# FINAL TRANSCRIPT



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| **STRAND TITLE:** | AA306: SHAKESPEARE, TEXT & PERFORMANCE | **PRODUCT TITLE:** | CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS |

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| **PROGRAMME TITLE:** | VC7 |

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| **PRODUCER:** | JENNY BARDWELL | **PA:** | CAROLE BROWN |

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**SYNOPSIS:**

VC7 is the final video in the series and revisits some of the key critical approaches to understanding Shakespeare - especially new historicism and cultural materialism. It is largely interview material collectat the World Congress on Shakespeare in Los Angeles in 1996, and includes opinions of Stephen Greenblatt, Terence Hawkes, Jerry Brotton, Kiernan Ryan, Catherine Belsey among others. The progamme is linked by Stephen Regan on location in Stratford upon Avon.

**MAIN CONTRIBUTORS:**

| NAME: | TITLE (Job/Company etc) |
|---|---|
| Stephen Regan | Presenter - OU Academic |
| Jerry Brotton | Interviewee |
| Terence Hawkes | Interviewee [University of Wales, Cardiff] |
| Russ McDonald | Interviewee |
| John Drakakis | Interviewee [Dept English Studies, University of Stirling] |
| Reg Foakes | Interviewee |
| Catherine Belsey | Interviewee [University of Wales, Cardiff] |
| Ania Loomba | Interviewee |
| Stephen Greenblatt | Interviewee |
| Kiernan Ryan | Interviewee [New Hall, University of Cambridge] |
| Penny Gay | Interviewee [University of Sydney] |
| Jyotsna Singh | Interviewee [Dept of English, Southern Methodist, Dallas] |

Continued....

BBC OPEN UNIVERSITY PRODUCTION CENTRE - ARTS FACULTY

FINAL TRANSCRIPT

# AA306
# SHAKESPEARE:
# TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

## VC7: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

**PRESENTER:**
**Stephen Regan**

**CONTRIBUTORS:**
**Jerry Brotton**
**Terence Hawkes**
**Russ McDonald**
**Stpehen Greenblatt**
**John Drakakis**
**Reg Foakes**
**Catherine Belsey**
**Ania Loomba**
**Kiernan Ryan**
**Penny Gay**

**PRODUCER**
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**Final tape No: OU CASSETTE 1085**
**Costing No: 1/FOU/A571X**
**Dur: 56'11**
**First Presentation: 2000**

**AA306 VC7: CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS**

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| | ***OU IDENT*** | OU music RT 10" |
| Opening title sequence: montage of images taken from course material RT:37" | ***AA306 OPENING TITLES*** | Music: Specially *composed by* Adrian Lee RT:37" |
| caption: | ***CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS*** | |

All specially shot unless specified

various shots of Hollywood

Steve Regan to camera in Stratford Upon Avon

**Stephen Regan.**

Most of the material in this programme was recorded at the World Shakespeare Congress in Los Angeles in 1996. But today we've come back to Stratford-upon-Avon, to think again about some of the critical issues surrounding Shakespeare's work. Here in Stratford there's no getting away from Shakespeare, or from the Shakespeare industry.

Music: Track 19 Angularity" [J Fiddy/S Burdson] from Minimal SCD 254 Sonoton recorded music library. RT: 37"

Shakespeare scholars are standing around on every street corner. Hello Jerry. What are you doing here. ?

Music ends

**Jerry Brotton**

Hello Steve. Oh I'm just brushing up on my Shakespeare actually.

**Stephen Regan.**

Been doing a bit of shoplifting again.

**Jerry Brotton.**

Yeah, afraid so.

**Stephen Regan.**

Can we ask you why has Shakespeare become such a cultural icon, cultural hero?

**Jerry Brotton.**

I think that there's a long historical process, it's tied up with nationalism. I think that there's a need for a very big cultural national icon, that's happened to Shakespeare over several centuries, and I think that critics are arguing over is there an innate universal quality to Shakespeare, or is it actually a process by which that canonicity has been created for very specific social cultural aims

**Stephen Regan.**

Can we learn anything more about Shakespeare, what is there left to learn now?

**Jerry Brotton.**

I still think that there's probably quite a lot to learn from Shakespeare, I think every generation recreates a certain version of Shakespeare. I think we're probably quite a long way from saturation point, even though some critics argue very cogently that that might be the case.

***Music.***

Music: Track 19 Angularity" [J Fiddy/S Burdson] from Minimal SCD 254 Sonoton recorded music library. RT: 1'04

Caption

***POPULAR CULTURE***

**Terence Hawkes:**

There's a real question about whether Shakespeare's work should be performed at all, it seems to me. The one advantage Shakespeare has over a modern dramatist is that he doesn't have an albatross called Shakespeare hanging round his neck.

**Russ McDonald:**
You can't escape him. My nine year old child knows much more Shakespeare from television commercials than he knows from me.

**Stephen Greenblatt:**
Beavis and Butthead could say 'to be or not to be' and get a laugh, even though the people wouldn't know necessarily what the context of that illusion was.

**John Drakakis:**
There are many films now for example, many television programmes, which use Shakespeare in terms of particular quotations; isolate those quotations from their dramatic context. And by doing so of course they actually fragment and undermine that notion of an organic Shakespeare.

**Reg Foakes:**
The greatest department salesman in the world is Shakespeare according to an ad appeared recently in the New York in the New Yorker.

**Catherine Belsey:**
The astonishing thing is that 400 years on we're still having a World Congress and people are producing new readings of Shakespeare's plays.

**Ania Loomba:**
Certainly in India Shakespeare was a token of culture, a token of education, of literary power, so the purpose of interpreting and re-interpreting Shakespeare is in a sense to intervene in power structures to make Shakespeare speak to other constituencies.

**Reg Foakes:**

Plays like Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear, Romeo and Juliet and so on have been re-written many times reworked, because Shakespeare's imagination seems so powerful that we can never never let it go.

