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Empowering First-Generation Students: Bardolatry and the Shakespeare Survey

CASSIE M. MIURA

A few years ago, I taught an introductory course at the University of Michigan called “Shakespeare on Screen” that focused on processes of adaptation across genre, medium, and culture. We read a handful of Shakespeare’s plays and then looked to contemporary films like *10 Things I Hate About You*, starring Heath Ledger as a modern-day Petruchio, and Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran*, a visually stunning retelling of the story of King Lear set in feudal Japan. Students wrote film reviews, engaged with rigorous Shakespeare scholarship, and wrote their own creative adaptations of a select scene from a play of their choosing. As one might expect, I found that the films, sometimes just by virtue of their being performed, made the Shakespearean text more accessible to students with limited previous experience reading early modern English. I was also pleased to notice that the creative adaptation assignment encouraged students to return again and again to the original text in order to justify their own creative renderings of it. However, toward the end of the semester, I began to wonder whether all of the rich and culturally diverse representations that I had consciously built into my syllabus were reinforcing the idea of Shakespeare as a universal genius in ways that I had not intended.

Once I began teaching at Western Oregon University, an institution with a more diverse student body and a large number of first-generation students, concerns about equity, inclusion, and student retention moved to the forefront of my thinking. Especially in first-year and/or introductory literature surveys, I found myself deprioritizing Shakespeare to focus instead on works by Junot Díaz, Roxane Gay, and Sherman Alexie.¹ This marked a decisive break with my prior training as an early modernist but, I avoided replicating the skewed vision of multiculturalism that my previous course had, at least in part, affirmed. An extreme articulation of this vision can be found in Harold Bloom’s claim from a 1995 interview: “Shakespeare is universal. Shakespeare is the true multicultural author. He exists in all languages. He is put on the stage everywhere. Everyone feels that they are represented on the stage.”² Given Bloom’s immense influence in the field of literary studies and the ubiquity of sentiments like this at all ranks across the academy, the petition circulated by Yale undergraduates in the spring of 2016 calling on the English department to decolonize a required two-semester sequence on Shakespeare and seven other dead white men (Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Donne, Pope, and Eliot) should have come as no surprise. Nevertheless, student activists met resistance. Katy

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Waldman, a staff writer at *Slate* and Yale English alumna, defended the two-term sequence with the claim that “these writers tried to represent the entire human condition, not just their clan. . . [M]any of Shakespeare’s female characters are as complexly nuanced as any in circulation today, *Othello* takes on racial prejudice directly, and *Twelfth Night* contains enough gender-bending identity shenanigans to fuel multiple drag shows and occupy legions of queer scholars.”³ These statements are all perfectly true, but they are deployed here to support a contrarian defense of the status quo, and there are few serious scholars of Renaissance and early modern literature who would maintain that, for example, studying Shakespeare’s female characters is an acceptable substitute for studying women writers.

While far-right “news” sources like *RT*, *Fox News*, and the *New York Post* have been quick to run headlines lamenting how the nation’s top institutions no longer require English majors to take a dedicated course on Shakespeare, this has in fact been common practice for some time.⁴ A 2015 report from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni found that among 52 elite institutions surveyed, only four (Harvard, UC Berkeley, the U.S. Naval Academy, and Wellesley College) have retained such a requirement.⁵ As Stephanie Pietros notes in her contribution to this issue, the current conversation about decolonizing the English canon has been led in large part by students and faculty at elite institutions and does not necessarily reflect the interests or concerns of those at regional and public institutions which disproportionately serve first-generation students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.⁶ At the University of Washington Tacoma, my current institution, there is no Shakespeare requirement because there is no English degree. Rather, we offer a dedicated literature track within a more interdisciplinary Arts, Media, Culture major. Nevertheless, during the Shakespeare Association of America seminar from which this special issue first arose, some auditors raised strong objections to points emerging from our discussion on the grounds that we, as Shakespeare scholars, seemed to be arguing ourselves out of a job and contributing to the general decline of early modern and Renaissance literature in American public education and in the academy at large. My own position, quite different, is that for Shakespeare to stay the course in the 21st century and for the field of early modern studies to continue to advance in new and productive ways, we need to intentionally foreground how our work informs and is informed by current events. Especially as early modern scholars, we need to respond to the world as it is and imagine how it could be rather than waxing nostalgic for the past.

