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They Did Things Differently Back Then – The Problematics of Teaching Texts and Their Historical Co/n/texts

The historicisation of literary criticism in the last two decades has become a commonplace to many researching in the field of Shakespeare studies. This is not necessarily the case outside academe and to underline this point I want to frame my discussion of historiography in the classroom by relating a tale from the recent past.

Back in July 1999, I was teaching *Hamlet* to a class of seventeen year olds. Having spent a couple of lessons on the "story" I was about to introduce the notion of multiple readings using excerpts from several films released during the past fifty years. I began by playing the section from Act 1, Scene 2 in Olivier's black and white film where Gertrude gives Hamlet a lengthy and distinctly unmotherly kiss. At this point in the course I usually raise the idea that multiple readings of texts are theoretically based, either explicitly or implicitly, beginning with Oedipal readings of *Hamlet*. I was very surprised when the students viewed the scene with atypical placidity.

Don't you read that Mother-son exchange as a little unusual? I asked. *Oh no*, replied one of the students, *they did things differently back then. You know, they showed a lot more physical affection*. This explanation was greeted by a murmur of general acceptance – the rest of the class was clearly familiar with text and historical context links. I felt dismay on two counts: firstly, the students had tacitly equated fictional characters with

"real" people; secondly, they were operating from a premise that "back then" could subsume a film made in 1948 and a play staged around 1601. Both times had become undifferentiated monolithic "history" – a singularity defined only by being "not now". As I investigated further, it became clear that students felt all aberrations in the behaviour of characters in any particular production of *Hamlet* could be explained away as examples of real life customs of a uniformly peculiar past. Given these assumptions even a basic thematic consideration of Shakespeare's work became irrelevant. To add insult to injury, the students' notion of the past as uniformly "physically affectionate" elided one of the great historical debates of the last few decades. Lawrence Stone argues in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* that the Elizabethan family was marked by "distance, manipulation and deference" and that most people "found it very difficult to establish close personal ties with any other person" (Stone 1977: 117). Stone's broad brush approach has been vigorously contested, for example by Linda Pollock in *Forgotten Children: Parent – Child relations From 1500 to 1900* and by Patrick Collinson in *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* and by Keith Wrightson in *English Society 1580–1680*.[1] The debate has had clear literary historical resonance from the early 1980s when Marianne Novy discussed its implications for Shakespearean critics in her essay "Shakespeare and Emotional Distance in the Elizabethan Family". The dissension among academics is clearly at odds with any kind of certainty about an unproblematic relationship between a text and its historical context. I decided to disrupt the assumptions of my students.

It was in vain, however, that I laboured to destroy both the initial, unsubstantiated belief about family life and what I thought was a distinctly curious conceptualisation of "history". The students seemed to me to have developed an oppositional notion to traditional ideas of "intentional fallacy" (specifically the conviction that Shakespeare had intended a particular, universally accessible interpretation) by asserting what I came to think of as a "uniformity of the past fallacy". Students were sure they would be able to explain away all the action and all the "problems" in any of the

[1] To a degree this debate functioned as a sideshow in the larger historicist versus psychoanalytical discussions of the past two decades. Interesting examples of the more recent trajectory of this larger discussion include Stephen Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture" in *Learning to Curse*. Routledge, London and New York 1990, 131–145, and Meredith Anne Skura, "Understanding the Living and Talking to the Dead: The Historicity of Psychoanalysis", [in:] M. Brown (ed.), *The Uses of Literary History*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 1995, 93–105.

performances of Hamlet they saw by invoking an inexplicable past as monolithic "other". There seemed to be no way they would accept our current complex, partial, provisional and disorderly histories (Baker 1997: 135) of either Shakespeare's early modern England or Olivier's post-World War II film-making England, over the simplicity of their constructed narrative of an overridingly physically-affectionate social life which had lasted over three and a half centuries and then had abruptly ceased sometime during the last 50 years.

