

6-15-2019

Peripatetic Pedagogy: Teaching Shakespeare at a First-Generation University

Kerry Cooke

Follow this and additional works at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/emc>

Recommended Citation

Kerry Cooke (2019) "Peripatetic Pedagogy: Teaching Shakespeare at a First-Generation University," *Early Modern Culture*: Vol. 14 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/emc/vol14/iss1/12>

This Seminar Essay is brought to you for free and open access by TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in Early Modern Culture by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

Peripatetic Pedagogy: Teaching Shakespeare at a First-Generation University

KERRY COOKE

As Aristotle reminds us, most drama moves from a place of ignorance to one of knowledge or understanding. My first year as a full-time assistant professor of Shakespeare and drama, in 2017, in Mary Baldwin University's theatre department, was my *anagnorisis*. That is, during this time, I gained a fuller realization of what it is to be more pedagogically conscious, generally, and what it is to be more conscientious when engaging with underrepresented students, specifically. It is, perhaps, important to note, I began teaching at MBU in and around the time it transitioned from a residential college for women to a co-ed, first-generation university. To take statistics from the residential colleges at MBU, 30% of students identify as African American or black, 11% identify as Hispanic, 12% as other, and 47% identify as white. Furthermore, 45% of first year students identify as first-generation college students.¹ With this said, I do not have a statistical breakdown of the racial composition of first-generation students; it would be irresponsible, therefore, to correlate "first generation" with any one racial group at the university.² Indeed, part of my realization has been the ethical dimensions of the way that broad demographics played out where we ply our trade, in the classroom.

To be sure, the shift from a college for women to a co-ed, first-generation university was an exciting one. It was one that, to my mind, chimed with the institution's early history of democratizing education: MBU emerged in the nineteenth century as a seminary for women – many of whom were likely the first in their families to enjoy a formal education. Heartened by and proud of this through line, I (a middle-class white women, it should be noted) went about constructing courses – Shakespeare and otherwise – that I hoped would reflect and support our democratic demographic. Through this process, however, I have realized that my understanding of MBU's identity, past and present, was in some ways inexact. This resulted in a pedagogical error (in action, perhaps) while teaching Shakespeare to first-generation students. It is an error upon which I will elaborate here, and one I hope to reverse in the process, and in future delivery of all my courses.

First-Generation Shakespeare

In order to address this error, it will be necessary, first, to consider MBU's history more fully. I will, therefore, maintain a relatively tight focus in the next few sections both on MBU, and developments of women's education more broadly. Far more complicated than it first appears, MBU's history is a tangle of progress, "progress," transgression of gender norms, rather strict adherence to them, inclusion, and exclusion. To begin, the institution emerged in the mid nineteenth century as Augusta Female Seminary in Staunton, Virginia. As many have noted, hundreds of seminaries and academies for women were established in the United States between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Indeed, a confluence of events during the antebellum period, including a shift from an agrarian to industrial culture, a re-distribution of land and land grants, regional and national discussions about women's rights, as well as heated debates about education (who received it and how), culminated in the formalization of women's education during this time.

It is in this way that Augusta Female Seminary (AFS), participated in and contributed to the kinds of progressive reform for which this century is known. This sweeping effect does, in some ways, belie the entirely humble beginnings of AFS. Rufus William Bailey – a writer, editor, minister, and educator – founded the school in 1842; as the local newspaper, the *Staunton Spectator*, noted, after Bailey consulted with several gentlemen in town,

it was decided that the interest of the community would be promoted by the establishment in Staunton of a Female Seminary. Several individuals were appointed trustees of the proposed institution whose names are presented in the plan which is herewith submitted to your inspection.³

This constitutes a promising start, indeed; but the initial announcement was grander than the establishment at first. As one of the first pupils, Catherine Baylor McChesney, wrote,

The Augusta Female Seminary opened September, 1842, upstairs in an old frame building, long known as the Plant Building, situated on the corner of Court House Alley and New Street. This house was entered by a flight of stairs, leading up from the alley. It consisted of one large room used for study-hall recitation room and all other duties relating to school, excepting music, for which purpose there were two small rooms. The Reverend Bailey, his wife, and two daughters were the teachers.⁴

This is to say, Mary Baldwin University began as a family operated, one-room schoolhouse.

Peripatetic Pedagogy

The trustees of AFS, in concert with the trustees of the partnered Presbyterian church, would later gather funds for a new building – what is now referred to as Main Building. However, it was within the “old frame” house that Bailey first framed the curriculum for his students. His scholastic design was, in all ways, a reaction to earlier conceptualizations of women’s education. Prior to the Revolutionary War, and as the colonies developed, women – like men – were committed to manual forms of labor associated with agrarian life: any education they received was suited to their roles as wives, mothers, and managers of domesticity – it was based upon utility. As new ways of life stabilized, however, the wives and daughters of wealthy men found opportunities (that is, time) to refine themselves. Through private tutoring, young women were introduced to a curriculum that emphasized music, dance, needlework, French, and other “ornamental” accomplishments. Many of the academies established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century went on to formalize this working prospectus, and would become representative of what Bailey would later refer to as superficial “fancy work,” or dilettantism.⁵

A parallel ideology formed to compete with ornamental education. Figures like Catharine Beecher, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Sarah Pierce helped develop the notion of “republican womanhood,” or the concept that post-revolutionary women participated in the formation of the new nation in crucial ways: they instilled their children (nascent citizens of the new Republic) with moral insight, virtue, and sensibility. On this basis, Wollstonecraft insisted that a more rigorous education would “render women truly useful members of society,” positing further, “the more understanding women require, the more they will be attached to their duty.”⁶ This, too, was Pierce’s rationalization for establishing Litchfield Female Academy in 1792. Her institution formally introduced young women to rhetoric, logic, grammar, math, history, Latin, (less) Greek, classics, natural sciences, and perhaps most importantly, ethics.⁷ This curriculum came to embody the agenda of later, antebellum, academies and seminaries like AFS.