As a teacher at a majority-minority institution, I want my students to learn that historical context matters and that we are all embodied and culturally situated as readers. This, to my mind, is precisely the kind of critical thinking that enables individuals to deconstruct the increasingly pervasive narrative that Western culture is somehow under siege or that white men are being unjustly robbed of the “natural” privileges and power afforded to them by history. Those who overstate the threat that curriculum reform poses to Shakespeare studies contribute to this narrative and do so at the risk of further alienating the next generation of students and early modern scholars. While the current iteration of

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the debate over canonicity harkens back, in part, to the culture wars of the 1980s, it also assumes an entirely new form with the election of Donald Trump, the rise of white nationalism, and the proliferation of hate speech and racially motivated acts of violence on college campuses across America. How does one teach Shakespeare, assuming one does still teach Shakespeare, without also engaging students in this broader public and most urgent conversation? Given the opportunity, I argue that first-generation students are uniquely equipped to participate in the ongoing reappraisal of Shakespeare in the field of early modern studies and doing so can furnish them with the critical skills and conceptual vocabulary needed to articulate their own positionality within the university and to interrogate other forms of symbolic power.

From a student-centered perspective, I suggest that one way to better serve first-generation students is to make visible the process of canon formation alongside our teaching of canonical works. By this, I mean empowering students to vocalize and interrogate their own assumptions about Shakespeare within the larger educational, cultural, and arts institutions that have shaped them. Some students may approach the study of Shakespeare with feelings of curiosity, excitement, and admiration, while others might approach it with feelings of intimidation, indifference, or resentment. What remains essential, in either case, is meeting students where they are and creating a space for authentic engagement with the text. In an article addressing Shakespeare and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy, Laura Turchi and Ayanna Thompson argue that the first step in “rebooting” outdated approaches to Shakespeare is “for educators to have a frank conversation—and perhaps a debate—about why Shakespeare is in their curriculum.”⁷ While I have some reservations about asking students to engage in a debate for which the conclusion is already forgone— even if students decide unanimously that Shakespeare should be excluded from the high school curriculum, their course is unlikely to be altered—such ‘frank conversations’ would also benefit college students. While first generation college students may have had prior experience reading Shakespeare in high school, many took little from this endeavor apart from a general sense of foreboding and the memory that he made getting an “A” more difficult.

Recently, I co-designed a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) experience that connected first-year students from the University of Washington Tacoma with students from the Institute of World Literatures and Cultures at Tsinghua University in Beijing.⁸ The purpose of this experience, apart from using technology to promote cultural exchange, was for students to discuss their respective readings of the *Tempest*. The classes exchanged fun introductory videos and discussed the process of deciphering Shakespeare’s English, motivations for reading the play, and ideas for representing Caliban in a contemporary context. Perhaps the most illuminating aspect of the experience, however, occurred when my students were preparing contemporary vernacular English translations of select passages to send to the students at Tsinghua, all of whom have a very high level of proficiency in English but less familiarity with American slang. This group activity became a catalyst for students in my class to

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reflect on their own everyday language practices and the ways that reading Shakespeare might differ for modern readers as well as for non-native English speakers. My students not only enjoyed being given permission to use the very language that English teachers typically prohibit in the classroom, but also made convincing arguments about ways that their translations might more effectively convey the ideas and emotions of Caliban or Prospero to modern readers.

While this translation exercise uses Shakespeare to introduce first-year writing students to the history of the English language, it also reinforces a unit on linguistic identity that is designed specifically to raise consciousness of the politics of dominant academic discourse or “standard” English in broader academic and professional contexts. Scholars of rhetoric and composition such as Bruce Horner, Paul Kei Matsuda, and Vershawn Ashanti Young have done valuable work to address ways that the teaching of academic writing must be transformed to meet the needs of an increasingly multilingual classroom, but these insights rarely inform the teaching of English literature despite the fact the we share many of the same students in common.⁹ At my institution, for example, there may easily be ten-to-fifteen languages and/or dialects represented in a group of just twenty students, and my aim as a teacher, regardless of whether I am teaching first-year writing or an upper division literature course, is to leverage the lived experiences of my students in a way that positions their multilingual backgrounds as an asset rather than a deficit. In my experience, the students who are most intimidated by academic writing are also those for whom the language of academic discourse feels the most foreign. If the rules of English grammar and the task of college-level writing cause many first-generation students to question their own abilities or to feel unwelcome at the university, this is all the more true of reading Shakespeare, who has become synonymous with eloquence and mastery of the English language.

