

Sophie P.
Shakespeare
Mr. Doelger
July 13th, 2010

After reading so much Shakespeare in school, seeing exquisitely staged productions of Shakespeare's plays was fantastic. The Royal Shakespeare Company focuses on such an entirely different side of Shakespeare than we usually do in class: therefore, it was lovely to hear such different production based analysis. It is amazing that there is an entire organization just dedicated to Shakespeare's life and plays.

I think the most important realization I came to was a byproduct of all the different staging and interpretations we saw of *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*. In our post performance discussion Nick asked us whether we thought it matched up to our expectations, if the characters were as we had imagined them. Of course they weren't, because unless you direct a play yourself and play all the parts, someone else will have differing ideas from yours. However, even though it wasn't precisely how I pictured it, I still found the performance engaging and credible. The plays we saw in Stratford and video clips and pictures of many different successful interpretations led me to believe no correct interpretation exists. I personally may imagine Lear as tyrannical and terrifying, but still enjoy a play in which he is old and pathetic. As long as the script is unchanged, any interpretation can frame the words in any infinite number of ways as long as the final production makes logical and emotional sense to the audience.

Surprisingly, even though the *Morte D'Arthur* was by far my least favorite play we saw in Stratford, I think it was the most useful for me to see. Although I don't think *Morte D'Arthur* comes close to depth or beauty of *Romeo and Juliet* or *King Lear*, it was revealing to me when juxtaposed against *King Lear*. Here were two plays, both originating from ancient myths, documenting the fall of a once great king that could not have been more different. One was a deep psychological study that could be transposed to any place or time, and the other was a surface narrative irrelevant to anyone not already familiar with the premise. It deepened my appreciation for how Shakespeare was able to combine complicated plot with character development. *King Lear* involves four inheritances, two countries, five romantic relationships and at least seven deaths. Nevertheless, each is poignant and unique. The *Morte D'Arthur* covers the same breadth, but each character is about as human as a

finger-puppet. Seeing such an awkward and expository play made me appreciate much more how good of a playwright Shakespeare really is.

I enjoyed the trip we had very much, and can honestly say that no lecture or activity felt meaningless to me. My only suggestions for improvements therefore would just be minor structural changes or just additional activities. If possible, it would have been really fascinating to be able to visit the Globe in London, especially if we would have been able to see a play there. The comparisons between a high concept production like the one we saw at the RSC and a more simple set-up would be very interesting. We would also be able to compare the varying effects of different types of stages: thrust, in the round, outdoors. Visiting the globe would of course also allow us to see more staged Shakespeare plays.

On a practical note, I wish the trip had come at the end of the two weeks of classes, not in the middle. That way it could be the culmination of the more traditionally academic part, and we would have the maximum possible Shakespeare knowledge before we got to ask questions from all the different experts. I'm not sure how the decision was made to place the trip in the middle of the three-week class, but if possible it would be nice to have it at the end.

Mykaylla V.

My trip to England started even before I got on the plane. Months before the class even started, I was planning and packing. Having never traveled abroad before, I was a little apprehensive about travelling. I worried about how long the plane ride would be, how different Stratford would be from Seattle, what the people were like, how much money I would have, and many other things. I was not sure how much I would enjoy the trip or the classes or even the plays we were going to see; but, on Saturday, I got on the bus at five in the morning, said goodbye to my parents, and went to England anyway.

Looking back, I remember being in a daze of sorts on my first day in Stratford. We arrived outside of our Bed and Breakfast at eight in the morning, and were told that the rooms would not be ready until noon. We were allowed to wander around and explore the town until then. I walked around and was pleasantly surprised to see how nice and clean the town was. While there were few trash cans, there was almost no litter. Not to mention, the buildings were phenomenal. When, after much exploring and wandering, noon finally rolled around, we put our stuff in our rooms and started the educational part of our trip by visiting Mary Arden's Farm. Mary Arden's farm was good first-day activity and learning opportunity, as was the entire trip. At first, nobody knew whether it was an actual farm, or just an old house. We took a short train ride, and found out that it was actually a farm, as well as a historical building. Everyone who went ended up being very glad they decided to suffer the fifteen minute train ride, and the short walk it took to get to Mary Arden's farm. We had nothing else planned the rest of the day, thankfully, so we all attempted to catch up on some sleep.