Perhaps you would like to hear more about what it was like to go to the theatre in the past, I said finally, opting for a shock strategy, which included some material from Peter Holland's paper on intervals in the theatre. I paraphrased from memory. *Apparently people frequently talked during the play performances. Samuel Pepys, who kept a famous diary, recorded many of the conversations he heard around him in the theatres of the 1660s. Talking was still occurring over a century later. Fanny Burney, a famous author, wrote in her diary for 28th May 1790 that she attended a performance of* The Messiah, *found she was seated next to her father and spent three hours talking to him. She records the conversation in detail but says nothing at all about the music.* The students expressed horror at this point. (I hypothesised they had chosen to study Music in preference to History.)

I continued undaunted. *Another thing that was different was the use of intervals. It appears there were no toilets attached to theatres then, and currently scholars are guessing that there were no play intervals such as we have now so we can go to the toilet. In fact, a number of critics think some people in the audience who needed to, may have urinated wherever they were while they were watching the plays. It appears lead lining was ordered for the galleries in one theatre in England to prevent 'nuisances' such as urine running down onto the heads of the people below.*[2] I was heartened by the now universal expressions of shock and disbelief on students' faces. I prepared for what I hoped would be something of a pedagogical coup.

There's also a case for thinking prostitutes may have plied their trade with members of the audience while the plays were being presented; it is certainly possible this was happening in the last part of the seventeenth century. I suppose you could call that showing more physical affection, I concluded, anticipating my use of a series of historical moments had sketched for my students an idea of a more complex, heterogeneous past.

[2] In 1837 at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle, lead lining was ordered for "the floor between the front seat and front of the Gallery...to prevent Nuisances" (Holland 2001).

Teaching Implications

This incident has a number of implications for teachers. It serves to problematise classroom pedagogy linking non-contemporary texts to what is commonly labelled as their historical contexts. In fact there are two distinct problems here: the first is directly related to pedagogical issues; the second results from the recent re-conceptualisations of history, and the subsequent shifts from the study of texts and their historical background or context to the study of texts and their co-texts.

Pedagogical barriers to a detailed consideration of texts/contexts/co-texts are significant. In the first place, the classroom situation is inherently complex because teachers and students often have highly differentiated ways of conceptualising historical "contexts". Teachers trained before the "new theory" may be struggling to eliminate the universalising tendencies of formalist approaches which tended to focus on common experiences and themes excised from history. At the same time, students with no exposure to New Critical theory and discourses, and no preconceived notion of "universal" themes, may well have the pronounced tendency to treat all other times as equally different or "other", resulting in the opposite, unproductive sort of mystification already discussed. Furthermore, not all teachers would accept the necessity to historicise texts at all, though there are significant reasons which suggest this is an approach well worth pursuing. Firstly, there are certain theoretical imperatives associated with the convergence of academic disciplines. To excise notions of historical/social/cultural contexts from our studies of non-contemporary texts is, as R. C. Richardson comments, to isolate ourselves "from continuing dialogues in which historians and practitioners of other academic subjects engage", and to embrace "disciplinary parochialisms" (1999: 233). The dialogues in question are at the centre of public discourses in a number of Western countries. Certainly an interest in historical issues and historicized practice has dominated literary theory for some time. Tony E. Jackson in "The Desires of History, Old and New" claims that this interest has extended well outside academia.

> Since World War II, there has been a fairly widespread turn by novelists to considerations of history. Nowhere is this more in evidence than in recent British fiction. It is not too strong to suggest that the turn to history as a theme may be the definitive element in British fiction of the last three decades (1999: 171).

He lists writers such as A. S. Byatt, Julian Barnes, Martin Amis, Peter Ackroyd, John Fowles, Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch and Penelope Lively to prove his point. In Australia we have also had a significant number of

novelists dealing with the issues of history: Peter Carey, Kate Grenville and Jean Bedford, among others, have delved into both European and Australian pasts. Other countries offer parallel examples. There appears to be little doubt that "history" is valued both as a lens for viewing texts and as a raw material from which texts can be created.

