

## THE COMMERCIAL BARD: BUSINESS MODELS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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Whether courting the Court of Queen Elizabeth, or relocating to save the finances of his co-investors, Shakespeare's entrepreneurial skill and nose for the market were as good as his writing.<sup>1</sup>

This, slightly unexpected, invocation of Shakespeare opens a report on 'The Entrepreneurial Museum', commissioned by the UK Museums and Libraries Association. The report provides a set of models for museum directors, urging them to embrace new business practices as a way of creating 'sustainable income through commercial activities' (p. 1). It urges museum managers to be aware of the commercial potential of the objects in their care and emphasizes the scope for creative association with commercial companies, offering examples of best practice such as 'the Natural History Museum's T-Rex pyjamas in M&S [Marks and Spencer], the John Lewis' V&A [Victoria and Albert Museum] secateurs, and the Science Museum's educational toys'.

In this context Shakespeare appears as an exemplar for contemporary cultural brokers, aware of and troubled by the traditional tension between commerce and the arts. It suggests that Shakespeare's aesthetic achievement was perfectly compatible with and perhaps even exemplified in his entrepreneurial role in the developing commercial theatre of early modern England. If there is no inconsistency between high value art (Shakespeare's writing) and the sharp management practice of the Globe's moonlight flitting, museum directors need not be concerned about any tension between the artistic and heritage values of

their collections and the interests of the reliable, middle-England, commercial partners who can help to market their assets and provide the financial resources that will ensure the continued success of their organizations.

At first glance this use of Shakespeare seems to fit the now familiar trope of a commodified Shakespeare, that Frederic Jameson described as yet another space in which something like the post-modern 'great transformation' can be read.<sup>2</sup> However, the MLA report, along with other exemplars of the invocation of Shakespeare in the first decade of the twenty-first century, seems to offer a different take on the familiar connections between commerce and the arts. It proposes a new kind of relationship in which commercial activity is an enabling device, using the markets of mass production to protect rather than exploit artistic products that can use commercial support in order to survive the rigours of the market. The examples of successful collaboration, moreover, include products that use the arts for excellent design to create objects in perfect taste. They do not imitate or reference art works directly and are easily distinguishable from the tourist tat, mocked in late twentieth-century accounts of the Shakespeare trade,<sup>3</sup> or from the poisonous associations of armaments and cigarettes

<sup>1</sup> 'Intelligent Naivety, The Entrepreneurial Museum', Report commissioned by the Museums and Libraries Association, 2008 ([www.IntelligentNaivety.com](http://www.IntelligentNaivety.com)), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Frederic Jameson, 'Marxism and Postmodernism', *New Left Review*, 176 (1989), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, *The Shakespeare Trade* (Philadelphia, 1988).

## KATHLEEN MCLUSKIE

that were used both in the 1980s critique of commercial sponsorship and in the radical denunciations, triggered by the 2010 drilling accident in the Gulf of Mexico, of BP's twenty-year sponsorship of the Tate Gallery.<sup>4</sup> The rhetorical strategies of the MLA report protected the value of the arts from the potentially controversial values of the market by literally and metaphorically separating out the space of cultural value in the gallery from the space of tasteful commerce in the surrounding shops or cafeterias or car parks.<sup>5</sup>

The protected space of cultural value was described as one of a direct communion between the art or artisanal craft work and the public: a space where the traditional artistic values of the heritage arts could flourish, where, in the words of the MLA document,

art and culture challenges the status quo, the mundane, the everyday, the ordinary. It elevates people to a higher ideal, a commonality of history or social bonds, or it dares to question the accepted norms of today.<sup>6</sup>

These values did not depend on the specific content of the 'art and culture' celebrated by the museums, which ranged from narrow boats to woodland crafts. Instead, the MLA document sought to manage the values of a generalized 'art and culture' by associating them with the desires and values of their audience. These values, which included challenging 'the accepted norms of today', could be kept clear of the market while ensuring that the resources to sustain their availability in a commercially competitive world could remain secure.