***music ends***

**Stephen Regan.**

Some critics would say that Shakespeare has been part of popular culture for the past 400 years, but what we're witnessing now is different from that surely we're seeing something on a global scale, huge international scale.

**Jerry Brotton:**

I think we are, I think that however that is a continuation of the popular culture elements that have always been there in Shakespeare. I mean you think of all the moments like, you think of the Porter scene in Macbeth, you think of the Fool in King Lear. You think of Stephena and Trinkella in The Tempest.

Actually what's happened is, all those popular cultural elements have always been there. The only difference is that where, we can't hear them any more, we're so historically distant from them.

However I do think that there are popular cultural elements such as film, thinking of Baz Lurhman's Romeo and Juliet, which I think is getting us back to the immediacy, to the populism of Shakespeare, that has actually always been there.

Poster from Baz Lurhman's Romeo and *Juliet, pan along bottom* showing credits RT: 10" **insubstantial**

**Stephen Greenblatt:**

Academics can pronounce about connecting

Shakespeare to popular culture but rather one of the happy facts is that Shakespeare in comic

Stephen Greenblatt to cam

book versions, and in cartoon versions quite happily thank you very much, it doesn't need professors at universities to make it happen.

**Stephen Regan.**

Inside Royal Shakespeare Company shop in Stratford -Upon-Avon

Well here we are shopping with Shakespeare and we've got all sorts of things here Shakespeare chocolates, Shakespeare sweets, Shakespeare tea, and Shakespeare socks.

**Jerry Brotton.**

Shakespeare socks, actually I have several pairs of these already so, but the tie the Shakespeare tie I think is particularly fetching

.

Music: Track 19 Angularity" [J Fiddy/S Burdson] from Minimal SCD 254 Sonoton recorded music library. RT: 03"

gv's Stratford

**John Drakakis:**

Let's start from the pre-supposition that Shakespeare is if you like the bearer of what we might call cultural capital. He already exists as a significant cultural figure - even the name let's leave aside the texts now which are slightly more problematical. Now it seems to me that the questions that we have to ask ourselves is how Shakespeare achieves that iconic status, what is involved, what is invested in that particular process.

Caption:

***CRITICISM***

Music: Track 33 Cello-Motion Paul Downing from Arthouse ATMOS CD63 RT: 05"

gv's Garden of New Place, Stratford Upon Avon

**Stephen Regan.**

One of the things I wanted to ask you Jerry, the difference between criticism and theory, is it a useful distinction to make.

**Jerry Brotton.**

I think in many ways it is I think it's important though to bear in mind the way in which theory does something very distinct from criticism. I think that the important distinguishing characteristic of theory, is that theory is something that you put to work around literature so I mean we can think for instance of the notion of arguments around feminism, being quite abstract theoretical issues, but now what's started to happen over the last couple of decades, is the way in which issues say around feminism can then be put to work. A theoretical issue can be put to work in relation to the play. So of course what that leads to is that you can take a theoretical argument around feminism, and say how does that help us think about say Lady Macbeth. How does it make us think about a character like Cleopatra. So theory in that way can be something that can be quite abstract, but then can also be something very enabling.

b/g garden as above

**Terence Hawkes:**

I can remember as an undergraduate and as a schoolboy writing essays on Macbeth as the embodiment of evil, as if evil was a free-floating quality like smog or smoke, floating in the air, and that occasionally attached itself to poor unsuspecting human beings

I don't believe that evil is like that I believe that evil is generated by a society for political or social purposes, and so a materialist reading of the play would say what is at stake in Macbeth in political terms

b/g garden as above

**Stephen Greenblatt:**

When I was trained as a literary critic it was as a new critic, which was very good training I hope, but it meant absolutely treating the work of art as if it were a still object completely framed and isolated from the rest of the world the world it came from, the world it was going to except in so far as you could look at it as a purely formal object and analyse it in formal terms.

It was a very good discipline and a very good way of actually paying attention to the literary object. But like all practices it began to feel airless after a while or routine, and new historicism in some sense wasn't very new at all but it was except in so far as an older historical practice an older interest in where these objects come from where they're going to, what entailments they have, what their situation is, had become outmoded or ignored, and then it was necessary to open the windows again and try to let some air in and think about doing this again so one piece of it was, as I say despite the phrase not so much new as just recovering.

**Jerry Brotton:**

In garden AB

All forms of criticism are underpinned by certain theoretical positions. People like A. C. Bradley, G. Wilson-Knight, they're all informed by certain theories, we all are, that's how we live our lives, we live our lives by taking a bunch of assumptions, theories, ideas ideals, and putting them to work in our everyday life. That's what we do when we read the plays.

b/g garden

**Kiernan Ryan:**

I'm particularly influenced by a German tradition of criticism of this century, figures like Walter Benjamin ,Walter Benjamin, Theordore Adorno, and above all Ernst Block who's less known in this country - undeservedly so - but I think in years to come he'll come to be seen as an increasingly important critic, and the aspect of their kind of Marxist humanist criticism that I'm most attracted to, is their interest in the way works - literary works - can not simply register or reflect what's happening in their own time, but are able to anticipate, to pre-figure, the way things are moving, the way things are going, the sort of lines of possibility which are often excluded or left out of conventional historiographical accounts of the period and of the literature of a given period.

b/g garden

**Catherine Belsey:**

If you want to do cultural history there is Shakespeare full of accounts of political issues, should you kill the king, love stories, marriages, family values, impossible relationships of various kinds, and they're recognisable to us and we can absolutely assimilate them to our own world if that's what we want to do. Equally from my point of view the interesting thing is the difference we can differentiate the way that Macbeth reacts to his environment from the way that we would react now, we can focus on witchcraft for example as one of the components of his temptation and downfall.

Extract from Orson Welles' Macbeth RT: 59" [inc still frame as b/g].