A second imperative for linking texts and "history" is underpinned by the notion that it is only by looking at changes in the past that students can develop a sense of alternatives to the present, a present which itself is both partly produced by and produces history. Many current pedagogical programs mandate social justice outcomes by encouraging students to think critically about textual constructions which marginalise or silence particular groups. Such education programs forfeit credibility where they maintain a silence about the past by omitting any reference to history or historical co(n)texts. Finally, there is a 'student interest' factor. Recently released films such as the Heath Ledger vehicle, *A Knight's Tale* with Geoffrey Chaucer as a character, and the Martin Lawrence film, *Black Knight*, involving time travel to the thirteenth century, indicate there is a significant young adult market for films which draw on the past. Admittedly many people – including the film reviewer who designated *A Knight's Tale* the worst film of 2001 – might be more inclined to dismiss these films as 'hash-tory' rather than to see them as new versions of history.[3] In fact such popular culture, filmic renderings of history are worthy of study precisely because (and usually within the first half hour) attempts at post-modern play collapse into a simplistic, contemporary Western triumphalism.[4] However, there have been other indications that students have a genuine interest in the historicisation of the texts they are studying. Josephine Ryan in her article "'Doing' Shakespeare: A Perspective on Reading in Secondary School", reports that her interviews show a significant group of students have an "appreciation for things that are different linked to [their] interest in Shakespeare as history". She comments this is "perhaps under exploited by teachers" (Ryan 2000: 12) who do not mention the historical side of Shakespeare as often as students do (*Ibid.* 2000: 10).

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[3] Danielsen, Shane, 2001. Film review. In: *Radio National Breakfast*, Australian Radio National. 2001 December 7. 825 hrs.

[4] Critics such as Dollimore view postmodernism as intrinsically hostile to historicist criticism. In "Shakespearean Understudies" he refers to the "facile postmodern erasure" of history "specifically, the denial of historical determinations in the present of criticism, or the past of the text's cultural production" (1994: 131). In contrast, historian M. Poster, *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges*, Columbia University Press, New York 1997, argues that an alternative postmodern "cultural history" is not only possible but desirable.

A number of classroom imperatives could account for this reticence. Firstly, "School English" tends to emphasise continuity and connection (often theme, issue or genre-based), which has the effect of largely abstracting texts from their historical context. Secondly, teachers facing severe time restrictions can mention little more than a text's "intended audience" and refer generally to dominant social attitudes and behaviours at the time it was written. In the case of teaching Shakespeare, there is an additional very good reason for a reduced emphasis on the specificity of historical context. Lloyd Davis (1999: 23) argues that in a classroom where the unfamiliarity of Shakespeare's language is already proving a significant barrier to student learning, the teacher is much more likely to stress thematic connection and relevance to the students' own lives rather than risk alienating the students further by stressing difference.

Teachers appear to face at least three challenges in preparing students to come to grips with historical background. The first involves avoiding a *history as undifferentiated other* approach. In the case of the physically affectionate Hamlet, some students clearly viewed all times from 1601 to 1948 as equally different, strange and other – as a sort of continuous historical freak show providing interest and spectacle but little else of value.[5] A second kind of historical approach which is equally misleading involves temporo-centrism (the belief that one's own times are superior to other times) – evident in the sort of twenty-first century triumphalism I have already referred to. Here interpretation of texts placed in their historical contexts mobilises a simple present/past – good/bad opposition. In other words, history is seen as recording the progress of society from past foolishness to present wisdom, as representing a steady progress towards a sort of Hegelian ideal. Accounts of the past historical contexts in which many literary texts were produced and circulated are read as revealing little more than the contemptible stupidity of those involved. For example, students using this approach might interpret representations of patriarchy in Shakespeare's plays in terms of double culpability based on their own "superior" ideological positions. In *Hamlet*, not only are Claudius and Polonius seen as guilty of corruptly exercising their patriarchal authority, but Ophelia (as a representation of women) is seen as equally guilty for not exercising sufficient "girl power" to resist her father. A third identifiable historical myth is based on the assumption that whatever appears in a literary text is a faithful reflection of life at the time, that the text is a display of past normative behaviours and therefore the characters represent real people

[5] E. D. Hirsch's "fallacy of the inscrutable past" where "a distant era seems to be populated by beings who might have come from Mars" (1976: 39) seems to share some similarities with this approach. However, there appears to be minimal critical commentary on an inability to discriminate between the distant and relatively recent past.

living in a monolithic society. In practical terms, this would mean that as Hamlet snogged his Mum in the Olivier film, then nearly all sons must have snogged their mums on a regular basis at the start of the seventeenth century.