The MLA report is only one example of a number of attempts to reconfigure ideas of cultural value that were made in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Reports commissioned by arts organizations and government bodies also tried to negotiate the terrain between making a powerful case for the economic impact of the arts in generating revenue and employment and endorsing an idea of the arts as an autonomous and precious locus of a different kind of value. In order to do so, they too left the vexed questions of particular

aesthetic and ethical value to one side in order to keep it discursively separate from the arts' contribution to the national and regional economy, even while acknowledging that dependence in financial terms.

This contest between different forms of cultural production crossed over the boundary between commercial and state-funded arts to define a new arena for debates about cultural value. It effected an uneasy convergence between cultural values defined in terms of their content and origins (heritage values and new cultural forms), cultural value defined in terms of its contribution to the national economy and cultural value defined in terms of the diverse contributions of a multicultural society.

An important study, commissioned by Arts Council England from the consultancy group Demos, places these values in distinct categories: 'intrinsic, instrumental and institutional'. These locations of value, the Demos group argued, did not need to be in conflict because each different concept was acknowledged and successfully established within satisfactory distinctions, invoked by arts providers and arts managers alike.<sup>7</sup> The contests of twentieth-century *Kulturkritik* between high art and low, between culture as a way of life and culture as artistic production, between the needs of the populace and the tastes of the elite were bypassed in order to resolve ideological conflict and facilitate what Stuart Cunningham, the sociologist of culture, has described as 'public processes involved

<sup>4</sup> Discussed in Kathleen McLuskie, 'Shakespeare and the Millennial Market: The Commercial Bard', *Renaissance Drama*, 30 (2001), 161–82; for a discussion of the protest against the connection between BP and the Tate, see [guardianonline.co.uk](http://guardianonline.co.uk), 28 June 2010.

<sup>5</sup> The 'value chain' that connects the artistic and commercial sides of arts businesses is discussed in Emily Linnemann, 'The Cultural Value of Shakespeare in Twenty-First-Century Publicly-Funded Theatre in England', Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010. See also Stephen Preece, 'The Performing Arts Value Chain', *International Journal of Arts Management*, 8:1 (2005), 21–32.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Entrepreneurial Museum', p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> John Holden, *Cultural Value and the Crisis of Legitimacy* (London, 2006).

## THE COMMERCIAL BARD

in formulating, implementing and contesting governmental intervention in and support of cultural activity'.<sup>8</sup>

Those changed cultural discourses replaced the complex abstractions of aesthetic and social analysis with the aspirations of public policy. In one public statement, for example, the culture secretary announced:

The whole process of stimulation through plays, books, films, works of art; the delight in design, in architecture, in crafts: all of this enlarges a country's capacity to be reflective, interested and bold. Dynamism in arts and culture creates dynamism in a nation. So when more children get access to the joy of art, it is not the art alone that they learn; it is the art of living, thinking and creating. They may never be, probably won't ever be, an artist or a dancer or a designer, but in whatever job, in whichever walk of life, they will carry an idea that is not just about the buying and selling, but about what makes the ordinary special. When people on low incomes can visit museums free of charge, and see great works of art, they take something of the inspiration with them. A nation that cares about art will not just be a better nation. In the early 21st Century it will be a more successful one.

Such policy statements<sup>9</sup> are less significant in their content than in what they signal about the struggle within the discourses of cultural value in the twenty-first century. They reflected the sense that sustaining a common 'culture' that embodies and communicates a set of abstracted common values may be the last and only hope of a divided society; they reiterated the commonplace distinction between 'great works of art' and 'buying and selling' and they aligned the aesthetic and emotive power of the arts with an idea of democracy achieved by widening access and the opening up of cultural institutions to the public as a whole. So the intrinsic value of 'great works of art' would be distinguished from the market value; free access to heritage institutions would ensure that this non-market value would become part of the national culture and the resulting 'dynamism and creativity' would contribute to the success of the nation.

The rhetorics surrounding those aspirations were both utopian and instrumental. Their utopian

vision of a society inspired by the arts echoed, and in some cases explicitly quoted, Matthew Arnold, to agree that culture encompassed 'the best that has been thought and said'. The social critique that lay behind Arnold's own insistence on the distinct ethical value of the arts and its contrast with mechanistic commercial and political culture was subsumed into a generalized admiration for the collections of state-supported museums and galleries and an assumed consensus about the value of heritage and creativity. The more instrumental aim was to sustain public support for state funding of the arts and to manage the competition between different demands on the public purse, each of which required justification in terms of value for money.

