works. The key now is to figure out what makes this Shakespeare program different.*

*The Shakespeare Project's director Jonathan Shailor and I have arranged to meet in a Starbucks in Racine, Wisconsin. Before he arrives I find myself in a familiar setting. The commodified decor of the Starbucks in the standard strip mall of America blurs the distinctions between this visit and the last. I thumb through the syllabus that Shailor sent me prior to our meeting.*

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[27] Unless otherwise cited, the information in this chapter comes from a visit to a rehearsal of the Shakespeare Project on January 18, 2007. The visit consisted of an interview with Mr. Shailor and with Ms. Gilbertson, the Racine Correctional Institution's Education Director, an opportunity to sit in on the rehearsal, and a question and answer period with the participants. The text in italics documents the narrative of the visit, while the normal text contains analysis and discussion with the program's director.

**Goals**

The first page contains two epigraphs, which in some way must embody the ideals or thoughts behind the program. The first is from Shakespeare, and it is Jaques's well-known soliloquy from *As You Like It*:

> All the world's a stage,
>
> And all the men and women, merely players;
>
> They have their exits and their entrances,
>
> And one man in his time plays many parts. (2.7.138)

The other is from Michael Rohd's Theatre for Community, Conflict and Dialogue:

> We are all artists,
>
> And theatre is a language.
>
> We have no better way to work together,
>
> To learn about each other, to heal, and to grow.

The syllabus goes on to describe the program's objectives; primary among them is "to develop a refined understanding of the richness of meanings and possibilities in [*The Tempest*], and to work closely together in crafting a powerful performance of the play for a public audience." In the process, Shailor aims at accomplishing the following goals for rehabilitation: cultural literacy, performance, empathy, insight, self-awareness, teamwork, and playfulness. Already differences between this program and Tofteland's program in Kentucky are apparent—most particularly, the concentration on performance, playfulness, and cultural literacy.

Following the section on goals the syllabus shows an even stronger dissimilarity between the programs: a section on ground rules. In contrast to Tofteland's theories on

countering the nature of a structured prison life in his program, Shailor's take on running a rehabilitation program is distinctively different. Inmates must be on time, respectful, focused, healthy, and prepared—which includes memorizing lines and completing homework assignments. Missed rehearsals require an explanation. In comparison with Tofteland's strict policy *against* rules, these written out regulations provide a great distinction. How, I wonder, will the differences play out in rehearsals?

*Shailor arrives, and we sit down to discuss the history of the program. The Shakespeare Project at Racine Correctional Institution began in 2005, with* King Lear. *Previously Shailor had been working with the inmates on writing scenes based on situations from their own lives. While working on these scenes, the group would study archetypal characters such as the Hero. Shailor is the chair of the Department of Communication at University of Wisconsin-Parkside where he teaches conflict management and performance as a means of "facilitating constructive dialogue," as he puts it. He has also had his own acting experiences, playing Prospero in a UW-Parkside production of* The Tempest, *the play the Shakespeare Project is working with this year. But the men did not pick up Shakespeare as their guide until Shailor met Agnes Wilcox at a conference.*

Wilcox is the artistic director of Prison Performing Arts (PPA), a program that brings the arts to inmates in the Missouri Department of Corrections. PPA has a number of different programs, but the most well known is the Hamlet Project, a three-year program in which inmates in a medium-custody prison put on individual performances of each act of *Hamlet*. The project was featured in "This American Life," a program in which commentator Jack Hitt interviewed the participants and sat in on their rehearsals.

The radio broadcast emphasizes that inmates understand Shakespeare in ways that most members of society cannot.[28] After hearing about Wilcox's work with *Hamlet*, Shailor decided to turn his efforts away from creating scenes and toward working with Shakespeare.

In order to recruit participants for the Shakespeare Program Shailor gave a lecture in the gym of the prison. He spoke on the power and beauty of Shakespeare's language, the magic of the stories, and how the plays could teach each inmate about human nature. Eighty inmates came to the presentation, and afterwards 40 signed up for the program. Later, one inmate reflected that he was amazed to see Shailor, who he described as a small man, demonstrate so much authority using just his language. Out of the 40 inmates who signed up, 20 qualified. Participants in the Shakespeare Program must have at least an eighth-grade reading level, no major offenses in the past 90 days, a good conduct report, and some indication that they will be able to participate for the nine months of the performance. When I interview Shailor, he expresses doubt that all those qualifications hold true for each participant. He suggests that at least some of the current participants in his program cannot read at an eighth grade level. Nevertheless, in 2004, the group of 20 men began learning and rehearsing *King Lear*. On the evening of the final performance, 17 men were involved. That first year, Shailor played the lead role because of the early release of the inmate who originally played Lear[29].

Shailor speaks of the great sense of accomplishment that each man felt at the end of that first year. Although he had mixed feelings that his playing of King Lear took

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[28] Jack Hitt, "Act V" This American Life (9 August, 2002). Episode 218.
[29] Jodi Wilgoren, "In one prison, murder, betrayal and high prose," New York Times (29 April 2005). Hereafter cited in the text.

something away from the program, he counters that by suggesting that his participation in the performance made him more of a role model for the other men. Significantly, the first year also taught the men how to deal with failure. Shailor describes a test run promotional performance that the men did at another inmate musical show. Expecting a hip-hop performance, the audience members thought the play was a big joke and were howling with laughter in their seats.

"It was like Rocky on the mat: I'm going to get up," Shailor says. "We knew what the bottom was."

Shailor says the audiences have improved a lot from that low point. "It's not the Chicago Shakespeare crowd. They respond in ways that show they're having nervous reactions, like nervous laughter during a murder scene," he says. "The guys are wrestling with something."