It seems reasonable to conclude that students do have an interest in and an enthusiasm for historical issues. However, because their critical thinking skills have generally been developed through work on contemporary texts, it can't be assumed that these skills are immediately transferable to work on non-contemporary texts or to their particular historical contexts.

According to Marta Straznicky, in the afterword to *Discontinuities*, those lecturing at the undergraduate level similarly report on

> the frustrations of teaching students who resist or fail to grasp the premises of historicist criticism, who are forever converting the past into the present without any sense of the mediating discourses that enable them to do so. And while they are keenly interested in, say, early modern hygiene or shaming rituals, and perfectly capable of understanding how traditionally non-literary discourses and practices intersect with the Renaissance text, they appear to have difficulty sustaining such work outside the lecture hall or seminar room (1998: 225).

She expresses concern that unless the newer historicising practices become institutionalised in the sense that they are taught to non-experts, they and the new knowledges they have produced will become little more than academic ephemera. Robert Hodge in *Literature as Discourse* also argues for the existence of a problem at tertiary levels, suggesting there is a frightening new breed of teachers who historicise their texts in autocratic ways. He argues that these teachers, having rejected the basic identity of the past with the present through the old style "timeless truth of the classic", go on to "insist on difference, constructing a version of the past as the key to the meaning of the classic. This key is controlled by the authorized guardians... either way history is mystified, and the real difficulties of the classic texts are exploited to reinforce the power of the teachers over the taught" (Hodge 1990: 214). It appears both secondary and tertiary classrooms have much in common when it comes to both teaching and learning. They reveal something of a discontinuity between research practices and pedagogical practices.

It is a commonplace in research to acknowledge the differences between old and new literary historical approaches and there can be no doubt that the sort of changes which provoked "the theory wars" in English departments have occurred in history departments, amongst others, with comparable levels of disagreement and angst. Traditionalists in the humanities area have generally viewed the death of the author as the first in a line of serial murders which has included history. Keith Windshuttle's *The Killing of History* (1994), subtitled *How a Discipline is Being Murdered by Literary*

Critics and Social Theorists is a clear example. Such works are generally underpinned by traditional notions of historical realism (history's equivalent to literature's author's intention), positing a recoverable history which is accurate, factual and untainted by the historian's own politics or language, or the cultural and social context in which she or he is writing. This view has been vigorously challenged at least since the 1970s.

Today, historiographers would certainly differentiate between the so-called "old historicisms" and the "new historicisms". Old historicisms tended to concentrate on both political history and histories of ideas, where as new historicisms tend to deal with social and cultural, and as Alun Munslow has called it, "deconstructionist" history. Louis Montrose argues that there are three basic old style literary historical approaches which have been problematised by recent theoretical developments. The dominant one in literary studies was used primarily in New Critical or formalist enterprises. It combined close reading "with the elaboration of relatively self-contained histories of ideas or of literary genres – histories that ha[d] been abstracted from their social matrices" (1989: 17). The second type was a populist approach which drew on dominant ideologies. E. M. W. Tillyard is by far the most famous exponent of this older style literary historical approach. His 1943 *The Elizabethan World Picture* has been labelled by Greenblatt (1982: 5) as a notorious example of the use of a single political vision attributed to an entire population; that is, the dominant ideology is interpreted as the only ideology. In the classroom, *King Lear*, for example, would have been taught as a specific disruption of the "great chain of being". Students were told that the Elizabethan audience – as a unified group – assumed that the tragic events in the play were a direct result of King Lear's reversal of the cosmic order. Similarly, in *Othello* students learned that the audience accepted Desdemona's death because she disrupted the chain of being by disobeying her father. According to Montrose, the third type of old historicist approach was a political allegorical one which involved becoming a historical detective and matching fictional characters and events with specific historical persons and events. (This approach probably only ever served a niche academic market.)