*All hail Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter.*

**Stephen Greenblatt:**

We're interested in the experience of witches for example, or heretics, or lunatics. We're interested in birth and death records, in public health matters, in other words instead of being centrally focused or principally focused on the, although we were of course interested in the doings of the upper class elite of the aristocracy and of the court, I did a great deal of work and still do on the court that wasn't the only way of understanding these works historically it wasn't only what Leicester or Elizabeth or Bacon was doing at a given time and it was also what they were doing in relation to other people out in the world, people on the margins of an older enquiry into historical life.

**Stephen Regan:**

We've heard a lot in recent years about two versions of historicist criticism, and new

historicism which tends to be the term used in the United States, and cultural materialism which seems to be the term favoured in Britain. The way I understand is that new historicism, if we take a play like

Macbeth would look at the extent to which the play is in dialogue with other texts, so of significance to a new historicist criticism would be things like proceedings of witchcraft trials, King James's writings on kingship for instance. Cultural materialism is also interested in that kind of relationship between the play and other texts and between the play and social history, but seems to give more emphasis to the political significance of the play now.

b/g garden

**Terence Hawkes:**

We need to take into account say in reading King Lear, the fact that it takes place, it was written at the time of the gunpowder plot in Shakespeare's Britain, but that it is we are reading it now, say at a time when our own union, the United Kingdom, is facing similar possibilities of splitting up. There are nationalist movements in Scotland in Wales and notoriously in Ireland that are presenting our society with a similar chasm, a similar possibility of break up that Shakespeare society was presented with, and that's where cultural materialism has something to add that it insists always that we return to the present.

b/g garden

**Kiernan Ryan:**

What you do if you're a culture materialist is you look for the gaps and silences and contradictions the little involuntary gestures of the play so to speak, in which the play gives away its guilty collusion with patriarchy or with hierarchy or with the throne in the case of King Lear say, and that

the best one can do as it were is switch the spotlight away from say King Lear to Poor Tom the Beggar, or in Macbeth switch the spotlight from Macbeth to The Witches so that the question of gender these marginalised figures on the edges of conventional reality suddenly thrown into the spotlight thrown into the foreground. And there's a lot of mileage in that and I have great sympathy with it and I use those techniques myself, but there's one fundamental thing wrong with that culture materialist approach which is equally wrong when the new historicists use it, and that is this unargued, unargued unexamined assumption that it is self evident that Shakespeare's plays must have originally been intended, and subsequently can only be regarded, as reinforcing the status quo of his time. Reinforcing hierachy, bolstering the power structure of his day, and that they can only go on being conservative unless we read them against the grain or de-mystify them, or expose the extent to which they're in cahoots with power, etc.

b/g garden

**John Drakakis**

Alternative Shakespeare's was alternative in that it challenged very directly what we might think of as the Shakespeare of the establishment, a Shakespeare which had prevailed I think virtually for two centuries, and which had its roots in A. C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy. Now, there were a number of challenges to Bradley's thesis in the 1930's and in the 1940's, but they all remained within a liberal humanist sense of the artist as having an overall view of human experience. Now what happened in the mid-sixties, and what happened also in the 70's, was an acceleration of a whole range of theoretical perspectives, not specifically to do with Shakespeare, Shakespeare was cordoned off from

much of this, which began to impinge upon the study of literature generally, and particularly upon the whole question of how literature is contexualised. It's a linguistic phenomenon, it's a social phenomenon, it's a psychological phenomenon, an aesthetic phenomenon.

Mausoleum in b/g

**Catherine Belsey:**

My interest in Shakespeare is in finding things that, topics that, treatments that we can recognise and yet differentiate ourselves from, for example; in Midsummer Nights Dream, the whole thing is engineered the whole plot is engineered by this love juice, this magic juice, and you might you might treat it with total contempt were it not for the fact that poor Demetrius gets married on the basis of the love juice this stabilising social public relationship is based on the totally anarchic activity of Puck, that the mistakes
that Puck has made with this magic juice. Now it seems to me that that for us is very odd and very anachronistic and maybe it's just a loose end and how do we account for it, but if we think in terms of historical difference, maybe this is a period at which the idea of marriage based on romantic love is very new, and the idea that romantic love is a moral force is not quite yet established.

b/g ab

**Ania Loomba:**

The play opens with a very patriarchal set up where womens marriage and womens right to choose their lovers is being denied by the Duke, and then these lovers sort of all escape into the
forest where of course a male fairy is denying the right of a female fairy to keep a little boy. So in that sense the play, the structure, of the play moves from one kind of male power to another kind of male power. But then what happens in the play is

quite disturbing I think, because on the one hand the lovers get to marry whom they want, but this is very much within sort of the couples structures I mean Midsummer Nights Dream ends with dotted couples all over the stage and sort of disturbing symmetry it seems to me they're almost more figures left out, out of these sort of endless heterosexual couplings. And Titania gives up her struggle to the little Indian boy quite easily. Of course you know it involves a whole lot of charade but I think it's a play which is quite disturbing and it's not very easy to recover a feminist perspective from the play, although if you look at you know my take as a feminist is, that I don't need a feminist text to do a feminist reading, I rather like very patriarchal texts because they allow me to see how gender might have been constructed.

b/g mausoleum in garden ab

**Kiernan Ryan:**

So one's got to find some way of reading a work at the point where a respect for its past-ness and its integrity intersects with our present situation and the urgent needs and questions dictated by our present point in history. Now the good interesting thing about cultural materialism which makes me in some ways more sympathetic to it than to new historicism is that cultural materialism throws the weight throws its emphasis more on present purpose, present function, present appropriation so the good thing about it is that it is historicist it wants to see works in its original historical context, but only in so far as that historicising manoeuvre is a prelude to seeing the best way in which you can enable Romeo and Juliet or Twelfth Night to be recycled, re-deployed in a more effective subversive or dissident fashion in the present.

