

Offensive Shakespeare



Monika Smialkowska, Northumbria University

Adam Hansen, Northumbria University

Edmund King, The Open University

WARNING

These lectures contain material that some viewers and listeners may find offensive.

WARNING

We are **not going to**: resolve the question of whether offence is a good or a bad thing; tell people what is and what is not offensive; prescribe what to do about offence.

We **are going to**: reflect on different meanings of offence; discuss some examples of people giving/taking offence; outline the state of debate on offence, particularly in relation to performance and education.

The age of offence

You can say nothing anymore. Some think it's political correctness gone mad, that people are too easily offended. It's like we're all **talking on eggshells in case we cause someone offence.**

Joyce Fegan, 'Trying not to Stay Silent in the Age of Offence', *Irish Examiner*, 21 July 2018
<https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-30856716.html>

- trigger warnings
- safe spaces
- no-platforming
- political correctness
- woke culture

For the 'culture of offence'

An increasingly sensitive and fine-grained **vocabulary for registering and opposing forms of sexism, racism, ableism and religious intolerance** has undeniably been developing within higher education. [...]

The **capacity to recognize and name sources of injustice** was constitutive of every progressive structural change in modern legal and political culture, from the elimination of Jim Crow to the institution of human rights laws to the liberalization of marriage. This **basic impulse toward equity and social justice** [was] harnessed by the civil rights, feminist and queer movements [...].

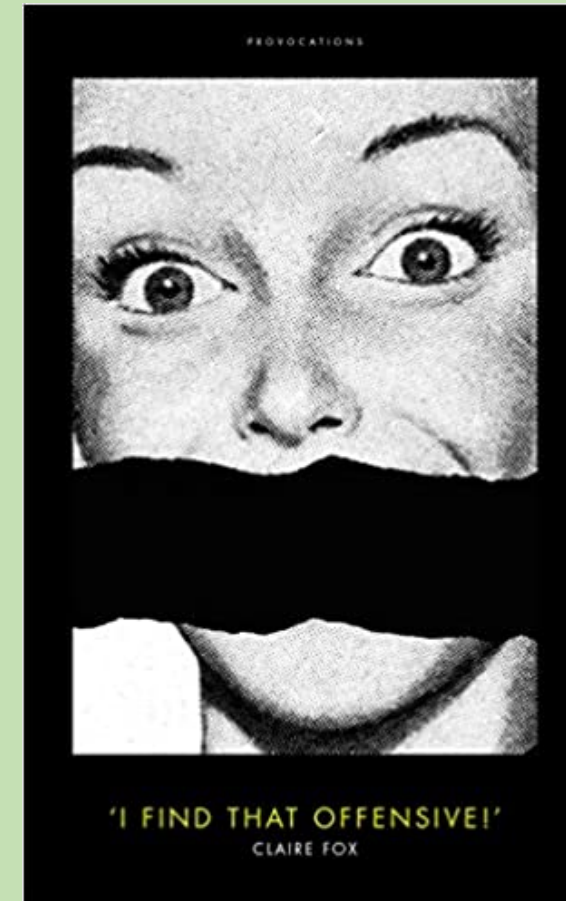
Ira Wells, 'The Age of Offence: The Politics of Outrage, and the Crisis of Free Speech on Campus', *Literary Review of Canada*, April 2017

<https://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2017/04/the-age-of-offence/>

Against 'the culture of offence'

The 'Generation Snowflake': young people who lack resilience, cannot face being challenged, and combine 'apparent **hyper-sensitivity**' with 'an almost belligerent **sense of entitlement that their feelings should take precedence**'.

Claire Fox, *'I Find That Offensive!'* (London: Biteback, 2016), pp. 57, xvi.



Against 'the culture of offence'

As protest and individual needs intermesh, **feelings and emotions cease to be a personal matter**. Emotions are mobilised to make a statement of outrage. Criticism and hard-hitting arguments are countered with the statement, 'I am offended'. Unlike the response 'I disagree', there is no comeback. Disagreement invites an argument, whereas the statement 'I am offended' **closes down conversation and debate**. [...]

There is an important **shift from the domain of ideas to that of emotions** when people state that 'I am offended' instead of 'I disagree'.

Frank Furedi, *What's Happened to the University? A Sociological Exploration of Its Infantilisation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 15, 4

Against 'the culture of offence'

Outrage does your arguing for you.

This is one of the most worrying aspects of the culture of offence-taking and offence-mongering. For what politicians and commentators who push such nonsense seem to desire is a public that is more incensed than it is interested. Consequently, **it is democracy that suffers when sensitivity gains the upper hand**. Important questions are put to one side in the interests of "respect" and "appropriateness". Sometimes, **whole issues are declared off limits**.

Richard King, 'The Age of Outrage: From Russell Brand's Sachsgate to Plebgate, Taking Offence has Become Ubiquitous in Modern Life', *Observer*, 30 March 2014

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/opinion/the-age-of-outrage-9224704.html>

For

- redresses power balance
- gives voice to previously silenced and marginalised people
- helps combat injustice and inequality

Against

- privileges feeling over reason, the personal over the objective
- stifles rational debate and free speech
- endangers democracy

Offence and performance



Offence (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

1. A breach of law, rules, duty, propriety, or etiquette; a transgression, sin, wrong, misdemeanour, or misdeed; a fault.
2. *Law*. An illegal act or omission; a punishable crime.
3. The action or fact of offending, wounding the feelings of, or displeasing another (usually viewed as it affects the person offended); an instance of this.
4. Offended or wounded feeling; displeasure, annoyance, or resentment caused (voluntarily or involuntarily) to a person. Frequently in ***to give (also cause, etc.) offence to***: to offend, displease; ***to take offence***: to be offended, to feel resentment, to take umbrage [...].

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

HORATIO These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET I'm sorry they offend you, heartily.

Yes, faith, heartily.

HORATIO There's no offence, my lord.

HAMLET Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
And much offence too.

(1.5.146-51)

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

GERTRUDE Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET Mother, you have my father much offended.

[...]

Gertrude Have you forgot me?

Hamlet You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife,
But – would you were not so – you are my mother.

(3.4.10-19)

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

HAMLET Oh, it offends me to the soul to see a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise [...]. (3.2.6-8)

KING Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?

HAMLET No, no, they do but jest, poison in jest: no offence i'th'world.

KING What do you call the play?

HAMLET *The Mousetrap*. (3.2.202-05)

KING O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder! (3.3.39-41)

Tragedy

Tragedy 'openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; [...] maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours', and 'with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded' [...].

Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* [1595], ed. by Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 45



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

Offensive Shakespeare, UK

Outrage as BBC bosses 'use Shakespeare to push pro-immigration agenda'

THE BBC is battling new accusations of bias after a top MP claimed the broadcaster used the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death to push a "pro-immigration agenda".