The new histories have wrought significant changes. Just as those working with texts have had to accept their ideological contamination or situatedness, so historians, through the offices of theorists such as Hayden White, have had to confront a range of complexities which underline the irrecoverable nature of the past as it really was.[6] In his useful *Beginning Theory* text

[6] White's work represents a convergence of formalist literary theory and history. Using literary tropes, he argues that historians base their historical narratives on a romantic, comedic, tragic or satirical style of "emplotment" (1973).

written explicitly for undergraduates, Peter Barry explains that for new style historicists, "Historical events as such... are irrecoverably lost.... the word of the past replaces the world of the past". Any historical text is 'thrice-processed': through the ideology and discursive practices of its time, through those of our own, and then through the "distorting web" of language itself" (Barry 1995: 175). We may accept that the new focus is Montrose's "the historicity of the text and the textuality of history", the difficulty is how to make this meaningful for students who have never thought about history as limited to textual residue. Thus the idea of presenting a text AND its historical context becomes problematic because it suggests the text is a reflection or product of history, rather than that they share mutual intertextual influences (Howard 1986: 24–5).[7] Rather than studying historical contexts, students are studying co-texts.

The new literary historicisms offer teachers a smorgasbord of approaches, incorporating updated versions of Marxism via Althusser and Raymond Williams, Foucaultian epistemes, and major contributions from theorists dealing with issues of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality. In fact, teachers wishing to address issues of historicisation at all levels may well find themselves spoiled for choice. In general, the emphasis in new approaches has moved from the *validation* of what occurred in the society to the *significance* of what occurred to *particular groups* within the society. No longer is there a simple focus on the production of a text, but also on its reception and circulation through various reproductions. We seem to be, as Jean Howard remarks, "very much in the era of the transdisciplinary microhistory" (1991b: 107).

Given the sophistication of new historical approaches, a basic problem for teachers is how to introduce accessible material into the classroom in practical and theoretically grounded ways. If students are struggling to develop a meaningful concept of history at all, is it feasible to attempt to explain the subtle differences between New Historicism with its "thick descriptions" and Cultural Materialism with its focus on material conditions? Like Jean Howard in "Feminism and the Question of History: Resituating

[7] A number of scholars have remarked on the problematic relationship between history and literary criticism, historians and literary critical historians. Lisa Jardine, for example, sees criticism as a client of history which, she argues, is treated as if it were "less available for scrutiny and critique" (1996: 17). For an interesting discussion on the absence of a mutually constitutive enterprise involving both historians and literary historians, see Robert Hodge, *Literature as Discourse*: *Textual Strategies in English and History*, who argues "The split that exists between English and History is not an oversight that could be overcome by a bit of good will from the various people concerned. It is systemic and functional, related to the way knowledge is organized within specific institutions in contemporary society" (1990: 219).

the Debate", I can't help wishing for a textbook which would juxtapose canonical texts with a range of non-literary ones. As Howard argues, this "might signal that, depending on the purposes of the investigator, different types of texts (poems, proclamations, polemical prose) might change places in terms of their position in the foreground or the background of particular analyses" (1991a: 153). It is certainly possible to use in the classroom passages from "typical" New Historicist essays commencing with an anecdote or an extract from a "non-literary" text which is subject to interpretation through close reading, then juxtaposed with the "literary" text which can then be read in a new way, disrupting traditional reading patterns. For example, a standard new historicist approach of introducing a letter from a subject swearing loyalty to Queen Elizabeth allows Katherina's speech at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew* to be read not just in terms of female submission to a male, but as a metaphor of the submission of a subject to a monarch.