The delicate balance was articulated by Tessa Jowell, arts minister from 2001 to 2007:

Value judgements, when fine judgements are required, are certainly to some degree subjective. But the kind of value judgement we make when we allocate millions to the Royal Shakespeare Company cannot be justified on subjective grounds: we need to be able to explain why it is right to do so to a critical bystander or a sceptical voter. We need to find a way to demonstrate the personal value-added which comes from engagement with complex art.<sup>10</sup>

By generalizing the value of the arts in terms of their inspirational impact on the society as a whole, these statements sought to avoid any focus on particular items of expenditure but they recognized the continuing power of oppositions between the canon of English artistic heritage and the cultural needs of minorities, or between high and low art. They could only be resolved by asserting the 'personal value-added which comes from

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Cunningham, 'Cultural Studies from the Viewpoint of Cultural Policy', in Justin Lewis and Toby Miller, eds., *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader* (Oxford, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> For a fully archived range of research publications and ministerial statements, see [www.culture.gov.uk/publications](http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications).

<sup>10</sup> Tessa Jowell, 'Government and the Value of Culture' (2004), p. 5, accessed via [www.shiftparadigms.org/images/Cultural%20Policy/Tessa.Jowell.pdf](http://www.shiftparadigms.org/images/Cultural%20Policy/Tessa.Jowell.pdf), 2 December 2010.

## KATHLEEN MCLUSKIE

engagement with complex art' and assuring the tax-paying public that those values could be available to the whole population.

Every arts policymaker and practitioner was aware that success in the arts had to be financially as well as critically rewarded and the rhetoric of public arts policy proposed that the arts could be assimilated into a managed economy whose primary aim is to provide the most efficient and effective distribution of goods, removing artificial barriers to participation and restricting the role of state intervention to managing the balance between a successful creative economy and the occasional requirement for protection against market failure. The arts were described as endowed with special values and accorded a special place in which to develop without being immediately and brutally channelled to meet the requirements of a demanded market. This subsidized space, moreover, could be managed with the same economic and fiscal protocols as such other vulnerable commodities as new inventions or new services, which are managed by alternative departments of state in the interests of the wider economy.

As the then prime minister explained in 2007:

The model is a mixed economy. It combines public funding with private enterprise, subsidy and the box office together. It is characterised by partnerships between the creative sectors and private sponsors. Critically, the Arts Council operates as an arms-length body so the state is placed in the position of doing what it has historically done well – funding – and not what it has historically done very badly – control of the arts.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond championing what the culture minister called 'the complex arts', there was no need for either the regulator or the market to concern itself with the particular character of the culture or artistic activity being developed. Shakespeare, or narrow boats or woodland walks, were equally important in the enclosed sphere of 'intrinsic value', the place of 'commonality of history and social bonds' whose value would be enjoyed by everyone who engaged with any form of culture.

The role of the market was to ensure access to the whole of the cultural sphere, untrammelled by

prejudices (in either direction) about high or low culture or an old-fashioned alignment of culture with social class. The role of government was to ensure that access to artistic production was not distorted by consumers' lack of knowledge of valued artistic products or that particular groups, such as children or poor people, were not excluded from the market by lack of funds. Arts Council policy was thus engaged in a balance between supply side intervention – subsidizing particular arts organizations – to demand side interventions such as the £10 ticket schemes for theatre or prioritizing audience development schemes and education in allocating funds to the complex mix of large-scale national organizations or community-focused providers.

## II

This discursive and fiscal management of the arts market in twenty-first-century England<sup>12</sup> offered a characteristic New Labour attempt to go beyond the often bitter and hard-fought cultural conflicts of the twentieth century. The contest between high and low culture and between culture and the market that had dominated earlier debates about the value of the arts was replaced by a consensus that the arts in general constituted a social good that should be protected from a profit-seeking market. This consensus avoided the question of the aesthetic value of particular forms of art in order to exclude any suggestion of a hierarchy among them. The new, managed, arts market must be open to all in order to realize the double requirement of economic growth and of free, unrestrained access to the 'added value' that it offered.