**John Drakakis:**

Anthony and Cleopatra we never think of as a play which deals with the question of post-colonialism or colonialism. But in actual fact the relationship between Rome and Egypt is a colonial relationship. Imperial Rome imposes itself upon Egypt.

2s Steve Regan and Jerry Brotton in garden

**Jerry Brotton:**

There's a danger of just saying this text is a historical document which tells us about a history long ago.

Now we still have to put it to work within our present context we need to say how can we use that historical awareness to pull the play into the present, to enable us to do something with it in the present, and I think that criticism can do that, and I think performance has to do that as well, they're both doing similar things, and we shouldn't divorce them.

b/g garden

**Penny Gay:**

We had recently a very interesting production of The Tempest in which the character of Caliban was for the first time *ever*, played by an Aboriginal actor, a native Australian Aboriginal actor, and the emphasis that he gave to the lines, *'be not afeared the isle is full of noises'* was just astonishing, it was as

though he was actually speaking about the land that he knew in a way that all the educated white folk both on the stage and

in the audience couldn't possibly have known, it was astonishing. It is of course common-

place and has been since I think the late 60's to have Caliban played by a recognisably non white character who might be thought of to be a native of some colonial some colonised island, but this was quite a breakthrough in Australian theatre.

Still frame 2S actors taken from specially recorded version of The Tempest - [Michael Hadley and Andrew Dennis] RT: 25"

**Jyotsna Singh**

In The Tempest something that a lot of western students miss that there's a whole tradition of re-reading the play from by Latin writers, you know that there's Roberto Fernandez Retima's essay which talks about how Latin writers have read him or Caribbean writers have read him, or there's a play

that I would recommend to your students A Tempest by Amy Cesare in French which is now translated, which I often teach with.

Extract from "The Tempest" specially recorded for VC5 RT: 35"
Extract from Une Tempete by Aime Cesaire, translated by Philip Crispin [first used in AA306 VC5]

***CALIBAN:***

*Sicorax, my mother!.*
*Serpent! Rain! Lightning!*
*I find you everywhere!*
*In the eye upon which stares at me, unblinking through the rushes.*
*In the gesture the twisted root with coiled spring.*
*In the all seeing blinded night, the nostril-less all-smelling night.*
*Often, too, she speaks to me in my dreams.....*

still frame of Michael Hadley and Andrew Dennis
RT: 45"

**Jyotsna Singh:**

I think that is one play that has really lent itself very well to post colonial theory, but there's also a move recently and I'm not sure if your students have caught up there have been several articles in the past few years one I think a few months ago by Doug Rooster, maybe a year ago, which basically has a sort of sense that let's bring the play back home. This is not about colonialism this is about the individual misunderstood man or this is about the English stage, and I think that's a kind of disingenuous move.

still frame ab

**Ania Loomba:**

I think for feminists one of the most disturbing

things in the play is that Caliban whom we might like to think of as this rebel slave, as the anti colonialist voice, *is actually equally patriarchal.* He does not deny that he wanted to rape Miranda, and moreover he says yes I wanted to rape because I would have peopled this isle with Caliban's. Now how do you know that the progeny wouldn't have been little Miranda's

**Jyotsna Singh:**
A lot of third world re-readings like Lambing or Cesaire or Ingugi who have talked of The Tempest who have either identified with Caliban and see Prospero as a coloniser, they're really in other ways very sexist, and they really don't question the kind of gender hierarchies very much.

**Ania Loomba:**
There's only one woman character, she's alone on the island, and for the first part of her life, and for the first act of the play, she is being totally commanded by Prospero her father so it's a play which actually symbolises the operations of patriarchy in a very sort of dramatic way.

**Jyotsna Singh:**
Aime Cesaire never has Sicorax appear, you know she is the native woman the Caribbean woman, all with Clarabelle's marriage to the
Tunisian king. So I think that's one of the real issues in even in Othello, and I think in a lot of post colonial theory and I think in a lot of theoretical work that is very compartmentalised as far as I'm concerned it's like - this is race and this is gender and this is queer theory, and everybody has their little turf. And that's a real problem I have with it.

2s Stephen Regan/Jerry Brotton in front of RSC, Stratford.

**Stephen Regan.**
We've heard about recent re-readings of The

Tempest, post colonial readings, feminist readings, where does criticism go now. ?

**Jerry Brotton.**

I think it learns from those developments, and I think they're very important. I think it's been very important to put issues of colonisation into our readings of the plays. I think
that now we do move on, I think that we complicate the way that we think about the play. I think we ask whether it's valid any more to talk about colonisation. Isn't it actually slightly anachronistic, because actually if you're
being historically specific, English colonisation hadn't really got going at the time. Now perhaps we want to consider whether we're believing the myth that the play in itself is starting to create.
The play also has a very vivid geographical imagination about that space of the old world, and that space of the old world is very much ever present in maps and geographical treatise of the time. So I mean if we look at images like this, an early 16th century global image of the world, the focus is on Africa and the old world. And that's very much the focus throughout this period, which is imbued with a classical past, people wearing classical clothing
That's what you're getting in the play, a cutting backwards and forwards from the classical past to the contemporary present.
This is not a play which is about confident colonisation, it's about how you use power and knowledge towards forms of colonisation and imperial power, and that's very different from just saying 'yes, here we have confident English celebration of colonial power and authority'.

I think that we need to question as well the

Over shoulder shot of book, showing 16th century global image, cu globe, then zo from globe to Ws picture. Title of tapestry is "The Sphere" © Patrimonio Nacional

2S Jerry Brotton/Stephen Regan ab

Shot of bookcover "Resplendence of the Spanish Monarchy" - *Renaissance Tapestries* and Armour from the Patrimonio Nacional - **insubstantial**

simplified notion of the relationship between Caliban and Prospero, as that between colonised and coloniser.