By [FRASER MOORE](#)

PUBLISHED: 04:26, Mon, Apr 25, 2016



EXPRESS

Home of
the Daily and
Sunday Express



<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/664069/bbc-shakespeare-pro-immigration-agenda>

Some responses

- Shut down the BBC now. Every day it seems there are more and more horror stories of profligate spending or broadcasting left wing anti British propoganda. The British people are fed of this Marxist cabal taking us for fools. pkvanderbyl, rhodesia Nottinghamshire
- BBC = BRITISH BOLSHEVIK CORPORATION Colin888, London
- Now that one in six of all on-screen BBC roles must go to l3sb1an, g@y, b1s3xu@1 and tr@nsg3nd3r or disabled people by 2020 at least it will make a welcome change from the P@3d0ph113 ring they were running ! Chris P Duck, Midlands

Some responses

- Strange the BBC have chosen a piece that Shakespeare never used! [...] Graysaxon, London
- William Shakespeare eh? This is William Shakespeare - This England never did, nor never shall, Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror, Sue100, Rochester
- This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, This other Eden, demi-paradise, **(being concreted over)** This fortress built by Nature for herself Against infection and the hand of war, **(no medical checks required, TB etc)** This happy breed of men **(now a minority in the capital)**, this little world, This precious stone set in the silver sea, Which serves it in the office of a wall Or as a moat defensive to a house, **(Govt no longer defends the moat)** Against the envy of less happier lands,-- **(no need to be envious any longer, they just move here)** This blessed plot **(thats losing the plot)**, this earth, this realm, this England. Mr Trillionaire, Newcastle upon Tyne

Some responses

- [It was St George's Day] and it should be a public holiday not because of Shakespear which I presume was made a big fuss of to exclude St Geoge's Day. The queen could easily have made it a public holiday in honour of her reign St George's Day for the English. VOTE BRITEXIT
Anonymous
- I have never understood why people 'rave' over Shakespeare, I have always detested him since being forced to read his work at school and have positively avoided him ever since. There are other writers out there who are better. Now that the left wing luvvies and scroungers have latched on to an obscure piece of work to promote immigration, it makes it all seem worse. [...] mhills1345, Worcester

Offensive Shakespeare, US

- <https://youtu.be/vFOxpcpiNzo>

Offensive Shakespeare, US

'Trump' Stabbed to Death in Central Park Performance of 'Julius Caesar'

Daniel Nussbaum, 6 June 2017



B BREITBART NEWS

<https://www.breitbart.com/entertainment/2017/06/06/trump-stabbed-death-central-park-performance-julius-caesar/>

Some responses

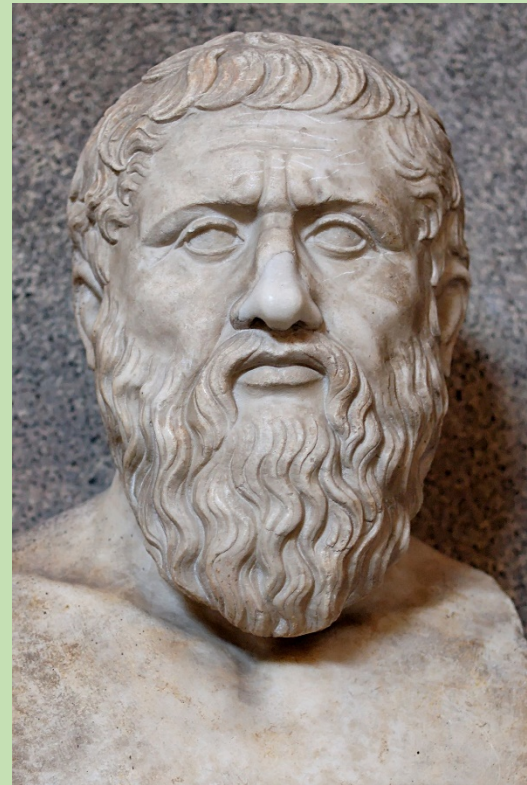
- I hope the next protests comes with a bang.
- If the actors are going to kill trump on stage, maybe they should be killed.
- Why don't you scum bag liberal baby killing piles of shit stop provoking violence through your sick garbage adaptation of Shakespeare? You and your shit director should be in prison for hate crimes and threats against the president!
- I wonder how much of this 'art' is funded by taxpayers? Serious question, when does 'art' become political speech & does that change things? [Donald Trump Jr on Twitter]
- Kudos to @Delta for pulling \$\$ from 'play' portraying assassination of @POTUS. No one should sponsor crap like that! [Mike Huckabee on Twitter]

All comments quoted in James Shapiro, *Shakespeare in a Divided America* (London: Faber and Faber, 2020), pp. 237-41

Ban offence, ban the theatre?

[...] we shall be justified in not admitting him [the poet] into a well-ordered commonwealth, because **he stimulates and strengthens an element which threatens to undermine reason**. As a country may be given over into the power of its worst citizens while the better sort are ruined, so, we shall say, **the dramatic poet sets up a vicious form of government in the individual soul**: he gratifies that senseless part which cannot distinguish great and small, but regards the same things as now one, now the other; and he is an image-maker whose images are phantoms far removed from reality.

Plato, *The Republic* [c. 380-360 BCE], in *Reader in Tragedy: An Anthology of Classical Criticism to Contemporary Theory*, ed. by Marcus Nevitt and Tanya Pollard (London: Methuen Drama, 2019), pp. 14-15



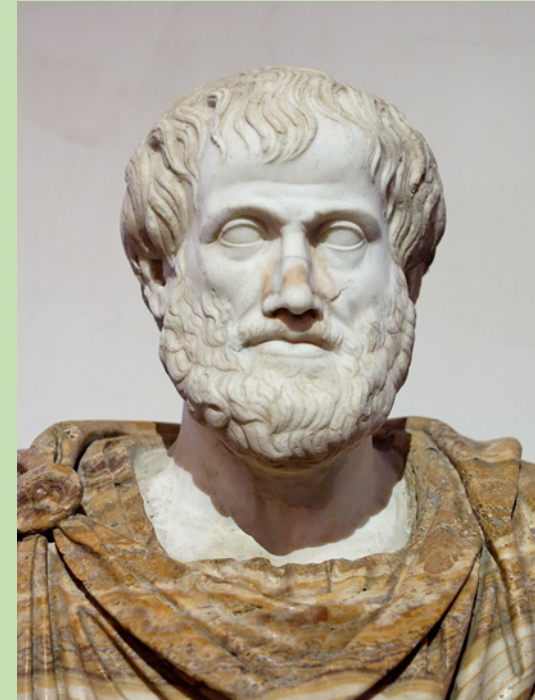
Don't ban offence, don't ban the theatre?

Tragedy: 'the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories [...]; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions'.

Aristotle, *Poetics* [c.350-330 BCE], in *Reader in Tragedy*, p. 19

Catharsis: 'purgation, purification, transformation, and more'.

Marcus Nevitt and Tanya Pollard, in *Reader in Tragedy*, p. 8



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

Rethinking emotion

Emotions are intentional in the sense that they are 'about' something: they involve a direction or orientation towards an object [...]

[...] emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices [...]

[...] emotions 'matter' for politics [...]

Emotion is 'a form of cultural politics or world making'.

Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 7-12

Many thanks for listening!

If you would like to continue the conversation, please contact me.

Dr Monika Smialkowska
Northumbria University

monika.smialkowska@northumbria.ac.uk

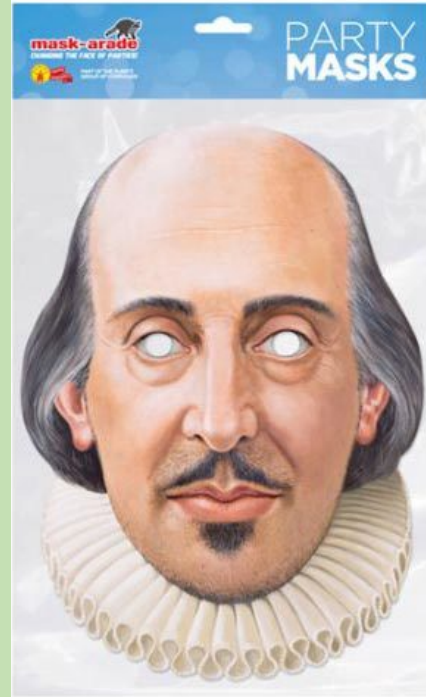


[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author
is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)

Taking Offence at/and Teaching Shakespeare

Adam Hansen (Northumbria University)

adam.hansen@northumbria.ac.uk



Trigger Warning:

This talk contains talk about ‘trigger warnings’ and ideas of an explicitly academic nature which may not be suitable for all audiences.

Questions and Aims

- A space to reflect on what is at stake when we teach Shakespeare as, or *and*, offence.
- How and why might teaching Shakespeare cause offence, and/or develop our understanding offence?
- In what ways is Shakespearean offensiveness useful and/or challenging for students?