In order to avoid reproducing what Bruce Horner calls the tacit assumptions of an English-only classroom when teaching Shakespeare to first-generation students, teachers need to create opportunities for students to reflect on their learning process.¹⁰ A short and relatively low stakes assignment that I have implemented in composition courses asks students to respond to Gloria Anzaldúa’s essay “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” by describing their own linguistic identity as well as assumptions or judgements that others might make about them based on their language practices. Here, students from multilingual backgrounds often address their experiences learning English as a first or second or third language but others consider their use of slang and profanity, a dialect of English such as African American Vernacular English, or the language of text messaging, social media, and internet forums. While presenting the assignment, I share a little of my own experience with pidgin English since I was born on the island of Kauai and most of my extended family still resides in Hawaii. I recount how my older brother was initially placed in ESL when we moved to Oregon, despite the fact that he only speaks English, and how I struggled to understand my grandfather over the phone because I had grown unaccustomed to the rhythms and slang of the island. Furnishing specific examples on the spot typically makes students laugh, but it also signals that it really is okay to be

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vulnerable and to bring other languages, dialects, and ways of communicating into the classroom. Once students complete their responses, the illusion of monolingualism in the classroom or what Paul Kei Matsuda calls the “myth of linguistic homogeneity” is immediately shattered.¹¹ While this assignment focuses on dominant academic discourse, I include below samples of student work since it remains worth stating that Shakespeare too is a dominant discourse and fluency in his language amounts to cultural capital in ways that understanding of works by authors of equal merit do not.

What strikes me as most important in these responses, and they are only two of a set of approximately fifty that I have collected, is the level of self-awareness that these students demonstrate as well as their ability to shift their language practices after having made an assessment (largely rhetorical in nature) of a given real-world situation. While I have advocated for engaging students directly in contemporary conversations about white supremacy and Shakespeare as part of the English canon, it is also important to recognize that course content is by no means the only way that systems of oppression are replicated in the classroom. First-generation students are cognizant of this in ways that may very well surpass the understanding of teachers who do not share these experiences and when they speak, we should listen. After describing a childhood spent in foster-care in a rural part of Washington state, student A writes,

I talked different [than] my friends at home though, I talked “white,” I talked educated. This seemed to be somewhat of a barrier for me. I would get teased sometimes and felt out of place in my own home often because of having a more diverse vocabulary than the adults taking care of me. I learned to decipher between the two, the video we watched in class on African American dialect was really relatable to me because over the years I learned to talk to my environment. If I was at school or anywhere outside of my neighborhood, I spoke proper textbook English. But if I was at home and around the eastside, I [spoke] like the stereotypical little black girl. I don’t know exactly why I did this, I think I just wanted to fit in.

Like student A, student B also associates “standard” English with whiteness and describes how academic environments require her to significantly alter both her speech and behavior to such an extent that she experiences a perpetual sense of displacement. She explains that,

The simple way that I and my friends talked was seen as dumb, delinquent talk. This was known early on in my life, and so within the classroom I make an effort to whitewash myself. Though I would love to be unapologetic in the way I speak, and respected the same way I am when I speak in standard or formal English, I know that talking in a “ghetto” way will immediately turn my argument into that of an uneducated brown person. This also goes

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the other way for speaking to other Chicanos or Latinos. I intentionally speak with more Spanish than I normally would, and use the more common vernacular among the community. Out of fear of seeming white this time. My true linguistic identity seems lost, as I am always shifting myself to be properly respected within the room.