Indeed, it is to this ideology that Bailey’s scholastic initiative adhered. This is made evident, first, in a series of letters to his daughters written in the 1830s, later published as *Daughters at School*. In one letter, he states that the place that the female occupies in society,

and the influence she exerts, require the most complete moral and intellectual education to prepare her for her duties. She may not only “learn to read and write and cipher,” but she ought to have her mind and character formed by whatever can adorn or give strength to the intellect. And why should she not? She has a whole life to live – why not spend it rationally? She must always be doing something. The mind must think. Why may she not as well be wise as frivolous? Why may she not as well be devoted to literature as to fashion?

He muses further that, in every instance, a woman “moves in a center and is a radiating point of influence.” She

First-Generation Shakespeare

forms her daughters to her own views and every habit of those ladies is the practical result of her training. . . . Let it be considered also that the pillars of the state rest on the foundation of the family edifice. Our wives are the guardians of our liberties.⁸

Within this context, Bailey eschews ornamental education, asserting,

There are some other branches of female education which I pass over as incidental. They may be omitted without material injury and cultivation of them should depend on circumstances of time, talent, genius, and faculties.⁹

Aforementioned, “all of which” he states, is called “fancy work.” The stance Bailey takes in this correspondence is refracted in the AFS catalogue of September 1842. It outlines,

Elementary class: Reading, Writing, Spelling, the Elements of English Grammar, Elementary Geography, and Elementary Arithmetic. Tuition in the course \$10.00 per session of five months.

Second class – English Grammar continued in parsing, critical analysis, and structure of sentences. English Composition and Geography continued. Tuition, \$12.00 per session.

First Class – English Grammar continued in its higher branches. Rhetoric and Composition, Comprehensive History, Geography, Astronomy, Natural and Moral Philosophy, the Elements of Natural Sciences, familiarly explained and practically enforced; Geometry, Algebra, and the simplest form of Bookkeeping. Tuition, \$15.00 per session.

Extra Classes – Latin, Greek, French, Music, Vocal and Instrumental, on Piano Forte, Guitar, and Organ. Mrs. Bailey will have entire charge of extra classes with exception of the Greek. Tuition in French, \$10.00 per session. Music on either instrument, accompanied by voice, \$20.00 per session, including use of Piano Forte, Guitar, or the Parlor Organ.

Neither dead languages (in this instance) or fine arts are at the curriculum’s core; they are not strictly necessary, and are therefore costly additions. As historian Mary Watters points out, against the superficiality of finishing schools, those like Bailey’s went too far in the other direction to stress serious disciplinary studies.¹⁰ The impulse to sideline the arts is one with which most faculty and students in visual and performance arts are, now, very familiar. To be more specific, the

Peripatetic Pedagogy

history I am parsing here and in the next section has incredible bearing on teaching these subjects at MBU (and institutions like it) *now*. At any rate, Mary Kelley makes a note of the initial, nineteenth-century, tendency, but reminds us that, as the capital of women's education began to rise, its authorizing value came almost exclusively from a rigorous curriculum.¹¹

The use-value of this education can be understood in terms of its outcome: in committing to this agenda, Bailey (and educators like him) were tasked with teaching students how to reconcile the ambitions that their education led them to discover with the culturally limited roles they played as women. Or, as Linda Eisenmann notes: while promoting women's education, such educators did not advocate for changes in traditional roles for women.¹² Therefore, in addition to the above curriculum (or, rather, through it) Bailey, and those like him, prepared young women to "exert their influence" through the republican responsibilities of motherhood, teaching, social reform, charitable activity, and organized benevolence.

Of course, adherence to ideological prescription is rarely exact. As social historian Rosemary O'Day points out, women conceptualized the purpose of education in different ways; or, not always as directed.¹³ For some, rigorous education was a conduit to moral living, a way to civilize men (and, problematically, "others"); it was also a means of becoming a better wife, mother, daughter and sister, or a way to signal benevolent contribution to the commonweal. For others, education was an avenue for radical reform. In addition, it was used as a way to assume social capital. Indeed, depending on the context, an ornamental or an arduous education were emblems of elite standing. Parallel to social capital was the acquisition of capital. David Gold and Catherine Hobbs have shown that industrial and vocational education for woman took on a new meaning in the American South, where the Civil War caused significant economic distress and left many "surplus women" who needed work. As such, newly emerging land-grant (public) colleges for women became a means of economic survival.¹⁴ Still other women sought education for purposes of self-actualization, and/or personal fulfillment. Over and beside all this, women often maintained multiple, sometimes contradictory, reasons for pursuing (or offering others) education across time, or all at once.

