
Upstaged! Eunice Hanger and Shakespeare in Australia

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Early one April evening in 1950, in All Saints Hall, Brisbane, where we lay our scene, the Twelfth Night amateur theatre company put on its debut performance of *Upstage*, an original play by the company's dramatist, Eunice Hanger (1911–72), a Queensland-born teacher, playwright and Shakespeare enthusiast. As the curtain lifted and the audience settled into an expectant hush, a drawing room scene was revealed and a single female actor stood as still as a statue on the stage. What followed was an evening of Shakespearian drama—with a twist. The cast was comprised entirely of the bard's best loved female characters who, in a spirit of fun, were gathered together to elect a 'Miss Shakespeare'. Literary jokes abounded, but the play carried a more serious commentary concerning the position of women as actors in both the little (amateur) theatre movement and in Australian cultural life generally. This paper looks at how Eunice Hanger read, or rather reread, the works of William Shakespeare. Through this, it examines the nature of reading as a simultaneously social and individualistic activity, and reflects on its implications for understanding the histories of reading English writers in Australia more broadly.

Recent historiography on the reading of English writers by Australians has been largely preoccupied with the complex colonial context in which this took place.¹ Throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Australia was the biggest market for British book exports, hampering the development of an independent Australian industry.² As John McLaren argued, 'no part of society maintained the imperial pattern more consistently than publishers and booksellers who exploited an Australian market held captive by its distance from the sources of capital'.³

1 For an overview of approaches to reading history in Australia, see Patrick Buckridge, 'The Historiography of Reading in Australia', in *Modern Australian Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Carter (Qingdao: China Ocean University Press, 2010), 139–52.

2 Martyn Lyons, 'Britain's Largest Export Market', *A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 335–58; Brigid Magner, 'Anglo-Australian Relations in the Book Trade', *A History of the Book in Australia: Vol. 3, Paper Empires*, ed. Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2006), 10.

3 John McLaren, 'Publishing of the Book in Twentieth Century', *The Book in Australia: Essays Towards a Cultural & Social History*, ed. D. H. Borchardt and W. Korsop, Historical Bibliography Monograph, no. 16 (Melbourne: Australian Reference Publications in association with the Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, Monash University, 1988), 66. See also Graeme Johanson, *A Study of Colonial Editions in Australia 1843–1972* (Wellington: Elibank Press, 2000).

This went beyond the direct, physical presence of the texts, extending into an entire sociocultural apparatus encompassing everything from what was reviewed, promoted and disparaged in popular newspapers and literary magazines, to what was stocked in libraries or taught in schools or universities and how. Engagement with an English literary canon was an inherently politicised activity, one means by which English values and systems of meaning were assimilated and reproduced within an emerging Australian sense of national identity and cultural superstructure.

Perhaps the central figure in such a canon, Shakespeare's presence within colonial contexts was particularly politicised. Drawing impetus from postcolonial theory, much attention has focused on Shakespearean texts and their broader sociocultural apparatus (popular editions, textbooks, examination syllabi, official institutions and so on) as the visible traces of an insidious and ongoing British cultural imperialism.⁴ As the New Zealand Shakespearean scholar Michael Neill commented:

The decentering of Shakespeare has generally been more rhetorical than real. [T]he long and complicated history of Shakespeare's entanglement with Empire has ensured that (for better or worse) his work has become deeply constitutive of all of us for whom the world is (to a greater or lesser degree) shaped by the English language.⁵

While the cultural politics underpinning and infusing these texts undoubtedly provide a crucial optic through which to view the ideological nature of reading, this view can assume too uniform and stable a response to text from readers. As the Harvard literary scholar Leah Price observed, it risks overlooking significant tensions between the implied reader and the empirical audience.⁶ Furthermore, it does little to illuminate reading as an activity to examine how readers read, which, as Tim Dolin argued, is a localised practice characterised by trans-subjectivity.⁷

4 See Helen Gilbert and J. Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory Practice and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996); Marion Campbell and Philip Mead, eds, *Shakespeare's Books: Contemporary Politics and the Persistence of Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

5 Michael Neill, 'Post Colonial Shakespeare? Writing Away from the Centre', *Post Colonial Shakespeare*, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London: New York: Routledge, 2002), 164–85.

