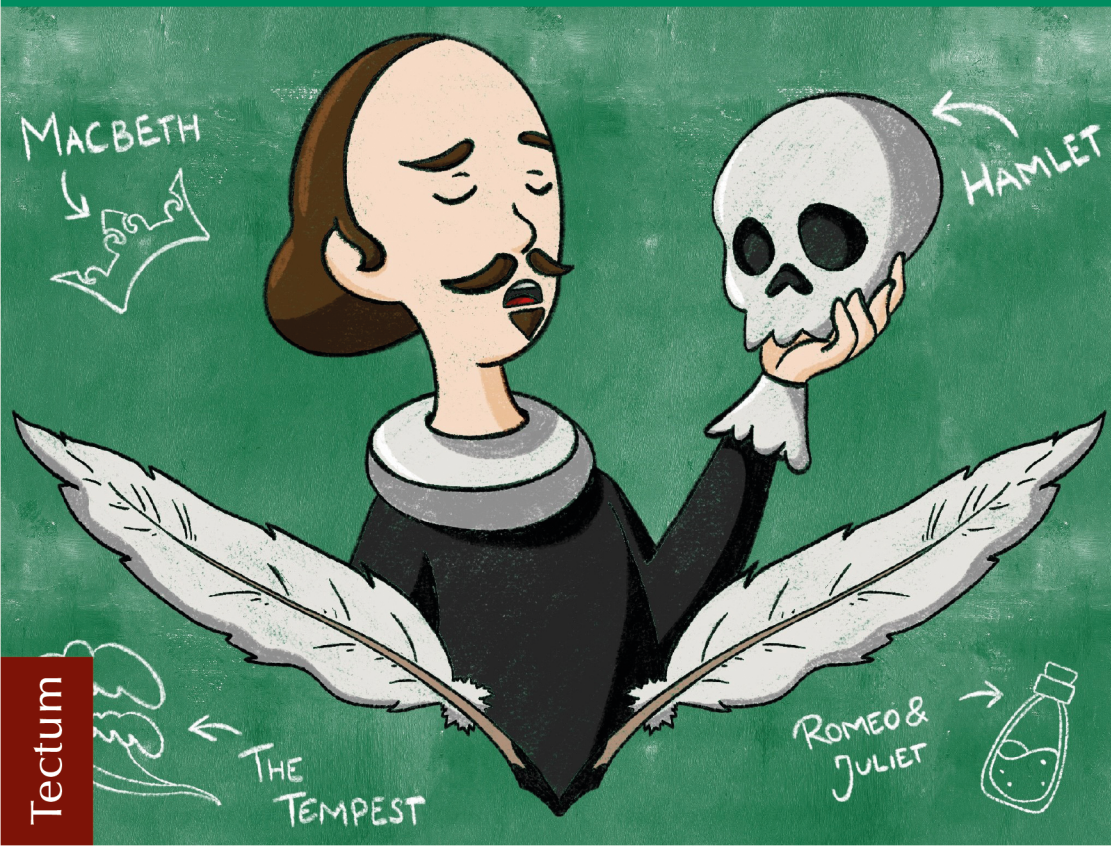


Daniel Schönbauer (Ed.)

'All the world's a stage' – Shakespeare in English Language Education

Topics – Tasks – Selected Texts



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Introduction: 'All the world's a stage' – Shakespeare in English Language Education

Daniel Schönbauer (Brühl/Bonn)

If asked about which writer they associate with Anglophone literature, most English as a foreign language (EFL) students most likely come up with William Shakespeare – the 'literary giant' of English language education. Not only has he shaped a whole literary period (i.e. the English Renaissance), but he has also become an integral part of British cultural identity. As a matter of fact, his works keep delighting audiences worldwide. On the contrary, EFL learners might struggle with the complexity and ambiguity of his plays and poetry. This results in Shakespeare often considered to be 'boring' or 'difficult', neglecting the various possibilities 'the Shakespearience' provides for cultural learning.

Against this background, a Master of Education seminar at the University of Bonn in the Summer Term 2018 focused on the current state of the arts when it comes to teaching Shakespeare and developed teaching approaches to render Shakespeare an enriching element in foreign language teaching. Guided by an interest in interconnecting major insights of Renaissance studies with the teaching of literature and culture, the participants explored the world of 'the Bard' from the perspectives of different literary genres. The edited volume at hand is the result of this exploration and pursues two major objectives: (1) It provides a collection of articles dealing with a variety of texts and genres considering traditional as well innovative approaches to teaching Shakespeare; (2) The articles do not only seek to provide academic insights, but also suggest concrete in-class activities and reflections of why and how to teach these texts in class.

