Shakespeare,
Our Personal Trainer

Shakespeare, Our Personal Trainer:

Teaching Shakespeare in Secondary Schools

Edited by

Margaret Rose, Cristina Paravano and Roberta Situlin

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Shakespeare, Our Personal Trainer:
Teaching Shakespeare in Secondary Schools

Edited by Margaret Rose, Cristina Paravano and Roberta Situlin

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1154-5
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1154-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

RICHARD DUTTON

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST
ACADEMY PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

The idea of education is everywhere in Shakespeare. At the opening of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Lucentio travels towards "fair Padua, nursery of the arts"(*Shr* 1.1.2) – a city whose university was famed for its teaching of the liberal arts, the bedrock of higher education in the early modern world. The King in *Love's Labour's Lost* is determined that his own court shall become equally famous as a place of learning: "Navarre shall be the wonder of the world; / Our court shall be a little academe, / Still and contemplative in living art" (*LLL* 1.1.12-4). And when news of his father's death comes through, it reaches Hamlet at Wittenberg in Germany, Luther's university, where he is a student with his friend, Horatio; at the same time his nemesis, Laertes, is a student in Paris – from where he too will return on news of the death of a father.

But just as study in *Hamlet* is overshadowed by issues of mortality (leading the Prince to conclude that "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*Ham* 1.5.168-9) – that is, in scholarly education), elsewhere too its course never does run smooth. It loses its appeal for Lucentio when he falls for Bianca and turns from student to tutor – her music tutor; for his pains he is crowned with her lute. The "little academe of Navarre" is similarly brought low by female presences – the Princess of France and her ladies; like the scholars at Renaissance Oxford and Cambridge, the King and his courtiers were supposed to live a contemplative life, away from female company – but that ideal quickly crumbles. And when old men look back, it is hardly the learning of their school-days that they recall. Polonius, the wily councillor in *Hamlet*, remembers playing the role of Julius Caesar on the stage while at university: "I was killed i' th' Capitol" (*Ham* 3.2.99-100), while old Justice Shallow's memories of studying at the Inns of Court, the London law schools, consist entirely of brawling and wenching at all times of day and night: "We have heard the chimes at midnight," Sir John Falstaff concurs (*2H4* 3.2.211-2). Everywhere in Shakespeare, it seems, the idea of

education meets its match in the realities of human nature and the pressures of a life lived.

There are hints, indeed, that Shakespeare did not altogether enjoy his own education. Mistress Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* declares that "my son profits nothing in the world at his book" (*Wiv* 4.1.13-4) and calls upon the Welsh parson, Sir Hugh Evans, to test him. In what must surely be a sly in-joke, the son is called William. In a further in-joke, young William actually knows the answers to all the questions, but the lesson overall is a hilarious disaster, partly because of Evans's stage-Welsh pronunciation of the Latin words, and partly because of Mistress Quickly's misunderstanding of virtually everything that is said. The figure of the schoolmaster fares no better elsewhere. Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost* is the prime example: he is referred to as 'the pedant,' which in one sense is an ordinary term for a school-teacher, but in another means one who "excessively reveres or parades academic learning or technical knowledge, often without discrimination or practical judgement." The latter sense is predominant here. In the same play, Biron proclaims that he was formerly "A domineering pedant o'er the boy" (*LLL* 3.1.172) before Cupid, the blind boy-god of love, turned the tables on him. The classroom in Shakespeare's imagination was a place ruled over by domineering, pedantic and pompous men.

And, of course, the classroom was all-male. Education was rarely wasted on girls, except to the extent that daughters of the upper classes needed to be trained up as suitable wives for the suitors their fathers would find for them. And then they would most likely be schooled at home by tutors – as Lucentio is expected to teach Bianca music, a fitting accomplishment for a young lady. When Petruchio in that play finds himself confronted by a prospective bride, Katherine, who is every bit as intelligent and resourceful as himself, he resorts to a different style of tutoring – that of the trainer of an animal or a bird of prey – to teach her the prime lesson for a wife: obedience. We might expect something better for Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* when the Countess announces that "I have those hopes of her good that her education promises" (*AWW* 1.1.37-8), but it is quickly clear that this is not education in any scholarly sense. Her father had been a great physician, "whose skill was almost as great as his honesty" (*AWW* 1.1.17-8), and so a very learned man; we might have trained Helena in his own skills. But he died before that was possible and the orphaned Helena was left to the protection of the Countess, in whose care she demonstrates that she "derives [inherits] her honesty and achieves her goodness" (*AWW* 1.1.42-3) from her father. Her education has not been in medical skills but in moral virtues, including the