6 Leah Price, 'Reading: The State of the Discipline', *Book History* 7 (2004): 303–20. Patrick Buckridge also emphasises the multiplicity of approaches to reading history, saying: 'The word [reading] carries not one but three distinct meanings, and this fact has influenced the range of its disciplinary canons and methodologies. The first is "reading matter" (*what* people read); the second the activity of reading itself (*how* they read); and the third is the social institution of reading (in effect, *why* they read—as when we speak about "the value of reading" or wonder gloomily about "the future of reading")'. Buckridge, 'Historiography of Reading in Australia', 139.

7 Tim Dolin, 'Reading History and Literary History: Australian Perspectives', *Australian Common Reader*, June 2008, accessed 3 January 2016, www.australiancommonreader.com/?p=13. See also 'The Secret Reading Life of Us', in *Readers, Writers, Publishers: Essays and Poems*, ed. Brian Matthews (Sydney: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 2004), 115–34.

This is the position taken by Kate Flaherty in her innovative study *Ours as We Play It* (2011), in which she argued:

To conflate Shakespeare as a static icon of cultural imperialism with what the Shakespeare play has meant, can mean and will mean in performance is too broad a stroke of criticism to be of any real use.

She continued: 'It is feasible to see Shakespeare's plays operating in Australian culture not as an occupier of space but as a space of play'.⁸ As her study further explored, Shakespeare's plays were also a site of potential cultural resistance.

This paper follows Flaherty in seeing the reading of Shakespeare in twentieth-century Australia as a complex and negotiated activity, both reinforcing and challenging the wider social order in which it took place. It further contends that a biographical approach can offer a means of bridging macro and micro perspectives on the histories of reading by considering the individual reader as a point of intersection for converging, contending and coexisting contexts in which their reading took place. The uniqueness of the experience was derived from the specific configuration of social factors that framed it.⁹ By using Eunice Hanger as a lens, this paper approaches the reading of Shakespeare as an idiographic experience and one firmly embedded within the larger sociocultural ecology in which she was situated.

The paper first considers the position of William Shakespeare as a cultural figure in Australia. It then discusses how Eunice's reading habits were shaped by her early life and education, before examining the creative reappropriation of Shakespeare in her one-act play *Upstage*. It argues that Eunice's rereading of Shakespeare suggests a dualist relationship, one cast and oscillating between personal identification and socially critical subversion.

8 Kate Flaherty, *Ours as We Play It: Australia Plays Shakespeare* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2011), 20.

9 See Stephen Colclough, 'Readers: Books and Biography', *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Elliot and Jonathan Rose (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2011), 50–62.

Act 1: William Shakespeare in Australia

It is important to distinguish between Shakespeare the sixteenth-century playwright, and ‘Shakespeare’, the figure that literary critic Terry Eagleton described as:

Less an author than an apparatus—his name is merely metonymic for an entire politico-cultural formation and thus more akin to ‘Disney’ or ‘Rockefella’ than ‘Jane Smith’ ... The apparatus has long achieved autonomy of whatever individual gave rise to it in the first place.¹⁰

Both are equally ‘real’ in that they had, and continue to have, significant impact on global cultural history, but in all likelihood the man himself had little conscious intention or even ambition to become such a politicised symbol. Shakespeare was born in 1564. After several years as an actor, his career as the in-house playwright for the Globe Theatre took off in 1594. Like many of his contemporaries in the theatre, during his lifetime he lived mostly in obscurity, generally working collaboratively with actors and other writers, drawing inspiration from folk legends and historical epics, which he transformed in pieces of theatre.¹¹

The transition from man to myth began shortly after his death in 1616. In 1623, his plays were collected and published in the first folio at a time when the paper trade was in its infancy and a mass printing industry unimaginable. Such a collection was, therefore, rare and quickly became a prized object (a copy cost around £1—or over £95 in contemporary value). Recording the plays also ensured their continual performance and, as Gary Taylor noted, after actors came publishers, and after publishers came critics.¹² Shortly after the first folio appeared, a body of literary appreciation began to be published. For example, Ben Jonson wrote the eulogy to the first folio and John Milton’s ‘An Epitaph on the Dramaticke Poet W. Shakespeare’ (1630) later appeared as the frontispiece to the 1632 edition of the folio.¹³

This alone might have been enough to ensure his reputation as a historically significant writer, but Shakespeare’s fusion with English (often used interchangeably with British) national identity and political agendas further assured his prominence in English culture. Taylor further contends that Shakespeare’s fortunes were closely aligned with the fall and rise of the English monarchy. On reclaiming the throne

10 Terry Eagleton quoted in Graham Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare: Essays in the Shakespeare Myth* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 4.

11 For an overview of Shakespeare’s life, see: Peter Holland, ‘Shakespeare, William (1564–1616)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 10 January 2013, accessed 7 July 2015, www.oxforddnb.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/view/article/25200?docPos=1.

12 Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (London: Vintage, 1991), 13–30. See also Jack Lynch, *Becoming Shakespeare: The Unlikely Afterlife That Turned a Provincial Playwright into the Bard* (New York: Walker and Company, 2009).

13 John Milton, *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Stella P. Revard (Chicester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2009), 44.

and reinstating the monarchy, Charles II not only reopened the theatres, which had been closed for the duration of the Civil War and interregnum, but also promoted the playing of Shakespeare, a favourite of his executed father Charles I.¹⁴

The stage was set for Shakespeare's transformation into a national treasure; by the mid-eighteenth century, crowds were flocking to Stratford to glimpse the birthplace of the bard. In 1769 David Garrick, an actor and theatre manager, staged a Shakespeare jubilee attracting thousands. In the nineteenth century the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was formed to oversee and regulate a flourishing Shakespeare industry. By the twentieth century enthusiasm for Shakespeare and all his qualities remained unabated. In 1970 the Globe Theatre was reconstructed to include a tourist centre.¹⁵ In 1999, Shakespeare was voted the English 'person of the millennium'.¹⁶ Richard Foulkes, reflecting on Shakespeare in the age of empire, argued that the performance of Shakespeare's plays created a sense of British nationhood both at home and overseas in the colonies, owing in part to the numbers of British actors that travelled to the far reaches of empire.¹⁷ Arguably, however, the picture is even more complex.

Turning to Shakespeare's fortunes in Australia, one way of discerning something of his presence in Australian culture is to run his name through the search engine of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*). The *ADB* offers a useful research tool, albeit with limitations. As a national dictionary, entrants are chosen because they are judged to have made a notable contribution to Australian history. They are not, therefore, straightforwardly representative of the population as a whole. On the other hand, searching for references to 'William Shakespeare' within the entries is more than simply an exercise in cliometrics (counting the number of returns this yields); it offers an opportunity to situate readers within a thicker contextual background: age, location, occupation and the nature of engagement with the text.¹⁸ So, while the dictionary cannot be used in isolation to infer a nationwide pattern, it can indicate some avenues for further inquiry.¹⁹

14 Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, 13–30.

15 For a sustained critical analysis of the Shakespeare myth, see Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare*.

16 Kate Watson Smyth, 'Shakespeare Voted Greatest Briton', *Independent*, 2 January 1999.

17 Richard Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2002), 102–03.

18 See Katherine Bode, *Reading by Numbers: Recalibrating Literary History* (London: Anthem Press, 2012). Bode argues for the use of digital search tools for providing a much richer picture of reading as a localised activity. A useful point of comparison can be made here with the Reading Experience Database (RED) UK. First established by Simon Elliot in 1996, it was made an online resource in 2006. The database takes an expansive approach to popular reading experiences and the range of texts this included. It defines reading experience as: 'A recorded engagement with a written text—beyond the mere fact of possession'. Simon Elliot, 'The Reading Experience Database (RED), 1450–1945', RED Project, The Open University, accessed 15 December 2015, www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/. There are plans for an Australian equivalent of RED, see Patrick Buckridge, 'An Australian Reading Database 1788–', *The New Empiricism: eResearch and Australian Literary Culture*, ed. Katherine Bode and Robert Dixon (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009), 340–47.

19 See Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1999), 146. Moretti suggests that national dictionaries can provide a useful index for inquiry.

Shakespeare's name appears 197 times in the *ADB* corpus, including in the following entries:

Table 1: A selection of results returned after entering 'Shakespeare' into the *ADB* online search engine (listed in order of birth).²⁰

Name	Date/Location	Occupation	Context of Reference
William Gore Elliston	1798–1872 Hobart, Tasmania	Schoolmaster and editor	Gave public readings of Shakespeare
Barnett Levey	1798–1837 Sydney, New South Wales (NSW)	Merchant and theatre director	Performed in and directed Shakespearean plays
Sir Alfred Stephen	1802–94 Sydney, NSW	Chief justice and legislator	Regular diner at the Shakespeare Club, NSW
George Matcham Pitt	1814–96 Richmond, NSW	Stockman and station agent	Shakespeare was favourite author
John Howard Clark	1830–78 Adelaide, South Australia	Newspaper proprietor	Shakespeare was favourite author
Mary Fanny Cathcart	1833–80 Melbourne, Victoria (Vic.)	Actress	Performed in Shakespearean plays
George Hawkins Ievers	1845–1921 Melbourne, Vic.	Estate agent	Member of a Shakespeare Society
Marian Fleming Harwood	1846–1934 Sydney, NSW	Scholar	Wrote a book: <i>The Cult of Shakespeare in Sixteenth Century Germany to the Present</i>
Alexander Leeper	1848–1934 Melbourne, Vic.	Educationist	Organiser of a Shakespeare Society
Zina Beatrice Selwyn Cumbera-Stewart	1868–1956 Brisbane, Queensland	Community worker	Member of the Queensland Shakespeare Society
Thomas Henry Bath	1875–1956 Perth, Western Australia	Miner, politician, farmer, co-operator	Founded a Shakespeare Club
Gertrude Amy Roseby	1872–1971 Sydney, NSW	School headmistress	Inspiring teacher of Shakespeare
Enid Derham	1882–1941 Melbourne, Vic.	University lecturer and poet	Won the 'Shakespeare' Scholarship, University of Melbourne
Beatrice Mile	1902–73 Sydney, NSW	Bohemian rebel	Recited Shakespeare in the street (for money)
James Crawford	1908–73 Brisbane, Queensland	Journalist and playwright	Lectured on Shakespeare to fellow unemployed

²⁰ *Australian Dictionary of Biography online*, accessed 12 June 2015, adb.anu.edu.au/biographies/search/?scope=all&query=shakespeare&rs=&x=0&y=0. A word search using the term 'Shakespeare' turned up 217 results. Not all of these are connected with William Shakespeare the playwright; some are references to individuals with the same name or places presumably named after him. The table shows a selection of the results that directly refer to the man. While the choice of individuals named in this table was largely random, the entries included were selected to provide a reasonable reflection of the range of different relationships to Shakespeare. They also concentrated on figures who, while prominent in their own occupational fields or social spheres, were not popularly or widely known.

These results suggest a mixed picture. Shakespeare was irrefutably a figure of high culture, the height of dramatic achievement for actors and theatre directors such as Barnett Lovey and Mary Fanny Cathcart; a potent symbol of intellectual achievement for both scholars and students (Enid Derham, for example, or Marian Flemming Harwood); and a leisure pursuit for the well-to-do (a conversation topic between courses for Sir Alfred Stephen for example). Yet, when read closely, it is striking how his appeal crossed social, economic and cultural borders as he was beloved of bohemian rebel, stockman and educationalist alike. Also significant is how much of Shakespeare's cultural presence in Australia was mediated through unofficial means: though the formation of Shakespearean societies, as part of the life stories of individual actors or stage entrepreneurs and as the favoured private reading of individuals.

Richard Waterhouse has argued that, with regard to Shakespeare in Australia, the institutions of high culture were missing. There was, for example, no corollary of The Globe, or a national Shakespearean theatre company. Instead there was an aesthetic of high culture present in cultural discourse.²¹ The distinction is important. A discursive aesthetic is inherently more fluid than an institution that, from the bricks and mortar of its building to the rules and regulations of its administration, is defined by solidity. Shakespeare in Australia, then, was a malleable entity.

Situating this historically, Waterhouse argued that Shakespeare was initially far from an elite or scholarly figure. In early nineteenth-century Australia, theatre-going was a distinctly popular activity with the middle and upper classes staying away in disdain, finding both the audience, and actors, offensively crude. Furthermore, in early colonial popular culture there was a strong taste for melodrama that Shakespearean plays well satisfied.²² Waterhouse suggested that it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that Shakespeare was subject to sacralisation, part of a wider process of distinguishing between high and low culture unfolding across the British Empire. Like Foulkes, he acknowledged the contribution of British actors and touring theatre companies who travelled to Australia seeking fame and recognition, not always forthcoming at home, in effecting this change. He notes that the growth of an urban popular culture, including sports and a wider range of theatrical entertainment, not only gave people greater choice of leisure activity but also increasingly removed Shakespearean drama, or more accurately Shakespearean language, from everyday life. Shakespeare, once disdained as popular, was effectively claimed by the colonial upper classes as a symbol of a refined and educated taste.²³

21 Richard Waterhouse, 'High Culture and Low Culture: The Changing Role of Shakespeare in Australia 1833–2000', in *O Brave New World: Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage*, ed. J. Golder and R. Madeleine (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001), 29.

22 Waterhouse, 'High Culture and Low Culture', 21–22.

23 Waterhouse, 'High Culture and Low Culture', 24.

In the early twentieth century, the transformation of Shakespeare from popular to elite culture intensified. Here again actors and theatre managers aided this process. Allen Wilkie, a British-born Shakespearean actor-manager, was, on his arrival in Melbourne in 1916, astonished to find that very little Shakespeare had been performed in Australia for several generations.²⁴ Moved to address such an omission, he set up a theatre company specialising in Shakespeare, going on to tour the country in 1920 and enjoying moderate, but not overwhelming, success. For all his efforts and ambition, Shakespeare remained without an institutional base, and with little funding available to support productions. As Penny Gay observed, the big Shakespearian productions of the early twentieth century were still put on by touring British companies, the most iconic of which was the 1948 Old Vic tour, which starred theatrical heavyweights (and the then-married couple) Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh.²⁵ Importantly, Gay noted, Shakespeare enjoyed more domestic success in the little theatre movement, which, from the 1930s, staged regular performances of his plays, suggesting a sufficient base of home-grown interest and talent. This prompted John Alden, the actor and theatre manager, to found the Australian National Professional Theatre Company in 1948, which embarked on a Jubilee Shakespeare tour in 1952.

Outside the theatre though, Shakespeare had a strong presence in Australian educational spheres. The late nineteenth century saw a mushrooming of Shakespeare societies, often publishing their own dedicated journals. He was also a regular subject of public lectures and a firm fixture in scholarly culture and educational practice. Yet much of this was discretionary. As Linzy Brady observed, in both the British and Australian schools of the early nineteenth century, Shakespeare was not initially a compulsory requirement but what she termed a form of ‘domestic didacticism’.²⁶ Adaptations of Shakespearean plays such as Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) were designed as attractive inducements for young readers rather than as texts to be formally studied. It was only following the introduction in Britain of public examinations in 1858 and the *Education Act 1870* that a shift occurred towards a more standardised model of educational provision that included Shakespeare on curricula and examination syllabuses. Even then, she argued, there remained a critical tension between the austere Shakespeare of the examinations and the more creative Shakespeare often taught in the classroom.²⁷

24 John Rickard, ‘Wilkie, Allan (1878–1970)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wilkie-allan-9096/text16039, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 7 July 2015.

25 Penny Gay, ‘International Glamour or Homegrown Entertainment?’ in J. Golder and R. Madeleine, *O Brave New World*, 180–99.

26 Implying a teaching tool that was not part of a formal national syllabus but a personal, private choice made by individual teachers.

27 Linzy Brady, ‘From Domestic Didacticism to National Compulsory Examination’, in *Teaching Shakespeare Beyond the Centre: Australasian Perspectives*, ed. Kate Flaherty, Penny Gay and L. E. Semler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10–13.

Shakespeare in Australia was a man of many parts. By the mid-twentieth century he remained an icon of a high English culture, a mark of a cultural refinement and a thorough English-language education. Yet the comparative lack of an institutionalised national presence meant that he also retained a degree of flexibility, having an equally, if not more, dynamic existence among independent readers, societies and amateur theatre groups.

Act 2: Eunice Hanger and William Shakespeare

Shakespeare was, then, an iconic cultural figure in Australia no less than in England. But how did our heroine, Eunice, encounter him? Eunice Hanger was born in Rockhampton, Queensland, in 1911, the third child of Thomas and Mfanwy Hanger both of whom were schoolteachers.²⁸ In his youth, Thomas, the son of a Rockhampton wheelwright, had been a bright student but his family's poverty had forced him to discontinue his studies and train as a pupil-teacher. He went on to a successful educational career culminating in his becoming headmaster of Gympie High School. These early restrictions fostered in him a deep value for education, in particular in literature and the arts, which he passed on to his five children, of whom Eunice and her brother Mostyn (later Sir Mostyn Hanger, a prominent Australian judge)²⁹ both won scholarships to study at university.

Eunice received a BA at the University of Queensland in 1932, later adding an MA (1940), both in the liberal arts. She joined the staff at Gympie High School in 1933, transferring to Rockhampton High School in 1940 and Brisbane High School in 1948. As a teacher Eunice was popular, and even acclaimed as outstanding. While at Brisbane High she joined a local theatre group, Twelfth Night, which began to stage some of her first plays along with adaptations of a number of authors including Shakespeare. As a director she was renowned for favouring the 'walk and talk' school of practice and for concentrating on the correct use of language in performances. Her first major success as a playwright in the little theatre movement came when *Upstage* was first performed in 1950. In this one-act comedy, Eunice protested against a lack of strong female roles in Australian amateur theatre, deliberately writing for an all-female cast and bringing together a collection of Shakespeare's best-loved heroines ostensibly to elect a 'Miss Shakespeare'. In 1958 Eunice was appointed lecturer in drama at the University of Queensland where she revitalised the University Staff Players and was the first to make production a compulsory

28 Richard Fotheringham, 'Eunice Hanger 1911–1972', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hanger-eunice-10407, published first in hardcopy 1996, accessed online 7 July 2015.

29 M. W. D. White, 'Hanger, Sir Mostyn (1908–1980)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hanger-sir-mostyn-10408/text18445, published first in hardcopy 1996, accessed online 7 July 2015.

component of senior undergraduate renaissance theatre studies. In later life Eunice became known as a critic of the three-act realist drama, which she saw as dominating Australian theatre, and as a champion of Australian-born playwrights whose work she collected to the end of her life in 1972 (her collection is stored in the University of Queensland library).