The shift from conflict to consensus was in part a product of the politics of New Labour. However,

<sup>11</sup> For example, see Tony Blair's speech on culture at Tate Modern gallery, 6 March 2007, [www.number10.gov.uk/Page11166](http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page11166). The balance that Tony Blair proposed in 2007 has of course been radically altered by policy reactions to the 2009 financial crisis and a change of UK government.

<sup>12</sup> Limiting the discussion to England is an attempt at precision rather than provincialism.

## THE COMMERCIAL BARD

it also reflected fundamental changes in the economy of mass production. This subsidized market in cultural goods could avoid the closed competition over the value of particular products because it proposed a different economic model from that of older, closed commodity markets. The shifts in the rhetoric of government policy configured the arts as so-called ‘non-rival goods’ whose consumption by one group does not diminish the quantum available for others. When museum collections or theatre companies are part of the heritage assets of the nation their asset value is increased rather than diminished by the number of people who have access to them. Moreover, it can be further increased by investment into the asset since additional consumers of a high value non-rival good increase rather than diminish its value. Where most commodities exist in a market in which they are consumed and replaced by other commodities, (buying and selling) the value of non-rival goods can be quantified in terms of the number of consumers whose engagement does not diminish the supply of the goods concerned.

The concept of a non-rival good is a useful one for economists attempting to arrive at quantification of intangible assets. It acknowledges the complex accounting methods of contemporary markets for which the customer base is as much of an asset as the stock.<sup>13</sup> It can also be effectively aligned with the idea of democratic access without being caught up in ideologically fraught questions of social class or the old divisions between mass and popular culture.<sup>14</sup> The term is never explicitly used outside economics, but the concept underlies the management of the publicly funded arts which in the twenty-first century have routinely used complex customer surveys as a means both of arriving at the value of the arts and meeting the demands for public accountability.<sup>15</sup>

This form of market has had a much more significant impact on ‘Shakespeare’ than the ‘assimilation of high culture into commodity production’ identified by cultural critics such as Fredric Jameson in the very different cultural and economic moment of the late twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> As the MLA report demonstrated, ‘Shakespeare’ could be invoked as

an exemplar of excellence because the mythologized historical positioning of his work resolved any residual anxiety about the relations between commerce and the arts, but the concept of Shakespeare was also usefully imprecise: the dramatic and poetic works, together with the historical figure, were corralled in an arena of ‘excellence’,<sup>17</sup> or ‘heritage’ without being tied to any specific production or object that might be the subject of commercially driven competition. This non-rival Shakespeare is the source of the value of all the particular objects and activities that exist in particular markets and each of those individual exemplars increases its non-rival value. The supply of those individual goods (this film, that theatre production) still requires financial resources but those financial resources are directed towards the value chain of additional goods and services that stretches from the non-rival Shakespeare to the final consumer.

The dynamic relationship between non-rival Shakespeare and particular ‘Shakespeare’ objects gives some sense of the complexity of Shakespeare’s cultural value. It is not a linear process in which some intrinsic aesthetic value held in the historic texts is transmitted to the present (the metaphor is telling). Rather it involves a circular, self-reinforcing process in which the dizzying

<sup>13</sup> The most obvious example is Facebook, whose millions of participants make it a hugely valuable company in spite of an almost complete absence of cash flow.

<sup>14</sup> A useful starting point for understanding non-rival goods is available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivalry\\_\(economics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivalry_(economics)). The importance of non-rival goods in sustaining relations of citizens rather than consumers in the modern world is eloquently argued in Michael Sandel’s 2009 Reith Lecture, ‘A New Citizenship’, available at [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/the-reith-lectures/archive](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/the-reith-lectures/archive).

<sup>15</sup> See [www.dcms.gov.uk/research](http://www.dcms.gov.uk/research).

<sup>16</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, *New Left Review*, 146 (July–August, 1984), p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> The word became a term of art in the 2008 Arts Council report that insisted on the ‘excellence’ of the arts production sponsored by the Council: its meaning depended on an opposition to ‘instrumentality’, the practice of prioritizing particular audiences. Excellence was a feature of the supply side; access and inclusivity the priorities of the demand side.