'honesty' (a term which comprehended celibacy for a virgin and chastity for a wife) that was above all essential for any young woman looking to be well married.

The liberal arts curriculum prescribed for men was also, at least in theory, a training in virtue, even as it instilled practical skills of writing, rhetoric, mathematics and logic that would be useful to a courtier, lawyer, secretary, tutor, or someone who would one day have an estate to run. And in this sense it seems that Shakespeare did not despair of education, even if he often pointed out the limitations of the institutions that were set up to instil it. This is perhaps best expressed by Duke Senior in *As You Like It* who, shivering the exile in the Forest of Arden, declares that "Sweet are the uses of adversity" (*AYL* 2.1.12), proclaiming that "this our life, exempt from public haunt, / Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, / Sermons in stones, and good in everything" (*AYL* 2.1.15-7). Nature provides its own education, finding "good in everything" without the need for domineering pedants.

It is in that spirit that *Shakespeare, Our Personal Trainer* brings together a range of unfamiliar but stimulating disciplines to offer "very different perspectives which highlight a new outlook compared to current ways of tackling Shakespeare in schools." The aim is to make Shakespeare's texts like "books in the running brooks," open to us all, showing "what we all need to do [...] in order to bring about a healthy re-balance in the state and the individual, observations that are still meaningful for our contemporary society."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Anna Anzi, Paolo Caponi, Mariacristina Cavecchi, Roberta Grandi, Francesca Lotti and Mauro Spicci, who for many years met weekly in what is now the 'Shakespeare seminar room' at the University of Milan to discuss our ongoing Shakespeare research projects and organise conferences and theatre workshops devoted to the Bard. For them, like us, Shakespeare stands, or stood, central to their teaching. We are very grateful to Professor Richard Dutton, who kindly accepted to write the foreword to the present volume. We are grateful to our Head of Department, Giovanni Iamartino, who gave his support to the project. Not least we would like to express our deepest thanks to our authors for their contributions.

ABBREVIATIONS

Ado	*Much Ado About Nothing*
Ant	*Antony and Cleopatra*
AWW	*All's Well That Ends Well*
AYL	*As You Like It*
Ham	*Hamlet*
1H4	*The First Part of King Henry the Fourth*
2H4	*The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth*
MND	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
MV	*The Merchant of Venice*
Oth	*Othello*
R2	*Richard II*
Rom	*Romeo and Juliet*
Shr	*The Taming of the Shrew*
Son	Sonnets
TGV	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
TN	*Twelfth Night*
Wiv	*The Merry Wives of Windsor*

All quotations from Shakespeare's works are from *William Shakespeare. The Complete Works* (2nd ed.), edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005.

ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

WHY SHAKESPEARE, OUR PERSONAL TRAINER?

MARGARET ROSE AND CRISTINA PARAVANO

> Why should we, in the compass of a pale,
> Keep law and form and due proportion,
> Showing as in a model our firm estate,
> Our sea-wallèd garden, the whole land,
> Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers chocked up,
> Her fruit-trees all unpruned, her hedges ruined,
> Her knots disordered, and her wholesome herbs
> Swarming with caterpillars? (*R2* 3.4.41-8)

In this extract from *Richard II*, set in the royal garden, the Gardener's servant spiritedly asks why he and the Gardener should keep the garden tidy when the entire nation, "our sea-walled garden," is left to rack and ruin. In this history play, set during the Wars of the Roses, Shakespeare has recourse to the metaphor of an unweeded garden to allude to *what* we all need to do – Kings and gardeners in this specific case – in order to bring about a healthy re-balance in the state and the individual, observations that are still meaningful for our contemporary society.