The volume is divided into four parts. Following this introduction, **Imke Lichterfeld** provides ideas of how to introduce Shakespeare and Racism in English Language Education and thereby taking for granted current issues in Renaissance Studies. The following subchapters shed light on different genres and follow a similar pattern. Based on one selected literary text, the articles examine major analytical focal points of the texts and thereby take the perspective of Renaissance studies as a base (WHAT?). This analysis is followed by an analysis from the point of view of English language education (WHY?), in which chances and challenges of teaching the texts are discussed. Finally, teaching activities following the constructivist PWP-model open some perspective(s) of

how to teach the text in class. In a first step, **Alina Dresen** and **Svenja Harzem** focus on the teaching of two selected Shakespearean Sonnets (Sonnets 20 and 144) and point out how to actively teach poetry in foreign language education. Following the two articles on poetry, Shakespeare's dramatic texts will take center stage focussing on both tragedies and comedies. Text to be discussed include *Much Ado About Nothing* (**Julia Falter & Christina Kattwinkel**), *Hamlet* (**Ruth Kühsel**), *Macbeth* (**Sophie Gnech & Daniel Schönbauer**) and *The Tempest* (**Alina Tary & Sofia Ullah**). Finally, the last set of articles discusses the potential of implementing adaptations of Shakespeare. In this regard, both a cinematic adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* (**Michelle Hausschild**) and graphic adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* (**Jessie-May Franken**) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (**Ovesiek & Voges**) will be considered.

Last but not least ...

I would like to thank all contributors for their patience during the editorial process and the effort they put in (re-)writing their articles. It was an honour to work together with you in the summer term 2018 and I will always positively think back to our common discussion on Friday mornings every other week. Next, I thank Sophie Gnech, Svenja Harzem, Milena Niesen, Fabian Richartz, Alina Tary and Sofia Ullah for their support during the editing process and reading of the manuscript. Without their help, this publication would not have been possible. Finally, I am most grateful to the Department of English, American and Celtic Studies at the University of Bonn for their generous financial support for the publication of this edited volume.

July 2021
Brühl/Bonn
Daniel Schönbauer

Visualising Injustice – Shakespeare & Racism in the EFL Classroom

Imke Lichterfeld, Bonn

1 Introduction

Teaching Shakespeare is sometimes considered difficult but it should not be this way. Motivation and participation are key issues when it comes to mediating Shakespeare. Watching adaptations, giving students translated versions, letting them work together on language tasks, or further creative approaches are means to target the supposedly difficult, and presumably boring early modern texts. Nevertheless, teaching Shakespeare in schools has been unjustly criticised for having little relevance today. However, a broad spectrum of issues which highlights that Shakespeare is indeed “for all time”, as his contemporary, playwright Ben Jonson claimed (Jonson, n.p.), can make the required reading of his texts more approachable, more enjoyable, and, in fact, highly relevant. After all, as Eric Ting states in an interview with Molly Eichel, “Shakespeare was writing for the broadest audience possible” (Eichel, n.p.). Shakespeare’s themes, one may still argue, speak to humanity – his plays explicitly address discrimination and can thus be used to uncover issues of injustice today. Of course, everyday themes such as love and jealousy make Shakespeare readily accessible, but nationalism, social inequality, topics relating to gender issues, and racism can also be taught via Shakespeare. Not only texts that lend themselves via their title, like *Othello*, *the Moor of Venice*, can be employed to target such issues. Today’s productions can offer opportunities to study a multiplicity of topics with regard to almost any play. London’s Bridge Theatre for example changed the texts of Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummernight’s Dream* and thereby changed the power dynamics between the different genders. Staging *Julius Caesar* with a Trump reference gives the assassination a whole new dimension in today’s political sphere. Cross-casting roles with actors of a different gender reveals fascinating aspects and underlying opportunities in a character’s reading. Casting specific roles like that of an illegitimate child with a BAME (Black Asian minority ethnic)¹ actor can increase discussions around their status.

¹ The term BAME is often used in British media. Some members of the Black British community criticise its use as generalising, insufficient, and misleading. Therefore, using the term, one should be aware of this controversy. See Fakim / Macaulay, n.p.