Cultural Materialism with its focus both on recovering past histories of exploitation at the times the texts emerged, and on critiquing uses of the texts today (Barry 1995: 187), also opens up space for student-friendly critique. Its more overt social justice platform has significant appeal to some students. Again *The Taming of the Shrew* provides a useful example of how it might be used in the classroom. In the 1980s TV series *Moonlighting* with Cybil Shepherd and Bruce Willis, the "Atomic Shakespeare" episode featured an explicitly feminist reworking of Shrew which is in stark contrast to the treatment the play received in the much more recent and highly successful young adult film *10 Things I Hate About You*. The conservatism of the later film demonstrates, albeit on a reduced time scale, the new historicist view that history should not be read as a chronicle of social development.[8]

Given the conceptual shift in the ways we regard history, a useful course for students could present some sort of broad indication of these changes, as well as specific contact with texts and selected co-texts. The former might indicate at the macro-level the kinds of shifts which have been made from the old histories to the new histories. Inevitably this would produce a reductive opposition invoking the very closure – the totalisation – which "new" history resists, and therefore would give a useful opportunity for students to problematise the metahistory produced. In *Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges*, Mark Poster goes a step further, arguing that in order to develop a continuously self-reflexive practice, "The discipline of history must develop discursive strategies that

[8] A useful example of this is discussed in *The Subject of Tragedy*, where Catherine Belsey compares *Fulgens and Lucres* (c. 1500) to *The Merchant of Venice* from a century later, finding the latter "rather less radical in its treatment of women as subjects" (1985: 196).

detotalize the past while recognizing a moment of totalization in its own epistemological position" (1997: 67). The table below might provide a useful starting point for student identification of the problematic nature of historical concepts.

Old Histories	New Histories
Modern	Post-modern
Linear and monological and homogeneous	Non-linear and dialogical and heterogeneous
Meta or Grand Narratives explaining development from past to present eg Marxism	*Little narratives*: all narratives constructed, partial, 'untrustworthy'
Traditional, single narrative with beginning, middle and end	Episteme or paradigm associated with each historical epoch (Foucault)
Diachronic structures of cause and effect bind together successive times – emphasis on passage of time and continuity	Synchronic structures of knowledge bind together coexisting actors at a single time: specified moments or " 'instants' or slices of time" (Jackson 1999: 170) – emphasis on rupture, exclusion, contradiction, discontinuity
Change continuous and progressive; history seen as the acts of free and determined agents	Changes haphazard and random – temporal discontinuities; history based on notions of time and change seen as human constructions
The "truth" of past reality seen through the transparent lens of language	The written texts of the past triply mediated through the ideologies of the historian's culture, the ideologies in the textual "residue" from past culture, and through language/ discourses
Historian records meaning	Historian makes meaning
Separation of literary and historical texts	Problematisation of boundaries between literary and historical texts
Either "history from above" or the more recent "history from below"[9]	History as a set of discursive practices requiring self-reflexive analysis
Production or construction of knowledge on a subject such as the family by domestication of potentially disruptive features/ differences eg the poor, women, non-nuclear families	Problematisation of production of knowledge on a subject by reconceptualisation and redrawing of cognitive maps including concepts of periodisation

[9] Poster also provides a detailed critique of the work of recent social realist historians including Lawrence Stone. Poster argues their methodologically innovative "history from below" remans "humanist to the bone" – and therefore unsatisfactory – because history is still defined as "the free and determined acts of agents" (1997: 4).

Old Histories	New Histories
Totalising narrative eg consumers as passive vehicle in capitalist system, consumption as victimisation	Partial, conflicting narratives and examination of the "tactics" of everyday practices eg consumers as heterogeneous, consumption as disruptive intervention caused by an "eruption of the heterogeneous"[10]
Political History: study of political leaders and influential leaders of elite classes	Cultural History: historian works with past and present in a dialectical relationship
Realist Social History: "recovery of past" by study of individuals and groups in everyday life producing realist social narratives: life as it was lived	Comparative History and cultural heteroglossia: life as it was told
History of ideas: presentation of "world pictures" focusing on the dominant ideology as universally accepted	History of ideas problematised by focusing on non-ideas-of-the-time eg. relatively modern concepts such as a homosexual identity "unthinkable" in past[11]
Empiricism (Enlightenment); Idealism and liberal humanism (Romantic period); historical realism (including Marxism)	Cultural materialism; New Historicism; neo-Marxism; recent feminism; post-colonialism

Providing student access to a text and a range of co-texts might also be usefully systematised. The list below indicates the range and groupings of resources which teachers using a "new" historical approach to *The Taming of the Shrew* might include.