In the course of four hundred years, the rupture between human beings and nature has grown steadily deeper, making the above quotation from *Richard II* even more significant for today. In the Western World we are experiencing a technological revolution which has already impacted on our daily lives, leaving us feeling uprooted and often alienated. Our environment is under threat, as is the quality of our food and drink, due to global markets and industrialised foodstuffs. This 'new world order' has brought about a series of negative outcomes, such as an increase in mental illness, eating disorders, the advent of Internet addiction and virtual social contacts. Our goal, though, as editors of *Shakespeare, Our Personal Trainer*, is not to hark back nostalgically to Shakespeare and his

contemporaries, but to suggest to the younger generations how we might learn from them in order to build a better future.

With this aim in mind, we have conceived the present volume, whose authors are linguistic, literary and theatre specialists, scientists from various fields, and a psychiatrist, capable of presenting Shakespeare's plays from very different perspectives which highlight a new outlook compared to current ways of tackling Shakespeare in schools.

The volume targets a readership of secondary school teachers, particularly those who teach Shakespeare, but also colleagues dealing with other subjects. As Richard Dutton argues, "Shakespeare is a bedrock figure in high school literature on both sides of the Atlantic" (2009, 197). Just the same, flexible, up-to-date strategies to make an impact on adolescents and show them that Shakespeare is still relevant are required. There is of course a huge bibliography available on teaching Shakespeare.[1] Among the most important contemporary methods is certainly the one pioneered by the late Rex Gibson at Cambridge University, which puts the emphasis on the student's active involvement, through practice and performance (Gibson 1998), and the more cultural, heritage and textual analysis focus practiced in many schools across Europe. However, we believe that a very broad, multidisciplinary approach to Shakespeare's plays can also be useful.

In *Shakespeare, Our Personal Trainer* teachers will not find actual lesson plans, but rather a range of filters such as food and plant sciences, geography, art history, costume design, comics, and street art to help them introduce Shakespeare to their students in new and vibrant ways. Ideally, Shakespeare should be approached through team teaching, involving colleagues from other disciplines. However, when this is not feasible, for practical or economic reasons, teachers should introduce these wider horizons in their lessons whenever possible.

The editors of the present volume, Margaret Rose, Cristina Paravano and Roberta Situlin, have been working together since 2015, setting up projects on such topics as Shakespeare and food, Shakespeare and plants, research that made them realise the special insight and knowledge that students can acquire thanks to a kaleidoscope of perspectives. Students today might not always see the relevance of Shakespeare, or feel baffled and put off by his language. Others, who have already chosen a science path, might think the study of Shakespeare irrelevant to their immediate goals. This handbook seeks to motivate even the most reluctant young

[1] See Gibson 1998; Blocksidge 2003; Shand 2009; Haddon 2009; Sedgwisk 2011; Winston 2015; Thompson and Turchi 2016; Cohen 2018.

people to get to know Shakespeare's work better and come to understand its relevance for the world they live in.

The starting point for the contributions in the first section, *"Our bodies are our gardens": Shakespeare and Wellness*, comes from Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Iago's conviction that "our bodies are our gardens" (*Oth* 1.3.317). Each chapter presents a facet of the concept of wellness or its antithesis, illness, discussing how the knowledge of Shakespeare's plays may contribute to our mental and physical wellbeing. In chapter 1, "Gardens in Shakespeare's Day and in the 21st Century," Margaret Rose delves into Shakespeare's relationship with gardens, exploring some of his plays, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II*, where scenes are set in gardens and orchards. The contribution derives from Rose's experience of developing a school project devoted to Shakespeare at the two botanical gardens in Milan, and of penning several site-specific interactive plays, rewrites of Shakespeare's drama, which seek to entertain but also heighten audience members' awareness of issues related to the environment. She invites teachers to take their students out of the classroom to visit botanical gardens, where they can learn more about the nutritional, therapeutic and symbolic value of the plants, flowers and trees that Shakespeare mentions in his plays.