I was very wary about the classes at first; oftentimes, classes like the ones we were taking can be boring, and any information trying to be conveyed to the students can be lost, simply because the students are bored. However, not only was Dr. Walton a fantastic speaker, the information was also very intriguing. Learning about and analyzing the plays that we were going to see was helpful, especially for *King Lear* and *Morte D' Arthur*. Never while in class, in fact, never at any point during the entire trip, was I bored and not learning anything.

The most interesting class for me was the class about Shakespeare himself; about his life and career. Many people know about his legacy and his plays, but not many people know a lot about

who he actually was when he was alive. Hearing about how the circumstances in which Shakespeare grew up affected him and his plays was fascinating.

Talking to Kelly Hunter was very informative. I remember slaving over *Midsummer Night's Dream* in middle school, being made to speculate on why some of the lines were not in iambic pentameter. To find out that it was because the rhythm was changed to match the heartbeat of the character was absolutely fascinating, and it really drove home how intelligent and insightful William Shakespeare was.

Visiting Stratford-upon-Avon was a magnificent experience. Seeing plays and learning about Shakespeare and his life as a playwright and also as a normal, everyday person was fascinating. Every place we visited had something to offer. Mary Arden's farm –the first place we visited – was one of my favorites. It had all the historical bits and pieces, but also had other things to see and learn about. Shakespeare's birthplace was also very fascinating, although we were a little rushed and may not have gotten to enjoy looking at absolutely everything. Another highlight was Nash's house, my favorite part of which was the garden and all the statues that were representations of different Shakespeare plays.

I wish that we had gotten to see more Shakespeare plays, even though it was probably not possible given the time allotted. I did like the non-Shakespeare play, but it would have made more sense to see as many Shakespeare plays as possible. The classes that we had after we saw each play were excellent. The classes helped clarify and explain any unclear parts in the plays, but I would have really enjoyed going a bit more in depth about the history of Shakespeare as the man he was when he was alive.

Coming back from Stratford was like coming back from camp. I was sick, tired, a little cranky, but most of all, ready to do the entire thing over again. In all, the trip was nearly perfect, and absolutely nothing on the schedule was boring or uninteresting. I could always count on every day to be exciting. This trip was an amazing learning experience, which could turn absolutely anyone into a fan of the theater, and specifically Shakespeare.

Maile W.
Tom Doelger
Shakespeare
13 July 2010

Reflections on Stratford-upon-Avon

The 2010 Stratford-upon-Avon lectures were insightful, classes were interesting, discussions were engaging, and the plays were brilliant. I am walking away from this trip with a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's work. Before travelling to Stratford, Shakespeare's work, while enjoyable and beautiful, seemed foreign and complex to me. I spent most of my time unlocking the language rather than feeling the emotional arcs Shakespeare created. In Stratford, I discovered that Shakespeare's work is dynamic, emotional and physical. These discoveries allow me to experience Shakespeare's work in a far more complete way.

For me, the Royal Shakespeare Company's voice class was the most illuminating experience of the entire trip. I am, by nature, a kinesthetic learner, and so the opportunity to move with the text was thrilling. I really appreciated the physical and vocal warm-up we did before we moved on to the text. As a drama student, those exercises were well within my comfort zone; however, I think they pushed other members of the class outside of theirs. It was a very safe environment in which to take risks, and we were rewarded with a deeper understanding of the text. The exercise in which we changed direction at every punctuation mark was particularly powerful, because it allowed us to tap into Romeo's frantic mental state. The exercise in which we were given specific physical actions to perform at key words during the speech was equally valuable. Emotions are stored in various places in the body, and when you move the body, you are able to locate those emotions. Those exercises helped me understand Romeo without combing through the text analytically. I really *felt* it. Although Kelly Hunter was not at the voice class, I thought she shared a related insight when she pointed out iambic pentameter is also heartbeat. When a character breaks out of meter, their heartbeat changes, and it is the actor's responsibility to figure out why. These experiences taught me how Shakespeare involves the entire body, and has given me tools to develop my fluency with the text.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's performances taught me that Shakespeare's work is intensely emotional, and sometimes even raw. To go to one of Shakespeare's plays is to go through an emotional Laundromat. Leaving a Shakespeare tragedy, you are damp, wrinkled,