Yes that's a very important dimension, but let's take a step back, let's think about the relationships in terms of learning, and power and authority. Who possesses the books. Prospero possesses the books. Caliban

says first possess his books, that's how you get hold of power and authority, Caliban knows that. So again, he has a sense of knowing what he wants within a social hierarchy, which puts him alongside other figures throughout

Shakespeare's canon. People like the Porter in Macbeth, and of course the rude mechanicals in Midsummer Nights Dream as well.

Caption:

## *THE PLAYS*

Music: Track 33 Cello-Motion Paul Downing from *Arthouse* ATMOS CD63 RT: 03"

Still[behind interview] Midsummer's Night *Dream showing O Wells* as Flute, R Arthur as Snout D Hobbs as Starveling and D Ryan as Bottom. Directed by M Boyd © **Donald Cooper** RT: 35"

**Stephen Greenblatt:**

One of the things that I think is quite characteristic, almost a thumbprint of Shakespeare is that he simultaneously does use the lower class characters as comic relief as foils, as characters to be laughed at, and at the same time he almost catches one up short, and surprises one by the

way in which the characters, those characters have their own weird dignity. Take the rude mechanicals in Midsummer Night's Dream. They're treated with hilarious unabashed contempt for their absurdity, for their grossness for their failure to understand what a play is, for their hopelessness, and yet they are in a way the great characters from that wonderful play, they're the characters who have the most dignity and they play more than Theseus.

Those are characters who actually have some sense of who they are, an indeed it's precisely and typical of Shakespeare that he gives one character in the play, not Theseus, not the upper class lovers, a glimpse of the fairy queen, he gives one human character and that's Bottom, at the lowest of the low, the vision of the fairy queen and that's not an accident in Shakespeare that's because that Shakespeare's playing this fantastically peculiar

double game of simultaneously asking us to ridicule these characters and then catching us up short in the ridicule and insisting that they have something which in fact the rest of the fancy people in the play don't have even a touch of.

b/g to interview group of books - **insubstantial**

**Kiernan Ryan:**

A play like Macbeth or King Lear imagines more than it knows. It implies more than it states, I think this actually hermetically true of all Shakespeare's work, that it's always foreshadowing something beyond itself something that lies beyond the horizon of overt expression. So that in a sense you get this wonderful contradiction or conflict between the historical world and time in which the characters themselves - in the case of Macbeth - are tragically imprisoned, that's the cause of their destruction. And a sense that they have a potential of milk of human kindness in the case of Macbeth, to be another kind of man in another kind of world which isn't available

b/g still frame from Measure for Measure - Isabella played by Catherine Cusack [specially shot for VC5]

**Penny Gay:**

Isabella is a very interesting character it seems to me. I mean she begins the play by saying she's going to be a nun, and you might say well that's a cop out she's escaping from the world but of course anybody who enters the religious life these days I mean women who enter the religious life will tell you that they are removing themselves from the world in order to give it some sort of spiritual strength so I don't think we need to call that a cop out. But in fact of course Isabella does re-enter the world, and in those scenes with Angelo she argues most eloquently there are some fabulous speeches that Isabella has, and I

think the fact that she has been forced to re-enter the world has if you like encouraged in here a sort of eloquence that she by taking a vow of silence, she was going to cut off, so in a sense she was going to not use those talents which if you like she'd been given by God or whatever.

b/g for interview still Isabella ab

**Ania Loomba:**
I think for a feminist it is important to see how Shakespeare's play allows us to look at gender relations in the 16th century and to look at gender relations in our own time, and it allows us to be feminist in a very, very, I think productive way. It's a play that allows us to critique what relationships between men and women are like or should be like.

b/g to interview Colour Still Helen Mirren as Cleopatra 1980's © Photostage

**John Drakakis:**
The traditional view of Cleopatra is that she is a femme fatale. Every middle aged male academics dream of what a woman should be. You know *age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety.* Now if we think of that particular play in terms of the opposition between Rome and Egypt, then immediately there is a political tension in the play. If we think of Cleopatra as black, then black and white, we have a racial tension in the play, we've got a a gender tension in the play. We have a political tension between Rome and Egypt, and of course this is cast in the framework of a tragedy.

b/g to interview still ab

**Ania Loomba:**
A feminist perspective for me in Anthony and Cleopatra actually involved looking at Cleopatra as constructed as a prototype of the Orient, this lascivious wanton unruly woman, but then the

stereotype why was Shakespeare constructing it or why did it have any meaning for people in Shakespeare's time, and it had meaning not simply because people were going to the East because there was colonial travel, because people had certain ideas about women overseas or women and men overseas but also because there was Elizabeth ruling on the throne, and she was she was a powerful queen, and there was a whole sort of discourse about unruly women, and a very very lively and intense debate about what a woman in power should do or could do or whether a woman should be in power at all.

b/g to interview Colour still of Diana Rigg + Dennis Quilley, in Anthony & Cleopatra, Chichester 85206-4© Photostage [used under review clause]

**John Drakakis:**
If we look at Egypt carefully we find that Egypt is gendered. Rome is male, Egypt is female.

Egypt is female. The female undermines the male. I mean this is why we like to keep women in their place of course because they're very dangerous to a patriarchal society.

b/g to interview colour still of Vanessa Redgrave as Cleopatra at Riverside 1/6/95 © Photostage [used on VC3]

***Ania Loomba:***
One of the things I always like to point out to my students is that Cleopatra refuses to call her Anthony 'husband' until after he is dead. Then he does not threaten her any more now. Throughout the play she's sort of resisting becoming Anthony's wife, resisting being a
Roman matron, you know, establishing an alternative style of sexual politics an alternative style of being, and as soon as he's dead she says you know whatever's good, what's brave, what's noble let's do it in the high Roman fashion and husband I come and, of course this is Cleopatra at her supreme actress-like best.