## KATHLEEN MCLUSKIE

plurality of forms in which Shakespeare exists adds value to the non-rival Shakespeare and increases its value for the future.

The individual forms of Shakespeare's reproduction offer an almost infinite and ceaselessly renewed source of material in technologized production such as films (art-house and mall movies), theatre adaptations, rap music or interactive web 2.0 virtual worlds, but they also include the circulation of second-hand copies or amateur productions or YouTube videos. Each of these forms can be identified as 'Shakespeare', usually via overlaps of narrative or character but their relationships to one another and to the Shakespeare of the full texts that exist in multiple copies in European and North American libraries or on the free space of the World Wide Web<sup>18</sup> presents a considerable challenge to traditional ways of analysing the impact and the value of Shakespeare in the contemporary cultural economy.

As Richard Burt has clearly shown, the diversity of products known as Shakespeare is impossible to catalogue or analyse. Most of its exemplars lack what he calls the 'hermeneutic density' that would allow their persuasive analysis in literary critical terms or for their existence to be corralled into clearly differentiated categories of high and low culture or progressive and reactionary political interventions. Burt recognizes that they constitute a self-reinforcing cycle of products but, by identifying them as unitary commoditized products, he has no recourse to the idea of a value that might extend beyond them. He ignores the extensive intellectual, creative and technical work involved in creating a mediatized Shakespeare production and the value added by its hundreds or thousands or millions of viewers and instead identifies value purely in terms of the content and marketing. This allows him to offer the defiantly iconoclastic account of Shakespeare production as a process where 'there is trash Shakespeare and there is trash Shakespeare that attempts to distinguish itself from trash Shakespeare'.<sup>19</sup>

Like the strand of twentieth-century *Kulturkritik* that identified the mass market as a conspiracy against gullible consumers, Burt is able to dismiss

the value that is repeatedly accorded to Shakespeare as mere delusion, a failure to see clearly the relentless logic of the market behind even the most valued individual product. The market in Shakespeare products undoubtedly exists but part of its process is to return value to non-rival Shakespeare by extending the range of values that can be associated with it. Those values include the representation of Shakespeare as accessible and ethically complex but even the trashiest of Burt's examples, such as the pornographic films, reinforce the value of non-rival Shakespeare as the source of the pleasures of iconoclasm.

It is important to distinguish these individual commercial forms from the non-rival Shakespeare that is the source and the recipient of their cultural value. This 'non-rival' Shakespeare exists in the public domain outside of particular markets and is constituted in a set of familiar narratives and quotations as well as a set of commonplace ideas about love and power. It is itself the product of centuries of cultural work that has not only kept Shakespeare's texts materially available in cheap print and theatrical traditions but also ensured that his plays were glossed, edited and rendered interpretable, the locus for the intellectual contest that could inform the innovation and adaptation that has made non-rival Shakespeare powerfully sustainable within the arts economy. However, the value of non-rival Shakespeare, which is different from the historical Shakespeare, is that it comprises only those ethical and aesthetic concepts that can be used as eloquent analogies for contemporary social preoccupations, as guarantor of their universality and their connection to the past.

In her critique of the banality of the 'Shakespeare' used to structure management training programmes, for example, Mary Polito observed that the trainers 'are entirely free to read for and utilize

<sup>18</sup> Extensive competition, of course, also exists among those libraries to digitize their holdings and to drive traffic to their sites accordingly.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Burt, ed., *Shakespeares after Shakespeare: An Encyclopedia of the Bard in Mass Media and Popular Culture* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 10.

## THE COMMERCIAL BARD

the affective potential of the plays and Shakespeare's name as a guarantor of value and ethics. There is no mechanism by which they are compelled to consider the critical tradition of the plays.<sup>20</sup>

The trainers' 'freedom', of course, comes from the material fact that non-rival Shakespeare is out of copyright and therefore poses no initial costs on the value chain from non-rival Shakespeare to the expensive training event. Non-rival Shakespeare also offers a discursive freedom in which ideas and speeches created for a particular historical purpose have been opened out into meaningful statements about their larger significance by precisely the critical traditions that no longer need to be acknowledged. The analytic and hermeneutic activity that Mary Polito champions as the antithesis of an instrumental deployment of Shakespeare is itself a competitor in the process of creating the value of 'non-rival Shakespeare'. However, its weak position in the intellectual marketplace and its unprotected intellectual property allows it to be absorbed as another free element within non-rival Shakespeare that does not have to be acknowledged.