Given the reality of these and other student responses to dominant academic discourse, the COIL unit on the *Tempest* aims to leverage skills that many first-generation students already have in translation and invites what Vershawn Ashanti Young calls code-meshing. It brings the outside in and enables students to showcase their expertise in language that, to their delight, often surpasses my understanding and requires that I consult *Urban Dictionary* to decipher new words like “thicc” or phrases like “what’s the tea?” Emphasizing how fluid the English language was during Shakespeare’s time and showing students the many variants of early modern spelling and punctuation also helps them to recognize the arbitrariness of the conventions governing dominant academic discourse. Likewise, framing Shakespeare as an innovative writer who broke linguistic rules more often than he followed them and who regularly employed non-standard English to appeal to both popular and elite audiences creates an unexpected affinity.¹² To this end, N.F. Blake’s *Shakespeare’s Non-Standard English: A Dictionary of His Informal Language* is especially useful. All of this is not to suggest that students should disregard the rules of dominant academic discourse, especially when following them is to their advantage, but considering why such rules have been instituted and by whom is empowering. In much the same way that interrogating the concept of dominant academic discourse benefits students in the composition classroom, I am arguing that interrogating the concept of canonicity and the origin of bardolatry would benefit students in the Shakespeare survey, particularly those students who are first-generation and/or from diverse backgrounds.

Since many students who enroll in a Shakespeare survey do so out of obligation, either to meet a major requirement or a general education requirement in the humanities, efforts to re-envision what students from diverse backgrounds and with a wide range of academic and professional interests should take away from such a course are vital. More than mere appreciation for Shakespeare or familiarity with the basic thematic content and context of his major works, I argue that a Shakespeare survey could be uniquely suited to raise consciousness about the nature of oppressive institutional structures while also equipping students with the critical tools necessary to determine what justice, access, and equity truly look like. For those students who choose to specialize in early modern literature, these are also the questions that they will need to cultivate and center as teachers of Shakespeare. Rather than beginning with the assumption that Shakespeare can teach us about race, class, and gender because he captures some essential experience that is shared by all humans regardless of time or place, we begin with the premise that Shakespeare can teach us about our own institutional histories and the ways in which power and privilege inform

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aesthetic judgement, ideas about authorship, and the circulation of cultural capital. Engaging with the broader question of how Shakespeare came to be regarded as the chief author of the English language while also conducting close readings of his poetry and plays would enable students to situate their own attitudes and critical perspectives as part of an ever-changing historical narrative. This shift demands that students move from a position of passively receiving a work whose meaning is fixed to a position of actively shaping a work whose meaning is always indeterminate. I am interested in finding ways for students to develop the metacognitive ability to take bardolatry itself as a critical object of inquiry and to locate themselves within a broader consideration of Shakespeare's legacy.

In place of the traditional Shakespeare survey, therefore, I argue for a reception-based approach to Shakespeare that would require students to engage with historical criticism, reader-response theory, as well as scholarship and contemporary public discourse on the politics of canon formation. While close reading would still be essential, the emphasis would move from text to context in order to give students more freedom to bring Shakespeare into conversation with their own cultural background and life experiences. As I discovered in my "Shakespeare on Screen" course, it is entirely possible for students to compare Cordelia's refusal to profess her love for Lear with the scene from *Ran* when Saburo breaks Hidetora Ichimonji's three arrows without once questioning the commensurability of these contexts or the "universality" of the tragedy itself.¹³ If I were to practice this form of criticism myself, for example, I would need consider that *Ran* was released well after Kurosawa's most prolific and successful years and that the film received considerably less critical acclaim in Japan than abroad.¹⁴ I would also need to grapple with my own identity as a Japanese American scholar of English Renaissance literature and the fact that in Shakespeare there are no representations of East Asian characters. Unlike Africa, India, or the New World, Japan and China both appear to be well beyond Shakespeare's geographic and literary imagination since these countries did not open to western influence until the 1850s. Close reading a Shakespearean play or adaptation and attending to the larger forces that have shaped our understanding of Shakespeare as popular playwright, Romantic genius, or national(ist) icon serve different learning objectives. The latter makes space in the classroom for feelings of both admiration and alienation in ways that the former does not and invites students to use such feelings as an entry point into an urgent debate that is currently informing public discourse and shaping campus climate at institutions of higher learning across America.