b/g to interview colour still of Helen Mirren as Cleopatra and Alan Rickman as Anthony at RNT 10/98 © Photostage [used in VC3]

**John Drakakis:**

What Cleopatra does she gets hold of a Roman, and she, well I was going to say castrates them but not quite that. Yes, she made proud Caesar lay his sword to bed, he ploughed her, and she cropped. And in fact of course she then produces Caesar's bastard son. Now if you think of a patriarchal society in which continuity is dependent upon the legitimacy of offspring, you can begin to see what kind of threat Cleopatra poses. Where Rome is rather anally retentive, Egypt of course is anarchic and carnivalesque. And this is the basis of an interesting conflict I think, between two radically opposed ways of looking at the world. Now that in itself of course produces a politics. Cleopatra's whimsicality, her strategies in dealing with Rome, are part of a politics which have to do with first of all experiencing colonisation, and then finding a way of surviving in the face of it.

caption

***IN PERFORMANCE***

Music: Track 33 Cello-Motion Paul Downing from Arthouse ATMOS CD63 RT: 04"

outside front of RSC Theatre

**Stephen Regan.**

What kinds of performance do you favour.?

**Jerry Brotton.**

I feel that modern dress performances are still vital and very very important, primarily because I think we need to remember that Shakespeare's plays were similarly performed in modern dress, so even if you're dealing with history plays Roman plays, there's a way in which a contemporary type of dress - Elizabethan and early Jacobean - is being used in these plays.

*Music.*

Music: Track 33 Cello-Motion Paul Downing from Arthouse ATMOS CD63 RT: 04"

**Stephen Regan.**

Well Jerry here we are at the main theatre of the Royal Shakespeare Company?

**Jerry Brotton.**

Yeah I mean it's very interesting to think about the way in which obviously as an institution the RSC has been so important, it's made huge developments really in our perception of Shakespeare, but I think it's worth bearing in mind of course that there are dissenting voices there are critical traditions which have a different take on the effectiveness of the RSC.

b/g RSC

**Terence Hawkes:**

They tend to present Shakespeare from high to low as if they're presenting us with wonderful gifts. We the people should be grateful for these gifts, although we are the taxpayers who support the company nevertheless, and what is the gift, the gift is an insight into the mind of Macbeth. We understand that ambition is a bad thing, but do we really need to sit for three hours through an appalling performance of Macbeth to learn that. I don't, and I don't suspect anybody else does either.

**Penny Gay:**

The text is there for actors to pick up and work with, and every performance is - or should be - a new interpretation however slightly nuanced or changed. The very worst thing is an attempt to repeat an old production.

**Russ McDonald:**

If you're doing a production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, three years after Peter Brooke's famous 1970 production of A Midsummer Night's Dream you're gonna have to do it, I mean however you do it is going to be response to that production.

***Act II, Scene I A Midsummer Night's Dream***

Extract Midsummer Nights Dream - 2 actors on swing [Oberon and Puck] RT:15" from "Review" BBC tx 1.01.71

*I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,*
*Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,*
*Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,*
*With sweet musk roses and with eglantine.*

**Russ McDonald:**

Colour still Midsummer Nights Dream RSC 1970/1 Director: Brook 9/4/91 © Photostage

For a few years the standard manoeuvre was to go as far to the other extreme as possible, Ron Daniel's production in 1981 was a huge Victorian extravaganza with flaps and elaborate

Colour still Midsummer Nights Dream Mike Gwillin as Oberon Juliet Stevenson Titania RSC/RST1981 ref CT81277-02-05 ©Photostage

Colour still Midsummer Night's Dream - Juliet Stevenson [Titania] with fairies.RSC/RST 1981 ref/CT81277-02-06 © Photostage

apparatus that was exactly the opposite from what Brooke had used in 1970 and now with Adrian Noble's production of

colour still Midsummer Night's Dream l-r Alex Jennings [Oberon] Kevin Doyle [Demetrius] Toby Stephens {Lysander] Barry Lynch {Puck] Emma Fielding {Hermia} and Helena Raymond {Helena] RSC/Barbican Theatre 20/04/95 ref/D26 © Photostage

Colour Still Midsummer Night's Dream - Peter Voss [centre]as Quince + others RSC/Barbican Theatre dir: Noble 20/04/95 ref/ F36 © Photostage

1995, it was 1994 actually it was first done, he's gone back to Brooke, but whereas Brooke was all in white he's gone back to Brooke in colour.

b/g article from Guardian - insubstantial

**Ania Loomba:**

Sometimes productions get so carried away by magic in Shakespeare, that they invest everything in making that literal in making that work. In a recent production of Midsummer Night's Dream in India, the director decided that we are a country where people believe we live very close to magic in a very literal sense in the sense that there are shamans or witch doctors in our daily lives, there's a sort of idea that the supernatural and the real world are sort of inter-linked, so that he didn't need any props, and the magic potion in that sense actually appeared for what it was a coercive device because the play this production stripped was stripped of any exciting lighting or any stage effects or anything else, and so you could literally see it as a manipulative thing with actually no other extra connotations.

BW still Gielgud at King Lear 1940© Hulton Getty -

**Terence Hawkes:**

In King Lear, where Lear says right at the beginning of the play he's going to unfold his darker purpose, the most serious point in the play, *give me the map there.* And the map is brought forward and Lear proceeds to divide it

Terence Hawkes to cam with picture ab in b/g

up, and this is the politics of the play starts from there, *give me the map there* now, on the Elizabethan stage, a huge map would surely be unfurled it would be a map of Britain, with London where we are in the theatre clearly marked, and as Lear divides the map up amongst his daughters, one thing obviously suggests itself to me, that he would stride to this map and tear off a bit and give it to the relevant daughter, there's thy portion. As he tears off Scotland. There's thy portion, as he tears off Wales. This to an audience that has recently been listening

to stories of the gunpowder plot, whose aim was to dissolve, to blow up the unity of Britain. Now a modern production of the play works like this, the famous Geilgud production in London in 1940/41, when he came to the line "*give me the map there*', what he did was simply hold his hand out behind him without looking, and a servant put the map into it, now Geilgud said he did it that way because he wanted to demonstrate Lear's inner conviction that such was the nature of his royal majesty that he would be obeyed without question he'd look a complete fool of course if nobody did anything. *Give me the map there*, he stretches his hand out without looking. The servant puts it in, and he opens it. Now can you see what I'm getting at. The point is that in the in the Globe Theatre, give me the map there is the prelude to a political discussion about what happens when you break up the unity of the United Kingdom. In the modern production of it, it becomes an example of what it's like to be inside King Lear.

