

Meredith Skura
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With such delightful hospitality, it is too bad that our gathering is somewhat smaller than usual. Many of us unfortunately had to forgo Miami in order to attend the International Shakespeare Association conference in Spain. But I wish not one Shakespearean more. We few, we happy few will certainly suffice. Indeed he that hath no stomach to the presidential talk which is about to begin—let him depart.

For as you know it is customary at this point during the annual luncheon for presidents to share their thoughts on the profession and on the Shakespeare-related events that have occurred during the past year. Some years have been very Shakespearean indeed. It wasn't too long ago that fin de siècle nostalgia had been producing what seemed to be an Elizabethan film every month. *Shakespeare in Love* and *Elizabeth* were on the lips of every movie critic or, still better, every student in our classrooms. That brief moment of fame has passed—a lesson to us all. This year it was not *Elizabeth*, the movie, in the news, but a book called *Elizabeth I CEO: A Strategic Lesson from the Leader Who Built an Empire*. It is no longer *Shakespeare in Love* but a book called *Shakespeare in Charge: The Bard's Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business stage*. (The book was, however, linked to the movie in that it is being advertised in the trailer to the video of *Shakespeare in Love*.) And that wasn't all; the past year and a half also saw the publication of *Shakespeare on Management; With Business Consul from the Bard*, and *Power Plays: Shakespeare's Lessons in Leadership and Management*, as well as a couple of others. Shakespeare in other words has been disappearing from the silver screen but turning up on *The Economist's* list of "reading for leading," which includes such other titles as *Aligning the Hearts and Minds of Your Employees*, and *Unleashing the Killer App*—. Similarly Tom Stoppard has been replaced by rather different Shakespeare re-producers. It is true that *Power Plays* is co-authored by Tina Packer, director of the Lenox Massachusetts Shakespeare & Co, and John Whitney, a former CEO turned academic; but other authors of these books are bigger guns. The co-authors of *Shakespeare in Charge* are Norman Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin, and Kenneth Adelman, former ambassador to the UN and U.S. Arms Control Director under Ronald Reagan. It is perhaps this Whitehouse connection rather than enthusiasm for Shakespeare which produced the blurbs from Colin Powell and Henry Kissinger on the back of this book (although they play this down: Powell calls the book "lighthearted," and Kissinger promises that it embodies the poet's insight in a way that is "a lot of fun to read.")

Even more successful than the books are the corporate training road shows. Do you teach Shakespeare through performance? So does Kenneth Adelman. He and his wife (also a former Reagan official) travel like itinerant players from corporate retreat to corporate retreat with their scripts and video clips and a trunkful of costumes. The group is called "Movers and Shakespeare," and for \$10,000, they will create for your executives an unforgettable customized program that focuses on the essential business and interpersonal skills necessary in today's business world. The program draws on and culminates in a performance of Shakespearean scenes, acted out by the newly educated and enthusiastic executives in cardboard crowns, doublets, and tights.

What do the Adelmans teach? It depends what you need. Motivation for an underdog company trying a hostile takeover? Try Henry V's speech at Agincourt, with its "8 power elements," starting with the "buy in" ("He which hath no stomach to this fight, / Let him depart"). Henry also teaches walk-around management, "rare in royals," and fearlessness about issuing that ultimate pink slip to the likes of Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey. There are also those famous lines from *Pericles* to encourage risk-taking in acquisitions and mergers: "The great ones eat up little ones." At the other end of the lesson plan, Adelman's fliers tell us, using Shakespeare for diversity training offers four advantages over conventional techniques. Shakespeare covers all types of discrimination, including both types of sexual harassment (quid pro quo—*Measure for Measure*—and hostile work environment—Parolles asking Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* if she is thinking on her virginity.)

What does all this have to do with us? Adelman's success shows that America's Shakespeare is alive and well, and that our nation's movers and shakers still believe in his wisdom. ("Business revolves around people," Adelman explains, "and no one has the depth of insights into people that Shakespeare" has.) What other writer could get the President of Grumman's Electronic Sensors Sector to put on tights and a purple cloak? Adelman's success also confirms our belief that we all make the Shakespeare we need. And right now America seems to need a very materialist Shakespeare indeed—a bard of the bottom line. It's not just Adelman's customers, either. If corporate executives turn to Shakespeare only to increase profit, university administrators seem increasingly to be driven by fiscal as well as—I want almost to say more than—academic concerns.

Certainly none of *us* uses Shakespeare to produce wealth or power. But I worry at times that we are too bottom-line conscious anyway. Not a financial bottom-line, of course. We are in the business of producing knowledge, not power, and our costs are measured more usually in time spent than in dollars. But it is still very easy to plan our profession with our kind of profit in mind rather than to remember other seemingly less profitable concerns.

Here I take the liberty of reminding you about the topic of my letter in the last SAA Bulletin, which talked about our relation to the growing crisis in our country's public schools. As Jim Bulman noted in his talk two years ago, freshmen are coming to us these days less well prepared by the schools. But while we complain, we do little about the problem. True, we are all individually overworked, and collectively we have other responsibilities. Surely it makes sense to concentrate on what we do best and let Education professionals deal with the schools. This powerful argument prevailed with me for years. But education is our business too. We have strong and, we believe, useful ideas about what it requires, at least when it comes to reading texts. Besides, no one else is solving the problem. If nothing changes, there will be no students ready for our classes except those headed for a few ivory towers, which will be increasingly isolated from the rest of American culture. Apart from any obligation to our communities, our own self-interest is at stake.

What can Shakespeareans do? First, we can think more about the potential teachers in our own classes. Although they may constitute only a silent minority, their choice deserves respect. It is sad to realize how frequently would-be teachers hear derogatory remarks about high school teachers or are "praised" by being told that they are smart enough to do something better.

Second, we can teach more about teaching—and learning—as well as about Shakespeare. We can increase students’ awareness of their own reading practices by being explicit about ours. I can explain WHY I chose the plays on the syllabus, their sequence, the questions I ask about them, the kinds of response I ask for, and the kind I discourage. I can even, now and then, ask students to reformulate one of their papers so that it could be presented to a high school class. Needless to say such disciplined attention to their audience and thinking process can benefit all students, not only future teachers. And what if we asked every graduate student to include a section in the dissertation that conveys the essence of its argument in a way that can be understood and appreciated by students and non-professionals?

Third, we might look at the intelligent and thought-provoking study prepared for the MLA in 1999, *Preparing a Nation’s Teachers*, edited by Phyllis Franklin, David Laurence and Elizabeth B. Welles, which addresses just these problems. Fourth, we can talk with the teachers who are already working in the schools and might welcome our collaboration. Finally, the SAA could work collectively to try to provide such collaboration, through workshops like those we have offered in the past, but perhaps also by reaching out in other ways, such as organizing Shakespeareans to run semester-long reading groups for teachers in their own communities.

I have heard from some and hope to hear from others here who have ideas about how—or whether—the SAA should address such issues. Meanwhile I end with the lesson in crisis management that Kenneth Adelman singled out from *Hamlet*. It begins with the following two maxims:

“This bodes some strange eruption to our state.” --Horatio

“The time is out of joint, O cursed spite,
that ever I was born to set it right.” --Hamlet