Diversity, inclusion, and equality are issues that all teachers have to respond to within a classroom environment. There is also a need for an intersectional recognition of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, and religion. The responsibility of consciously addressing these issues can appear overwhelming. I would therefore like to focus on one specific issue. I want to concentrate on skin colour² with regard to the casting of one specific role.

This paper will try to equip teachers with basic, yet necessary knowledge and awareness of racial understanding with regard to a supposedly “marginal”, though not minor Shakespearean character. It is aimed at helping educators how to use Shakespeare to teach pupils about racial and cultural identity and diversity. My argument will focus on the role of Edmund, the illegitimate son of the Duke of Gloucester in *King Lear* as a case study: Edmund represents a marginalised character who seeks empowerment and justice. Casting this social outsider with a Person of Colour renders the early modern question of who is part of the dominant order in society – and as such worthy of a voice – as a very modern question of acceptance of all racial and ethnic groups. I will strive to argue why targeting Shakespeare then becomes meaningful not only for his general contemporary relevance but also to support issues of intersectionality and social injustice.

The following article will first concentrate on the demands of the school curriculum and centres on questions and aspects that teachers have to discuss in class, such as how to approach racism, racial diversity, and identity issues. My aim is to show how these can be addressed via literature, in this case via Shakespeare. In the first subchapter “The School Curriculum”, I will address the German curriculum and its demands for teaching intercultural communication to pupils; among other aspects, this concerns issues of race and prejudices. I will look at German school curricula and especially NRW curricula for the subjects of English as well as history, as their goals can often be combined within certain fields of teaching. Thus, my ideas follow a transdisciplinary approach: while the subjects of history and English are certainly addressed, the topic also refers to issues of social sciences such as equality and injustice. In this subchapter, aspects concern a definition of racism and the concepts surrounding power and voice, white privilege, and stereotypical simplifications. I will try to highlight how

² This article uses British English. When quoting, I will of course use the original American spelling ‘color’, as in ‘colorblind’.

discovering transcultural similarities can aid pupils to articulate their own preconceptions, and that verbalising politically informed and morally grounded attitudes cannot e.g. be limited to the era of National Socialism and the Second World War.

One way to make students sensitive to aspects of discrimination is not only to latch on to personal experiences but also to include awareness workshops in schools. As far as English classes are concerned, students can research various databases, news, films etc. Currently, it is highly rewarding, if shocking, to research the Black Lives Matter protests, to look at historical material and online interviews, or listen to podcasts and read (excerpts of) recent publications. The intention of this article follows in more detail in the subchapter “Why Shakespeare?”. My argument is that teachers may use Shakespeare to teach, transmit, and discuss ideas of racism and understand parallels to today’s society. This will highlight how Shakespeare is still “for all time” (Jonson, n.p.). Since Shakespeare’s plays are written to be performed, the topic of casting choices needs to be addressed in this paper: the way we see things is, after all, influenced by what we have experienced, by what we therefore claim to know. Such is also the case with seeing actors on stage. If these are BAME actors, or People of Colour, our perception will probably influence our reading of a character. This can perhaps be ignored when an audience’s ability of the suspension of disbelief as an idea of colour-blindness is professed. However, casting Black actors will, I want to claim, not be ignored, and the term colour-blind is therefore very controversial. Casting choices are themselves an interpretation. Therefore, this paper will discuss the terms colour-blind and colour-conscious casting and argue that colour-conscious casting might be the more appropriate practice to reflect upon an audience’s impression.

Lastly, as announced above, this paper focuses on the illegitimate, “bastard” son Edmund in *King Lear*. Edmund is a fascinating, witty, and attractive character. He is branded as the marginal Other, but he shows an enormous potential for identification as he wants to rise up and seize his chances. He wants to succeed in a society that does not accept him as one of their own. In these paragraphs, I will focus on the argument that this kind of stereotyping combined with a visualisation on stage by casting this character with a Black actor allows for illuminating interpretation opportunities. Students can reflect how this evokes parallels between social discrimination in Shakespeare and racial discrimination today. My conclusion will then reflect upon the manifold

opportunities of approaching contemporary issues, questions, and themes by and through teaching Shakespeare and how this offers fascinating opportunities for students as well as for teachers.