even inside-out, but certainly clean. It is tremendously moving to see humanity in such a naked way, from the noble to the ignoble. I did not appreciate Shakespeare's insight into character until I saw it performed. Before the trip, Shakespeare's figurative language put a block between me and his characters. However, the Royal Shakespeare Company uses language so beautifully, it becomes music, with the ability to communicate through should alone, rather than solely through words. Waiting for a favorite monologue now seems like waiting for a favorite song at a concert. I am surprised to find Shakespeare's work so personally affecting, despite his abstract language.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Romeo and Juliet* has forced me to reverse my position on Romeo. I really like him. This portrayal gave Romeo an effective mix of endearing awkwardness and respect-worthy intensity. This Romeo was old enough to look over the horizon into adulthood, though his feet remained firmly planted in childhood. The actor's self-deprecating humor during the romantic scenes, and his physical comedy were completely appropriate for a teenage boy. However, the utter (deadly) seriousness of the fight with Tybalt, made it clear that Romeo was forced to participate in the adult world. This Romeo had the intensity that I missed in my early study of the play, and consequently, I was upset when he died. Romeo's delivery of "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks," was completely unexpected. He surprised me by leaping off the stage, and his fear reminded me of the impact the feud had in his everyday life. His performance has completely changed the way that I view Romeo.

There are very few things that I would change about the trip. I loved all of the lectures and demonstrations. The only class I would eliminate is the one in which we looked at different versions of Act 1 Scene 1 of *King Lear*; it was somewhat repetitive. The only day that was not fun was the first day. Arriving at 6:30 am was painful. If it is possible to arrive in England later, it would be well worth it. In general, communication between the Birthplace Trust and Lakeside could be improved. I am sure that those details will be ironed out if Lakeside decides to return to Stratford next year. I certainly hope that Lakeside does decide to offer the course next year. I would take this course again in a heartbeat, and will recommend it to my peers.

Liam J.

Mr. Doelger

7/12/10

Reflection – Stratford

Upon arriving in Stratford, I realized I'd only slept for about a half an hour over the past 16 hours, and that it was 6:00 AM. The first day was a blur, and I remember only snippets; a very glorified store called "Poundland", a review of King Lear giving it five stars, and a much deserved nap. Luckily, over the next two days I recovered from this cumbersome jetlag, and by Wednesday I had recovered. That jet lag was a critical part of those first couple days, because it made my initial experience of Stratford fairly tedious.

However, after that obstacle had been overcome, I was better equipped to appreciate the rest of the trip. The courses at the Shakespeare Trust were very engaging and some were remarkably entertaining. The voice lesson was really interesting, and I learned a lot about animation and enunciation. However, the most fun part of the course was the wigs and makeup class. The woman teaching it was fun and really knew how to transform peoples' appearances. I had a good time being a pirate, and it was neat seeing her morph my classmates into different characters.

The pre-performance discussions were normally pretty interesting, and it was nice to know some of the basis of the story of *Le Morte d'Arthur* before seeing the play. Nick Walton was a very energetic guy, and he did a great job of keeping our discussions moving, while providing answers to our various questions. The post-performance discussions tended to be a little bit better, and it was fascinating to see what other people thought about the performances.

The plays themselves were very good, and I enjoyed the plays more than their film counterparts; it was a lot more exciting to see the plays live. The *Romeo & Juliet* play was definitely my favorite, because of how close we were to the action and the performance itself was much, much better than the written version. The fight scenes were very cool, and were much better than the fight scenes in *Morte d'Arthur* where they didn't ever hit swords. The *Morte d'Arthur* was still pretty good though; it was visually spectacular and there were a lot of cool

lighting effects that they did. King Lear was also a great production, though I don't remember it as well, because that was when I was still fighting off my jet lag.

Overall, the trip was a blast, and I would recommend others to take it in the future, as long as they have some interest in Shakespeare. There wasn't really anything I'd change about the trip: there was a good balance of taking the course, watching the plays, and free time. If there was a way to eliminate jet lag, I'd certainly recommend that, but the trip was still fantastic.

Lucia C.