Shakespeare Insult Kit

Combine one word from each of the three columns below, prefaced with "Thou":

Column 1

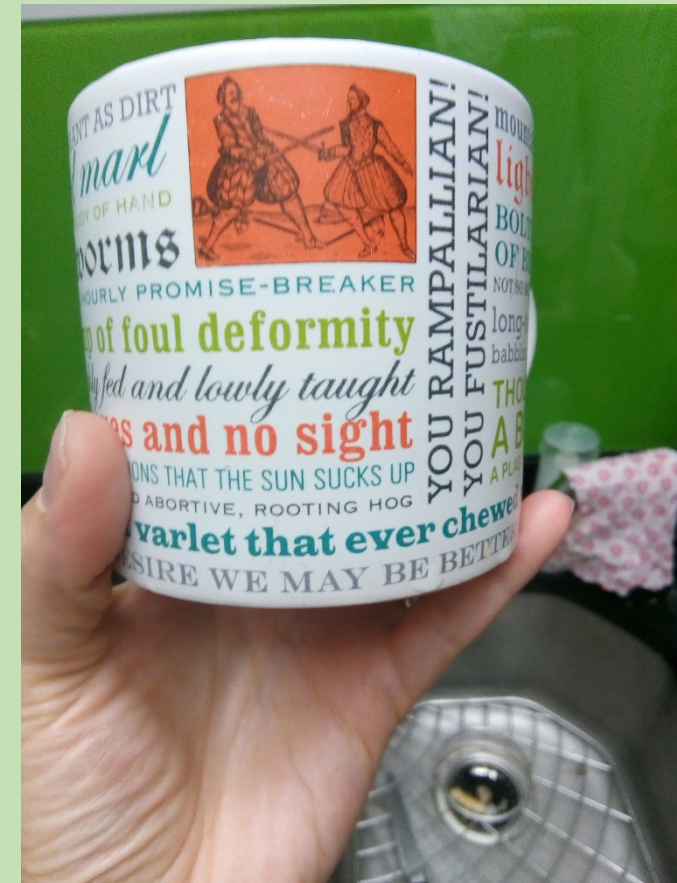
artless
bawdy
beslubbering
bootless
churlish
cockered
clouted
craven

Column 2

base-court
bat-fowling
beef-witted
beetle-headed
boil-brained
clapper-clawed
clay-brained
common-kissing

Column 3

apple-john
baggage
barnacle
bladder
boar-pig
bugbear
bum-bailey
canker-blossom



Example 1# - Northumbria University

I am left with a nagging doubt: **if a black actor plays Othello does he not risk making racial stereotypes seem legitimate and even true?** When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in make-up and for a predominantly white audience, does he not encourage the white way, or rather the wrong way, of looking at black men, namely that black men, or 'Moors', are over-emotional, excitable and unstable, thereby vindicating Iago's statement, 'These moors are changeable in their wills'?

- Hugh Quarshie, *Second Thoughts About Othello* (1999), 5.

In my discussions with English undergraduates, I was struck by the fact that many of them have decided to **self-censor...the extensive practice of self-censorship has developed into an aggressive conviction**

- Frank Furedi, *What's Happened to the University?: A Sociological Exploration of Its Infantilisation* (2017), vii, 80.

[One] enemy of free speech today is **self-censorship**

- Mick Hume, *Trigger Warning: Is the fear of being offensive killing free speech?* (2015), 4.



A culture of **censorship has gradually been creeping in** [to universities], and a monoculture is now emerging where some views are 'in' and others are clearly 'out'... [due to] the rise of no-platforming, safe spaces, trigger warnings and protest.

- Sam Gyimah 'Civility Under Threat', *Research Research* (1 October 2018; <https://www.researchresearch.com/news/article/?articleid=1377459>)

Critics [*or, indeed students*] who have notoriously read Othello's end as the inevitable relapse of an innately savage black man have failed to understand or have resisted [*or have not been taught about*] the play's dialogic demand for **racial self-inquiry**. Speaking of Othello, speaking about race within the discipline, **requires unpacking one's white positioning**, which includes making whiteness visible and an object for critical interrogation; **checking privilege**; and exposing the denials and misinterpretations that...keep race a minority issue and race studies a faddish or questionable enterprise in the era of so-called postracial enlightenment.

- Ian Smith, 'Speaking of Race', *Shakespeare in our Time*, eds. Dymphna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett (2016), 121.

Universities are places where, above all, free speech should be honoured, not prevented.

- Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, House of Commons, Hansard (12 November 1985), col. 423. Cited in Evan Smith, *No Platform: A History of Anti-Fascism, Universities and the Limits of Free Speech* (2020) 158.



Example 1# - Northumbria University

I am left with a nagging doubt: **if a black actor plays Othello does he not risk making racial stereotypes seem legitimate and even true?** When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in make-up and for a predominantly white audience, does he not encourage the white way, or rather the wrong way, of looking at black men, namely that black men, or 'Moors', are over-emotional, excitable and unstable, thereby vindicating Iago's statement, 'These moors are changeable in their wills'?

- Hugh Quarshie, *Second Thoughts About Othello* (1999), 5.

In my discussions with English undergraduates, I was struck by the fact that many of them have decided to **self-censor...the extensive practice of self-censorship has developed into an aggressive conviction**

- Frank Furedi, *What's Happened to the University?: A Sociological Exploration of Its Infantilisation* (2017), vii, 80.

[One] enemy of free speech today is **self-censorship**

- Mick Hume, *Trigger Warning: Is the fear of being offensive killing free speech?* (2015), 4.



A culture of **censorship has gradually been creeping in** [to universities], and a monoculture is now emerging where some views are 'in' and others are clearly 'out'... [due to] the rise of no-platforming, safe spaces, trigger warnings and protest.

- Sam Gyimah 'Civility Under Threat', *Research Research* (1 October 2018; <https://www.researchresearch.com/news/article/?articleid=1377459>)

Critics [*or, indeed students*] who have notoriously read Othello's end as the inevitable relapse of an innately savage black man have failed to understand or have resisted [*or have not been taught about*] the play's dialogic demand for **racial self-inquiry**. Speaking of Othello, speaking about race within the discipline, **requires unpacking one's white positioning**, which includes making whiteness visible and an object for critical interrogation; **checking privilege**; and exposing the denials and misinterpretations that...keep race a minority issue and race studies a faddish or questionable enterprise in the era of so-called postracial enlightenment.

- Ian Smith, 'Speaking of Race', *Shakespeare in our Time*, eds. Dymphna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett (2016), 121.

Although formally introduced by the NUS [National Union of Students] in 1974 as a reaction to the rise of the National Front (NF) in Britain, **'no platform'** had its antecedents in the anti-fascist battles of the 1930s and 1940s, and the student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since then, it has been continually re-evaluated. ... Even in the twenty-first century, it remains a living and reflexive tactic, which students themselves determine, debate and continue to argue over. ... students have argued for **'no platform'** to be **extended to other forms of prejudice since the 1970s**, and ...this has been **continually contested** (Smith, 4, 218)

No Platform

A History of Anti-Fascism, Universities
and the Limits of Free Speech

Evan Smith



Fascism and the Far Right



Example 1# - Northumbria University

I am left with a nagging doubt: **if a black actor plays Othello does he not risk making racial stereotypes seem legitimate and even true?** When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in make-up and for a predominantly white audience, does he not encourage the white way, or rather the wrong way, of looking at black men, namely that black men, or 'Moors', are over-emotional, excitable and unstable, thereby vindicating Iago's statement, 'These moors are changeable in their wills'?

- Hugh Quarshie, *Second Thoughts About Othello* (1999), 5.

In my discussions with English undergraduates, I was struck by the fact that many of them have decided to **self-censor...the extensive practice of self-censorship has developed into an aggressive conviction**

- Frank Furedi, *What's Happened to the University?: A Sociological Exploration of Its Infantilisation* (2017), vii, 80.