Following their work with *King Lear*, the inmates turned to *Othello*. Speaking of the similarities in working with the two tragedies, Shailor says that the inmates quickly grasp not only the concepts at stake with plays about family dynamics and murderous impulses such as *King Lear* and *Othello* but also cling to the power of these plays. In contrast, Shailor has had more difficulty getting the inmates to connect with *The Tempest*. Whereas the tragedies seemed more immediately accessible to the inmates, this play's comic and fantastical elements make its power subtler. Still, Shailor assures me that the men are warming up to it slowly.

The clearest difference between the population in this group and the men working with Shakespeare Behind Bars in Kentucky is the amount of time they have been working with Shakespeare. While Tofteland's has passed its first decade, Shailor's program is only

in its third year. Tofteland has worked with men who have been released, and continues to work with men like Hal, who speaks eloquently of his experience with Shakespeare and how it has changed his outlook on life behind bars. Shailor hasn't had as much experience working with inmates on Shakespeare, or with the widespread media coverage. While Tofteland's program has received wide national coverage including an award-winning documentary, Shailor's has received most mention on local radio news outlets, and only a single article in The New York Times (Wilgoren 2005). It also is clear that the director as well as the participants in the Wisconsin program are less experienced, both in working with Shakespeare and in talking about that process. For many of the participants in *The Tempest*, this year will be their first time working through a Shakespearean play. This is not meant as a criticism of that program, but rather as a significant factor in the study of these two populations. As I listen to the men speak about the program and what it has done for them I can't help but think of first-year undergraduates, enthusiastic about their studies but not quite understanding the implications of everything they are learning. Looking at the two populations offers an opportunity to examine how working with Shakespeare affects these captive audiences over time. Rehabilitation cannot be accomplished instantly but, like rehearsing a play, is a process. And while these men may have to struggle to fit the rehearsals into their busy prison schedules, in the long run, time is the one thing that they have.

Shailor describes the process of preparing for the final performance. A participant auditions for a specific role by reading a speech from the play and explaining why the role is important to him. The group then decides if he is right for the part, but Shailor also has veto power and the deciding vote in the case of a tie. Beginning in

September, the group meets once a week. They start with an introduction to the play through viewing films, followed by a discussion of the plot, characters, and themes. In October they read the play, dedicating one week to each act. Shailor says they work primarily with the text, but each man also has access to a copy of No Fear Shakespeare, a version of the play with modern English translations of the text alongside the original language.

No Fear Shakespeare offers the men a quick reference if they are confused about their lines, Shailor says. But the men also become aware of the power of the Shakespearean language as they deal with what Shailor calls the "poverty of the translation." No Fear Shakespeare's translation of Gonzalo's first speech in 2.1 demonstrates this deficiency:

> Please cheer up, sir. Like all of us, you have a good reason to be happy. The fact that we're alive outweighs our losses. Many people every day feel the sadness we feel now. Every day some sailor's wife, a ship's crew, the merchant who hired the ship all experience the same loss we've undergone. But the miracle—the fact that we were saved—only happens to a few people out of millions. So remember that, and take comfort in it, to counterbalance our sadness.[30]

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[30] "No Fear Shakespeare (February 2007)," http://nfs.sparknotes.com/tempest/page_60.html. The actual text reads:
Beseech you, sir, be merry. You have cause,
So have we all, of joy, for our escape
Is much beyond our loss. Our hint of woe
Is common. Every day some sailor's wife,
The masters of some merchant, and the merchant

The group dedicates the month of November to the music from *The Tempest.* Some participants will be playing instruments during the performance, such as Haisan, the inmate playing Ariel. In December, each rehearsal is dedicated to the reading of at least one, and sometimes two, acts. In January, when I join the group, they have begun to meet twice a week to do initial blocking of the play. After that, they work on developing, refining, and running each act until the performances set for the middle of May. As seen in the syllabus, this preparation period seems well organized: when I arrive on January 18th they are right on schedule, beginning to block Act 2. But the rehearsal is only three hours long, and must encompass discussing their homework and warm-up exercises as well as blocking the act. They are tight on time.

**Prologue**

*Shailor and I drive to Racine Correctional Institution at 5:00. It is dark out now, and large snowdrifts line the sides of the road that leads from Starbucks to the prison. It is about a five-minute drive. We park and walk inside. The guards ask me about the Wolverines as I put my personal belongings in a locker and walk through the metal detector. Shailor and I proceed through the double doors and outside into the cold night again. Passing through another building and another set of double doors we emerge in a large open space, presumably the yard. There are small groups of men walking around, but mostly everything is quiet. I am moved by the same emotion that I felt entering Luther Luckett: nothing separates me from the prisoners. Before entering a prison, I imagined men locked in cells, permitted to leave only under direct supervision*

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Have just our theme of woe. But for the miracle—
I mean our preservation—few in millions
Can speak like us. Then wisely, good sir, weigh
Our sorrow with our comfort. (2.1.1-9)

*by a prison guard. I thought that I would be given some kind of a security device, a radio to be used in an emergency. But both in Luther Luckett and here in Racine, I am carrying nothing but my tape recorder, a notebook, and a pen. I have a visitor's pass attached to my coat, and I am a woman, but other than that I could be mistaken for just another prisoner.*

*Elizabeth Gilbertson, the education director for Racine Correctional Institution, meets us in the education facility and explains the security measures at Racine. The prison of my expectations is a maximum-security prison, where inmates are kept in their cells and have limited movement. Much like Luther Luckett, Racine Correctional Institution is a medium-security prison. The prisoners carry keys around their necks that let them in and out of their own cells. They can come and go as they choose, provided that they show up to security head counts throughout the day. There is also a solitary confinement region, where inmates who violate prison behavioral regulations are punished with the removal of their mobility. Otherwise, the men work jobs for a minimum wage, take classes, and participate in voluntary programs such as Shailor's. At the time of my visit, there are 1600 inmates living in Racine Correctional Institution, and 400 of them are involved in the education programs. In addition to high school equivalency classes and voluntary programs such as The Shakespeare Project, the prison offers vocational studies such as business applications and culinary arts. At a minimum-security prison, where many inmates are sent prior to their release, the inmates are permitted to leave the premises for temporary jobs, and there is less in-house security.*