Extract Measure for Measure - specially shot [in prison] RT: 10"

***Claudio**:*
*Now sister, what's the comfort.*
***Isabella**:*
*Why, as all comforts are ...*

**Penny Gay:**
The big question I suppose and the most interesting one is what happens to Isabella at the end of the play, and this is one of the many fascinating silences of women in Shakespeare. The Duke says to her "I have a plan for you, you're going to marry me'. And she doesn't say a thing. Now in recent productions we've run the whole gamut from a passionate kiss of acceptance to a slap on the face. We've had Isabella standing on the stage looking desolate that it

should have come to this. We've had her walking out, refusing to countenance such an invasion of her integrity, that she has proved that she had during the play. So I think often Shakespeare's silences, the things that he, he allows a woman to stand there on the stage, which means that he empowers the actress in modern days or the actor the young actor in the old days, he empowers them to decide for themselves what this character is doing in response to the demands of an essentially very powerfully male masculine society, and sometimes that's as useful a thing for an actress to be able to do as for her to have you know yet another eloquent speech she's, Isabella has showed earlier in the play that she can speak. Shakespeare chooses not to let her speak at the end there, but he neither does he neither does he say Isabella kneels and says yes, oh thank you Duke, marry me. That's what I always really wanted.

b/g still frame Hamlet Alex Jennings - released as part of Electronic press kit from RSC - free use [VC4]

**Catherine Belsey:**

It's a cliché that every generation makes its own Shakespeare. So for example Hamlet has been in succession a sort of romantic poet for Coleridge, I have the smack of Hamlet myself if I may say so he modestly says. And for the end of the 19th century a brooding disturbed melancholy figure who can't quite deal with the world around him, and I would say now perhaps a political figure confronting a corrupt world and wondering whether violence is the right way of dealing with it or some other, so I think that re-readability is one of the reasons why Shakespeare stays on the syllabus and has this kind of centrality.

Extract Charlie Simpson as Caesar from Anthony and Cleopatra specially shot for VC3 RT: 10" + 32" mute

*High events as these, strike those that make them, and their story is no less in pity than his glory which brought them to be lamented.*

b/g empty set

**Penny Gay:**

The plays must speak in all sorts of subtle ways to todays audience, I mean if it's things like body language, intonations even you can get there might be a buzz-word that happens to be a joke slang word in 1996 that's not going to make any sense at all in the Year 2000, but you'll get a joke on it in 1996 those sort of things you know are what makes the play and its conflicts and its psychological explorations work for any one audience.

b/g empty set

**Terence Hawkes:**

I haven't seen a performance of Shakespeare in the last 20 years that would make me want to switch off my television set, pay a lot of money put on my best suit and go out and watch it. It's a deeply uncomfortable experience and I think Shakespeare would have felt the same. The nearest a modern audience gets to Shakespeare is when it watches a football match. When you when they used to allow you to stand on the terraces, to make cat calls to say the sort of thing you would never dream of saying in public. To cheer your own side, to say rude things in a loud voice to scream at the referee and, because you're standing literally cheek by jowl with somebody else, to feel that weight of your individual personality lifted from you, and you become one with a large crowd of people, it's a wonderful and a dangerous experience, and that's why in the early days of the Elizabethan theatre, the

Clip showing football crowd - taken from Ipswich v Arsenal Cup Final 1978 tape no: 922260 BBC from RT: 13" + still frame b/g interview RT: 45"

authorities were jolly afraid of the theatre they didn't like crowds they didn't like this experience. You don't get that in the modern theatre, if you give any sign at all in the modern theatre that you're an individual human being, if you rustle a sweet paper if you cough, if you make a noise with any of your orifices, you are immediately told to shut up or removed bodily from the theatre. Who wants to pay £10 £15 £20 for that.

b/g cu headline "Is Shakespeare overrated ?" Guardian - insubstantial

**John Drakakis:**
There's a sense in which of course every academic who teaches Shakespeare has a pristine view of a performance in his or her mind. And then of course we go along to the theatre and we see something that either does or something that either does or approximate to our ideal view. Now, that's the kind of position of course that produces the sort of disgruntlement as you come out of a theatre you say yes you know, this particular speech was cut, this particular effect was produced that was wrong etc. I mean we're very summary in our judgements there. I've changed my view on that. I think that a Shakespearean text is there to be plundered, and I think some of the best performances of Shakespeare that I've seen have been in the parodies that we find in popular film

2s Neil Gore playing Antony and Clare Malka playing Cleopatra with hand held camera specially shot for AA306 VC3
Total running time inc still frames : 2'35

**Russ McDonald:**
There are lots and lots - both in Britain and America - of little theatre companies who are putting on Shakespeare plays all the time, and putting them on in vital and novel and very

And so it would be foolish to pretend that it is a major cultural force in some aspects of society and yet in others it's obviously still vital you get ten people who get together and want to put on a production of Titus Andronicus in a garage.

2s Neil Gore playing Antony and Clare Malka playing Cleopatra with hand held camera specially shot for AA306 VC3

**Penny Gay:**

I must say I'm a an absolute devotee of modern dress performances, by which I don't mean specifically street wear, but what I don't like is ye olde medievaly costumes, some pretence that the plays happened a long time ago in another place, or the story happened a long time ago. I like, I mean the plays were written as contemporary for Shakespeare's audience they were dressed in contemporary costume. The issues the story that they tell, the very fact that the plays have survived for this long, suggests that the stories have a universal fascination, and that's why I like to see them contemporary.

2s Neil Gore playing Antony and Clare Malka playing Cleopatra with hand held camera specially shot for AA306 VC3

**Catherine Belsey:**

A lot of academics have been very differential towards the stage and have felt that they're just kind of second rate because they can't act or perform or produce or put on plays, and that's where the real event happens. Now I think nothing could be further from the truth I don't mean to say I want to reverse the values and say the real thing happens when you read the play, and the performance is neither here nor there. It simply seems to me that there are two quite different projects here one, the performance one, is to fill the theatre and give people a

a good time, and these people could be schoolteachers but they might equally be people who just popped in, because they didn't have anything else to do. There are cinemas in Stratford, or they could be Japanese tourists or who knows what, and it seems to me therefore that theatres have to interpret Shakespeare in the light of modern concerns, they have in almost to allegorise Shakespeare and say 'this is the way it's relevant to you now'. That's fine with me, I find it very interesting and I'm happy to watch it. But for the project I have in mind which is cultural history, what I want exactly is to know more about its period, and to know more about ways in which it might have been perceived in its own time.

caption

## *CONCLUSIONS*

Music: Track 33 Cello-Motion Paul Downing from Arthouse ATMOS CD63 RT: 03"

**Stephen Regan.**
There is something extraordinary about the language of the plays surely.

**Jerry Brotton.**
Absolutely and I don't think that we should lose sight of that, but again there's a way in which this is a very specific form of representation, the dramatic text written in blank poetic verse is very very different, although it may resonate with a travel document, with a map, okay with birth and death records. Now they're related but the dramatic text is different. There's something about the texture of the poetry which

I think is what gives the play an afterlife, it's what makes it possible for us to still get something out of it, and I think that that's very very important to hold on to that.

b/g garden

**Kiernan Ryan:**
If we don't find satisfactory convincing ways of reinterpreting Shakespeare's work, Shakespeare's work from the past in our own time, then that work will simply become a piece in a museum, it will have no life whatsoever it'll be part of the heritage industry, absolutely inert, politically inert, culturally inert.

in streets of Stratford Upon Avon

**Stephen Regan.**
Do we need to know anything about Shakespeare's life to appreciate the plays.

2s walking through streets

**Jerry Brotton.**
We're looking at Shakespeare from a history of the present, and how it might illuminate our present situation. Biography can help us with that, but it can't be the be all and end all. We should always remember that any interpretation, any performance of Shakespeare that tries to get back to the original Shakespeare, has just moved one step further away into the future, away from Shakespeare's original moment.

shot inside pub showing bust of Shakespeare

***Stephen Greenblatt:***
My guess is that, since I tend to believe that there really was someone out there named Shakespeare and that he was an incredibly clever fellow, that he sort of under - he got it very early on, that it was as it were in his interests broadly speaking in the interests of his profession his company and perhaps of his own ambitions, that he in fact

be lots of things to lots of people, be used in lots of different ways. I went before the fall of the Berlin Wall I went to an East German event called a Shakespeare Taga, quite a remarkable event in Dima I think it still happens now but the Shakespeare Association is reunited in Germany, but it there was I remember and this was the old East German regime GDR regime there was a performance a student performance of Hamlet, no better than it should be, and it was one sat through it politely but there was one moment, a moment an odd moment in the play to think of as the most exciting moment in the play, in which Laerte's asks for permission to go back to go to Paris, and I don't know if you remember the moment, the king says 'I'll have to get your fathers permission or have you got your fathers permission' he said. 'Yes' Polonius says 'Yes I've given him permission'. And then in this production, pure bit of stage business it's not the text at all, the king Claudius went over to a huge escritoire, opened it up, took out a passport an East German passport, and handed it to Laertes, and the entire crowd gasped, (gasps), because it was so hard to get a passport to get out of, cos they were shooting people at the wall at this point to go to Paris now, is this purely extraneous bit of stage business - well yes, I mean there's a Shakespeare was not anticipating the GDR, but I think that Shakespeare in lots of different ways, was anticipating precisely the use of his texts for all kinds of purposes other than the one strictly speaking for which the texts were originally written. That's why an older historicism that simply tries to track down the relation of the text to its immediate historical setting, doesn't get what the texts actually are even in their own historical relation which is

much more open, much more vital and much more disturbing than they might at first seem.

**Kiernan Ryan:**

For William Morris the purpose of art was to *educate our desire, to teach us to want more,* to want better, to want different, than the world currently affords us, and Shakespeare can do that better than any other writer who's ever lived.

**Russ MacDonald:**

There are few sources in the world of such extraordinary pleasure, because to experience one of these plays in a brilliant production, and to have a minimal apparatus for understanding and appreciating and enjoying that play, is to afford yourself a kind of joy that you can't get any place else.

In front of Shakespeare's Grave [inside The Holy Trinity Church]

**Stephen Regan.**

Well we've travelled a long way. We've listened to critical opinions about Shakespeare from all over the world, and we've heard about many different ways of performing the plays. There's no telling what kind of reputation Shakespeare might acquire in the 21st century. Shakespeare himself lies here, dreaming on things to come.
Shakespeare was canny enough not to invest too much faith in the permanent value of anything, except perhaps for his own writing. As the sonnets suggest, the most fitting monument perhaps is the writing itself, 'And thou in this shalt find thy monument, when tyrants crests and tombs of brass are spent'.

Music: Music: Track 19 Angularity" [J *Fiddy/S Burdson]* from Minimal SCD 254 Sonoton recorded music library. RT: 33"

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