[One] enemy of free speech today is **self-censorship**

- Mick Hume, *Trigger Warning: Is the fear of being offensive killing free speech?* (2015), 4.



A culture of **censorship has gradually been creeping in** [to universities], and a monoculture is now emerging where some views are 'in' and others are clearly 'out'... [due to] the rise of no-platforming, safe spaces, trigger warnings and protest.

- Sam Gyimah 'Civility Under Threat', *Research Research* (1 October 2018; <https://www.researchresearch.com/news/article/?articleid=1377459>)

Critics [*or, indeed students*] who have notoriously read Othello's end as the inevitable relapse of an innately savage black man have failed to understand or have resisted [*or have not been taught about*] the play's dialogic demand for **racial self-inquiry**. Speaking of Othello, speaking about race within the discipline, **requires unpacking one's white positioning**, which includes making whiteness visible and an object for critical interrogation; **checking privilege**; and exposing the denials and misinterpretations that...keep race a minority issue and race studies a faddish or questionable enterprise in the era of so-called postracial enlightenment.

- Ian Smith, 'Speaking of Race', *Shakespeare in our Time*, eds. Dymphna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett (2016), 121.

Example 2# - Durham University

...no one is saying that *Titus Andronicus* should be taken off the curriculum because of its potential to trigger victims of sexual abuse. This, ironically, is what **trigger warnings** are for: to **give vulnerable people the choice to opt out of a potentially harmful discussion, whilst still leaving the topic open for those able to contribute.** ...

I really cannot see how anyone can be offended by trigger warnings, which do not in any way prevent us from discussing difficult topics and save some people a lot of pain. ...

- Simon Fearn, 'In defence of trigger warnings', *Palatinate: Durham's Independent Student Newspaper* (May 7, 2016)

This **privileging of subjective interpretation** means we are all easy targets for being accused of hate crime.

- Claire Fox, 'I find that offensive' (2016), 22



That some students now seriously believe that warning them about the content of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is an example of good academic practice might seem puzzling to the millions of readers who regard the **emotional upheavals** provoked by his plays as part of a **wonderful aesthetic experience.**

- Furedi, *What's Happened to the University?* 150

...*Othello* made **too much sense** to me – so much so that I could no longer even read it.

- Jonathan Dollimore, *Desire: A Memoir* (2017), 42

Rules of Engagement?

On this module we can expect to engage critically with some potentially controversial or disturbing ideas and arguments. ... many of Marlowe's ideas were challenging in their own time, and many remain so.

... As we work with Marlowe, and with each other, it is important to remember that we base our arguments on evidence from the texts and contexts we are studying. ... this should not mean your arguments can fall back on saying 'I believe...' or 'I feel...'.

Instead, say what you think the text or context says, always conducting your arguments, and confronting assumptions, within appropriate and constructive modes of expression.

... Marlowe was taught to think in terms of *argumentum in utramque partem* (arguing/defending in both directions): let's see if we can do the same.



Example 3# - Cambridge University



“Trigger warnings” were printed alongside the description of at least one English literature lecture and one seminar due to take place this term. One was a lecture on violence, which was billed as a discussion of “control and consequence; when do we laugh at violence, and why?”, focussing particularly on Shakespeare’s *The Comedy of Errors* and *Titus Andronicus*, and Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*.

- Camilla Turner, ‘Cambridge students warned Shakespeare plays may distress them’, *The Telegraph* (18 October 2017)

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/10/18/cambridge-university-students-given-trigger-warning-shakespeare/>

From the ‘Comments’ section:

- It would appear that education has come to an end. **The age of enlightenment is over** [Roger Williams].
- History shows that when civilisations become too soft **they often disappear** [William Stewart].
- What this is about is the creeping control of language and the continued assault on free speech emanating from **the cultural Marxists**. These people have a stranglehold over academia and with every new piece of ideological insanity emerging from their twisted minds it becomes more impossible to not notice [Andrew Sarchus].
- I bet that the poor little darlings all have box sets of *Game of Thrones*, **do those carry a trigger warning?** [John Gresham].

Example 3# - Cambridge University



- May I suggest the Telegraph **includes a trigger warning** at the top of page one, indicating: "Warning, this newspaper contains material which some readers may find intensely irritating. Those who are easily distressed are advised not to read any further" [Gary Hirsch].
- It's PC gone mad. **Even Roy Rogers films come with trigger warnings now** [Kirk StMoritz].
- Trigger warnings are just a tiny label, not a big deal, and you're all massively overreacting. ... Trigger warnings are just that, a warning. A little symbol ... **no different from having a content warning on a movie**, just so anyone going to the lecture knows what to expect. It's to warn those with traumatic pasts, **not to dissuade and censor** the learning of the average student. The lecturers here aren't expected to tone down their content at all; on the contrary, trigger warnings are to prevent them from having to do that [Shona Webb, a Cambridge English student].

‘Thou but offend’st thy lungs to speak so loud:’ (*MoV*, 4.1.142)

1. Teaching has always been subject to conditions, controls, censorship, interventions, bowdlerizations and silencing:

Teachers appointed to instil knowledge into the minds of the citizens should not teach that which is false or noxious....they should not teach that which tends to disturb civil society...

- Samuel Von Pufendorf, ‘On the Duties of Citizens’ (1682), in Paul Barry Clarke, *Citizenship* (1994), 92.

2. So has ‘free speech’:

The unrestrained communication of thoughts and opinions being one of the most precious rights of man, every citizen may speak, write, and publish freely, provided he is responsible for the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by the law.

‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens’ (France, 1789), reprinted in Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1791-2).

3. So has literature, *including Shakespeare*:

Titus Andronicus...I shall leave out of account, because, even if Shakespeare wrote the whole of it, he did so before he had either a style of his own or any characteristic tragic conception.

- A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearian Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (1904; rpt 1994), 21.

‘Thou but offend’st thy lungs to speak so loud:’ (MoV, 4.1.142)

4. Trigger warnings have a mixed press, and unclear effects:

Much support for trigger warnings arises from the desire to provide students with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other disadvantaged groups with an inclusive, level academic playing field. ... However, others believe that **trigger warnings hamper academic inquiry and “coddle” students by sheltering them from any stressful material they may encounter...**thereby undermining their preparation for the “real world” beyond the campus gates. ...

Trigger warnings do not appear to be conducive to resilience...Trigger warnings do not appear to affect sensitivity to distressing material in general, but may increase immediate anxiety response for a subset of individuals whose beliefs predispose them to such a response.

- Benjamin Bellet et al. ‘Trigger warning: Empirical evidence ahead’, *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 61 (2018), 134-41.



‘privileging of subjective interpretation’? (Fox, 22)

QUINCE (*as Prologue*)

If we offend, it is with our good will.

That you should think: we come not to **offend**

But with good will. To show our simple skill,

That is the true beginning of our end.

- *MND* (5.1.112-15)

[Palgrave (2007) editorial note: **112 will**. Quince inadvertently inserts a full stop here and changes the meaning of the line]



- An early modern trigger warning?
- Ambiguous punctuation > **do or don't the players mean to offend?**
- If they **don't** mean to offend, they mean instead simply to evoke good will.
- If they **do** mean to offend they **also** mean to do so **only** ('But') with good will.
- Quince signals – and queries – intention ('our end'), but also tries to **condition** audience response.
- Quince introduces **conditionality** ('If we offend'); offence is not a given but depends on **subjective responses**.
- Quince's paradoxes ('the true beginning of our end') highlight the oxymoron of working with 'simple skill': this is simple and skilful language, at once silly, banal and profound.

