1 Introduction

The teaching of Shakespeare's plays became mandatory in England in 1989 (DES, 1989) and has remained so ever since. In two national curricula – the first in 1989, and the current one introduced in 2014 (DfE, 2014) – he is the only named author. At present students have to study at least two plays between the ages of eleven and fourteen and one play from fourteen to sixteen, typically for examination. He dominates the English curriculum in the secondary sector, replete with cultural capital. This is seen as oppressive by some (Coles, 2013a, 2013b, 2020) while others laud it (Gove, 2010; Lawson, cited in Lister, 1993). Studying him is fraught, a wrestle between many positions, which, in part, depends on whether he is considered as predominantly a playwright or attention is focused on his plays as printed texts. And on that subject the English curriculum in schools is torn, on the one hand viewing him as a dramatist and on the other, for example, exploring the richness of the language within the text. (This is also true in higher education. See Lukas Erne's *Shakespeare As Literary Dramatist*, 2013.)

In this Element, however, we take a different view. We focus on how it is possible to watch Shakespeare pedagogically, the teacher allowing the students to consider themselves as an audience of a performance, as spectators of the Shakespeare play they are viewing. They are not simply being shown a Shakespeare play; they are actively watching it, asked to think and comment on it. In so doing we see how this approach enables the students to engage with the texts, learn from the experience and create their own meaning from the play.

Students encounter performances of Shakespeare texts in a number of different ways. They can see a performance in the theatre; they can see a digital performance of a theatre production; they can watch a Theatre in Education production at the school; they can watch a film version of a play; they can view extracts of a film or a digital version of a theatre performance. Typically they do a variety of these. The nature of the performance, the choice of cast, the direction – all these will affect the watchers and create meaning from their encounter (Escolme, 2005).

We look at the experience of two practising teachers and the moments when they explore watching Shakespeare pedagogically as opposed to

simply showing the play. How they watch the play may differ, in a theatre, in a school hall or digitally in the classroom, but each viewing experience is typical of the kind of encounters students might have with a play. Myfanwy Edwards is completing a PhD on a National Theatre production of *Macbeth* specifically designed for schools. The students come from five different schools (three are in the London area and two are outside of London in South East England and South Yorkshire). All were studying the play for GCSE, the examination for sixteen-year-olds, and had studied the text in detail in their respective classes. All watched a complete performance of the play, though students from one school watched it at the National Theatre while the students from the other four schools watched it at their respective schools. Her work is based on post-viewing focus groups.

Charlotte Dixey, perhaps more typically, uses film versions of *Hamlet* when teaching her A-level class (the examination for eighteen-year-olds). Her English department has in the past concentrated heavily on textual interpretations of the play rather than considering it as a drama. She was asked to revise a scheme of work (SoW) for her department, in particular the section of the exam rubric which focused on the mandatory teaching of critical theory in relation to the play. Amongst other things, she explores how watching different interpretations of the play lends itself to enabling students to recognise how various theorists understand the play (Semenza, 2003).

Dilemmas with the Current Climate: A Knowledge-Rich Curriculum

As we shall see, both teachers examine the pedagogy of watching Shakespeare's plays. Students are encouraged to confront, interpret and understand them in their role as spectators. The play text becomes open to multiple meanings and we will link this later to spectator theory. The current trend in England, however, differs and is more focused on 'core knowledge', which can be problematic. It is important to note, however, before we begin, that at no point are we advocating that knowledge is unimportant. Rather it is the way the knowledge-rich curriculum can be exemplified, the pedagogy attached, that causes a dilemma for those

considering a different method of teaching. So we start by looking at the knowledge-rich curriculum and move to spectator theory afterwards.

The 'knowledge-rich curriculum' has gained increasing sway within schools in England, the US and Australia. A version of it began with the American E. D. Hirsch's (1987) book *Cultural Literacy*, in which he outlined what he thought students should 'know' when leaving school, including a canon of literature with which they should be familiar. He purports that his aims are progressive in that he believes it is the task of those involved in education to give all pupils the 'intellectual capital' that at present only a few possess. He aims to equalise society by giving the culture of a powerful minority to everybody.

The phrase 'cultural literacy' has now been replaced by 'knowledge-rich' in popular discourse, the media and government policy in England. Yet the link between 'culture' and 'knowledge' is all too evident in Conservative Party, right-leaning thinking (Yandell, 2017). Nick Gibb, former Conservative Minister of State for Education, writing a defence of Hirsch, highlights the tension, saying that the new curriculum, introduced in 2014 (DfE, 2014), was 'derided by one critic as "rote-learning of the patriotic stocking fillers", as if all that was driving us was a desire that schoolchildren celebrate the glories of the British Empire' (Gibb, 2015: 15). Absent for that 'critic' is any writer other than those who are white and British born. Given that Michael Gove, former Secretary of State for Education, had previously given a list of dead white, almost entirely British men who should be studied, the comments of the 'critic' are not surprising. Gibb argues, however: 'In reality, our reforms were based on a desire to see social justice through equalising the unfair distribution of intellectual capital in British society. Unlike so many other inequalities, this is one that schools – if performing their function properly – have the power to address' (15). He adds that 'Hirsch's arguments provided us with a compelling social justice case with which to argue for a knowledge-rich curriculum' (15).