July 13, 2010

Stratford Reflection

At 11 o'clock in the morning on the Fourth of July, Sophie Padelford, Simone Alicea and I were sitting on a park bench down the road from our respective B and B's. We were jetlagged, fatigued, hadn't showered in over twenty-four hours. Unsurprisingly, our conversation leaped wildly from topic to topic, from tone to tone. Soon we were discussing our trip; why we had each chosen to take the summer class, what we expected out of our time in Stratford. In my exhausted state I began to bemoan the trip. "Wasn't it excessive?" I demanded of my classmates. Wasn't it grossly unnecessary to fly across a continent and an ocean just to see a few plays and hear a few lectures? Who were we, so saturated in privilege, to think it appropriate to fly to Europe and back for only a six day trip?

I grew up traveling, and unconsciously absorbed a specific set of rules from my previous trips. First, any trip out of state (and naturally out of country) had to last long. More than a week was a given, while over two months was not uncommon. While on a trip, it was mandatory to do all one could in that foreign land; to judge the quality of a restaurant by the number of locals eating there, to sweat on crowded metros rather than relax behind the tinted panes of taxicabs, to see every museum and archeological site while dodging the dreaded label of *tourist*. When in Rome, as my family very often was, we stayed in a rented apartment and haggled for our fennochio and pomodoros at the open-air market in the local piazza. Each trip had to be worthwhile – to be for a reason beyond entertainment – and no trip could be wasted in an air-conditioned resort.

All of these traveling principles that imbued my life contradicted this six day trip to the tourist attraction of one small town in a country that begged exploration. I knew this when I signed up for the class, though I did my best to ignore what I saw as an embarrassingly superfluous trip. I wanted to take a summer class, and was intrigued by the subject; the trip out of the country I tried not to think about. Thus, drooped on a park bench in my jetlagged stupor, I found myself in a state of near despair. My reason obscured behind layers of fatigue, I was horrified that I had broken every natural law of travel, that I had spent time and money and precious fossil fuels to see some plays that I could easily see closer to home. *Absolute folly* were the words reverberating in my exhaustion-numbed mind. *Absolute folly*.

But as it always does, time passed. I left the somber park to wander about town. I showered, unpacked, chatted with Mrs. O'Rourke, the proprietress of the Aidan Bed and Breakfast and my doubts of that morning slowly evaporated in the mild English sun. During the next week I never stopped to wonder if the trip was worth it. Stratford is a tourist town, but unabashedly so. Bus rides advertised historic sites and Shakespeare's visage gazed ponderously from nearly every shop sign. This frankness put me at ease; there was no need pretending that I was not a tourist. Having accepted this much, I was free to enjoy our activities. Each of those classes and lectures and plays that we watched and took part in amazed me. I was never bored; never anything less than enthralled. Though all were spectacular, a few moments stand out in my memory. I remember my blood racing to the seductively sinister drum beat that controlled the dance in *Romeo and Juliet*, and later in that same play, my tears falling as Mercutio stumbled at the top of the steps, nose daubed clown-red in his own blood. I remember, as I watched the deathly still silhouette of Mariah Gale lying in her white-laced wedding gown, realizing why this was considered one of the greatest tragedies. I remember listening, enthralled, to the nuanced details of the black market hair industry, to an actual actress discuss the trials of reconciling her artistic views with those of her director's, to the process of bringing a patchwork of King Arthur's history into a cohesive play. I remember walking through various gardens smelling nearly every rose, eating grilled paninis at small cafes, wandering in open-mouth fascination through a number of recreated Shakespearean houses.

I cannot think readily of a single thing to change about the trip. As someone with no acting experience, I was surprised by the brief acting workshops we had, though I ended up enjoying them immensely. We were often busy, though never too rushed, and had enough free time to relax. Our time in Stratford truly surpassed everything that I expected.

Ben B.

7.12.10

Shakespeare

Reflection.

When jets of fire erupted around a thrashing, bound Benvolio, the air around my face felt as though it would melt with heat. His fear was so real, his doom so impending that for a moment I forgot the storyline of the play—he was really going to burn. I was so captivated by the RSC’s production of Romeo and Juliet that I found myself constantly leaning further towards the stage, even when blades seemingly clashed a dangerously short distance away. To have such great seats for such an engaging and electrifying performance was fantastic, and one of my most powerful experiences in a theater. Seeing this show was one of my highlights of the trip, along with our session with the voice coach.