In December of 2016, just weeks after Trump's election, students from the University of Pennsylvania removed a large portrait of Shakespeare that hung in the main staircase of Fisher-Bennett Hall which houses the English Department. They replaced this portrait, which was unharmed in the process, with an image of the black lesbian poet and activist Audre Lorde.¹⁵ This gesture was intended to reflect the students' commitment to inclusivity and desire that a physical manifestation of this commitment be on display in the centrally located and communal space. Although faculty had voted to relocate the Shakespeare

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portrait years ago, no plans had been made and action was continually deferred so the students took matters into their own hands. In a letter later reprinted in the *Washington Post*, department chair Jed Etsy assured students that the faculty share their commitment to inclusivity and urged “everyone to join us in the task of critical thinking about the changing nature of authorship, the history of language, and the political life of symbols.”¹⁶ As teachers and scholars of Shakespeare, I want to suggest that we should not only be joining in the task that Etsy describes but leading it. If some in our classrooms, including but not limited to first-generation students, regard Shakespeare as a symbol of oppression, then we have a responsibility to address these perspectives openly and with compassion. I believe that creating space for such conversations contributes to a classroom in which students from all backgrounds can thrive since they do not have to check half of their identity at the door in order to engage in an academic exercise on terms that are not their own.

In the epilogue of her book *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, Kim F. Hall suggests that Shakespeare studies and black feminist theory can and should benefit mutually from one another. “Teaching Shakespeare,” she says, “is a good place to begin disrupting the language of white supremacy, both because Shakespeare figures so prominently in high school and college curricula and because questions of race are so easily raised—and so easily dismissed—in connection with Shakespeare’s language.”¹⁷ Perhaps teaching Shakespeare can and should lead us to Lorde? Perhaps giving students the critical tools necessary to consider Shakespeare as both a literary artist of the highest caliber and a symbolic construction of power and privilege can help us to develop an antiracist pedagogy that truly benefits both first-generation students and the field of early modern studies? Some may be concerned that the shift I am suggesting brings contemporary politics too close to the classroom or that ideology will obscure attention to historical accuracy. The types of activities and assignments that I envision, however, would do just the opposite. In order to understand why 17th century audiences preferred *Venus and Adonis* to *Hamlet*, for example, students would need to visit the Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts and spend time with the commentary of some of Shakespeare’s first readers and viewers. In order to understand the origins of bardolatry, students would need to assess Ben Jonson’s claim in the first folio that Shakespeare was “not of an age, but for all time” and think about the changing status of popular drama during the early modern period. And for those students who meet Shakespeare with disdain, they may find support for these views in an overview essay like Erin Sullivan’s “Anti-Bardolatry Through the Ages—or, Why Voltaire, Tolstoy, Shaw, and Wittgenstein Didn’t Like Shakespeare.”¹⁸ Regardless of where students land by the end of term on the question of whether Shakespeare’s works have lasting merit, they will have acquired the skills necessary to think critically about the form and content of their own education and the ways in which texts and larger cultural narratives are constructed to suit the interests of specific audiences. In her column for the *Yale Daily News*, Adriana Miele argues that, as English majors, “we are taught how to analyze canonical literature works. We are not taught to question why it is

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canonical, or the implications of canonical work that actively oppress and marginalize nonwhite, nonmale, trans and queer people.”¹⁹ While Miele is right to point to the limitations of a curriculum that does not require students to gain facility with a wide range of critical perspectives, her comment also emphasizes how important it is for us as teachers and early modern scholars to be open about our own negotiation of the questions that she raises about oppression and marginalization. This is especially true for those of us who *also* identify as ‘nonwhite, nonmale, trans and queer’—and to this list we could add many more qualifiers.

Contemporary debates about Shakespeare and the English canon have often overlooked that, in terms of equity and social justice, it is not only *what* is being taught that matters but also *how* and *by whom*. At one of the first events that I attended in graduate school, I recall being seated next to a man who had peppery hair and brown skin like my father and who reminded me of the extended family that I still have in Hawaii. He asked me, as the first person in my family to pursue an advanced degree, what I planned to study. When I explained that Latin, French, and an interest in English Renaissance literature had brought me to the Midwest to study Comparative Literature, he looked at me with a puzzled expression. Why not American Studies or Asian American literature instead? Don’t I speak Hawaiian or Japanese (I don’t)? Kim F. Hall critiques what she calls a “homology between text and critic,” noting in particular how such presumptions can re-inscribe a troubling essentialism for both early modern and black feminist scholars.²⁰ Nevertheless, seven years later, on the day that I defended my dissertation, I saw five amazing mentors who offered me wise counsel and unflagging support at every stage of my doctoral degree, but could not help but notice that I was the only person of color seated at the table. When I reflect on my training as an early modernist and my current role at an institution where more than 50% of the student body self-identifies as first-generation, I am cognizant now more than ever of the contradictions in my own identity but also know enough to understand that they are not easily resolved. When I teach Shakespeare, I do not believe that I am participating in my own oppression nor do I believe that my writing, for example, on Donne or Milton is an act of false-consciousness. That said, I would not want students to leave my classroom without grappling, more rigorously than I did, with the darker implications of Shakespeare’s legacy.