*The inmates at Racine are lucky to have these education facilities, a result of the history of the institution. Gilbertson tells me that the structure was built around a school,*

*which was donated to the state after its closing. The rest of the institution was built around this education facility, which includes both a law library and a general library where the Shakespeare Project holds its rehearsals. The concept of a prison built around a school seems symbolic to me, as it stresses the importance of rehabilitation facilities within the harsh punishing structure of the double doors and barbed-wire fences. But the importance of the history of the structure is more than just symbolic. While inmates at Luther Luckett complained of having to rehearse in the gym, or the janitor's closet, Shailor's participants made no complaints about the facilities in which they rehearse. This is a privilege for them.*

**Entrances**

*At 6:00 the men begin to wander in. They have not been warned of my last-minute visit, and they clearly are intrigued by my presence. We all walk together down the hallway from Gilbertson's office to the library. They don't make conversation with me, but instead talk to one another and to Shailor, whom they have affectionately nicknamed "Doc." Once inside the library they roll the tables over toward the walls and create a large circle with chairs in the middle of the room. As we arrange ourselves in a circle, one man sets up a video camera. Because Shailor is writing about the ways in which the inmates interpret the experience of working with Shakespeare, the inmates video-record rehearsals—footage that Shailor will use as data for his book. The library is a simple space, with shelving for books and a small computer lab. There are two posters on the wall opposite where I am sitting. The first is an image of a shot glass, with a blurb below: "It's caused more dropouts than organic chemistry, prelaw and calculus*

*combined." The other is an image of Muhammad Ali with a quote: "Impossible is nothing."*

*The rehearsal begins with quick introductions. The men seem interested in my project, and a few of them ask questions. I say that I'm interested in seeing how they each relate to Shakespeare, how this program has affected them. Shailor takes attendance. Scott, the inmate playing Miranda, has made beaded jewelry that he wants to show everyone. He's hoping to wear the jewelry as part of his costume. We pass the items around the circle. Being as diplomatic as possible, Shailor explains that he thinks it is best to avoid dressing in drag when playing a woman's role. He doesn't want the costuming to be over the top.*

Shailor later tells me that Scott has been open with the group about his desire for a sex-change operation, a desire that some of the men do not support. Given this information, it seems that Scott's role as Miranda could be a kind of practice run, an opportunity to think through what it would be like to be a woman. With this in mind, Shailor's dismissal of Scott's jewelry seems—well—unfair. While he may be right that dressing Miranda in full drag would seem extravagant in terms of the performance, it seems unjustified to criticize Scott's interpretation of the role that he is playing.

In Unmarked: The Politics of Representation, Peggy Phelan write about *Paris Is Burning*, a documentary film about drag balls in Harlem, that touches on Scott's situation. Phelan says that the men recognize that being a "real woman" is about a normative definition of gender, one that they can only achieve by being unremarkable. They combat this by using "the hyper-visibility of the runway to show the power and freedom

of invisibility outside the hall."[31] Perhaps Scott's experimentation with over-the-top costuming could help him to realize that his gender identity exists within him, and not in his exterior image. Phelan writes:

> The extravagant costume and personae displayed at the balls are serious rehearsals for a much tougher walk - down the "mean streets" of New York City. The balls are opportunities to use theatre to imitate the theatricality of everyday life - a life which includes show girls, bangee boys, and business executives. (98-99)

Through later communication with Shailor, I learn that Scott has not relented his insistence upon crafting his own costume. Shailor writes: " He has crocheted a miniature version of the dress he envisions for himself. I have told him that I am sending a photo of his design to our costume designer in Massachusetts, for her consideration."

**Dialogue**

*The men's first activity is to share their homework assignments with the group. They have each selected a line from the play and written in their journals about what the line means to them. Prior to the rehearsal Shailor has explained to me that these journal assignments are meant as a push for more reflection from the men whom Shailor describes as "product oriented." This process of self-reflection is not unlike many of Tofteland's strategies in his own program. The notion of inmates learning to empathize and self-reflect as a result of their similarities with the characters that they play is central to the ideology of Shakespeare Behind Bars. But as many of the inmates chose to*

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[31] Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: The Politics of Representation (New York: Routledge, 1996), 93. Hereafter cited in the text.

*write about lines spoken by their own characters, this exercise quickly turns into a process of exploring one's acting role.*

This practice of self-reflection has been present in past years of the program as well. In the profile of the program in the New York Times, Megale is quoted as saying that playing the Fool in King Lear demonstrated to him "how much of a fool I've been in my life." Later in the article he continues: "I've always been an actor... We always have on our masks - life is a stage, really (Wilgoren)."

Megale's insights are not out of line. In both Shailor's program and in Tofteland's, inmates are encouraged to find similarities between their personal struggles and those of Shakespearean characters—a process exemplified in the documentary Shakespeare Behind Bars, when Ron finds similarities between his past and that of Miranda (see Chapter One). Whether as a process of preparing for performance or of analyzing the play for therapeutic purposes, finding points of similarity between themselves and their roles is an integral aspect of both programs.