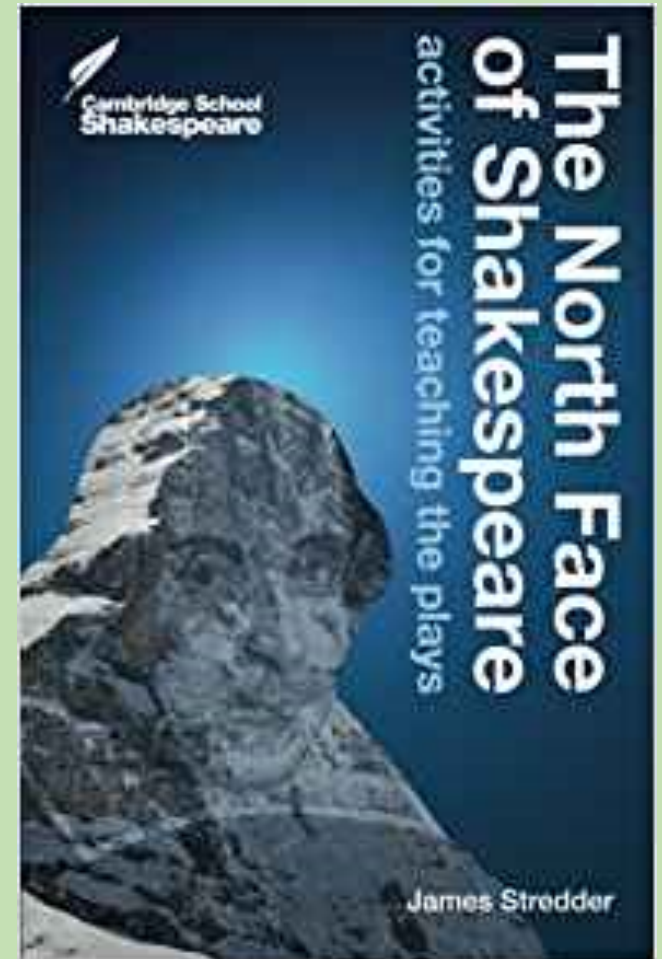
Mobilising Offence in/as Shakespeare Teaching – Example 1#

Safety awareness is vital, too, in imaginative work, which may **disturb areas of the mind and the emotions**, and reveal them to others in ways that have not been anticipated and **may be distressing**. This can happen, of course, in serious work of any kind.

In an apparently academic classroom discussion, **personal memory may be touched very painfully for a particular individual**, causing an unexpected and unwelcome breaking out of feeling. ...

If educational work is serious and sensitive to differences of all kinds within groups, it should have the resources to withstand **the potentially negative effects of such rare incidents** – and quite possibly turn them into positive experiences. ... Insult games assemble pairs or groups as antagonists in order to explore and enjoy the energy, humour and inventiveness of Shakespeare's 'insult' language.

- James Stredder, *The North Face of Shakespeare: activities for teaching the plays* (2009), 31, 156.



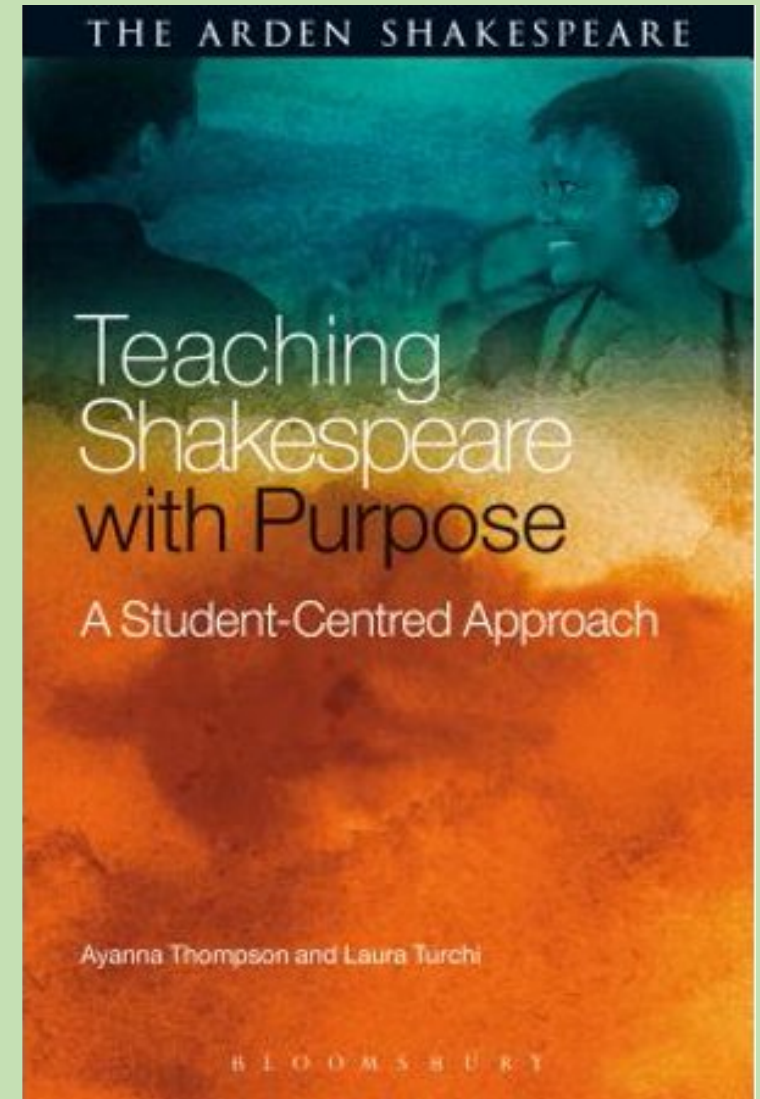
Mobilising Offence in/as Shakespeare Teaching – Example 2#

The purpose of teaching Shakespeare's plays is to increase a student's **familiarity with complex texts**. ... But the *teaching* of Shakespeare is a vehicle rather than a destination: advanced learners need increasingly sophisticated literary skills **to face all complex texts**. ...

- Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (2016) 7, 8.

[I]f we don't have a way to talk to our students and to make the learning of Shakespeare coincide with the learning of truth...then it's done [ie. learning about Shakespeare is doomed]...Shakespeare does allow us to talk about race...in truthful ways.

- Ayanna Thompson in conversation with Laura Turchi, 'Shakespeare Teachers' Conversation: Teaching Anti-Racism through Shakespeare' (31 July 2020; convened by Gillian Woods, Birkbeck University)



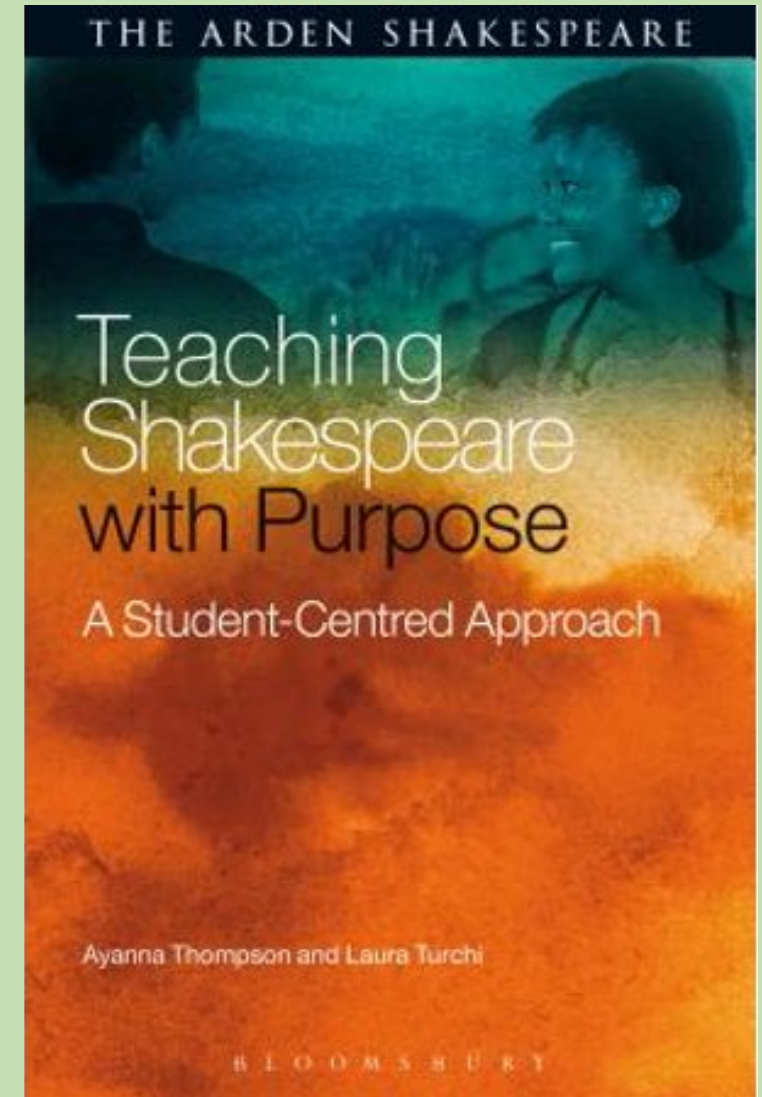
Mobilising Offence in/as Shakespeare Teaching – Example 2#