While the ability to articulate one’s own relationship to Shakespeare and the institutions that have shaped his reputation does not require that students also cultivate a deep and abiding love for his work, this end is by no means precluded. Since a reception-based approach to Shakespeare surfaces the question of just how “the Bard” became so venerable, it ultimately leaves students free to determine for themselves how best to engage in the continual process of determining his meaning and significance in the present day. In my view, one of the most valuable effects of a reception-based approach to Shakespeare is that the reader, whomever that individual may be, is invested with a new kind of interpretive authority. For first-generation students, this interpretive authority contributes to a greater sense of self-efficacy within the

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college classroom and resists the impulse to reduce contradiction for the sake of ideological consistency. As a teacher, I never want to suggest to a student, especially a first-generation student, that this author or that subject area is not for you. If they want Shakespeare, they should take it, and make it their own. If they do not, then a course like the one I have been describing can give students the language and context necessary to make this case in as strong and clear a manner as possible. Their estimations of Shakespeare would no longer depend on matters of personal taste but on a critical examination of his work and an understanding of the broader historical processes that have invested it with value. In his contribution to this issue on the danger of stereotype threat in the Shakespeare classroom, Kyle Grady considers the lived experiences of black students and argues that many “find themselves at a disadvantage in traditional educational spaces, in large part because such spaces often operate in a white cultural register.”²¹ Doing the work to recognize and change ways that our pedagogy may either intentionally or unintentionally have this impact on our students requires sustained effort. Conversations about first-generation pedagogy often focus on student deficits, but this issue suggests that we would do well to focus on our own deficits as teachers.

In a 1985 address to an Iowa audience, the poet Maya Angelou reflected on her experience of reading Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29 as a young girl. She recounts how the poem seemed to resonate with her personal experiences to such an extent that, at the time, she concluded that “of course he wrote it for me; that is a condition of a black woman. I understand that. Nobody else understands it, but I know that William Shakespeare was a black woman.”²² One year before her death, Angelou returned to this anecdote in a 2013 speech in Virginia. This time she substitutes the phrase “Shakespeare must have been a black girl” and adds the further suggestion that “the poetry you read has been written for you, each of you—black, white, Hispanic, man, woman, gay, straight.”²³ Over the years, this short response has been commented upon by several Shakespeare scholars. Terri Power understands Angelou here to be “articulating a feminist intersectional approach” while Marjorie Garber suggests of Angelou that “if she can be persuaded to believe that he [Shakespeare] speaks for her even— or precisely when—he is in fact speaking against her[,] then the ideological danger of fetishizing Shakespeare becomes clear and present.”²⁴ I conclude with Angelou’s remarks because I think that they could serve as the basis for a productive assignment asking students to engage simultaneously with questions of interpretation, identity, reception, and canonicity. Before turning to Angelou’s and other critical remarks, students would first read Sonnet 29 and practice close reading techniques in order to better understand the formal elements of the poem, Shakespeare’s use of religious language, and/or the speaker’s address to the youth within the context of the sonnet sequence. A second reading would ask students to respond to some of the poem’s central themes and to record their personal responses in a journal. The third and final step would ask students to engage with Angelou’s claims about the poem and to consider their broader significance and purpose. This assignment guides students through a series of discrete tasks so that they gain experience practicing different

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kinds of reading and so that they are prepared to reflect on Angelou's position with respect to Shakespeare while also articulating their own.