One response to Megale's second comment and to the frequently quoted, "All the world's a stage"[32] comes from a sociologist's writings on the subject. Erving Goffman's The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life contends that all social interactions are based on representations, not on factual reality. As a result, people have no obligation to represent their "true selves" but instead can manipulate their exterior image. These manipulations are analogous to the masks Megale speaks of, and Goffman uses the

[32] I think it's important to note that while many people think of this line as coming right out of Shakespeare's own lips, it actually appears in a distinct context. These lines belong to Jaques, a melancholy character in *As You Like It.* While Jaques's speech deems life to be meaningless and desolate, the rest of the play contradicts this message. One cannot assume that Shakespeare held Jaques's point of view, although it seems that Goffman's view does have some similarities with that of Jaques.

metaphor of the theater to discuss this phenomenon as well. He writes that the self is a construction of those representations, or performances, made for the benefit of the audiences around us:

> In analyzing the self then we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his body merely provide the peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments. There will be a back region with its tools for shaping the body, and a front region with its fixed props. There will be a team of persons whose activity on stage in conjunction with available props will constitute the scene from which the performed character's self will emerge, and another team, the audience, whose interpretive activity will be necessary for this emergence. The self is a product of all of these arrangements, and in all of its parts bears the marks of this genesis.[33]

As I recall Tofteland's statements about how inmates often come from scarred pasts, and from environments in which the performance expected of them was a life of crime, Goffman's ideas seem especially pertinent. Indeed, many of these prisoners speak of their personal histories as forming them into the people that they are today. Perhaps

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[33] Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life" in The Goffman Reader, ed. Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 24. Hereafter cited in the text.

Megale's realization of the role he has been playing can only come in the context of preparing for another staged performance. In Goffman's view, performance functions only as an analogy; he sees personality traits as far more real than fictitious. He explains:

> A character staged in a theater is not in some ways real, nor does it have the same kind of real consequences as does the thoroughly contrived character performed by a confidence man; but the successful staging of either of these types of false figures involves use of real techniques—the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their real social situations. (25)

Goffman's conclusion implies that the process of staging a performance could call attention to the everyday representations of the self. In that they imply that the criminal mentalities of these men are not set in stone but instead are representations that can be changed, Goffman's theories support rehabilitation efforts. His notion of a play as an analogous symbol of normal interaction also affirms the vision of this program and its concentration on performance over simple textual analysis. Such realizations would not come from just reading the text of Shakespeare's plays but must be accomplished through performance.

But an examination of the fool in *King Lear* shows that Megale's understanding of his character is not the most profound. Ironically, the fool is portrayed as the wisest character in the play, as he is the only character who freely speaks his mind on the matters at hand. The implication of Megale's comment that the Shakespearean character has made him realize his own foolishness is, thus, somewhat misleading. This specific character in *King Lear* is much more than his title of "the fool." It's possible that Megale

was discussing the power of playing any role at all in forcing him to consider the parts he played in his lifetime.

*Karl is the first participant to volunteer to share his journal entry. Although he's a tall muscular man, he does not give off the image of being a tough guy. He smiles while he speaks and jokes around with the other men. He is playing Antonio and has chosen one of his own lines, which he introduces by saying that Antonio is attempting to coerce Sebastian into killing Alonso, using an example of what he has done to Prospero in an attempt to solidify his own power:*

> *Antonio: My brother's servants*
>
> *Were then my fellows. Now they are my men.*
>
> *Sebastian: But, for your conscience?*
>
> *Antonio: Ay, sir. Where lies that? (2.1.239-42)*

*Karl begins reading from his journal in a slow, even tone, telling about his father, who worked as a meter reader in a Chicago suburb where many gang bosses did business. Karl describes his father as "a very honest, God-fearing man who has nothing but goodness inside of him. Don't get me wrong, he's not perfect, but he's a very good, giving man. No swearing, no bad temper, no drugs, no drinks, no smoking. I grew up in a house much like Happy Days. Very nice. My dad would not steal, lie, or any number of things that I thought were okay." Karl recounts a story of his father meeting a famous killer.*

*"When he let my dad in he didn't say much, and he didn't do anything out of line. But my dad said he looked into his eyes, and he saw nothing there." Explaining further that his father went on, saying things like "not human" "no soul" and "no remorse." Karl*

*goes on to recount how, when his father visited him in prison (Karl was in his early twenties), he looked into his eyes and recognized that same void. "Dad said to me, 'You scare me. When I look into your eyes I see the same emptiness.' Wow. It took me back a few notches," he remarks. "That day changed me forever, my view on victimizing people... [when I thought about Antonio's line] I felt sad for a minute because of the pain I once caused my father. But now I feel relief because my Dad and I are so close." Karl looks up.*

*"Thank you for sharing that. Could you just say a couple of words now that you've read that, about the pith meaning for you of that phrase?" Shailor asks.*

*"It just means I had absolutely no remorse for anything. It was all self centered. Much like Antonio... whatever my whim was, and it really didn't matter, whatever Karl wanted, Karl got."*

*Next asked to share his thoughts is Shane, the inmate playing Trinculo. He says it was difficult for him to take on this role that he found to be so similar to the person he used to be.*

*"That was my reason for why I was struggling with memorization. I didn't, I didn't want to be that, you know, drunk. Remember the night when we talked about how Trinculo was something that I do, it's a role that I play, it's not who I am? I'm Shane playing a role, I'm not Trinculo. That really helped me."*

*Megale, who plays Stephano in this year's performance, has had a similar experience playing the role of a drunk. When I meet him he is very outgoing and willing to speak about his experiences with the program; he also seems especially aware of my presence as an audience for his words as he speaks directly to me instead of to the group.*

*"I'm playing Stephano. Stephano's a drunken butler," Megale says. "I am myself a recovering alcoholic and I have no qualms, I'm open about that. That's part of the reason why I'm in prison... I could actually play this role, 'cause that's the role that I actually played out in real life, before I got incarcerated. And basically it's really me taking a look at myself, not just that man, myself. And taking some personal inventory of how I used to be. And that's why I chose to play this character. 'Cause it's a role that I can actually look deep down inside of and then come to the conclusion that that's not the person that I want to go back to. That's why I took on the challenge of playing Stephano, the drunken butler."*

The second recitation of his character's full title makes me wonder whether Megale thinks of his character only as a drunken butler. This seems to contradict the argument that Tofteland and character critics make for Shakespeare's portrayal of deep, three-dimensional characters that cannot be boiled down to a simple phrase. Perhaps the only connection that Megale can find with his character is that of alcoholism, and that is enough to solidify his decision to move away from his dependency on substances. But both Megale's and Karl's comments strike me as recollections of realizations that they have come to in the past. While talking about Shakespeare's text gives these men the opportunity to express their insights into their histories, the discussion itself does not necessarily provide these insights.