Non-rival Shakespeare can be used both to endorse commercial products ('trash Shakespeare that attempts to distinguish itself from trash Shakespeare') and to make a claim for values that transcend the commercial. Writing on behalf of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, in defence of the value of the research that they fund, Jonathan Bate invoked the moment in *Troilus and Cressida* where Troilus and Hector debate the 'value' of Helen of Troy. Bate opened his essay with Troilus's famous line 'what's ought but as 'tis valued' and concludes his reading of the passage with:

The relativism of Troilus (things only have value in so far as they are valued by particular people who prize them) is replaced by the proposition that there can be essential values, that a thing might be intrinsically valuable ('precious of itself').<sup>21</sup>

Professor Bate himself is well aware that the historical Shakespeare's articulation of this opposition arose in a theatrical and historical context

where ideas of transcendent value were under quite specific pressure from social, religious and material change, not least in the theatre itself. Information about the precise historical circumstances of the plays' production or their formal articulation and about the theatricalisation of the debate is irrelevant to its particular rhetorical purpose. The Shakespeare that is being invoked has already been subject to the fundamental critical processes of interpretation and glossing in order to make it available for its new purpose in the cultural economy of state funding for academic research.

This process of transformation and re-deployment is fundamental to the circulation of Shakespeare in contemporary cultural markets. It involves a highly mediated relationship between the semi-processed material of non-rival Shakespeare and the particular market relations that draw on and reinforce it. Those mediations range from the simplest form of rhetorical analogy to the complex value-chain of mediatized production and it is those mediations rather than the content of the individual products that determine the terms in which Shakespeare functions in the contemporary cultural economy. They are, however, most effectively deployed by institutions that can bring both the commercial resources of the value chain and the institutional assets that will make the resulting new products stand out.

## III

In the spring of 2008, the Royal Shakespeare Company launched a new initiative called 'Stand up for Shakespeare'. The initiative was the culmination of a project in which RSC Learning (the education wing of the RSC) worked with schools from the public sector to train teachers to deliver Shakespeare lessons in ways that were informed by contemporary theatre practice. Teachers who received RSC training were put in touch with

<sup>20</sup> Mary Polito, "'Warriors for the Working Day": Shakespeare's Professionals', *Shakespeare*, 2 (2006), p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Public Value in the Humanities* (London, 2011), p. 5.

## KATHLEEN MCLUSKIE

up to ten schools each and were charged with communicating their learning across the sector. The learning culminated in a 'Schools mini complete works Shakespeare festival' that allowed 2,300 children to participate in a week-long series of performances, managed entirely by the youngsters themselves.

The strap-lines for the new project – 'Do it on your feet'; 'See it live'; Start it earlier' – indicated the core values of the project. They were to make the experience of 'doing Shakespeare' more dynamic, accessible and, above all, pleasurable. It would involve active learning using physical techniques and was explicitly contrasted with a view of existing education practice that was alleged to be, in the words of *The Independent* newspaper, 'a byword for boredom'. The project polarized what was described as 'academic' Shakespeare, 'desk-bound', 'rote learning' with active learning that engaged the students' enthusiasm and innate love of and admiration for Shakespeare.

The antithesis between RSC learning and academic learning was perhaps more insisted upon by the press reaction to the 'Stand up for Shakespeare' project than the RSC itself. However, it indicated the discursive competition that accompanies the launch of new products in the cultural arts market. It would have been merely pedantic for academics to protest that what Styan described in 1977 as 'the Shakespeare Revolution'<sup>22</sup> had already rooted performed-Shakespeare in academic practice or that academic criticism had engaged enthusiastically with the polymorphous variety of contemporary Shakespeare production. The knowledge produced by their carefully researched and theorized analysis of past events has been assimilated into non-rival Shakespeare that informed the live, young, physical experience, which united the classroom and the rehearsal room as places of experiment and creativity.

Paradoxically, it is precisely that antithesis with authoritative but past knowledge that has allowed RSC Learning to create such a powerful new Shakespeare product.