Contrary to the deficit narratives that so often characterize pedagogical discussions and administrative initiatives dedicated to first-generation students, I want to close by emphasizing the stories of resilience, the dedication to higher education, and the immense intellectual capacity that these students demonstrate on a daily basis. While centering student needs and access in the classroom is imperative, so too is recognizing the wealth of knowledge that first-generation students can impart to us as teachers. Earlier I wrote of consciousness raising as a valuable part of classroom discussions of canonicity and the reception of Shakespeare's work in contemporary America, but this process is not unidirectional. Working with first-generation students and others from diverse backgrounds at the University of Washington Tacoma has done more to reform my teaching and to increase my awareness of food insecurity, homelessness, discrimination, and the realities of higher education than so much of my previous education. These students ask hard questions, they force us to remember and articulate why Shakespeare matters, and they demand that we exit the ivory tower to return knowledge to its rightful place in the world. Beginning in 2017, undergraduate students at Cambridge University organized like those at Yale to decolonize the English syllabus and to work for the meaningful inclusion of diversity. The campaign has expanded over the last year to other departments including Classics, Physics, Chemistry, Engineering, and Medicine.²⁵ These students are holding up a mirror to our classrooms, they are showing us the world as it is and working together to make it better. Let us do the same.

Notes

1. Since I last taught these materials, numerous sexual harassment allegations against both Díaz and Alexie have made the teaching of their works as well as discussions about institutions of power and privilege all the more complex and all the more necessary.

2. Harold Bloom, "Harold Bloom Interviewed by Eleanor Wachtel," *Queens Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 609-19.

3. Katy Waldman, "The Canon Is Sexist, Racist, Colonialist, and Totally Gross. Yes, You Have to Read It Anyway," *Slate Magazine*, May 24, 2016, http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2016/05/24/yale_students_want_to_remake_the_english_major_requirements_but_there_s.html.

4. See Linda Massarella, "UPenn Students Swap Out Shakespeare Portrait in Favor of Audre Lorde," *New York Post*, December 13, 2016, <https://nypost.com/2016/12/13/upenn-students-swap-out-shakespeare-portrait-in-favor-of-audre-lorde/>; "Yale Sidelines English Poets After Complaints of 'Colonialism,'" *RT*, October 27, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/usa/408017-yale-english-lit-diversity/>; Alyssa Damron, "Yale 'Decolonizes' English Dept. After Complaints Studying White

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- Authors 'Actively Harms' Students," October 27, 2017, <http://nation.foxnews.com/2017/10/27/yale-decolonizes-english-dept-after-complaints-studying-white-authors-actively-harms>.
5. American Council of Trustees and Alumni, *The Unkindest Cut: Shakespeare in Exile 2015*, April 23, 2015, <http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/local/the-unkindest-cut/1523/>.
 6. Stephanie Pietros, "If we shadows have offended?: Shakespeare's 'Problems' and First-Generation Students," in this volume.
 7. Laura Turchi and Ayanna Thompson, "Shakespeare and the Common Core: An Opportunity to Reboot," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 95, no.1 (September 2013): 34.
 8. Many thanks here to Elizabeth Mathie who collaborated with me on this endeavor.
 9. See for example Bruce Horner and John Timbur, "English Only and U.S. Composition," *College Composition and Communication* 53, no. 4 (June 2002): 594-630; Paul Kei Matsuda, "The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition," *College English* 68, no. 6 (2006): 637-651; and Vershawn Ashanti Young, *Other People's English: Code Meshing, Code Switching, and African American Literacy* (Teachers College Press, 2014).
 10. Horner and Timbur, "English Only," 594-97.
 11. Matsuda, "The Myth," 639-41.
 12. N.F. Blake, *Shakespeare's Non-Standard English: A Dictionary of His Informal Language* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
 13. Peter Erickson and Kim F. Hall offer a compelling critique of Kiernan Ryan's *Shakespeare's Universality: Here's Fine Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015) on the grounds that re-asserting Shakespeare's timeless universality obscures serious considerations of race during the early modern period and positions Shakespeare as already containing the answers to the specific problems of our time; Erickson and Hall, "A New Scholarly Song: Rereading Early Modern Race," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol.67, no.1 (Spring 2016): 5.
 14. Ann Thompson, "Kurosawa's *Ran*: Reception and Interpretation," *East-West Film Journal* 3, no. 2 (June 1989): 1-4.
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