Shane's response to his role seems more immediate to me. Instead of rationalizing the way in which he connects with the part of Trinculo, he expresses a basic response to performing the role of a drunkard. His inability to memorize his lines seems to reflect his fear of facing the character traits that he has seen in himself. Although

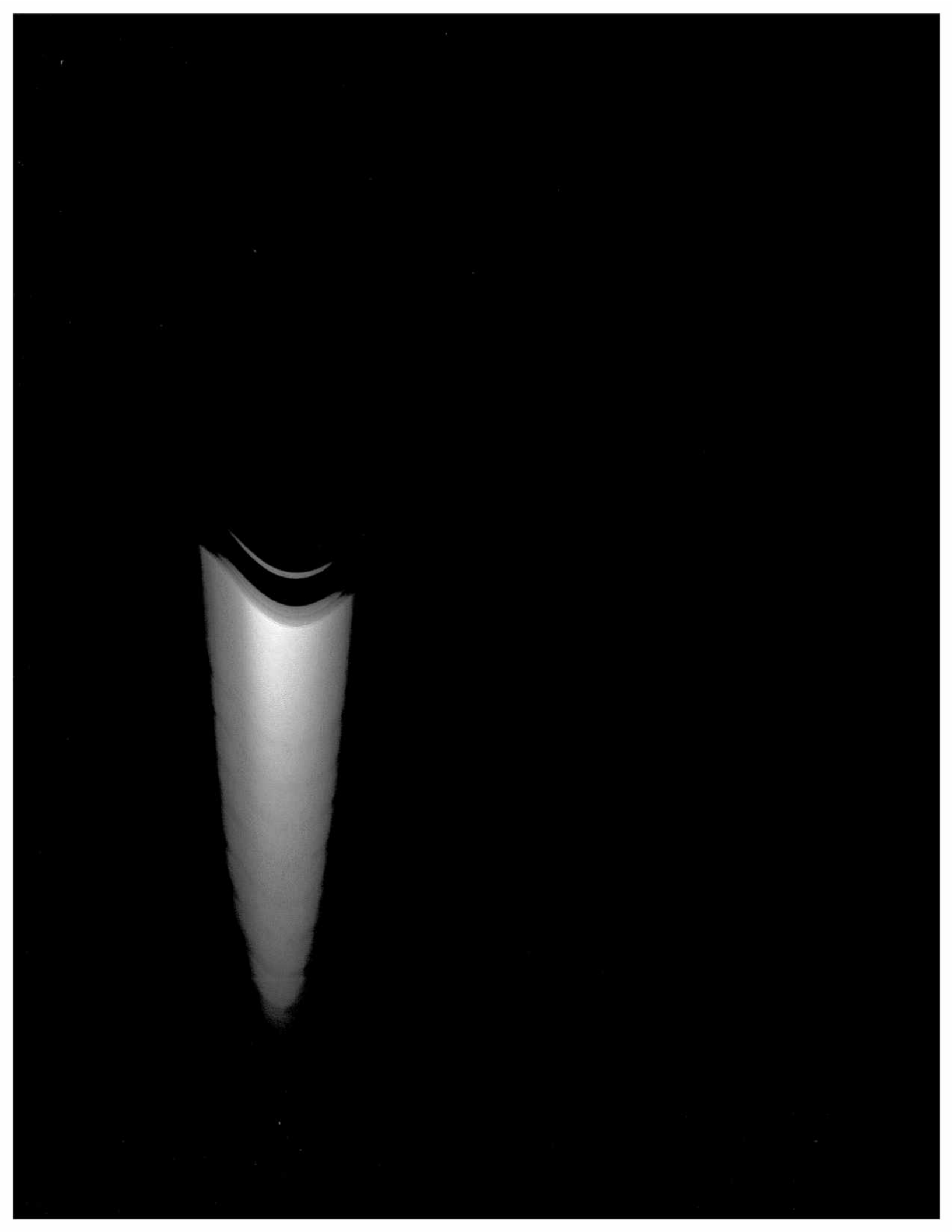
Trinculo and Stephano are great comic roles, I can understand why an inmate, paying the price of his own substance abuse, would have difficulty taking that alcohol abuse lightly. Shane shares only a few words with the group, but his reaction to his role seems more profound than Karl's and Megale's realizations about their pasts.

Only four of these men have been working with the Shakespeare Project for all three years, and five more have been involved for two. The rest are beginning the program this year. It's possible that these men have not yet connected with the text in the same way that some of the participants in Tofteland's program have. Much like all performers, they must first become comfortable with the text before they take real insights from their work with it. Rehabilitation, like rehearsal, is a process.

**Play**

*After a few more inmates share their passages they begin their warm-up exercises. Haisan, the inmate playing Ariel, leads them in the exercises. They all stand up. They begin with "zip-zap-zop," in which one man yells "zip" at another, and he in turn yells "zap" at another who yells "zop" at a fourth. This continues for a little while. Then Haisan begins another exercise. Two men must make eye contact with each other and switch places in the circle by dancing across the middle. The men are nervous at first. Shailor points out that this exercise may be more difficult with me watching, since it's harder to look silly in front of an audience. They try a different exercise.*

*Now in pairs the men take turns making noises while their partners create movements that go along with the sounds. They are working on loosening up, both with their voices and their bodies. After a while they break out of the pairs and work alone, creating noises and movements all at once. Some of the men are crawling on the ground;*



*others are jumping through the air. Many of their movements are violent. One inmate makes swimming motions to move across the space; another does the chicken dance. It is a great commotion. The men are changing rhythms and levels with each movement, and their noises create a loud buzz of blended sounds, which reminds me of images of animals in the wild, each performing his own task without any consideration for the others around him. It is an amazing sight; the inmates, generally restrained by the prison's structured environment, are creating a form of controlled chaos. Shailor circles them as they move.*

*At the end of the warm up they are all laughing. Shailor asks them what the point of the exercises is.*[34]

*"It was fun."*

*"It's to get over your fear of feeling stupid."*

*"You ain't cool when you're doing that."*

The syllabus specifies the objective of playfulness for the program: "We will cultivate humor, gentleness, kindness, and creativity in our work together." When I speak to Shailor before the rehearsal he says that one of the goals of the program is to teach the inmates the ethics of social interactions. He wants them to understand the importance of sensitivity, and the boundaries of different relationships. Much of this, he believes, can be learned through playful exercises.