The discursive contrast between knowledge, experience and creativity had important material

effects. The RSC project was financially supported both by the 'Creative Partnerships' initiative that funded artists to support teachers in schools and by the Higher Education Funding Council that had supported innovation in teaching by establishing ring-fenced funding for 'Centres of Excellence in Learning and Teaching' (CETL) in selected universities. These state agencies were motivated less by the commercial imperative to market a unitary product than by a sense of crisis in an education system that they felt was not delivering the social goods of innovation and critical thinking required by modern economies. Working with the RSC offered these agencies the opportunity to support new forms of learning that would marshal the creative practice of the rehearsal room used by the flagship national Shakespeare company to produce new cultural goods in support of the transmission of other forms of knowledge. It would also provide high value endorsement of a government initiative through its link with the status of the Royal Shakespeare Company brand.

This authoritative endorsement provided more than funding. It allowed the company to cross organizational barriers and to change the relationships that had existed between 'Shakespeare in Schools' and Shakespeare in performance. As the project has developed since 2008, RSC Learning has collaborated with the University of Warwick Institute of Education to offer credit-bearing continuing professional development awards for teachers and extended its programme with the so-called 'Shakespeare challenge' that offers an accredited international award for young people, in collaboration with Trinity Guildhall, an international examinations board offering qualifications in English language and the performing arts. These collaborations offer an elegant and effective balance between the intrinsic good of personal engagement with Shakespeare and the instrumental need to work within the authoritative structures of existing institutions to diversify the economic base of a publicly funded company.

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<sup>22</sup> J. L. Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge, 1977).



## THE COMMERCIAL BARD

These developments extend the educational work undertaken by many arts organizations but their scale and organizational innovation indicate a significant change of direction in the role of Shakespeare in the twenty-first century arts economy. The ‘Shakespeare’ offered in this form does not need to compete explicitly with the multiple other forms of Shakespeare offered in new adaptations or new technologized forms. It insists on the use of ‘original language’ as the founding principle of the education provided.<sup>23</sup> However, the ‘original language’ (taken from edited texts and often adapted and cut, as is commonplace in performance) is made part of the teachers’ and pupils’ experience, thus building their confidence and making Shakespeare their own.

The evaluation of the work of the Learning and Performance Network asked candidates how far they felt able ‘to make their own informed interpretive choices’ and ‘relate the experiences of Shakespeare’s characters to modern events and personal experience’.<sup>24</sup> The resources for teachers on the RSC Learning website provides teachers with learning exercises that encourage independent thinking untrammelled by any acknowledgement of critical traditions or the historical distance between the early modern period and today. Its Shakespeare is always new because it is created afresh in each new direct encounter, encouraged and facilitated by the conduits to learning provided by the RSC.

One of the respondents to the evaluation further admired the ‘personalised’ approach. ‘Too much INSET [In Service Educational Training] requires teachers to shut up, sit still and listen – the worst approach for effective learning! This INSET felt tailored to our needs, we could negotiate, we felt trusted... High challenge/low threat – Inspirational!’

The response assumed the virtue and the value of a kind of learning that prioritized personal growth over the command of knowledge and, in common with much recent educational writing, accordingly emphasized pedagogy over curriculum. High cultural assets no longer needed special pleading for their value or the guidance of authorities to

make them accessible. They could be engaged with through a direct connection between the learner’s experience and the material itself. Where earlier generations of progressive educationalists, such as the establishment figures who contributed to the Newbolt report or the teachers involved with the influential ‘Shakespeare in Schools’ project initiated by Rex Gibson,<sup>25</sup> had to argue a case for the role of the arts in education or the active engagement of children in their own learning, the RSC project and the national organizations that support it can safely invoke a universalized Shakespeare and an idealized image of the creative child or young person as the founding principles of their project.

The synergy between an idealized Shakespeare and an idealized child, together with the boundless creative enthusiasm of the teachers involved, made a significant contribution to the powerful impact of the ‘Stand up for Shakespeare’ project. It embodied, and was described in terms of, all the utopian aspirations of a free space of cultural engagement untrammelled by hierarchy and outside of the market. This illusion could be effectively maintained because the learning involved was, like the National Health Service, ‘free at the point of access’. Neither the children nor the teachers and mentors trained in the project paid directly for the privilege of participation. The entire project was funded by a mix of state and grant funding that removed the direct connection between the cultural product and the market in which it functioned.