Introductory Materials, Modern Appropriations

- ***Moonlighting*** – **"Atomic Shakespeare"** TV series episode (starring Cybill Shepherd and Bruce Willis) on *The Taming of the Shrew* (1986) – induction establishes matriarchy as dominant; explicitly feminist appropriation eg Kate's concluding speech given by Petruchio who affirms that Kate is correct and he has been wrong (link to early 1980's "grand narrative" of emancipatory feminism)
- ***10 Things I Hate About You*** (1998) – a contemporary remake of *The Shrew* which privileges normative behaviour eg both "outsider" characters, Kat and Patrick, are normalised to the extent they dress up and go

[10] De Certeau's work, in particular, allows consumption to be read as resistance.

[11] Richard Levin coined this phrase in his attempt to satirise new historical approaches. See "Unthinkable Thoughts in the New Historicizing of English Renaissance Drama" (1990).

to the school prom; heterosexual pairing is privileged; (using current news articles, film could be read resistantly or subversively as promoting stalking: males continue pursuing females despite repeated rejections).

Extracts From Various (Historical) Co-Texts which Draw on Dominant Ideologies

- Peter Stallybrass (1986), "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed" quotes
  - William Whately (1617), *A Bride Bush or a direction for married persons. Plainely describing duties common to both, and peculiar to each of them. By performing of which, marriage shall prove a great help to such, as were now for want of perfecting them, doe find it a little hell..*: "The whole duty of the wife is referred to two heads: the first is to acknowledge her inferiority: the next to carry her selfe as inferior." Ideally the wife is to be trained like an animal so "she submits herselfe with quietness, cheerfully, even as a well-broken horse turns at the least check of the riders bridle, readily going and standing as he wishes that sits upon his backe" (qtd. Stallybrass 129).
  - William Gouge (1622), *Of Domestical Duties*: a wife must submit herself to her husband as "a King to governe and aid her, a Priest to pray with her and for her, a Prophet to teach and instruct her Such tokens of familiarity as are not withall tokens of subjection and reverence are unbeseeming a wife" (qtd. Stallybrass 129).
- Lynda Boose (1995) "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member" provides an interesting account of ducking stools and scold's bridles (1620+) both of which had strictly gendered uses. Pages 246–47 contain illustrations of ducking stools; 268–69 have sketches of various scold's bridles. Boose quotes from the one known account written by a woman (Dorothy Waugh) who was bridled because she was "moved of the Lord to goe into the market of Carlile, to speake against all deceit & ungodly practices" (265). In a revealing practical example of ideological layering, Boose also critiques the source of much of her information, a paper presented in 1858 by Mr T.N. Brushfield, Medical Superintendent of the Cheshire Lunatic Asylum.
- Fletcher (1995) *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500–1800*
  - "A spaniel, a woman and a walnut tree/The more they're beaten the better they be" (proverb in Ray's collection 1670 qtd. Fletcher 1995: 192)

- Aughterson (1995) *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook* and Fletcher: diseases such as the "greensickness" or chlorosis, wandering womb etc.
- Ian Frederick Moulton (2000) *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*

– Fletcher's and Massinger's play *The Custom of the Country* could be used (judiciously in high schools because of its "baudry") to problematise conventional early modern and contemporary beliefs about the sexual aggressiveness of males (and Petruchio's supposed sexual "restraint") through the story of the character, Rutillio, who escapes a male brothel where (although an acknowledged rake) he is unable to match the voracious sexual appetites of his female clients. He declares battle and torture are preferable. "Women? Keep me from women;/ Place me before a cannon, 'tis a pleasure;/ Stretch me upon a rack, a recreation" (qtd. Moulton 2000: 76. See also 70–79.)