Where better to talk about complex identity issues than through complex texts? ... **[If we don't engage with 'complex identity issues']** rich differences among...students are ignored, thereby rendering those differences unmentionable and irrelevant. ...

Silence is never neutral with regard to difference. It communicates values, assumptions and hierarchies for race and social identity...

[T]he costs of silence and colour-blindness are experienced by all: not just by people of colour.

- Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (2016) 13, 74-5.



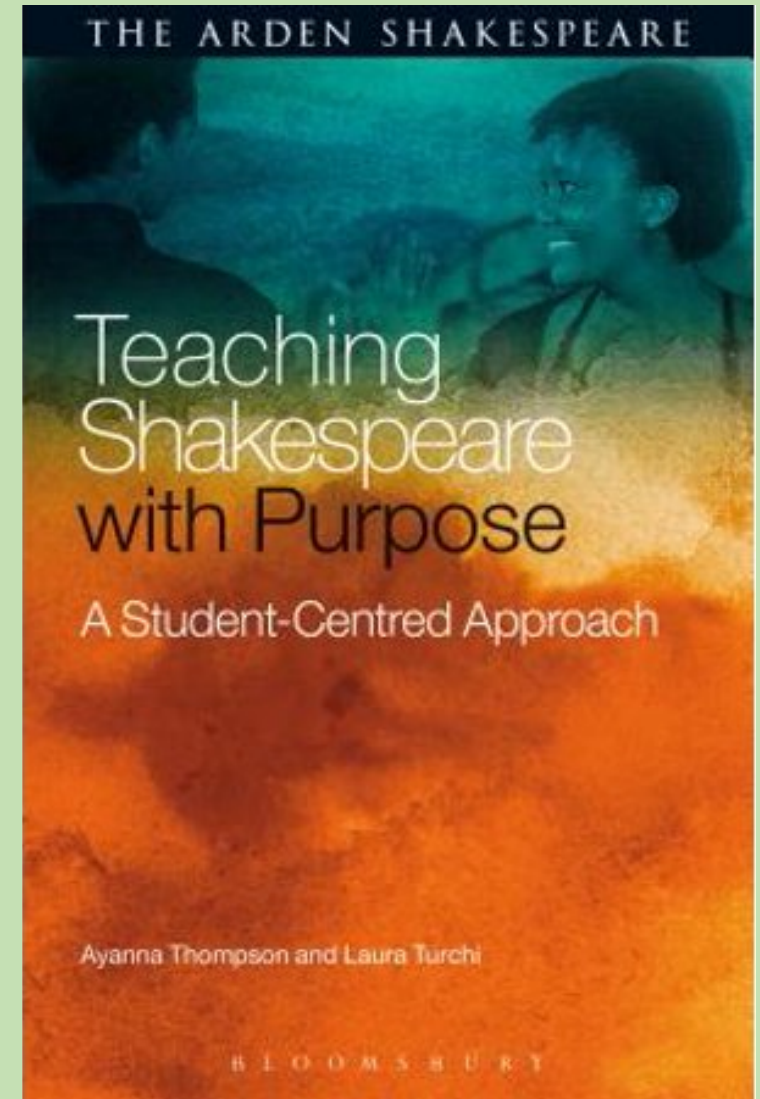
Mobilising Offence in/as Shakespeare Teaching – Example 2#

Shakespeare's plays may offer lines that some students are not willing to speak: ... 'As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear' ... **Students preparing scripts for classroom performance may be tempted to edit out or otherwise de-emphasize troubling lines.**

Teachers may want to point out that theatre companies, textbook editors and politicians have all edited Shakespeare for the same reason. Especially when one has to perform lines that are awkward [**or offensive?**] socio-politically, one may want to change the script. ...

Advanced learners should be granted the opportunity and authority to **edit Shakespeare** [**including by not doing Shakespeare?**], but they need to be held accountable for these decisions and all decisions must be subject to scrutiny [**by?**].

- Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (2016) 80-81.

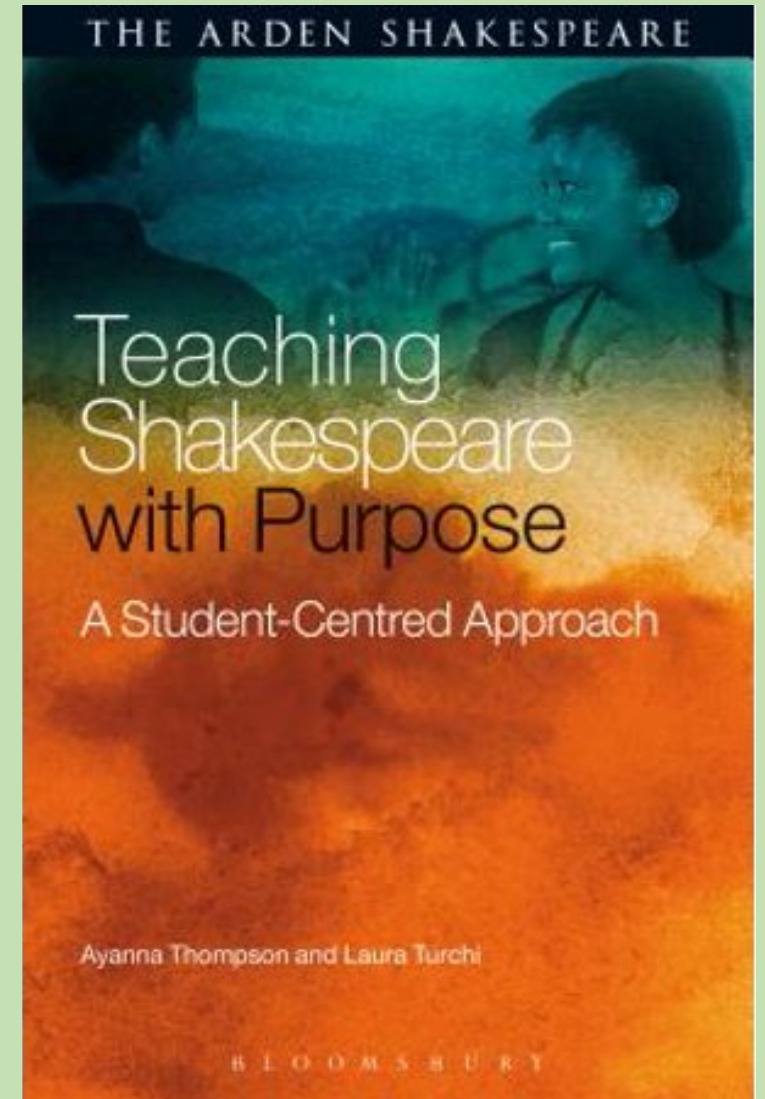


Mobilising Offence in/as Shakespeare Teaching – Example 2#

In a curriculum that pushes identity to the forefront of discussions about Shakespeare and performance there is **the potential for bad choices and significant discomfort**, and so we urge overarching principles of *direct talk* and *safe spaces*.

Teachers have a responsibility to let students know that the classroom is the place **to ask questions and make statements about race, gender, ability and sexuality [and class?]**...**without fear of censorship**. Even with this acknowledgement, neither the students nor the instructor should then believe that there is no **risk of offence** when one asks about or points out areas of tension. There will be tense moments because these conversations are not occurring elsewhere in our students' lives.

- Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (2016) 83.



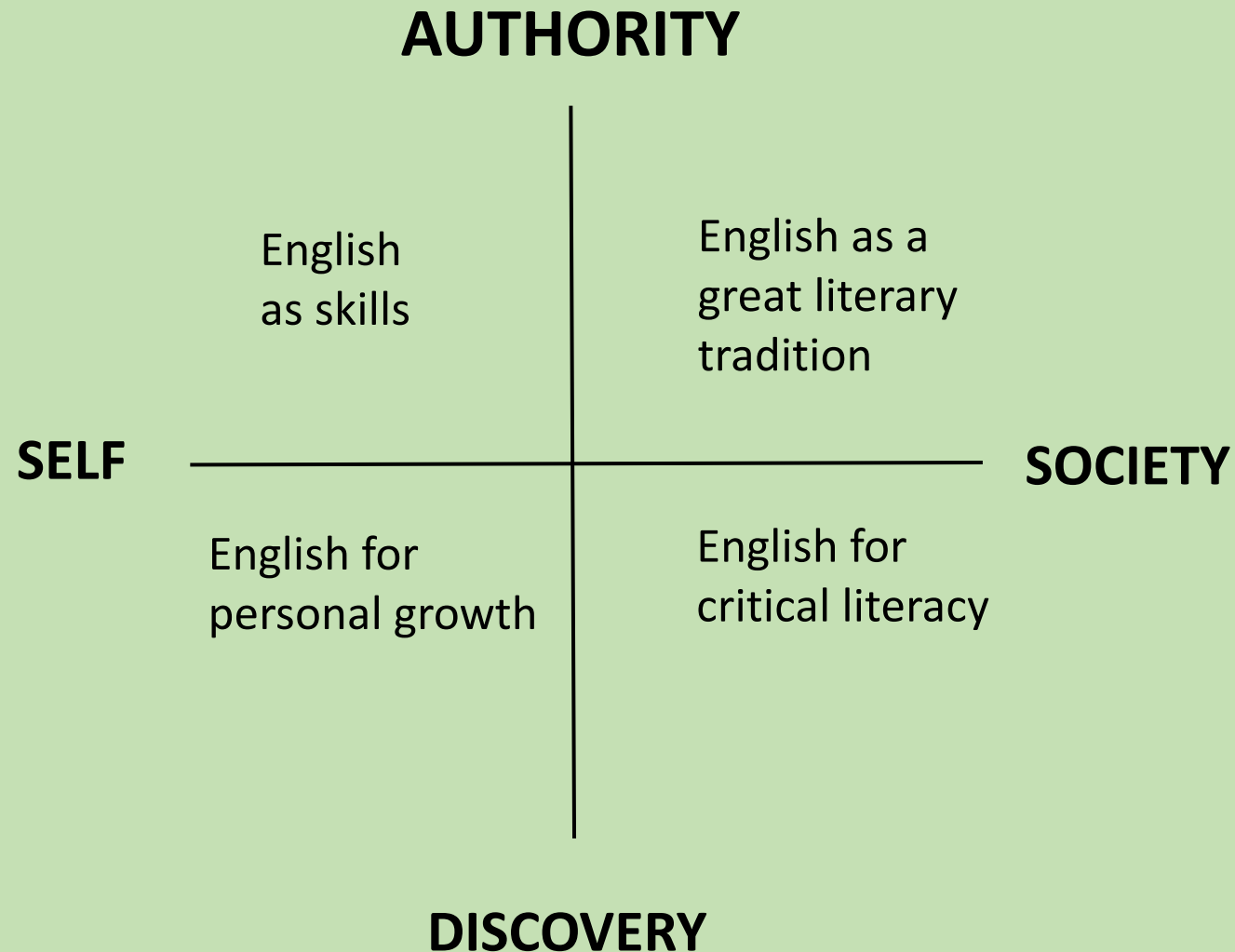
Someone saying something that may be offensive at the beginning of the semester, and then moving his or her thinking throughout the semester is OK...I do like to say...that there are going to be times when we all say something that offends somebody else and this [the seminar or class] is precisely the place where you should do it, because this is the place where we're meant to learn together.

- Ayanna Thompson in conversation with Laura Turchi, 'Shakespeare Teachers' Conversation: Teaching Anti-Racism through Shakespeare' (31 July 2020; convened by Gillian Woods, Birkbeck University)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=514eXyZ5kBo&feature=youtu.be>



Models of English

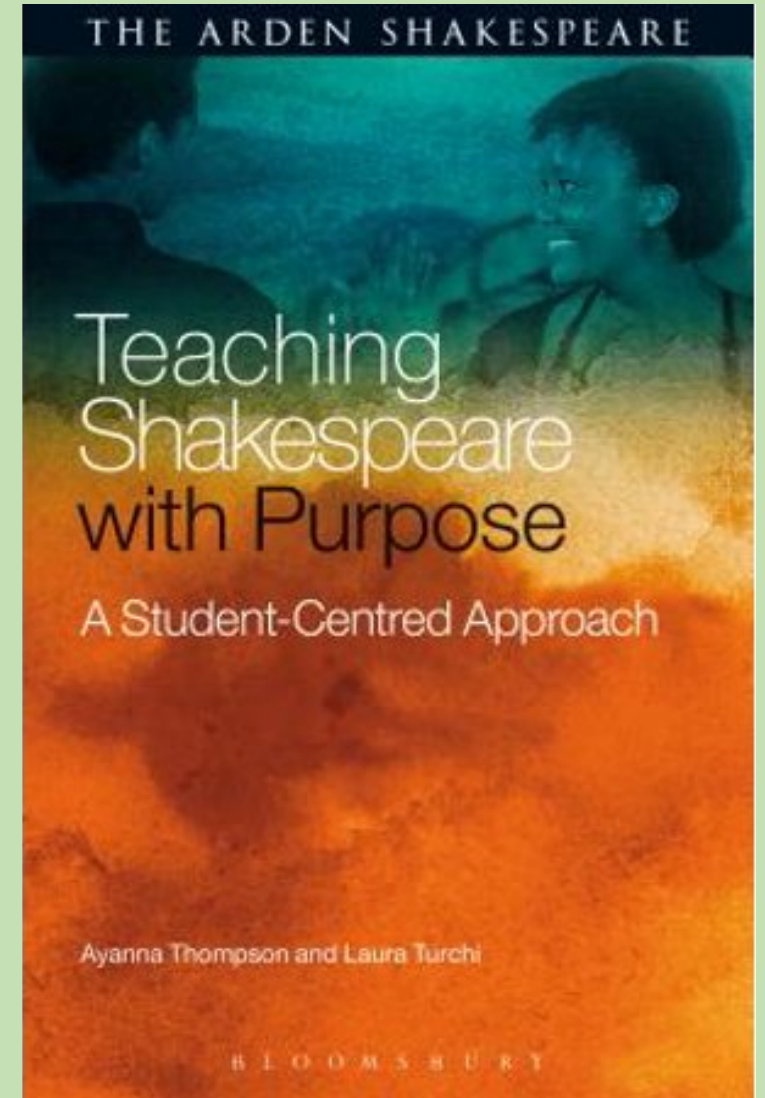
In *Learning English* (2007), eds. Neil Mercer, Joan Swann and Barbara Mayor, 154; adapted from S. Ball, A. Kenny, and D. Gardiner, 'Literacy, politics and the teaching of English', in *Bringing English to Order* (1990), 76.