Biologist Angela Ronchi, the coordinator of a school programme at Milan's Città Studi Botanical Gardens, presents her experience of teaching plant sciences, with reference to Shakespeare. She investigates some of the plants and herbs Shakespeare includes in his plays and points to their relevance in the Renaissance and in today's world. The author also re-reads *Romeo and Juliet* through the lens of plant science, showing how the plants and herbs that figure in the tragedy are fundamental to a more nuanced understanding.

Instead, Roberta Situlin, a medical doctor with a specialization in nutrition, examines the themes of food, overeating and obesity in *Henry IV*. She discusses the attitude of Shakespeare and his contemporaries to these issues, by focusing on Prince Hal (the future Henry V) and Sir John Falstaff, and then pitting the Renaissance mindset again our contemporary attitudes.

Paolo Giovannelli, a psychiatrist and a specialist in Internet disorders, has devised an innovative therapy to help his patients, many of whom suffer from eating disorders and Internet addiction. While the author does not exclude psychiatric drugs from his treatment, he regularly involves patients in the exploration of Shakespeare's characters through performance. He outlines his methodology and points to the deeply therapeutic results, when a hospital ward or a clinic are turned into a theatre workshop.

Susan Marshall, design historian, costume designer and teacher, presents an introduction to the Shakespearian stage and an overview of clothing and costume in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. She goes on to offer practical advice, regarding the organization of the design aspects of Shakespeare production, all of which can be easily transferred to the classroom and school productions. Marshall's costumes, whose hallmark is sustainability and recycled natural fabrics and dyes, reflect her efforts to bring environmentally 'friendly' Shakespearean productions to audiences of all ages and social classes, including secondary school students.

Finally, linguist Laura Pinnavaia delves into Shakespeare's language from a historical perspective, demonstrating how the Bard's works may be used to teach idioms and how beneficial this may be to improve the proficiency of both native and non-native speakers. Her choice of idioms in the semantic field of food and drink, an area where the presence of Shakespeare's creative coinages is extensive, is an important one. This is because consuming food and drink amounts to a profound expression of social belonging, which in Shakespeare's day was very strong. Through a study of these idioms, we can therefore discover the social, political, economic and cultural identity of people in Elizabethan England, and compare them to our own.

In the second section, *"Strange shapes": New languages in the Classroom*, the essays investigate Shakespeare's role "as a cultural icon and emblem of Englishness," but also his noteworthy presence "in the world beyond the classroom" (McEvoy 2003, 103). The "*strange shapes bringing in a banquet*" in *The Tempest* stand as a metaphor for the many guises Shakespeare's works have morphed into media, such as cinema, television, the visual arts and music, and also for the various ways the plays have been re-appropriated and reshaped in order address the present and to reinvent "the Renaissance so that it speaks with purpose to the contemporary moment" (Brown, Lublin and McCulloch 2013, 1).

The section opens with Francesca Orestano's contribution, a very rich palette of critical perspectives on *Antony and Cleopatra*. Ranging from adaptation studies and visual arts to the category of Orientalism as discussed by Edward Said, the author investigates the poetical fascination exerted by this Roman play, while inviting the reader to assess the wider scene.

The next two essays build on the idea that non-canonical genres, such as young-adult literature and comics, may be usefully deployed as a complement to the study of Shakespeare. Proposing a student-centred approach, Cristina Paravano explores two popular trilogies targeting a young-adult readership (Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* and Lauren

Oliver's *Delirium* series), and demonstrates the educational potential of this popular genre. The author shows how young-adult literature may help improve students' literary skills, while introducing them to Shakespeare from an angle very familiar to their generation. Mauro Gentile suggests incorporating comics into the school curricula. Belonging to the world of teenagers, comics can act as a bridge not only between teachers and students, but also between art and literature. He analyses three recent comic adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* which offer complementary perspectives on the tragedy, thus enabling students to understand the complex and subtle mechanisms behind adaptation and appropriation of the play.

Mariacristina Cavecchi investigates the intricate relationship between words and visuals by discussing the impact of Shakespeare on street art. Once students discover Shakespearean imagery and verses in disused areas of our cities, they will hopefully wish to find out more about Shakespeare's plays, as well as gaining insight into the cities and towns where many of them live. The huge popularity of this urban art form, loved by many young people, can work as a powerful icebreaker in the classroom.