Mary Julia Baldwin – the successor of Rufus William Bailey – embodies this multiplicity. Bailey, after establishing AFS, setting forth a curriculum representative of its purpose, and developing a small but respectable physical plant capable of meeting the needs of around sixty-five students, ultimately resigned in 1849. He did so to join the cause of the American Colonization society (a fact to which I will return later). A series of administrators replaced Bailey – the tenure of each was relatively short. Watters notes that a decline in enrollment accompanied this transition, a phase that lasted until 1863.

First-Generation Shakespeare

Institutional instability, much exacerbated by the Civil War, resulted in the near closure of AFS. On this basis, Watters argues that Baldwin's arrival – or rather return – constituted a second institutional foundation.¹⁵

Baldwin was, indeed, a student of Bailey's in the earliest years of the seminary. Elizabeth Emma Stephens, a pupil who attended AFS shortly after Baldwin, recalled:

I was in Mrs. Bailey's class of beginners in French and on our recitation days, Miss Mary Julia Baldwin, who had graduated a year or two before, came with a companion or two to read Racine, or some other French dramatist, under Mrs. Bailey's supervision. We became well acquainted and were always friends. But no one suspected what a blessing she was to be, to her church, her state, and her sex. How she extended far and wide the beneficent influences set to work by Mr. Bailey.¹⁶

The idea that “no one suspected” Baldwin's eventual “beneficent influence” is interesting. The claim, perhaps, derives from descriptions of her as somewhat “timid” and “frail.” As a small child, she suffered a fever that resulted in some facial paralysis and “twisted” facial features. She avoided portraits or photographs for much of her life as result. Consequently, one of the only extant images of her is a sketch, drawn by a mischievous student, which distantly outlines a woman kneeling in dutiful prayer – with a not too small dog perched atop her bustle. The image is as charming as it is telling: she was known as a pious and dutiful woman who *bustled*: she graduated at the top of her ASF class, and before returning to the seminary, she was a Sunday school teacher for young women, organized school sessions for children of color, and founded her own school, the Bee Hive Seminary.¹⁷

This is to say, some *could* certainly suspect, even expect, Baldwin to engage in beneficent activity. To reiterate, and momentarily make ambiguous her activities, the ideology that prompted those like Bailey to offer scholastic opportunity to those like Baldwin guided women's public use of education. Women were already recognized within the home as superior mentors; with formal training, they could be mothering teachers too. This more public opportunity was opened further as men began moving more swiftly into formal professions: this division of authority – predicated upon (problematic) binaries that gave “separate spheres” their shape – sanctioned women's increased visibility. Out of this new prominence emerged an expectation that women like Baldwin should, indeed, have a “beneficent” influence by giving the public access to her education.

With this reasoning – as well as an awareness of her reputable character – the Secretary of the AFS Board, Joseph Waddle, approached her with the position of principal. Otherwise poised to close, the institution issued a statement in the summer of 1863, announcing

The Trustees of this institution announce that the next session will begin the first of October. Miss Mary Julia Baldwin, aided

Peripatetic Pedagogy

by competent teachers, will have charge of the school and miss Agnes McClung of the boarding department.¹⁸

Indeed, the story goes that Waddle persuaded the Board to hire her as the head principal; upon this appointment, she took possession of one building (in need of some repair and a few furnishings), the institution's not insignificant debt, and a dwindled student body.¹⁹

Of the many issues Baldwin addressed, the institution's curriculum was one of the first. Indeed, crucial developments in women's education had occurred since Bailey set forth his agenda in 1842: seminaries and academies began to model their itineraries on that of men's universities. As Kelley points out, "those who claimed that women had the same intellectual potential as men were gaining ascendancy. They were institutionalizing the claim's obvious corollary: female educational opportunities should reflect equality."²⁰ Within this context, the AFS curriculum in 1863 followed that of its neighboring university. With the assistance of Professor W.H. McGuffey, Baldwin put forward a renewed agenda:

The plan of the institution is that of the University of Virginia modified only so far as to adapt it to the peculiar requisites of female education. The course of study is distributed into "Schools," each constituting a complete course on the subjects taught.²¹

Another professor would later declare:

Having much opportunity of knowing the character of the instruction in the Augusta Female Seminary, of which Miss Mary Julia Baldwin is Principal, I am persuaded that for thoroughness, elevation, and utility, it is for young ladies what the University of Virginia is for young gentlemen; for it is little less than the plan of the latter most faithfully and ably executed.²²

The AFS curriculum, therefore, offered Latin, (again less) Greek, French, history arithmetic, ethics, and natural sciences, that began to define itself against other seminaries and alongside universities for men.

To execute this adjustment – to overhaul the curriculum in a way that met new and heightened demands in women's education – was a mammoth undertaking. It signals Baldwin's agency, her influence, and the kind of progress for which many women of her day strove. With this said, these developments, generally speaking, would not be considered *overly* progressive. In fact, the ways in which her agency manifests gestures to what Jaime Osterman Alves explains as "collateral learning," which involves women's "absorption of their culture's attitudes toward and expectations of adult women."²³ Baldwin's role as principal,

First-Generation Shakespeare

in many ways, shows the necessary transmission of and adherence to prescribed gender roles and scholastic experience.