Yet much of the problem for Shakespeare, even if we allow for the claimed motivation of 'social justice', which is highly questionable, lies in the way he is positioned within this debate. This positioning, for the Tories at least, is one of 'cultural heritage' as Brian Cox named it in the first

national curriculum for English and before that in the Bullock Report (DES, 1975). Ken Jones (1989), in his book *Right Turn: The Conservative Revolution in Education*, highlights the way in which the Conservative government has consistently used the canon, and in particular Shakespeare, to herald a return to teaching 'our culture' as opposed to anything else. John Marenbon (1987), a member of the right-wing think tank the Centre for Policy Studies, wrote in *English Our English*, for example: 'A good teacher should be sceptical of originality in response to literature because it is most likely to betray a failure of understanding. The competent reader reads a work of literature much as any other competent readers read it' (37, cited in Coles, 2013b: 33).

When David Pascall, himself a chemical engineer, was given the job of rewriting the national curriculum for English after Cox was accused of 'going native' (Marshall, 2000: 12), he firmly placed the canon – and with it Shakespeare – at the centre of the English curriculum. Jane Coles analyses in some depth his 1992 speech to the Royal Society of Arts. In it, she writes, he

> [m]akes his position clear in terms of how he regarded the relationship between culture, nation and education. On the one hand Pascall acknowledges today's students will have 'a range of cultural experiences' (1992, p.16); on the other he repeatedly talks of 'our' culture, or 'a' culture and asserts that 'we' all 'share a set of values and traditions which has been developed over the centuries' (p.5). Not surprisingly, those 'important strands from our culture' which 'define and enrich our present way of life' are 'of the Christian faith, the GrecoRoman influence, the liberal Enlightenment' (p.5). All examples of 'great art' he cites come from the Euro-American tradition (such as Tolstoy, Mahler, Elgar, Eliot, Shakespeare and Mozart). In arguing for all children's entitlement to this highly selective cultural diet, Pascall invokes a deficit model of 'other' cultures, positioning popular culture solely as a tool to help us distinguish between poor art ('a pervasive diet of sloppy speech and soap operas', p.18) and great art. To Pascall, education about the arts is 'part of

> a civilising curriculum' which will contribute 'to our moral and spiritual good' (p.11); behind artists such as Mozart or Shakespeare 'lie essential truths about our understanding of humanity' (p.15). Internally contradictory, Pascall's speech exposes his version of the entitlement argument as shallow and excluding. (Coles, 2013b: 37)

Pascall echoes the then Secretary of State for Education, John Patten. At the Tory Party conference in 1992, he proclaimed that, instead of allowing those 'trendy lefty teachers' to destroy 'our great literary heritage', he wanted 'William Shakespeare in our classrooms not Ronald McDonald' (Patten, 1992).

Fast-forward nearly thirty years and Nick Gibb's desire to espouse Hirsch's cultural literacy takes on a different complexion completely. In a speech, significantly entitled 'All pupils will learn our island story', Michael Gove (2010), then the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, speaks of a pupil enraptured by a performance of *Hamlet*, declaring that 'Our literature is the best in the world – it is every child's birthright and we should be proud to teach it in every school.' As the only named author in the English curriculum of 2014, Shakespeare lies at the centre of this claim.

Yet it is not just that the knowledge curriculum, in England at least, has overtly jingoistic tendencies; it is that this knowledge-based, jingoistic curriculum is to be unquestioningly transmitted, to be handed down. Gibb, writing his defence of Hirsch, cites Gove, who says,

> A society in which there is a widespread understanding of the nation's past, a shared appreciation of cultural reference points, a common stock of knowledge on which all can draw, and trade, is a society in which we all understand each other better, one in which the ties that bind are stronger, and more resilient at times of strain … [We should] completely overhaul the curriculum – to ensure that the acquisition of knowledge within rigorous subject disciplines is properly valued and cherished. (Gove, 2009, cited in Gibb, 2015: 13)

The 'shared appreciation', 'cultural reference points' and 'common stock of knowledge' all sound like Hirsch's 'share[d] cultural markers' (Leitch, 2009: 7), which should arise when students all study the same canonical literature. But it is the 'acquisition of knowledge' that makes it sound traditional. John Dewey, the parent of progressive education, defined traditional education as 'prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material instruction' (Dewey, 1935/66: 18). Acquiring knowledge makes it sound as if knowledge is merely handed down, passed on as 'prepared forms of skill'. The sense that knowledge is not something one can get through progressive education is reinforced when Gibb talks of educational practice under a Labour government. He claims, 'To the uninformed outsider, "independent learning", "learning to learn", and "individualised instruction" all sound misleadingly like reasonable ideas. However, reading Hirsch provided me with the mental armour to see these ideas for what they were, and fight them accordingly' (Gibb, 2015: 13). For Gibb, and by implication Hirsch, the thought that pupils could 'learn how to learn' or even learn independently is something he has to do battle with, to clothe himself in 'mental armour' and 'fight'.