In the following contribution Marco Canani addresses the connections between Shakespeare and music, championing a cutting-edge approach which should appeal to young people. He proposes some teaching strategies drawing on hip-hop, rap and contemporary music to introduce the Bard's sonnets and plays in the classroom. His investigation zigzags between Shakespeare, the American poet Erik Didriksen and the British rapper Akala.

In the final chapter of this section Anna Anselmo outlines an inventive way of using film in the Shakespeare classroom, offering a perspicacious reading of two screen versions of *The Tempest*, Percy Stow's silent film (1908), and Derek Jarman's idiosyncratic reworking of the play (1979) in light of adaptation theory. The approach provides teachers with powerful tools for introducing the adaptation process to students and highlights the ever-valid relevance of Shakespeare on film in the classroom.

The broad spectrum of perspectives and methodologies we have presented amounts to an innovative way of approaching Shakespeare in the classroom. If teachers adopt a more interdisciplinary outlook, Shakespeare will certainly remain, as Rex Gibson sustains, "the central pillar of the classical curriculum in English Literature" (1998, xvi), but he might also become somebody important in the student's everyday life, nothing less than a Personal Trainer.

References

Brown, Sarah Annes, Robert I. Lublin and Lynsey McCulloch. Eds. 2013. "Introduction." In *Reinventing the Renaissance. Shakespeare and his Contemporaries in Adaptation and Performance*. 1-16. New York: Macmillan.

Cohen, Ralph Alan. 2018. *Shakesfear and How to Cure It: The Complete Handbook for Teaching Shakespeare*. London: Bloomsbury.

Dutton, Richard. 2009. "Divided by a Common Bard? Learning and Teaching Shakespeare in the UK and USA." In *Teaching Shakespeare: Passing It On*, edited by G. B. Shand, 197-214. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Gibson, Rex. 1998. *Teaching Shakespeare: A Handbook for Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Haddon, John. 2009. *Teaching Reading Shakespeare*. London; New York: Routledge.

McEvoy, Sean. 2003. "Shakespeare at 16-19." In *Shakespeare in Education*, edited by Martin Blocksidge, 97-119. New York: Continuum.

Sedgwick, Fred. 2011. *Resources for Teaching Shakespeare: 11-16*. New York: Continuum.

Thompson, Ayanna and Laura Turchi. 2016. *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-centred Approach*. London: Bloomsbury.

Winston, Joe. 2015. *Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company*. London: Bloomsbury.

PART I

"OUR BODIES ARE OUR GARDENS": SHAKESPEARE AND WELLNESS

CHAPTER ONE

GARDENS IN SHAKESPEARE'S DAY AND IN THE 21ST CENTURY: DO WE REALLY NEED THEM?

MARGARET ROSE

Shakespeare's gardens

During the 2015 Expo exhibition, "Feeding the Planet," I started a project with scientists at the two botanical gardens in Milan (The Brera Botanical Garden and the Botanical Garden at Città Studi, part of the scientific campus at the University of Milan). Our initial work explored Shakespeare and food,[1] but soon the focus of our collaboration shifted to Shakespeare's knowledge of gardens and the plants and herbs growing there.[2]

I went on to write *A Walk in Shakespeare's Garden* (hereafter abbreviated as *AWSG*), a musical promenade play. The work combines a narrative about Shakespeare's knowledge of gardens, scenes from some of the Bard's plays set in gardens and orchards (or where characters reference these places), Renaissance music and song.[3] The production, directed by Donatella Massimilla, is a multisensory one, in which audience members are invited to smell the scents of the flowers and herbs, touch the leaves

[1] For the findings of the research, see Caponi, Cavecchi and Rose, 2016.

[2] The concept of a garden, where nature is tamed by humankind is only one aspect of nature that Shakespeare puts onstage. For the wilder and untameable side of nature, see Estok 2011.

[3] CETEC's production of *A Walk in Shakespeare's Garden* continues to tour garden venues far and near. See Rose 2016. Visit the website www.cetec-edge.org. CETEC (Centro Europeo Teatro e Carcere/European Centre for Theatre and Prison) is a Milan-based theatre company founded by Donatella Massimilla. It is driven by an artistic and social mission to make theatre inclusive of diverse audiences and communities, reaching out beyond the walls of traditional theatres, playing in prisons, social centres, piazzas and so on, and breaking down barriers of every kind.

and the bark of trees, hear the bird song, etc. Since its debut at the Brera Botanical Garden in April 2015, *AWSG* has visited gardens in Italy and England, entertaining very mixed audiences of different ages and backgrounds.

Fig. 1-1 The narrator\botanist (Mace Perlman), with a magnifying glass in *A Walk in Shakespeare's Garden.*

Fig. 1-2 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania (Gilberta Crispino) lying asleep in her bower. Left Anna-Jane Davies, soprano.

Fig. 1-3 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom, the Weaver (Stefano Guizzi), transformed into an ass, Titania (Gilberta Crispino). Left Anna-Jane Davies, soprano.

Fig. 1-4 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom (Stefano Guizzi) in the guise of an ass and Anna-Jane Davies.

In April 2017, it was performed in the Great Garden at New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, as part of Shakespeare's birthday celebrations.[4] Through this research and my own creative writing, it gradually became clear to me how much people's wellbeing depends on their contact with the natural world. What, I asked myself, can we learn from Shakespeare and his contemporaries, who lived close to nature and knew so much more than we do about the natural world? In our technological era, when many of us – and especially young people – spend hours studying and playing on computers, a selective and cautious use of the way Elizabethans viewed the world might work as a kind of antidote.

When you visit Stratford-upon-Avon, the town where Shakespeare was born and presumably lived until his early twenties, you soon come upon Shakespeare's own gardens.[5] During his lifetime he never lost touch with them, since he regularly returned to Stratford while he was working in London, and in his final years he went back to live in his hometown. By taking a short walk through the centre of Stratford, you can visit the three gardens – or rather the contemporary versions of these gardens – with which the Bard enjoyed a close connection. The first garden belongs to the house, where he was born and brought up on Henley Street; the second is at New Place, the large house he bought in 1597; the third is at Hall's Croft, where his son-in-law, the physician and herbalist John Hall, and his daughter Susanna lived until Shakespeare's death in 1616. Following his passing the couple moved into his New Place home.[6]

Gardens in Shakespeare's last will and testament

To find out exactly how much Shakespeare cared about his real estate, including his gardens, it is worthwhile reading his will, emended on 25 March, just a month before his death on 23 April 1616 at the age of fifty-two. From this, Shakespeare's intentions become clear. He wanted to be sure that Susanna, his first-born daughter, would inherit not just his tenements and "inheridaments" (or heritable property as we would say today) in Stratford-upon-Avon and in nearby villages, his recently purchased house in the Blackfriars area of London, but also his gardens, orchards, stalls, barns and land. Here are the words of Shakespeare's will in a modern English version:

---

[4] For James Willetts's short video, see https://youtu.be/zAfba7P9vps. The cast include: Gilberta Crispino, Anna Davies, Stefano Guizzi, Mace Perlman, Chris Susans.

[5] See Bennett 2016.

[6] See the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust website at https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/

> All my barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, tenements and heritable property, whatsoever situated [...] to the already mentioned Susanna Hall.[7]

For people today, Shakespeare's emphasis on his barns, stables, orchards, gardens and land, followed by reference to his tenements and heritable property, over and above any money or jewels in his possession, or even the original manuscripts of his plays, might seem strange. However, a substantial part of a person's livelihood in the early 17th century depended on how much grain he had in his barns, how many horses in the stables, how much fruit in the orchard. And, of course, there would have been herbs in the garden for cooking, but also for healing common diseases, plants for decorative purposes, but also edible ones.

So to return to the question in the title of this chapter, Elizabethans – and Shakespeare was no exception – did need their gardens. Especially ordinary folk were reliant on their gardens and orchards for their survival and wellbeing, unlike today when the majority of people, living in towns and cities, consider gardens as places where they can relax and eat, weather permitting.