This, perhaps, makes what follows rather surprising. Indeed, as Baldwin's itinerary developed across time, she augmented her traditional role as female principal to acquire a more "masculine" form of agency. She parlayed her curricular developments into opportunities for land management, ultimately becoming a well-known property mogul. We gain valuable insight into this, rather radical, progress by examining how she paired her development of literary studies with new property acquisition. Indeed, in the process of renovating the curriculum, she significantly expanded the "school" of English Literature. Watters notes, in fact, that this department "probably underwent more change than any [other]." Moving away from an almost complete emphasis on grammar, rhetoric, and composition, the seminary introduced a two-year survey of English literature classes.²⁴ "It would require more space than I am allowed," one student claimed, "to mention all the writers we studied carefully." The student does say,

While studying Shakespeare, we read a play a week, out of class – and then each one wrote impromptu compositions on a subject given from the play read. While studying English Drama we read Addison's *Cato*, Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* and *Edward II*; also plays of Sheridan and Goldsmith.²⁵

Indeed, institutions that modeled their course study after universities for men, by extension, sanctioned access to the canon, a culturally determined list of important authors, like Shakespeare and Marlowe. To foreshadow, this is the same canon that MBU invites its first-generation students to manage. Alexis de Tocqueville spoke to the value of "the canon" in his treatise *Democracy in America* in 1840, suggesting it was necessary to the process of "becoming" or "remaining" civilized.²⁶ Transmitted into a seminary like AFS, young women were given access to texts – notionally off limits – that constituted the basis for cultural capital in civil society.

An amplification of literary studies is interesting in and of itself, but there's more! Baldwin eventually combined this curricular revision, and those like it, with a drastic space audit. Aforementioned, she took on one building in 1863 and a level of debt that did not support its repair. However, as the new curriculum began to attract new students, she began investing tuition into AFS property, as well as that which surrounded it. To give some perspective on this process: AFS opened with about 80 (mainly local) students in 1863, her first year as principal. By 1870, and into the 1890s, AFS boasted an average of 207 students per year from across the country.²⁷ These doubled – sometimes tripled – numbers allowed Baldwin to purchase additional land, repair old structures, erect new ones, and eventually expand various buildings onto still more land.

With the development of the physical plant came new interior and exterior furnishings. One account states,

Peripatetic Pedagogy

The scene in and around the institution was most attractive. The terraced yard with its lawns and fountains, and the portico filled with flowers and rare birds of brilliant plumage from Java, Syria, Africa, and South America were fit surroundings for the halls of the institution, which were decorated with exceptional good taste.

Fountains and birds of brilliant plumage! This is a surprise. My awe here may be useful though: for one, it does much to communicate the current dearth of such amenities on campus; by extension, it signals a turn that both this essay, and the institutional history that it chronicles, will (indeed, must) soon make. But just as importantly, to wonder at the capital that such plumage represents is to fully recognize Mary Julia Baldwin's prowess as a property mogul. Others certainly did: by the end of the nineteenth century, she became known as "the best business man in Staunton."²⁸

Lest we lose sight of the rigorous curriculum that subsidized these fountains and feathers, a library, or ladies "Reading Room" was also built anew. One student notes that it was "fitted" with "comfort and taste,"

Handsome book-cases filled with carefully selected books, comfortable chairs, pretty tables, pictures, etc., together with the bright southern exposure combined to make the room a favorite place of resort for all who love reading.

As if to recognize the relationship between Baldwin's literary and land management directly, the account continues, stating, "the chief aim of the Principal in the arrangement of the Reading Room" is "to cultivate a taste for choice literature."²⁹

Ultimately Baldwin realized the valuable proximity between "choice" prose and property, allowing her to venture literary capital successfully – and allowing us to speculate about the ways in which she expanded her role beyond its traditional limits. The kinds of negotiation involved in the transactions she performed seem well outside Bailey's conceptualization of a woman's typical responsibilities. If we recall, the catalogue from the years Baldwin attended AFS listed only the "simplest form of Bookkeeping." With this in mind – or rather to my mind – her use of the "simplest form of bookkeeping" to (essentially) flip a curriculum, property, and position as principal to become a business phenom suggests she became a woman before her time, rather than of her time. Mary Julia Baldwin bustled indeed.

It seems that, because she was so successful, AFS maintained its seminary status longer than we might expect. That is, the foundation of Vassar College in 1865, and Smith College in 1875 further elevated women's education, and its potential designations. We see this with the emergence of Wellesley (1875), Radcliff (1897), Bryn Mawr (1880), and Randolph-Macon (1893). And, Mount Holyoke became Mount Holyoke Seminary and College in 1888. But AFS, it has been argued, remained a seminary for some time due to its thriving

First-Generation Shakespeare

principal-proprietor establishment.³⁰ When Augusta Female Seminary did finally elevate its status in 1923, the institution, needless to say, credited its female founder by naming it Mary Baldwin College.

I have purposely lingered over the school's early history: doing so draws attention to various forms of progress with which the institution is still associated: a rigorous curriculum, opportunities for women, specifically, and – in becoming a co-ed, first-generation, university – democratization of education more generally. And, while our institutional rhetoric gestures to two founders (particularly on “Founders’ Day”), our pride often redounds upon Mary Julia Baldwin especially. Our inspection and speculation – I think rightly - has turned to celebration of her radical achievements. But as I move forward, gaining further perspective on this history, some of its aspects reveal themselves to be problematic, both then and now.

To continue teasing this out, Eisenmann helpfully outlines the broader developments in education that would follow the elevated designations of women's institutions: in the twentieth century, women's colleges continued to emerge, though at a slower pace as higher education became available in public colleges and universities, and when male institutions, previously single-sex, began admitting women.³¹ This trend proved to have a significant influence as the twentieth century progressed. Eisenmann observes that by 1960, nearly 300 women's colleges remained in the United States. By the mid 1990s, however, this number dropped to 82. The most dramatic decrease occurred in the 1970s, when many institutions closed, or became co-educational.³² Indeed, many (though not all) women's institutions became victims of the progress for which they argued.

Mary Baldwin College oriented itself to these developments in interesting ways. As we know, its earliest curricula reacted to “toy box” education; its early twentieth-century agenda, too, defined its purpose using the language of rigor. In a historically ironic turn, however, Mary Baldwin College assumed a reputation as a more of an elite finishing school by the mid twentieth century. There are many factors involved in this eventuality: after the Depression and World War II, private, single-sex education seemed a path of utter luxury; the school's status as a liberal arts college, rather than an institution that focused on vocational or professional training, contributed to this new conceptualization. It is fascinating to note that the institution did not, it seems, shy away from this characterization: this era, then as now, is referred to as the “pearls and squirrels” era. “Pearls,” of course, represent the elitism of the student body – and also rhymes with the school's mascot, the “squirrel.”

This phrase is used variously now. Many seem to use it wistfully, associating it, I think, with our wealthier past – that is, the robust institutional economy that subsidized the pearl-wearing mode of operation (and plumage maintenance, before that). Indeed, with the rise of co-education, the tradition of

Peripatetic Pedagogy

– and funding for – single-sex education declined drastically. To survive in a co-ed culture, the college for women began discounting its tuition at a higher rate. This led to the drastically altered demographic represented by the statistics I offered earlier. As if to give this distance a name, a new version of our mascot was introduced: the “fighting squirrel.” We are now the home of students who have to fight their way into an academic setting. Faculty and administration, in our own way, must fight to occupy a place in the world of higher education: even with discounted tuition, numbers in the college for women are low. Departments constricted some time ago as a result – many of which constituted “fancy work,” or what we identify as the liberal arts. On this basis, the institution built co-ed graduate programs, a new college for co-ed undergraduates, and a co-ed Health Sciences College around the shrinking college for women. In so doing, we obtained the status of a diverse – and growing – co-ed university. It is because of the diversity we have achieved that the term “pearls and squirrels” is often used, too, to recognize our homogenous past, and create some distance from it.

And there it is. Or rather, there it has always been. “Pearls and Squirrels” does not gesture to one era of homogeneity only; it is a phrase that strings through and around our emergence as an institution. Indeed, “pearls” encode a long history of elite whiteness. The institution has not moved smoothly around a continuum of democratization; instead, it often encircled and ornamented affluent white women. This troubles my earlier statement that our institutional identity, now, chimes with its early history of liberalized education: there is asymmetry in our institutional past and present that I did not initially recognize.

In hindsight, I overlooked this fissure because I conflated the progress of historically under-presented groups. Even in a #metoo #blacklivesmatter era, I imagined that Mary Julia Baldwin’s radical success benefitted, or ultimately empowered, everyone. Karen Sanchez-Eppler speaks to such tendencies – specifically assumptions about the twinned progress of marginalized groups in the nineteenth century – as the “century of liberalization.” As she observes, women of the nineteenth century often involved themselves in the women’s movement and abolition, as well as advocating for prison and school reform. These causes seem to cohere naturally because the social and political goals of white women, women and men of color, and/or those who were economically disadvantaged all depended upon radical acts of representation.³³ Each sector’s need to act against cultural norms of white masculinity created the illusion of alliance. And still does, of course.

As Sanchez-Eppler asserts, despite a similarity in aims, such coalition “is never particularly easy or equitable.”³⁴ Kimberle Crenshaw, as we know, speaks to this uneasiness, arguing, gender and race are not, and have never been, mutually exclusive categories of experience.³⁵ There are any number of ways to illustrate both Sanchez-Eppler’s and Crenshaw’s claims within the context of nineteenth-century reform. The example that women’s educational history draws to the fore is separatism as a means of reform. Indeed, while the antebellum era showed significant advances in formal education for women, it relays a vastly different narrative for people of color: white women were the beneficiaries of

First-Generation Shakespeare

Republican womanhood while men and women of color struggled against manifold forms of prohibition.³⁶ Moreover, Kelley explains, there were significant “practices of exclusion based on class and race,” meaning that the “everyone” in the rhetoric of white female reformers frequently meant “every woman like themselves.”³⁷ Such “universal” language and action cultivated a powerful and self-authorizing *esprit de corp*.