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[34] Shailor later explains the purpose of the warm-up exercises in an E-mail: "Many of the 'playful' exercises that we engage in, especially in the earlier parts of the rehearsal process, are designed to help the actors to flex their expressive muscles and their ability to be responsive to their fellows 'in the moment.' My hope is that this helps them to remember that a scene is never the same thing twice, because in addition to the memorized lines and the basic blocking, there is the magic of the present moment, and the actor's ability to respond rapidly and fluidly to what is happening on the stage, moment by moment."

"Children's socialization occurs through play," Shailor says. The practice of playfulness allows these men to start over, as their histories and the former roles that they've played no longer matter in their social interactions. Similarly, they are not thinking about the roles that they are playing in the upcoming performance. In fact, they don't seem to be thinking about Shakespeare at all.

I wonder if the choice of working with Shakespeare is contradictory to this goal of playfulness. Most people might not think of Shakespeare's oeuvre as encompassing the most playful theatrical works. While Shakespeare's plays make use of wordplay and comedic scenarios, this is not the image that the inmates have of them: they relate more to Shakespeare's tragic scenarios than to the plays' comedic aspects, which they find harder to grasp.

The choice of Shakespeare also affects the amount of improvisational play possible. Arguably, Shakespeare offers more opportunity for interpretation and different acting choices than more modern texts. Moreover, actors must adhere to textual obligations, such as the plays' structure, in both their overall shape and within the iambic pentameter of the lines. But one reason that Shakespeare remains popular in acting companies is that so many different acting choices are possible in performing the plays. Indeed, the playful freedom possible when acting Shakespeare resembles in many ways the playfulness exercises that the inmates practice in the context of their institutionalization. And if anyone understands order and structure it is these men, who live in an environment of regulations. If they are to be playful, it must be within the confines of that order.

**The Scene**

*After the warm-up exercises they begin blocking Act 2. At Shailor's instruction, Larry, playing Alonso, sits on the ground in the designated "downstage" area.*

*"You're looking out to sea," Shailor instructs him.*

*"I'm sad," Larry responds. "I'm thinking about the son that I lost at sea."*

*Once he has assigned entrances for each of the actors, Shailor goes into another room to work with Haisan on some of the music for the play. The men are left to work through the blocking of the scene on their own. I become a little nervous. How will the group act without Shailor observing them?*

*The scene begins. Nick, the inmate playing Ferdinand, is not in this scene, and he acts as a prompter, reading along in the text as they work, correcting the actors' mistakes, and providing them with forgotten lines.*

*The acting abilities of the men vary, but the most believable of the performances are those of Karl and Jason, the inmates playing Antonio and Sebastian.*

*"We're just kicking it," Karl says, regarding their blocking. "Waiting to kill someone." Later Jason says that he doesn't like some aspects of Sebastian—"My character's a jerk. He's persuaded easily"—and refers to times in which his friends have persuaded him, times when he "fell into things."*

*For the most part, they run the scene without interruption. I stop taking notes for a while and just watch the performance, becoming lost in the reality that they have created of the men on the island and forgetting, for a moment, where I actually am. I look around the room. The other men are all watching intently as well.*

*At the end of the scene Shailor returns. The actors discuss the blocking of the scene and any problems that they had with the way it ran.*

*" I feel like Prospero right now," Shailor says, referring to the intentional loss of control. "It was very pleasing to me to be out of your way and to see that you could perfectly get through the scene without me. It's kind of humbling actually." The men applaud one another.*

*He asks that they run through it again, this time with him watching. The second time around, the performance does not go as smoothly. Under the pressure of Shailor's gaze, the men stumble over their lines and stand awkwardly, not sure if they are in the right place. Shailor gives them some blocking instructions and asks them questions about their character motivations. He tells them that rehearsal is an opportunity to be explicit about their characters' intentions as a means of meditating on the roles. While I can see the men listening to Shailor and learning from this advice, the most telling aspect of this moment for me is to see how the director's presence in the audience affects their performance. When Terry, who plays Francisco, one of the lords in Alonso's party, has difficulty remembering his lines, he expresses his frustration.*

*"I could sit in my room all day and say [the lines], but it's harder to perform."*

**Learning from Performance**

It's a simple truism, but it seems profound when he says it. Dealing with the pressures of performance may be one of the most difficult aspects of this program for the participants. A conversation that I had with a struggling-actor friend of mine comes back to me at this moment.[35] Actors deal with pressures that many of us never face in

[35] From a conversation with Charlie Hewson, December 30, 2006.

everyday life. Along with the stress of performing in front of a group of people, which Terry has noticed, there is also the process of taking criticism from directors. Many people never confront these harsh realities, which actors face every time they go to work.

Theatrical performances have been some of the most stress-causing events in my own life. Though my acting experience is limited, I was in an amateur Shakespeare company in the beginning of high school for a few years. To this day, my anxiety dreams always consist of me standing either on stage or just off stage, waiting for my cue. I can see my parents and the director of the play sitting in the front row, but I have no idea what play we are performing. The stress of every set of eyes in the audience staring at me while I try as hard as I can to remember what part I am supposed to play has woken me up many nights. These dreams almost always involve Shakespeare. The night before my visit to Luther Luckett I have a dream that I am in the car on the way to the theater where I am meant to play the role of Iago. I am struggling to quickly memorize all of his lines as the other cast members give me worried glances. They are depending on me. While I will abstain from psychoanalyzing a dream about playing the role of Iago before I enter a prison for the first time, clearly my anxieties about the visit have played themselves out in this stressful dream.