2 The School Curriculum in Germany³

As far as racial issues are concerned, educators need to be accustomed to the idea that the teaching of Shakespeare to pupils should be “aimed at developing their personal understanding and awareness of racial diversity and identity issues in education” (Diane Warner, “Shakespeare and racial diversity”, n.p.); this, however, applies to students as well as teachers.⁴ Looking at Shakespeare allows for topics such as respect towards all cultures, a necessity in functioning multicultural – and transcultural – communities. In many acting companies today, there is racial and ethnic diversity on the Shakespearean stage.

Intercultural communication and its ideals will be a good introduction to this topic. Targeting communication and addressing questions across different cultures – whether religious, social, or ethnic – is essential in lessons. Teachers need to dare to address these issues and not shy away due to their own “lack of awareness and recognition of children’s racial and ethnic cultures” (Warner 3). There is a necessity to teach children and young adults about cultural awareness, which can arguably be conveyed via Shakespeare. Therefore, teachers need to be confident “about using Shakespeare as a site for teaching children about racial and cultural identity and diversity” (Warner 4). They need to be competent to speak about skin colour and not feel embarrassed or insecure.

The competence area “Interkulturelle kommunikative Kompetenz” is one of the basics of English language teaching at German schools today. It is aimed at the understanding and the taking of action in situations of intercultural communication. Undoubtedly, sociocultural knowledge and an intercultural awareness are prerequisites of successful communication (cf. Kerncurriculum Auslandsschulen, KMK Englisch

³ I have consulted the NRW curricula as well as those for German schools abroad (“Auslandsschulen”).

⁴ The *Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes* has published a study called “Diskriminierung an Schulen erkennen und vermeiden. Praxisleitfaden zum Abbau von Diskriminierung an der Schule” (see bibliography); a good introduction into the topic is also “Schule ohne Rassismus – Schule mit Courage”. They offer material for teachers, give recommendations for different target groups, and comment on recent events. A good general introduction to everyday racism in Germany is: Tupoka Ogette, *exit Racism*. Münster: Unrast, 2019.

9). Pupils can obtain knowledge from issues they recognise from their own environment; arguably, they can only start from their experiences, and then, the teacher can induce further insight and acknowledgment. Catherine Little of the Canadian newspaper *Globe and Mail* states that “True diversity – literary and otherwise – needs to be about adding voices, not replacing them” (Little, n.p.). Indeed, the Kerncurriculum for German schools abroad acknowledges this fact:

Die Auseinandersetzung mit anderen Lebenswirklichkeiten fördert die Bereitschaft zur Selbstreflexion und ermöglicht den Schülerinnen und Schülern, unter Berücksichtigung der eigenen Biographie und Herkunft Perspektivwechsel zu vollziehen. Fremdsprachenunterricht wirkt damit persönlichkeitsbildend und eröffnet die Chance für ein friedliches Miteinander in einer globalisierten Welt. (KMK Englisch 9).

In Germany, it might be more difficult to address racism in school than in other colonial nations like the United Kingdom or France. In those countries, a supposedly ‘glorious’ colonial past is part and parcel of history, and this comes with racial and ethnic minorities from former colonies as part of the nations’ population.⁵ Yet that does not mean that problems with racist practices and prejudices have been sufficiently addressed. On the contrary, former empires struggle to come to terms with the consequences of their colonial and imperial history. As this conversation would go beyond the scope of this article, there are various texts in the bibliography that can aid such a discussion.⁶ Even in those countries, there is an open reproach of a huge lack of public discussion, as will become apparent in quotations below, but it needs to be clear that racial discrimination is part of everyday life and issues of racial and ethnic diversity and identity need to be addressed anywhere – in German schools just as much. Again, this article cannot address in detail the history of colonialism in Germany and latent racism in the German society. What needs to be clear is that racial discrimination

⁵ This history-conscious debate is extremely sensitive, and a term like ‘glorious’ shows the hierarchical debate between the coloniser and the colonised already. See Afua Hirsch, *Brit(ish). On Race, Identity, and Belonging*.