Flowers, herbs and trees in Shakespeare's plays

A reading of Shakespeare's plays confirms that he had a good knowledge of the natural world and a keen interest in gardens. The articles written about his knowledge in this area by botanists and herbalists generally support the idea that he knew as much as most country gentlemen of his era. In his plays he mentions no fewer than 117 wildflowers, 36 garden flowers, 44 herbs, 90 different fruits, 80 shrubs and trees plants.[8] References to the seasons, colours and properties of these plants are invariably accurate.

The 19th century herbalist Ellacombe notes that the vast majority of these plants were ones growing in England and in particular in Warwickshire, the county where the Bard was born ([1878] 1896, 3). One can suppose, moreover, that Shakespeare's knowledge in the area of botany and gardens probably derives, at least in part, from his mother's side of the family. As a boy, William would have visited the Ardens' farm at Wilcote, four miles (6.4 kilometres) from Stratford-upon-Avon, where he would have learnt about plant-lore from his maternal grandmother, Anne Arden. And Shakespeare continued to take an interest in plants, flowers and herbs throughout his life as the constant references in his

[7] This modern version is by the present writer. For the original will and testament, see Honigmann and Brock 1993, 107.
[8] See Thomas and Faircloth 2014.

works demonstrate. In London, like Stratford, there were many fine gardens, including the well-stocked herbal garden of the herbalist and botanist John Gerard (1545-1612), in Holborn, which Shakespeare probably knew.[9] That said, we will never know whether Shakespeare was actually an active gardener.

Gardens in Shakespeare's plays

Shakespeare set approximately twenty-six scenes of his plays in gardens and orchards, unlike dramatists today who prefer rooms and kitchens in urban environments. He also refers to gardens, using them as metaphors, to discuss such issues, as the state of the nation, or an individual's wellbeing. I have selected the following scenes from his plays which can be used in class to introduce the topic of Shakespeare and gardens to your students. We'll begin with *Othello* and Iago's line "our bodies are our gardens." In 1.3, set in Venice, Roderigo, Othello's lieutenant, has just revealed to Iago, Othello's ensign, that he has fallen madly in love with Desdemona, Othello's wife:

> RODERIGO
> What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it.
>
> IAGO
> Virtue? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce […] either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. (*Oth* 1.3.317-22; 324-6)

What exactly does Iago, the arch villain of the tragedy, tell his army colleague? Like a garden, he informs Roderigo, a person's body is a living, pulsing organism that needs taking care of. If Roderigo decides to look after his body, he will prevent the passion he feels for Desdemona from getting the better of him. It is worth remembering that Elizabethans considered measure and moderation fundamental to a person's wellbeing. Through the garden-body metaphor, Iago insists we must be careful what we plant there. He is of course wrong that lettuce and nettles are bad for you – the Elizabethans believed that lettuce and other vegetables contained too much water – but his general idea is sound. In other words, 'we are

[9] See Gerard 1597.

what we eat' and it follows that we need to pay attention to our diets and how we treat our bodies.

A LOOK AT TODAY: The close link between bodies and gardens which Iago flags up is very different from our attitudes today. We are likely to spray perfume, containing chemicals, on our skin, or eat fast food, with colourings and preservatives. Are we doing our bodies a favour, by treating our bodies in this way? And even if our body grows ill and warns us through symptoms, such as pain, that things are not going too well, we often persist in our habits.

LINK: perfume and fast food advertisements. With students, find, read and analyse the labels of ingredients on perfume and deodorant sprays as well as fast food products.

Gardens can also stand as metaphors for entire kingdoms in plays such as *Hamlet* and *Richard II*. Like many Elizabethans, Shakespeare believed the state of a royal garden reflected the state of a nation. In his first monologue, Hamlet is talking to his mother, Gertrude, and to her new husband, King Claudius. Expressing his disgust at the state of affairs in Denmark after his father's untimely death, the young prince compares the world of the Danish Court to a neglected garden:

> Fie on't, ah fie, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature|
> Possess it merely. That it should come to this – (*Ham* 1.2.135-7).