Larry, the inmate playing Alonso, speaks of the trepidation he felt prior to his participation in this program. "Throughout all my life I've been really withdrawn. I've been in a shell. Even when I was going to school it was hard for me to get up in front of the class if I was giving a speech. The main reason that I joined is to get over that shyness. And this has done it for me." Larry played Desdemona in last year's

performance of *Othello.* He describes doing a test-run in a space near the weight room and hearing the men lifting weights whistling at him in his costume.

"That got me over [the fear of performing]. It had to. There wasn't any method. You just gotta do it."

In this program, the men are learning to deal with the pressures of performance. By concentrating on the product of their efforts and not just the interpretative processes that shape performance, Shailor forces the participants to confront stressors that many people attempt to ignore everyday. The triumph that these men must feel at the completion of the final performance helps to build confidence in dealing with these pressures. As Terry complains of his inability to remember his lines in the moment of performance, I think of the anxiety that inmates must feel at the time of their release. They may have learned valuable lessons through rehabilitation programs such as Shakespeare Behind Bars and the Shakespeare Project, but these insights also must stand up in the moments of the performance they must give in the outside world.

Charles Frey's essay on the history of Shakespeare education argues for the performance of Shakespeare in classrooms as it forces students to make their own interpretations of the plays. He writes that Shakespeare is difficult for students, and they would learn more if they accepted that struggle instead of simply memorizing the formulaic interpretations of their teachers. He suggests that students participate in their own performances of the plays as a means of interpretation (Frey). Milla Cozart Riggio's Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance also argues for the power of learning through performance. She writes that modern students of Shakespeare more clearly understand theatrical texts in terms of performance because of their close familiarity with

films, television, and other performance arts. She explains that performance gives students a better sense of the subtext of the plays, and "provide[s] a personal involvement and a point of view for each participant."[36] Perhaps the fact that this program is performance-based allows the inmates to interpret the highly venerated works of Shakespeare and thereby empowers them.

Shailor's program aligns with Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, which provides insight into many of Shailor's practices. Boal's notion is that theater originated as an open practice: everyone participated in the action of the drama in a carnival or feast forum. Over time distinctions were made between actors and spectators, and further classifications separated protagonists from the masses on stage, such as choral roles. Boal calls the audience members "the oppressed" and presents ways in which they can participate in the drama unfolding on stage. In his People's Theater, Boal uses theater to teach self-empowerment to oppressed peasants in Peru, where illiteracy remains a great problem because of the many indigenous languages spoken. The objectives of Boal's program were:

> 1- to teach literacy in both the first language and in Spanish without forcing the abandonment of the former in favor of the latter;

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[36] Milla Cozart Riggio, ed. Teaching Shakespeare through Performance (New York: MLA, 1999), 2-3.

> 2- to teach literacy in all possible languages especially the artistic ones, such as theater, photography, puppetry, films, journalism, etc.[37]

The groups began by learning a theatrical vocabulary of sound and movement, and learning to know their bodies and to make them expressive. Boal writes that everyone's body is shaped by his/her position in life, and that these exercises create first, an awareness of the ways in which each participant's body is structured and, then, of how bodies may be used to express ideas. One of Boal's exercises has slips of paper with the kinds of animals that the participants select and then act out using only movement (131). One could see how Shailor's warm-up exercises imitate this practice of bodily expression.

The third stage of the Theater of the Oppressed is to make theater a language of expression. Boal writes about three types of theater that allow for participation from both the actors on stage and the spectators in the audience. Simultaneous Dramaturgy, Image Theater, and Forum Theater all take plot suggestions from audience members and then improvise scenes from these suggestions. Boal's examples all describe the presentation of scenes that are similar to the lives of the participants. In one scene, for example, an illiterate woman's husband asks her to hold documents, which he says are very important. One day they have a fight, and the woman takes the documents to a neighbor and asks what they say. The neighbor informs her that they are not important documents; rather, they are love letters from her husband's mistress. After performing this scene the actors turn to the audience members and ask what they should do (132). Boal argues that instead

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[37] Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), 121. Hereafter cited in the text.

of the traditional Aristotelian effect of catharsis coming from watching tragic theater, the participants are moved to action after seeing the scenes:

> The truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner. While he rehearses throwing a bomb on stage, he is concretely rehearsing the way a bomb is thrown; acting out his attempt to organize a strike, he is concretely organizing a strike...The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action. (141-142)

Boal describes other theatrical practices such as Invisible Theater, where scenes are performed in public without informing passersby, and in all of his examples he attempts to do away with the distinction between the spectator and the actor, thereby empowering the oppressed spectator into action. While some degree of similarity can be found between the theatrical work with illiterate peasants in Peru and The Shakespeare Project with inmates in Wisconsin, the choice of Shakespeare seems antithetical to the ideas behind the Theater of the Oppressed. Working with the established and venerated canonical text of Shakespeare makes it difficult for the participants to contribute to the plot of their performance, and Shakespeare's language does not allow either actors or spectators to forget that this is a play. If an actor recited Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy in public, passersby would automatically be aware that it was a performance. Still, the Shakespeare Project gives the inmates an opportunity to be a part of the theater,

even if they are not writing it themselves. Shailor speaks of the influence of Boal's movement and has renamed the agenda that he uses as "Theater of Empowerment"[38].

Shailor speaks of this as his last goal for the program: cultural literacy. He teaches the men about the history of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan era. When I question why this is important in the life of an inmate, he responds that knowing Shakespeare is part of any well-educated citizen's background.