As we will see in the later sections, such an approach is very different from the sort advocated by those wanting to adopt a more progressive pedagogy of watching Shakespeare. Yet despite or perhaps because of its opposition to progressive ways of learning, the knowledge curriculum has gained a substantial foothold in England as well as the US. In the States, the influence of Hirsch can be found, for example, in the number of websites dedicated to following his core curriculum. One such is the Core Knowledge site (Core Knowledge, consulted on 24.08.2021), which tells us on its home page that 'E. D. Hirsch Jr. is the founder and chairman of the Core Knowledge Foundation.' The site claims that he has 'as a voice of reason [been] making the case for equality of educational opportunity'. Echoing Tory rhetoric, the home page ends with the dictum that his core knowledge will 'educate our children using common, coherent and sequenced curricula to help heal and preserve the nation', which, up until recently, excluded all that was not white and western European (Yandell, 2017; Marshall, 2020).

In the UK, a number of multi-academy trusts have been set up on the basis that they will teach a knowledge-rich curriculum, all with components on

Shakespeare. So, for example, the Mastery Curriculum (2019) has amongst other plays a unit on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which starts with a substantial amount of 'factual', so-called historical information before even looking at the text. Robert Eaglestone (2021), a professor of English literature, comments on the SoW, which outlines what it intends the students to acquire: '"The key knowledge: Life in Elizabethan England; life in ancient Athens; Shakespeare's life; the four lovers; the love potion; Elizabethan family relationships", and then only finally, "the form of a play"' (27).

As Eaglestone goes on to point out, 'The historical context is prioritised over how a play works or what a comedy is' (27). The curriculum was originally part of the Ark Academy Trust but is now available as the Mastery Curriculum to purchase for around £6,000. They offer a knowledge-based curriculum in all subjects aimed at pupils aged between eleven and fourteen. Their 'knowledge-rich English curriculum' provides 'teachers with the resources to help students master the ideas, concepts and stories that have shaped the world' (Mastery Curriculum, 2019). The Inspiration Trust (2019) declares that, at the heart of its 'vision', it 'will work with the best educational knowledge – nationally and internationally – in order to create a world-class curriculum'. Others, such as the Pimlico Academy Trust (2019), do not have a published version of their curriculum, but do state 'subjects are taught discretely according to schemes of work that set out what knowledge we expect our students to acquire'.

The use of the word 'acquire' is again significant. Once more it implies that something, in this case knowledge, which students previously lacked, is given, handed down. In this respect the Pimlico Academy owes much to the work of Michael Young. In an article entitled 'Overcoming the Crisis in Curriculum Theory: A Knowledge-Based Approach', he writes in the abstract, 'The paper argues that curriculum theory must begin not from the learner but from the learner's entitlement to knowledge' (Young, 2013). In the paper itself he adds that the 'progressive, learner-centred tradition [which] can be traced back to Rousseau and took its most sophisticated form in writings of those influenced by Dewey' (102) needs to be replaced with 'the question of knowledge' (103). Young is not a Conservative and yet the thrust of his work, which for him is apolitical, sits comfortably within a right-wing agenda.

Robert Eaglestone, again avoiding the political implications of a knowledge-based curriculum, argues vigorously against it for the subject of English. In a pamphlet written as part of a series called Impact, Philosophical Perspectives on Education Policy, Eaglestone (2021) considers the idea that both Hirsch and Young take a scientific approach to knowledge and thus undermine the arts, and in particular English, by forcing them into a scientific model.

For Eaglestone, the subject of English is dialogic in nature. He writes, for example, in an earlier book, *Literature: Why It Matters* (2019), that 'literary studies aims to do something different from most disciplines' (29), adding that while most subjects drive toward consensus, the goal of 'literary studies is to help develop a continuing dissensus [*sic*] about the texts we study' (29–30). Talking of close reading, an activity frequently undertaken at school and university level, he comments that 'Scientists and historians, for example, try and cut down ambiguity, to avoid doubt . . . in close reading the point is to respond to the "simultaneous presence of many meanings" (Wood, 2017, p. 47) rather than draw out one unambiguously . . . "Close reading" then becomes open ended, hard to pin down and shared creative activity' (Wood, 2017, p. 47) (Eagleston, 2019: 45–6).

This is very different from Hirsch's or Young's models (yet similar to the ones we shall examine later when we consider the work of the two teachers). 'Knowledge', Eaglestone (2019) argues, 'is not simply deposited or downloaded but developed in the process of teaching and learning . . . Everything, not simply what is formally stamped as "knowledge", is brought to the experience' (32). In his pamphlet he uses a creative/critical rewriting of *Hamlet* to demonstrate his point. He begins by saying that 'Young's insistence that the focus should be on the knowledge not the knowers may be right for science' but that 'this idea makes the humanities incoherent' (Eaglestone, 2021: 15). He then compares a passage that Young has written on geography to his version of *Hamlet*.

> Pupils' relationships with the 'concept' of a city should be different to their relationship with their 'experience' of London as the city where they live. It is important that the