This non-commodified Shakespeare project was accompanied by more directly marketed products such as the print-based book of resources for teachers which took its place in a suite of Shakespeare products that included the co-branded *Complete*

<sup>23</sup> See the curriculum requirements provided at [www.rsc.org.uk/education/award/shakespeare-challenge.aspx](http://www.rsc.org.uk/education/award/shakespeare-challenge.aspx).

<sup>24</sup> Extract from the University of Warwick ‘Impact Evaluation of the LPN/PG Cert Programme’, slide 4. I am grateful to Jacqui O’Hanlon, director of RSC Learning for sharing this evaluation report with me.

<sup>25</sup> Discussed in Kathleen McLuskie, ‘Dancing and Thinking’, in G. B. Shand, ed., *Teaching Shakespeare: Passing It On* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 121–41.

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*Works of Shakespeare* edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, published by Macmillan, and the co-produced BBC production of *Hamlet* that was aired on Christmas Day 2009 and sold on DVD. These individual products allowed the RSC to monetize its past productions and secured their growing intellectual property in the ideas that drive their work, while leaving non-rival Shakespeare in the free space of cultural engagement.

These complex business models of the RSC Learning projects illustrate most clearly the different roles of non-rival Shakespeare and commercial Shakespeare products in the mixed economy of the arts in the UK. In each of them there is a value chain that involves expensive and highly qualified staff creating new Shakespeare experiences, together with the venues in which they take place and the organizational efforts required to secure their success. Their dependence on state and trust funding, and the small margin between price and cost, make a nonsense of any notion of a commercial commodity based on buying cheap and selling dear in order to make a profit. Their value, as with all rival goods, depends on engagement in which the number of people associated with the product becomes an asset in itself, even when they do not always result in sales. Levels of engagement, that can be quantified, become the direct justification and product for funding and investment, giving a reality to the aspirations for democracy and access to the arts.

Nor does this activity in any way diminish the quantum of non-rival Shakespeare available to other providers. In spite of the RSC's energetic efforts to associate themselves with the highest quality delivery of 'Shakespeare', both in the theatre and in education, there can be no question of their ability to operate as an exclusive supplier of 'Shakespeare'. Their emphasis on the face-to-face experience of Shakespeare is driven partly by their artistic and ideological preferences but it is also designed to create a special relationship with their audiences that cannot be so effectively reproduced by other providers.

The role of engaged participants that informs the RSC's rhetoric of a free Shakespeare is a

critical dimension of the relationships established by Shakespeare institutions and non-rival Shakespeare. Although it is highly mediated by the value chain that provides the potential for free access, the idea of 'free Shakespeare' depends upon immediate and direct engagement between Shakespeare and the individual that does not require the mediation of the critical tradition. For the RSC, that immediate access is provided by the physical engagement using rehearsal techniques, but it can also be claimed for other forms of free access, including those provided by new technologies. The British Library's 2009 funding campaign imagined new ways of using the vast resources of information and knowledge held in its historic collections. The Library aimed to raise £50m over five years to extend its digitization of collections which already offers one million pages of historical newspapers, 4,000 hours of archival sound recordings and 100,000 out of copyright nineteenth-century books. The campaign document included a set of imagined scenarios in which this knowledge might be used including 'Imagine if Schools could encounter Shakespeare in a new dimension'. The new dimension is not theatre but comprises the 'wealth of contextual materials . . . formerly the privilege of adult researchers' that would be made directly accessible to students and school children. These images of the quartos of Shakespeare are currently available on the 'Turning the pages' section of the British Library website which will eventually include copies of the quartos held in collections worldwide.<sup>26</sup> The implications are that the former 'privilege' of academic researchers who have acted as conduits and mediators of knowledge for students and children will be removed and the knowledge will be available free, within the Library, to anyone who seeks it.

As with other heritage products, this 'free engagement' comes at a cost. The digitization of the British Library's heritage assets will add value to them, not only in engaging considerably larger numbers of people, but in pioneering new

<sup>26</sup> See [www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp).