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Mary Ann Rygiel.

SHAKESPEARE AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN.

Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English (U. S.), 1992.

135 pp.

Shakespeare will probably survive current attempts to purge the literary canon of overvalued, dead, white, European, male authors, but whether he can overcome the dazzle of popular electronic culture and the reluctance of teachers and students is quite another matter. Will Shakespeare become, like Aristophanes, a playwright of the ancient past — studied in departments of classics but rarely read or performed by adolescents? The purpose of Mary Ann Rygiel's book is to halt this slide into obscurity by bringing the Bard's plays to life in the secondary classroom.

Rygiel is only partly successful in her task. As a secondary teacher writing to her colleagues, she fills a gap in the literature by offering a book

chock-full of practical ideas for teaching Shakespeare to high school students. But the book is curiously uneven and, in the end, Rygiel's positive contributions are diminished by the presence of excessive attention to marginal concerns and the absence of ideas and information that might help teachers and students experience the plays as living theatre rather than cultural artifact. But let's start with what works.

The book is best used as a bibliographical resource for teachers who want to learn and teach about Shakespeare's historical period. Rygiel draws on a wide variety of contemporary scholarship and Elizabethan documents to create a picture of Shakespeare and his times. Teachers who make use of these accounts will help students overcome the distance imposed by Shakespeare's status as a cultural icon and allow them to see him as a real person enmeshed in the political, theatrical, and social realities of his day. Information that Rygiel supplies about such topics as court politics, spying, poisoning, duelling, and witchcraft helps to place the plays and the person in context. And, though factual details of Shakespeare's life are few, some of the fanciful speculations Rygiel recounts do give him a human face. That the greatest English playwright may have begun his show business career by holding playgoers' horses outside the theatre does make him seem less intimidating.

Another benefit of Rygiel's book is the wealth of exercises, assignments, and projects she suggests. Her rejection of traditional textual approaches to *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Hamlet* (the plays she focusses on), in favour of more creative activities, would certainly enliven the secondary school study of Shakespeare.

Unfortunately, the book has a thrown-together feel and could use a judicious revision, which suggests that Rygiel's publisher may be as much at fault as she is herself. For example, although they would support the text and help the reader, there are no reproductions of Quarto or Folio pages, no drawing of what the Globe Theatre might have looked like, no photographs of stage or film productions, no costume designs — in fact, no graphics at all. And though Rygiel makes more than one reference to Shakespeare's dedication of the 1609 Quarto of the sonnets, she does not include it. Yet, she provides a three-page list of various Elizabethan items and events and their cost.

There are other indications that the book could do with a thorough revision. For example, Rygiel devotes most of a chapter to a discussion of challenges to Shakespeare's authorship. This is no longer a serious scholarly question (if it ever was), and Rygiel's failure to cite published challenges is evidence of that. More troubling than this, however, is the short shrift given to available audio, video, and film resources that could help lift

Shakespeare off the page. Students can understand Elizabethan English much more easily when it is spoken than when it is written. Besides, with Mel Gibson as Hamlet, students may find the Bard more accessible. A similar lack exists in Rygiel's overly-brief treatment of Shakespearean performance. Although there are many excellent books and articles on theatre in the secondary classroom, Rygiel mentions nary a one, and her own advice is far too superficial to instill confidence in the neophyte teacher/director.

Finally, despite giving a full chapter (the first) to the question of literary theory and Shakespeare, Rygiel's grasp of current criticism is shaky. She suggests that deconstruction has "little practical application at the secondary school level" (p. 24), although she herself employs some of its methods, and she appears to equate reader-response approaches with evoking affective reactions to the plays and making them "relevant" to contemporary students (sample question: "What would Hamlet be preoccupied with if he were in your school today?" [p. 26]).

In Rygiel's words, "The aim of this book is to make some connections for teachers between Shakespeare and his historical context on the one hand and secondary students on the other" (p. 1). In this task she is only half successful. She does provide information and resources that will allow teachers and students to place Shakespeare in his lively times, but the book and the approach it recommends tend to overlook the playwright's powerful stories and the opportunities for theatre they provide. Moreover, too much of the book is taken up with fuzzy theory, an unnecessary discussion of authorship, and somewhat gimmicky attempts to make Shakespeare "relevant."

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**Cecille DePass, John L. McNeill, & Matthew Zachariah (Eds.).
NEW CHALLENGES FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION IN
CANADA IN THE NINETIES. CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL
EDUCATION, 20, 1991, Faculty of Education, The University of Calgary,
168 pp.**

This is the second issue of *Canadian and International Education* devoted to examining development education in the Canadian context. Both publications grew out of national workshops held at The University of Calgary and were designed to ". . . facilitate the ongoing interactive dialogue on issues, strategies, and outcomes of development education in