Mobilising Offence in/as Shakespeare Teaching – Example 2#

All students need these skills to be prepared for university and employment in the twenty-first century...

- Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (2016) 7, 8, 13



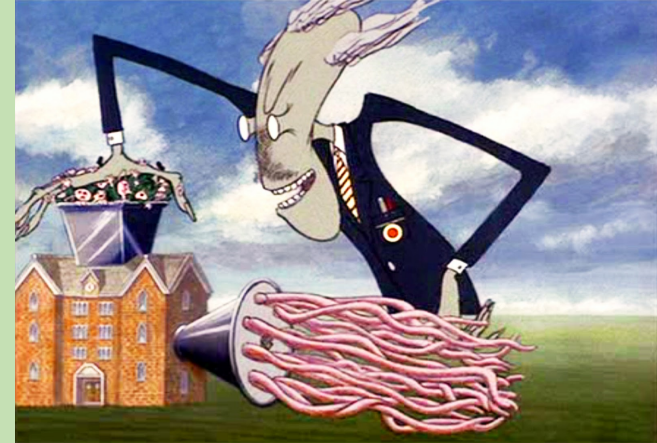
Offence and Employability: The Business Case

The higher education sector...needs to transform itself to remain relevant to the changing landscape. The focus of higher education needs to change from providing employability enhancements, to prepare learners into thinking, **complex problem-solving** and decision-making individuals. Based on current trends in the job market, some of the proposed enabling factors for the individual learner are as follows:

➤ Focus on judgement-driven skills: Preparing the student for complex-decision [sic] making by inculcating the softer aspects of the job requirements in the curriculum – **negotiation skills**, analytical thinking, complex problem-solving, **communication skills**, **people management and cognitive flexibility**

- Ernst and Young and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), *Future of jobs and its implications on Indian higher education* (India, November 2016), 6.

[http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-future-of-jobs-and-its-implication/\\$File/ey-future-of-jobs-and-its-implication.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-future-of-jobs-and-its-implication/$File/ey-future-of-jobs-and-its-implication.pdf)



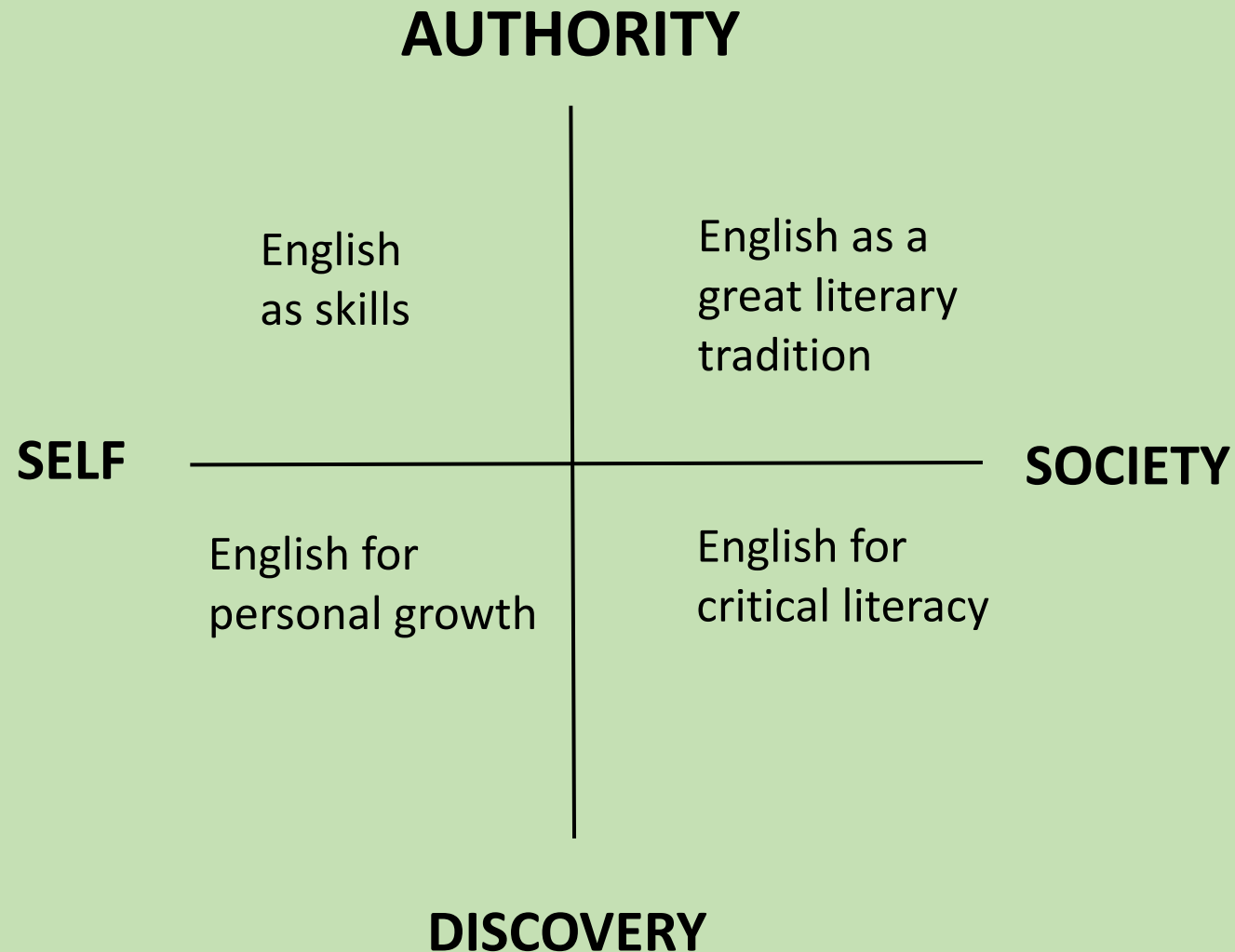
Higher education providers need to provide degrees with lasting value to their recipients. This will mean ... teaching students the **transferrable work readiness skills that businesses need**, including collaborative teamwork and the development of a positive work ethic, so that they can contribute more effectively to our efforts to boost the productivity of the UK economy. ... **employers need access to a pipeline of graduates with the skills they need...**

- UK Government, Department for Business Innovation & Skills, Green Paper on Higher Education *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (2015), 8, 11, 19.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/474266/BIS-15-623-fulfilling-our-potential-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice-accessible.pdf

Models of English

In *Learning English* (2007), eds. Neil Mercer, Joan Swann and Barbara Mayor, 154; adapted from S. Ball, A. Kenny, and D. Gardiner, 'Literacy, politics and the teaching of English', in *Bringing English to Order* (1990), 76.



The Citizen Scholar

A student who cares not only about gaining information and generating knowledge but one that is rooted in the reality of their context, problem oriented and interested in applying their knowledge for the betterment of society: **a student who is a Citizen Scholar.**

- James Arvanitakis and David J. Hornsby, 'Introduction', in *Universities, the Citizen Scholar and the Future of Higher Education*, eds. Arvanitakis and Hornsby (2016), 1-6, 1.

...universities need to inculcate a set of skills and cultural practices the educate students beyond their disciplinary knowledge...to improve the societies in which we live and foster citizens who can think outside of the box and innovate with the purpose of community betterment. ...

Critical thinking...Problem-solving...Reflexivity...Adaptability...

- Arvanitakis and Hornsby, 'Are Universities Redundant?', *Universities, the Citizen Scholar* 7-20, 11, 16-17.



Cultural humility >

a commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique...a desire to address and change power imbalances...the development of partnerships...**Might I be offending, or prying into someone's life...?**

- Milton Nomikoudis and Matthew Starr, 'Cultural Humility in Education and Work', *Universities, the Citizen Scholar* 69-84, 71-2, 76.

Many thanks!

Dr Adam Hansen

Northumbria University

adam.hansen@northumbria.ac.uk

Twitter: @ShakesClub