Levine's Highbrow/Lowbrow discusses this phenomenon in the context of immigration into America in the early twentieth century. He writes that the millions of non-English-speaking immigrants were faced with a challenge when attempting to understand Shakespeare, the accepted American standard for theater at the time. By writing and performing their own adaptations, these immigrant groups re-appropriated the works. Levine cites examples of a Yiddish *Hamlet* from 1899 and *The Jewish King Lear*, as well as silent films, which also became popular at this time (47). Much like the immigrant populations did in the early twentieth century, these inmate populations recognize that part of being an American is having an understanding of Shakespeare.

"It helps them become more fully members of society. It gives them a sense of belonging when they are able to quote Shakespeare," Shailor says. "A lot of the men are interested in doing something that will raise their status." Working with Shakespeare gives these men the opportunity to be known for something other than their crimes.

Dale, the inmate playing Prospero, agrees. "It's an opportunity to finally do something that I can be proud of. I've done a lot of terrible things for the past several years so now this is something that I can show my family and be proud of. And it's a

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[38] Shailor later clarifies that Boal's "Games for Actors and Non-Actors" and "The Rainbow of Desire" have had the strongest influence on him.

good chance to educate the public too. We are real people, not just animals behind bars. We have interests, intellect, just like everybody else. I think it's important for people to know that."

"We're not inmates doing Shakespeare," Haisan says. "We're actors doing Shakespeare, who happen to be inmates."

Coda: "As you from crimes would pardon'd be"

An analogue to these prison programs occurs in Laurie Maguire's When There's A Will There's A Way. Maguire's work goes beyond the context of academia and instead presents Shakespeare as an early modern self-help manual. Her chapters encompass struggles with issues such as identity, family, friends, gender relations, love, acceptance, anger, jealousy, positive thinking, forgiveness, risk tasking, maturity, and loss. She argues that reading these plays offers solutions to these everyday struggles:

> Each of Shakespeare's plays depicts a human predicament and attempts a solution. The predicaments are personal, political, social (in other words: human), and the solutions, whether comically successful or tragically ill timed, come from characters whose motivations and mistakes are recognizably contemporary. In reading these plays we encounter life's predicaments and characters' strategies for dealing with them. In other words, Shakespeare's plays offer life coaching (2).

Many of the examples in Maguire's book relate to issues that distinctly affect women. But her idea is not different from the notions of Tofteland or Shailor as they encourage the inmates to consider the similarities between the characters in the plays and themselves. Maguire's work impacts on studying Shakespeare's drama in the context of incarceration with its view of how Shakespeare might effect change or aid in the rehabilitation process. Just as these programs function as "life coaching" for the inmates, Maguire writes that Shakespeare is a form of therapy: the works unlock different perspectives in readers' minds without prescribing one "correct" way of thinking.

Maguire sees *Measure for Measure*, the play currently being studied in Tofteland's program, as a self-help resource. She writes that soon after Isabella manages to avoid Angelo's sexual proposition, she must respond to the Duke's marriage proposal, an almost equally undesirable offer for a novice nun. Although Isabella's decision in the conclusion of the play is open to different interpretations, her silence implies her inability to stand up to the controlling men around her: "The harassment plot is also part of a much bigger topic: the importance of the female voice, the problem of ignoring it ('what part of "no" don't you understand?'), and the damage when spirited women are silenced (70)." Maguire relates Isabella's experience to moments in which she has not stood up to gender stereotypes. She writes that understanding Isabella's predicament encourages women to be vocal against the societal norms of sexism.

But the issue that is perhaps the most pertinent to the inmates' situation comes from Mariana, who accepts Angelo, the play's villain, despite his flaws. Maguire highlights this example of acceptance in her book as well. Both "rehabilitation" efforts reflect one purpose of Shakespeare in our society, which Maguire sums up well: "We read self-help books for the same reason we read literature. To find solace and inspiration. To find guidance and advice. To find comfort: comfort that we are not alone, that others have shared our experience. Shakespeare and self-help will always overlap" (198).

Maguire's look at *The Tempest* does not offer as much insight. Her book mostly skips over the play, except for a brief mention in the chapter on forgiveness. She presents Prospero as a character who is not quick to forgive, but instead holds a grudge against his

brother, Antonio, even as he claims to forgive him. Maguire cites Prospero's lines (75-132) in 5.1 as evidence. She writes:

> Each declaration of forgiveness is followed by a clause reminding us what there is to forgive—Antonio's unfraternal behavior ("unnatural"), his multiple flaws ("all of them"). Prospero insistently reminds us of the transgressions he claims to have forgiven. Surely the gentleman doth protest too much? I think there's a lot of learning and healing still to take place (152-3).

Along with characters who present helpful insights for audiences, Shakespeare also creates characters whose flaws do not allow them to lead admirable lives. What if inmates, much like Prospero, see the right course of action, but refuse to take it? The invitation to self-help, which Maguire suggests Shakespeare offers, does not guarantee rehabilitation for these prisoners. Furthermore, the lessons that these characters offer are buried deeply within these complex plays. Interpreters often must struggle through layers of ambiguity to find the self-help manual that Maguire sees.

Can an overarching conclusion can be reached as to the effectiveness of these programs? There are many factors that affect the rehabilitation of these men, and as an outsider it is difficult to measure the degree to which these men are changed by their work with Shakespeare. But while the *product* of these programs cannot be determined, it is clear that the *process* of working with these plays is a positive one. The rehearsals force these men to cooperate, to think deeply about themselves and one another, to stand up to the pressures of performance, and to interpret the rich language of Shakespeare.

And as Shailor points out during my visit, the writer of an honors thesis at the University of Michigan wouldn't visit these men if they weren't working with Shakespeare.

With that in mind, it seems appropriate to quote Prospero's last words:

> As you from crimes would pardoned be,
>
> Let your indulgence set me free (Epilogue.19-20).

Even if one sees Tofteland and Shailor as Prospero's surrogates, neither they nor Shakespeare has the power to pardon crimes. But both programs give the participants an opportunity to be known for something other than their pasts.

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