What can this tell us about the kind of reader Eunice was? She was brought up in an environment that valued literature, the bright daughter of schoolteachers, a scholarship-winning student who studied for two degrees in the arts, and a teacher who then deciphered and disseminated her own learning to her students. She would, therefore, have had her initial reading of Shakespeare guided by teachers and lecturers, and her appreciation of his works assessed through the medium of examinations and essays. An early example of her work as a cultivated student of Shakespeare is her prizewinning essay 'The Charm of Shakespeare', published in a local newspaper when she was 17 and still a student at Gympie High School. The praise for her subject flowed, uncritical in its acceptance of his importance: Shakespeare is a 'great man', his melody is 'faultless', his verse 'full of beauties'.³⁰ As a teacher she was responsible for conveying and framing the appreciation of Shakespeare, instructing, guiding and assessing her students' literary appreciation of his works. As an actor-director heavily involved in amateur theatre, she was renowned for enforcing the correct use of Shakespearian language and stagecraft.

So far, Eunice appears as a well-educated, middle-class woman, successfully inducted into an Anglicised intellectual literary and artistic culture that, in her professional roles, she contributed towards reproducing and consolidating. At the same time, Eunice's background was more complex than simply that of the diligent student turned able teacher. Her life (1911–72) spanned a period of dramatic national change, throughout which Australia was renegotiating its relationship with Britain and its position as an independent nation in the world. The breakdown of the empire and the decline of Britain's position on the world stage had further cultural ramifications. Compared with the vibrancy and novelty offered by a youthful America and the glamour of Hollywood, traditional English culture appeared weary and outdated. Furthermore, for Western European and English-speaking nations, the mid-twentieth century was a period in which seemingly settled social conventions on class, ethnicity and gender were subject to question. The burgeoning women's movement was a major strand of this challenge, both in its focus on making women visible and in terms of the larger social critique advanced by some of its components. The creative arts offered important, more accessible, spaces for the expression and development of new ideas.

30 Eunice Hanger, 'The Charm of Shakespeare', *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 29 July 1928, 26.

In Eunice's specific family background, an important crucible in forming her attitudes was her father Thomas Hanger. His intellectual ambitions had been denied by poverty, giving him firsthand experience of, and a critical perspective on, social inequity, something he was determined to address in his professional life. The social mobility he had achieved, from pupil-teacher to headmaster, had come through his own efforts. When he read for a bachelor of arts at age 40 (1914, University of Queensland), he did so by correspondence, completing his assignments without direct supervision. As a thinker, Thomas was accustomed to being self-directed and driven. Despite enjoying a more consistent education than her father, Eunice also had direct encounters with inequality. While she and her brother were scholarship winners, Mostyn's achievements facilitated a high-profile career in the law, culminating in his appointment as a High Court judge. In her chosen professions, education and the dramatic arts, Eunice did not advance to leading roles, instead enjoying more modest successes. This might have been simply the result of their different ambitions and aptitudes but, undeniably, it would have been harder for Eunice as a woman to advance in quite the same way as her brother.

Nevertheless, it seems that she had acquired the family streak of independence in her thinking and reading habits. Returning to her youthful essay, 'The Charm of Shakespeare', alongside the enthusiasm of a high achieving schoolgirl for a literary icon, Eunice gave a more substantial hint of why Shakespeare was important to her: 'He gets exactly the right word from his abundant vocabulary and puts his idea just as he wants to put it'. She concluded: 'his power is infinite and infinitely valued, and probably to each reader means a different thing'.³¹ Eunice's bard was neither static nor exclusive; the root of his power lay in his use of language as a tool to vividly create and convey ideas. Social and family contexts were not alone in framing Eunice's perspectives—her Queensland location was also significant. Unlike the more populous cities of Sydney and Melbourne, both of which boasted established arts and theatre infrastructure, 1950s Brisbane did not have as extensive a theatrical culture. This would suggest that it was comparatively less accustomed, and thus less hospitable, to more experimental forms of drama, which tend to develop in response to dominant forms. The city was visited by the Old Vic 1948 tour, but on a truncated program. Alden's jubilee Shakespeare tour (1952) also briefly ventured north. Before the visit, he felt it necessary to explain the populist elements of Shakespeare to prospective Queensland audiences, presumably seeking to pre-empt cynicism or even hostility to Shakespeare as 'high culture' among the northerners.³²