In this place, measure and moderation are absent, and so terrible deeds can unfold: King Hamlet (Hamlet's father) is poisoned, while sleeping in his orchard, and later his ghost appears.

In the history play *Richard II*, instead of an orchard, Shakespeare takes us inside the royal garden, where weeds and caterpillars abound. This garden, like the previous orchard, stands as a metaphor for a nation in ruins. The spatial arrangement of the scene is carefully organized. Queen Isabella, Richard II's wife, and her ladies-in-waiting are positioned so they can eavesdrop on the conversation between a royal Gardener and a Servant. As the two workers discuss what needs doing in the garden and start to tidy it up, they mention the Elizabethan ideals of order, measure and harmony, while alluding to the dire political problems the country is facing and what might be done to improve matters. It is significant that Shakespeare allows two commoners to comment on the nation's problems,

rather than important statesmen or politicians. He has actually turned the rigid hierarchy of the Elizabethan world upside down.

The Queen and her Ladies stand apart

GARDENER [*to First Man*]
Go, bind thou up yon dangling apricocks,
Which, like unruly children, make their sire
Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight.
Give some supportance to the bending twigs.
[*To Second Man*] Go thou, and, like an executioner,
Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,
That look too lofty in our commonwealth.
All must be even in our government.
You thus employed, I will go root away
The noisome weeds, which without profit suck
The soil's fertility from wholesome flowers.

[FIRST] MAN
Why should we in the compass of a pale
Keep law and form and due proportion,
Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,
When our sea-wallèd garden, the whole land,
Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
Her fruit-trees all upturned, her hedges ruined,
Her knots disordered and her wholesome herbs
Swarming with caterpillars? (*R2* 3.4.41-7)

In the scene the Gardener points specifically to apricot trees, which Henry VIII had brought from Italy, and whose fruit was a delicacy by Shakespeare's time. The weight of the heavy boughs is compared to "unruly children" who need training. The Gardener recommends two verbs, "cut off" and "root away," showing that the remedy he is advocating is a drastic one. The first man asks why he and the Gardener should set an example, when the general situation is so bad. And to talk about the nation's problems, he actually uses a series of garden images: the abundance of weeds, choking flowers, upturned fruit-trees, ruined hedges, disorderly garden knots (in Shakespeare's day these were knot gardens) and herbs full of caterpillars.

A LOOK AT TODAY: While it is true that many students, especially in cities and towns, don't have a garden, or if they do, they are not at an age to show much interest in it, in recent decades a good number of garden projects have sprung up, some in schools, some in local neighbourhoods,

and through these you could introduce this topic to students. There are also Shakespeare gardens scattered throughout the UK, America and other parts of the globe. Most of them are themed gardens, where signs featuring verses from Shakespeare's plays, in which he mentions plants and herbs, are placed next to a particular plant. Many of these gardens run seminars and workshops for students of all ages as well as putting on plays or inviting companies to perform in the garden.

Fig. 1-5 Shakespeare Garden at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco.

LINK: During the 2015 EXPO, Benedetta Parenti, an English teacher at the Frassati scientific secondary school (Seveso, a town near Milan), in collaboration with the present writer and Cristina Paravano, organised an interdisciplinary project, "Shakespeare, the Herbalist," that involved teachers of literature, theatre, history and science. Focusing on the herbs, fruit and flowers in *Romeo and Juliet*, and organising a visit to the Botanical Gardens in Città Studi, we aimed to make students more aware of the various ways plants and herbs figure in Shakespeare and of our need to take care of the environment.

This initial project led Cristina Paravano and I to team up with biologist Angela Ronchi, the coordinator of a school programme, at the Botanical Gardens in Città Studi. The three of us set about devising visits for students in order to introduce them to the garden and to a 'green' Shakespeare. We selected excerpts from those plays, where the Bard's knowledge of gardens, plants and herbs are important, and combined these with our own narrative.[10] If you take your students to visit a botanical garden to learn more about Shakespeare's love of gardens, the experience can become part of your lessons devoted to Shakespeare and his theatre.

[10] See the website of the event at https://exposhakespeareandfoodforthecity.wordpress.com/progetti-2/.