Extracts From Various Historical Co-Texts Which Introduce Competing (Proto-Feminist) Ideologies

- J. Fletcher *The Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tam'd* (reply to *Taming of the Shrew*): 1604–17 (Epilogue):

The Tamer's tam'd, but so, as nor the men/ Can finde one just cause to complaine of when/ They fitly do consider in their lives,/ They should not raign as Tyrants o'r their wives./ Nor can women from this president/ Insult, or triumph: it being aptly meant, To teach both Sexes due equality;/ And as they stand bound, to love mutually./ If this effect, arising from a cause/ Well layed, and grounded, may deserve applause,/ We something more than hope, our honest ends/ Will keep the men, and women too, our friends. (Bowers, ed. 1966: 117)

- Fletcher: references to Mary Frith or "Moll Cutpurse" whose real life story was celebrated in Dekker's and Middleton's play *The Roaring Girl* (1611). Moll was prosecuted in 1612 for public immorality:

Being at a play in man's apparel and in her boots and with a sword at her side, she told the company there present that she thought many of them were of the opinion that she was a man but if any of them would come to her lodging they should find that she is a woman and some other immodest and lascivious speeches she also used at that time. And also sat there upon the stage in the public view of all the people there present; in man's apparel, and played upon her lute and sang a song". When she was made to do penance at Paul's Cross, she "put on a magnificent display of bitter tears and penitence rumoured to be based on having drunk a huge amount of sack" (qtd. Fletcher 1995: 9).

- *Jane Anger, her Protection for Women To defend them against the Scandalous Reports of a late Surfeiting Lover and all other Venerians*

[wanton lustful individuals] *that complain so to be overcloyed with women's kindness.* Written by Jane Anger, Gentlewoman (1589):

Fie on the falsehood of men, whose minds go oft amadding, and whose tongues cannot so soon be wagging but straight they fall arailing. Was there ever any so abused, so slandered, so railed upon, or so wickedly handled undeservedly as are we women?" (extract from pamphlet by unknown author qtd. Henderson and McManus 1985: 173–74; also Aughterson 1995: 266)

I want to conclude by returning to another moment in my teaching practice, which occurred some time after the incident with which this essay commenced. I was using a similar teaching strategy to that outlined above but based on *Hamlet* rather than *The Taming of the Shrew*. The assessment task required the 45 students in the course to present an idea or "pitch" for a new film or theatre adaptation of *Hamlet*. The main proviso was that students needed to be able to articulate links and discontinuities between their appropriation and the text of *Hamlet* they had studied. Given the classroom emphasis on "new" history, I expected a fair proportion of the proposed films to be set in early modern England. In fact only 16% of students chose to use a historical approach. Half of the total group of students developed films with contemporary settings associated either with drugs, the mafia or Hollywood. In a number of these films there were some predictable plot transformations such as King Hamlet being injected in the ear with heroin, and some quite inventive ones – for example a film set in the Elsinore Hair and Beauty Salon. Here Polonius spies on Gertrude and Hamlet who have met in a waxing cubicle which is, of course, the innermost, closet-like sanctum on the premises. Polonius has super-heated hair removing wax poured over him by an angry Hamlet but doesn't actually die. The student claimed he doesn't need to – in Hollywood the resulting disfigurement would mean social death anyway.

Despite the students' obvious preference for a *Hamlet* played out through modern discourses, 40% of students said they would have liked more historical information in the course and the majority – another 57% of students – agreed that historicising the play they were studying was "of some use".

Certainly the sort of approach I have outlined here allows students to access specific and conflicting textual traces of social and cultural life at the time of the text's origin. By reading the text juxtaposed with a range of additional texts from the time, instead of simply looking at social trend data about marriage ages, death rates and so on (though that is still useful material), students are more likely to move beyond the concepts of the past as undifferentiated other or the past as populated by ignorant unfortunates. There is also a level of consistency in research and pedagogical practices.

The interest factor in a pedagogical approach which links texts to their historical co/n/texts is considerable. However, such an approach is likely to raise further issues which require attention, as student answers to the final question in my course evaluation survey indicated. In response to the question *Have you any further comments about the historical background?* one student had noted, *I want to learn more because it sounded horrid.* In fact, a summary of the two moments in my pedagogical performance has me beginning with some complacent students and ending with at least one horrified one. I duly note the new historical hypothesis that histories (including histories of our teaching practices) are not necessarily either linear or progressive.

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