⁶ A good introduction to the topic might be: Reni Oddo-Lodge, *Why I’m no Longer Talking to White People about Race*. The popular study with the provocative title as a reaction to reluctant White listeners to questions of injustice against Blacks centres on race relations, specifically on Black history in Britain, White Privilege, women, and class.

exists and that it should be discussed at school as part of intercultural communication. The recent debate around these topics, following the death of George Floyd, only makes them more urgent as a necessary focus at school that not only concerns but also stirs deeply emotional responses among young people. Especially white teachers need to dare⁷ to address these topics more consciously. Diane Warner conducted a study at four British universities with participants of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) on Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME) and the perception of racism. She concluded that young teachers are often hesitant to address such issues or they blatantly know too little to be able to transfer knowledge and guide a debate:

This seemingly vacant space of racial and ethnic awareness among these student teachers has significant implications for teacher educators. The DCSF [Department for Children, Schools, and Families] (2007c) identified a lack of training in diversity and citizenship issues in ITE and proposed a firmer agenda for diversity education in the curriculum. This included children learning about and understanding difference and multiple identities in UK society and teaching to 'address issues of disparity, commonality and how we live together' (2007c: 18) (Warner 7).

German teachers, too, need to learn about a contextualised awareness and how to find their own language as well as how to facilitate and moderate discussions.⁸ Currently, the German core curriculum of the "Qualifikationsphase" in the subject of History is rooted in contemporary history (KMK Geschichte). Here,⁹ students are to understand the constructed character of historical narratives and develop questions regarding social structures. This covers an orientation towards problems and social action, also with regards towards multiperspectivity, controversies, experiences of alterity, and intercultural learning.¹⁰ At this point, the goals of teaching history and

⁷ This can be seen as implicit racism already. If the teaching body were more diverse, such questions might be addressed with less insecurity and hesitation.

⁸ Melisa Erkurt's "Generation Haram" might be of aid.

⁹ „Der Geschichtsunterricht gibt den Schülerinnen und Schülern Kategorien wie Fortschritt/Rückschritt, Revolution/Evolution, Ereignis/Struktur usw. an die Hand, mithilfe derer sie sowohl den Konstruktcharakter von Geschichte erkennen als auch eigene historische Fragestellungen zu entwickeln lernen (vgl. dazu auch Eingangsvoraussetzungen: Sozial- und Selbstkompetenz).“ (Kerncurriculum Auslandsschulen, 2010-04-29-Kerncurriculum-Geschichte. 8)

¹⁰ Ibid. 9.

teaching English merge. Students of history are to have the competency to describe the process of decolonisation and evaluate it from different perspectives.¹¹ However, such reprocessing of the colonial history and questions of decolonisation in Germany is currently in its fledgling stages as far as the school curriculum is concerned.¹²

This double coverage in the subjects of History and English – to a certain extent – of a similar (albeit differently defined) focus might address one problem that can surely be raised at school concerning any theme, which is that there is too little time to cover many ‘new’ issues. There are, of course, limitations that a schedule poses when time constraints complicate a matter. However, there are possibilities of crossing different subjects and combining transdisciplinary approaches.

Terminologies have to be clear from the beginning. Students need to have definitions for keywords. What is racism? Students should try and find their own definitions which should include that it is a social practice that is embedded in power relations in societies; it contains aspects of ethnic stereotyping, prejudices and discrimination. Racism includes an inherent belief that there are different human races and the implication of the superiority of one's own (White, n.p.) race. Racism is often based on appearance (Banks 3). A German student might be sitting in a predominantly ‘White’ classroom. Yet ethnic backgrounds – to be differentiated from (further) questions on race – play a huge role in racial discussions in Germany, too. Migration backgrounds of generations past as well as the presence of refugees might play into the socio-political climate of a classroom. Therefore, these definitions are of course not exclusive and often not enough. This need to address injustice is directly linked with the need to revise one's own privileges. The follow-up question therefore needs to fathom contrasts: What is privilege, and especially what is White privilege? Students could phrase and argue that privilege grants some kind of immunity and causes elitist

¹¹ Kerncurriculum Auslandsschulen, 2010-04-29-Kerncurriculum-Geschichte, 15.

¹² On the handling of Germany's colonial history, see among others Jürgen Zimmerer, “Kulturgut aus der Kolonialzeit - ein schwieriges Erbe?”. *Museumskunde* 80 (2). (2015): 22-25; or: Jürgen Zimmerer, “Humboldt Forum: Das koloniale Vergessen”. *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 8. (2015): 13-16. Other publications include: Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner. Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*. Europa Übersee 10. (Münster-Hamburg-London: LIT, 2001); Jürgen Zimmerer/Michael Perraudin (eds.), *German Colonialism and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2011). Another study is published by Dirk van Laak, *Dossier Bundeszentrale fuer politische Bildung. Deutschland in Afrika – Der Kolonialismus und seine Nachwirkungen*.