By extension – wittingly or not – many founders argued for educational reform without suggesting integration. This manifests, certainly, in MBU’s history. Bailey, in particular, was a sorter and a sifter. As we know, he promoted the education of women without arguing for their integration into public spheres. This separatist impulse finds further expression in his resignation as principal of AFS to join the American Colonization Society, an organization that argued that freed slaves be taken to a British colony in Sierra Leone. This “progressive” agenda, in fact, stymied emancipation efforts for a time. Indeed, his separatism manifested a range of essentialist assumptions about the proper place of women and people of color. As we know, Baldwin problematized the binaries that Bailey bequeathed, thereby representing a kind of progress that defied gender-prescribed limits. But she better defined the limits of some: she taught local children of color, but there is no evidence to suggest she argued for their integration. In the end, then, AFS bestowed formal pearls of wisdom to an elite few rather the disenfranchised many. And, as I have realized, this asymmetry proleptically anticipates some of the implicit assumptions underscoring the current distribution of the first-generation students within the current curricula and disciplines of twenty-first century higher education.

With this said: it was not, initially, thorough research on the history of women’s education that led to this realization. In fact, it was an under-researched use of it, in a unit I taught on Shakespeare, that brought about my *anagorisis*. To elaborate upon this at last, and to reiterate briefly, I assumed my position at MBU just as we transitioned from a women’s college to a co-ed, first-generation university. This was (and remains) an exciting transition. It is worth mentioning, however, that there was some not insignificant blowback. As one alum phrased it, many were “in a twit” over the issue. “Impassioned pleas” were delivered by past students, arguing that the “decision to allow men to live on campus would destroy the very thing that made Baldwin so special to them.” The institution’s response was a multifaceted combination of press releases, formal comments, and listening tours. The refrain that emerged during this time, and remained after the uproar quieted, was that we are proud to be a co-ed, first-generation university “with a college for women at its center.”

This is intriguing rhetoric. The rising number of undergraduates in the co-ed residential colleges and graduate programs, alongside the decreasing numbers in the residential women’s college, suggested to me that our new refrain

Peripatetic Pedagogy

might soon become a state of mind, rather than a state of being. I tried to make sense of this potential when I located the through line from our identity as first-generation university to our early history of democratization. In other words, to be at an institution with women at our center is to believe in equal opportunities for higher education.

Inside this rationale, Mary Julia Baldwin, for me, came to represent this belief; she came to represent the underrepresented. In hindsight, I had a more personal reason, too, to place her – or keep her – at our ideological center. For the last institution with which I was affiliated in a full-time capacity was The Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon, as a doctoral student. In other words: Shakespeare had, for some time, been the best businessman in the town where I lived. To enter a collegiate environment founded upon a woman's achievements was altogether thrilling.

It was with an understanding of Baldwin as an empowering figure, therefore, that I began to search for bits of information on her life, curricular agenda, and achievements. I have used the word “bits” here purposely. As a new faculty member at a teaching-heavy institution, I had seven new courses to prepare that year. During an initial investigative foray, however, I hit upon her effort to, and success in, developing the school for English. This likely drew my attention because she augmented it with and around early modern dramatists like Shakespeare and Marlowe. In addition, however, I was poised to begin a unit on Shakespeare in an Introduction to Theatre course with a discussion of canonicity, an approach I inherited from a colleague at another institution. For this exercise, I typically ask students to come to class having read a brief essay on canonicity. Once we establish a working definition of the term, I invite the students to recall the texts that they have been asked to read, from middle school to university. I encourage them to look at our own course syllabus if their memories are foggy. Once they begin to relay texts (or authors), I begin to write them on the board. The list is predictable: *Hamlet*, *The Death of a Salesman*, *Oedipus*, *A Doll's House*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Crucible*, *Everyman*, *Tartuffe*, *Fences*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Antigone*, to name a few.

This exercise is rigged of course. The list it generates is predictable because the majority of students in class come from the same system of education, formulated long ago. But its predictability exemplifies the next argument that our assigned reading makes: the canon is constructed by the systematized efforts of authors, educators, administrators, scholars, and critics – or authority figures. Historically speaking, authorities are white men (now dead). Acknowledging this allows us to think collectively about the canon as a place of privilege, as well as about Shakespeare's place in our curricula as it relates to, and often contrasts with, a diverse student body. In the past, at other institutions, I have found that, by recognizing this disjunction, students are given license to ask a number of great questions: “as a representative of a patriarchal tradition, does Shakespeare represent me?”; “as a representative of the elite, does he represent me?”; “are his plays still relevant?”; “do canons change?”; “how?”; “how does Shakespeare earn his keep in a community that is diverse, socio-economically

First-Generation Shakespeare

speaking?” All of this is to note that, in the past, the day that we have this discussion is typically the day that even the quietest students begin to participate. And it is after this discussion that students start – more earnestly – to interrogate the course, its readings, and its themes, as well as look for passages or entire plays that allow them to confront issues of race, status, and gender. And as we know, there are plenty to be found in Shakespeare’s plays.

I have used this exercise several times with some success. I augmented it only slightly going into our unit on Shakespeare. Indeed, I began by drawing a connection between Baldwin’s curricular agenda and our task for the day: through our discussion, we, like Mary Julia Baldwin, would discover the ways in which canon management is empowering. An effective figuration, I thought. Except, it didn’t work. Unusually, the students did not, more earnestly, begin to interrogate the course; nor did they approach Shakespeare, specifically, with new “license” to ask questions about status, race, or gender. Rather, I found that I had to ask the questions that students in the past had asked with some eagerness. To be fair, a handful of students participated; but a couple of students, typically engaged, fell quiet. Beyond this, the students who were frequently quiet remained quiet. It culminated in a disjointed, asymmetrical experience.