After about 15 minutes of shaking my arms and legs and coaxing nearly every possible sound from my mouth in our voice coaching lesson, I felt very alive. My blood was surging electrically around my body; every muscle that had been stiff and tired was now itching to move, to twist, stretch, thrash, and flail. I found myself awestruck by the man who had coached me through such a transformation. Who was this magician and how had he conjured this new liveliness? It seems ridiculous that I could be so fully enlivened simply by making funny noises for a few minutes, but I honestly felt as though my inhibitions and fatigue had been shaken off amidst all that vibration.

Past Ben was fairly certain that actors were not real artists. All it took for me to realize the error in that conviction was to hear from Kelly Hunter, who delivered a powerful performance as Goneril in King Lear, about her process. The depth of her analysis was astounding, as was the creativity she had put into bringing her character’s story and personality to life. My Dad once told me about a playwright colleague of his who would rant about how the writer of a play was the only “creative” artist, while the director and actors were merely “interpretive” artists. Before this trip I thought there was some truth to that, but now I see how shallow and erroneous that understanding of acting is.

Every time I see one of Shakespeare's plays live I am reminded of how they truly come to life when performed. I think seeing these plays performed was what I needed in order to grasp why Shakespeare is deemed one of the greatest writers of the English language. His greatness was in the unmatched combination of reality and poetry in his work. All of his characters have distinct, real personalities that evoke powerful emotional responses even though we only know them for a couple hours. His plays not only capture and express universal human experiences but also do so with poetic beauty.

My only suggestion for future trips would be more of the same. Like many of my classmates, I found the performances the most revelatory moments of the week, and I could only wish for more. I think the tours of Anne Hathaway's cottage and Warwick Castle were, while interesting, less educational for me than seeing the plays. Seeing these places didn't bother me because we spent relatively little time at each one, but if it were possible to see another play at the expense of one of those tours I would recommend doing so. I thought the trip had just the right balance of organized class time and free time, and delivered day after day of interesting, thought-provoking lessons.

Simone A.
Tom Doelger
Shakespeare
13 July 2010

Reflection on Stratford

I think this trip was great for me because it was academic without being stiff. The goal of the trip—to learn about Shakespeare’s plays in context—was addressed in a variety of ways, and we got to see all of the sides of a Shakespeare play by reading it, discussing it, and then watching it. In discussing the plays on and off the stage, and in learning about Shakespeare’s history on and off the stage, I think each play becomes more three-dimensional. Once one understands the history of a piece, there is more to dissect and to pick apart. All of the lectures were informative and engaging, including the ones about which I was at first hesitant like the history of Shakespeare lecture and the talk on *Morte D’Arthur*.

My favorite part of the trip was seeing the performances. I had never seen any of Shakespeare’s plays live on stage, and it was great to see one story I had just gotten to know and one story I had known forever. I think, even with discussing the plays as stories and getting everyone’s ideas about them, it’s really easy to read the play a certain way and to create that particular story. The best part about seeing something one has read live is that one can see a particular creation of somebody else. Seeing another idea come to life on stage makes certain interpretations more tangible and more conceivable.

I think the main question about this trip is why Stratford? Isn’t it possible that we could have seen performances in Seattle, and surely there are Shakespeare experts in the U.S. who could have given equally compelling lectures? I think key difference between learning here and learning in England is the element of history that surrounds each of the lessons. In Stratford, I felt as though the plays we talked about had back stories and histories that were grounded in Stratford and in the information we could find there. Additionally, in watching the Royal Shakespeare Company, I understood that we were watching the best of the best. That is to say, it wasn’t as though somebody told me that this company was exceptionally great, and I believed him, but rather sitting in the theatre, I found myself in awe of the abilities of the actors, which I’m not sure we would have found in Seattle.

There are only two things about this trip I would change. Firstly, it would be nice if it could be longer. Even an extension by as much as three days would provide enough time for one more show and a few more workshops. I think that with the travel time and fatigue, it was hard to get the most out of the first couple of days, making the course seem shorter than it was. Secondly, I am not sure we needed to spend so much time at the various cottages associated with Shakespeare. The three that I found most compelling were Mary Arden's Farm, Anne Hathaway's Cottage, and the Birthplace—although, the Birthplace would have been a better experience had it not been so crowded. The other two seemed like extraneous visits.