Admittedly, it took some time to unpack this instance further. Perspective, paired with research, provided some clarity. With some remove, I realized first, that mostly women populated the course. The university has gone co-ed, yes, but it could take years until the number of women on campus is not disproportionately high compared to that of men. Second, I recognized that many of the women were white and middle class. Third, and in reality, there were only a handful of traditionally underrepresented students, either first-generation and/or people of color. To relate this demographic breakdown to the class’s participation in “canon management”: the middle-class white women, as well as the one or two white men, seemed willing to discuss the kind of privilege that the canon represents. In contrast, traditionally underrepresented students were quiet. I think because of the skewed demographics of the class, they had unwittingly become representatives of an entire group, or groups (or tokened). Having a discussion about privilege, it seems, put pressure on white middle-class students to perform their open-mindedness, while putting a great deal of representative pressure on those who are historically underrepresented.

And, there was, and remains, another issue parallel to this. While the ratio was not exactly even, most of the middle-class students were theatre concentrations while a good portion of first-generation students and/or people of color were taking the class as a gen ed requirement. Put in another way, traditionally privileged students (mostly white women) who could “afford” it had declared their concentration as theatre, a field of study that has been cataloged officially and unofficially as “ornamental” across time. In the vein of “fancy work,” theatre departments often constrict, or as Bailey put it can be “omitted” completely without any perceived “material injury.” This reality further underscores the risk involved in declaring or obtaining a theatre degree. Logically, then, those who are traditionally underrepresented – those who cannot risk a

Peripatetic Pedagogy

theatre degree - were enrolled in pre-professional majors; our theatre course simply ticked the box of a general requirement.

There is a lot to take from this to be sure. Before discussing its implications, however, I want to be clear: I am not suggesting that all theatre majors at MBU are middle class white women, nor am I suggesting that traditionally underrepresented students only major in pre-professional studies, and never in the arts. The analysis that I offer here is based upon the first course I taught in my first full-time term at MBU. Similar patterns have manifested in other courses since, *but* I have also taught courses with more equal distribution. I wonder, too, what courses will look like as the university continues to grow, and colleges define themselves anew. In fact, between the first draft and the final draft of this essay, MBU created a new College of Visual and Performing Arts. There is real opportunity here. Through more conscious programing, curricular development, class prep, and hiring, we can reintroduce our selves to the *whole* campus.

I better understand, now, that there has been asymmetry between the ideological whole of our institution and its attendant parts. This was certainly the case in the course I have discussed. An uneven gender distribution within an “ornamental” course created a space unrepresentative of the larger university. Indeed, a group coalesced that was far more homogeneous than the university demographics might otherwise suggest. The exercise I introduced did not only draw attention to this, it immediately engaged the middle-class white women pursuing an “ornamental” education to create further distance between them and underrepresented students. In truth, I think this would have happened whether I framed the exercise with Baldwin’s curricular agenda or not. However, in so doing, I further augmented, defined, and gave critical legitimacy to, a homogenous group joined in an educational experience *asymmetrical* to that of underrepresented students in the class. In the end, I misused our history. I inadvertently redistributed pearls of wisdom to some students and not others. I thereby collapsed the distance between the problematic aspects of our past and our present mode of operation. It is this error I intend to correct. That is, I hope that *anagnorisis* is followed by *peripeteia*, some reversal that sees a still well-meaning but altered approach to teaching at a first-generation university in flux.

By way of a conclusion, I would like to discuss a way forward that can operate alongside program, curricular, and hiring developments. Coincidentally, perhaps, a new approach to teaching Shakespeare presented itself while convening a course titled Women in Theatre and Drama the very next term. I had, in fact, been looking forward to teaching this course since I began at MBU. This eagerness, I now realize, dovetails with the initial thrill of entering a collegiate environment predicated upon a woman’s achievements. With this said, having just incorrectly used the work of one woman, I was not at all convinced I could properly teach

First-Generation Shakespeare

the work of many. I soon realized, however, it was the multiplicity of the course that would make teaching it successfully possible. We (or I) would not be operating under the pretense that the radical achievement of one woman empowered us all. Rather, we could find agency in the progress of women across a spectrum.

Somewhat emboldened, I penciled Beyoncé into the first draft of my course list: *Lemonade* and Kimberle Crenshaw are the women to introduce intersectional drama. Maria Irene Fornes, Sarah Ruhl, Susan Glaspell, Alice Childress, and Suzan Lori Parks also came to mind. I wanted to invite them all.

During this process, and as if to exemplify the argument that the course was beginning to make, I learned that there was not one, two, or three but four women in theatre whose work we could engage with directly in class: Allison Glenzer, Doreen Bechtol, Molly Seremet, and Ayanna Thompson. Allison Glenzer – a wonderful actor who worked at American Shakespeare Center in Staunton – was awarded the Spring 2018 Mary McDermott Fellowship Artist in Residence. This is a visiting position in the Shakespeare and Performance MFA program at MBU, but after a brief conversation, she agreed to extend her work into undergraduate theatre. We thereby began a collaborative effort to augment the canon for our course. We noted that Doreen Bechtol and Molly Seremet, our MBU colleagues and brilliant directors both, were opening and closing Spring term with David Adjmi's *Marie Antoinette* and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, respectively. On this basis, we ordered our syllabus in reverse chronology: *Lemonade*, *Marie Antoinette*, *In the Next Room*, *Venus*, *Fefu and Her Friends*, *Trouble in Mind*, *The Children's Hour*, *The Pleasure Man*, *Trifles*, and *Machinal*. We invited Professors Bechtol and Seremet into class to discuss their directorial work. In the aggregate of our plays, professors, and pupils we could, on any given day, occupy various intersections of gender, race, and class, as well as theatre practices, drama, and scholarship.

In truth, I did not immediately identify this approach – that is, forms of female collaboration – as a potential way to teach Shakespeare. The confluence of opportunity that the course manifested seemed too lucky to repeat. And, more simply, Shakespeare was not much on my mind at the time. Indeed, I was completely immersed in the theatre and drama of modern women. It was Ayanna Thompson's visit to MBU as the Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar that led me to consider it. Our class interaction with Professor Thompson came in two forms: our students attended her incisive lecture "Shakespeare, Race, and Performance: What We Still Don't Know;" in addition, we coordinated a class visit that would allow our students to relay questions and engage in discussion. In this second forum I noted, almost immediately, that while we had not discussed Shakespeare in our class, the students were drawing upon our discussions of intersectional feminism to ask Professor Thompson questions about nontraditional casting practices. Given access to the endeavors of many women, the students began asking questions about Shakespeare – interrogating tradition – more earnestly.

This was a pivotal moment in the ways I conceptualize pedagogical possibilities. In *Women in Theatre and Drama*, collaborative teaching was a

Peripatetic Pedagogy

literal manifestation of the argument the course makes: there is agency in heterogeneous representation. But this approach, I realized during Professor Thompson's visit, is entirely transferable. Opportunities to collaborate may be limited depending on circumstances; but once I began looking, I found there were more chances than I assumed there might be. I have, in fact, participated in collaborative approaches to three different Shakespeare-related courses since Women in Theatre and Drama. For instance, in the most recent section of Introduction to Theatre, we (the students and I) invited visitors across race, class, and gender, to our classroom, across term, to discuss the ways in which they engage with Shakespeare and other canonical writers. This occasion (and the others to which I referred) engendered intersectional discussion that broke up the homogeneity of a single-author course, one that otherwise becomes a synecdoche for the traditional canon. There are certainly other representational approaches to teaching Shakespeare – fellow contributors to this issue demonstrate this powerfully. I, therefore, see forms of female collaboration as one approach within a heterogeneous collection.

Notes

1. These numbers are taken from the university statistical analysis as represented in “MBU Demographics by Program – Fall 2017.”

2. MBU's definition of, and statistics for, first-generation college students are derived from FASFA.

3. Mary Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College, 1842-1942* (Staunton: Mary Baldwin College, 1942), 12.

4. *Ibid.*, 13. I would like to note, here, that the majority of my primary sources are drawn from histories of MBU, like that of Watters, or Patricia Menk's *To Live In Time* (1992).

5. Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College*, 25

6. Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak* (Greensboro: University of North Carolina, 2006), 47.

7. *Ibid.*, 37-39.

8. Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College*, 17.

9. *Ibid.*, 25.

10. *Ibid.*, 25.

11. Kelley, *Learning to Stand*, 70-71.

12. Linda Eisenmann, “Women's Colleges,” in *Historical Dictionary of Women's Education in the United States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 478.

13. Rosemary O'Day, “Women and Education in nineteenth-century England,” *Women, Scholarship and Criticism*, ed. Joan Bellamy, Anne Laurence, and Gill Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 94.

14. David Gold and Catherine L. Hobbs, *Educating the New Southern Woman* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014), 4.

15. Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College*, 90.

16. *Ibid.*, 35.

17. Patricia Menk, “Mary Julia Baldwin, 4 October 1829–1 July 1897,” in *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Library of Virginia (1998–), published 1998, rev. 2017. http://www.lva.virginia.gov/public/dvb/bio.asp?b=Baldwin_Mary_Julia.

18. Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College*, 72.

First-Generation Shakespeare

19. Menk, "Mary Julia Baldwin."
20. Kelley, *Learning to Stand*, 71.
21. Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College*, 89.
22. *Ibid.*, 89.
23. Jaime Osterman Alves, *Fictions of Female Education in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6.
24. Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College*, 93.
25. *Ibid.*, 95.
26. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (New York: 1945), 110.
27. Watters, *The History of Mary Baldwin College*, 113.
28. *Ibid.*, 90.
29. *Ibid.*, 143.
30. *Ibid.*, 81.
31. Eisenmann, "Women's Colleges," 479.
32. *Ibid.*, 480;
33. Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition," *Representations* 24 (Autumn 1988): 27.
34. Sanchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds," 27.
35. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, Art. 1 (1989): 139.
36. Eisenmann, "Women's Colleges," 478.
37. Kelley, *Learning to Stand*, 45.

Dr. Kerry Cooke is an assistant professor at Mary Baldwin University where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on Shakespeare and drama. She is the author of "Addressing the Address: Shakespeare and Early Modern Epistolary Theory" in the *Journal for Early Modern Studies* (2014), and the essay "The Other Winding Sheet: Letters in Early Modern Deathbed Images" in *Epistolary Discourse: Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern Art* (2019). She is currently working on her forthcoming monograph *An Epistolary Democracy*, which traces developments in epistolary theory across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.