Eunice shared something of this preference for Shakespeare as the people's playwright of his times. Her long-standing appreciation of Shakespearian language made her sceptical about the realist reinterpretations increasingly attractive to British

31 Hanger, 'The Charm of Shakespeare'.

32 Richard Fotheringham, 'Shakespeare in Queensland', in J. Golder and R. Madeleine, *O Brave New World*, 223.

companies during this time. In 1935 Laurence Olivier, one of the foremost actors of his generation, appeared in a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*.³³ He initially played Romeo, before swapping with director and fellow actor John Gielgud to play Mercutio in the second half of the run. Critical responses to the two performances were mixed. Olivier was seen as the more passionate and virile Romeo, but Gielgud was considered the more competent with Shakespeare's verse. Despite such reservations, Olivier continued to 'sell realism in Shakespeare'.³⁴ His *Hamlet* (1936) was deemed 'magnetic' and 'full of vitality', but lacking the linguistic grasp of the role's previous incumbent, Gielgud.³⁵ Undeterred, Olivier agreed to play Iago in *Othello* (1938). Much to the discomfort of Ralph Richardson, who kept his depiction of the Moor more orthodox, Olivier's Iago simmered with unexpressed sexual desire.³⁶ Turning what may have started as a professional weakness into a theatrical style, Olivier opened the door to a new approach to Shakespearian acting: 'un-patrician, muscular and anti-romantic', redolent with underlying class tensions.³⁷

During the Old Vic tour, Australian audiences had the chance to witness this firsthand, with Olivier taking the lead in *Richard III*. As in Britain, the performance prompted a mixed response, some critics lamenting the 'naturalistic' style and calling for a straightforward 'Australian' approach to Shakespearian performance.³⁸ In this case, 'Australian' style did not mean translating fair Verona into an outback setting and Romeo into a bushranger, but having Shakespeare as they liked him, back to basics, with linguistic proficiency favoured over the dramatic licence. As Waterhouse noted, the lack of an Australian national Shakespearian theatre company reinforced the dependency on touring British companies or reliance on localised amateur productions, unable to command the sort of prestige or financial support of a national body.³⁹ Eunice was among those sceptics. Conversely, this can be read as a conservative response from someone taught to understand and hold 'Shakespeare' in an elevated cultural position. In the twentieth century, Shakespearian language presented the major barrier to popular receptivity of his plays.⁴⁰ On the other hand, as she had written when still a teenager, Eunice saw language as integral to the conveyance of ideas, and responding to them was the personal prerogative of the reader. While playing Shakespeare always involved an act of interpretation, it was the actor's responsibility to restrict their interpretations to the perimeters set

33 Directed by John Gielgud at the New Theatre, 1935.

34 Richard Eyre, 'Laurence Olivier: The Most Revolutionary Actor of His Age', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 September 2007, accessed 23 January 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3667981/Laurence-Olivier-the-most-revolutionary-actor-of-his-age.html.

35 Ivor Brown, 'Hamlet in Full', *Observer*, 10 January 1937, 15; 'The Old Vic', *Times*, 8 January 1937, 10.

36 Directed by Tyrone Guthrie with the Old Vic Theatre Company, 1938.

37 Eyre, 'Laurence Olivier: The Most Revolutionary Actor of His Age'.

38 Richard Waterhouse, 'Lola Montez and High Culture: The Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Post-War Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies* 21, no. 52 (1997): 148–58.

39 Waterhouse, 'High Culture and Low Culture', 29.

40 Waterhouse, 'High Culture and Low Culture', 24.

by language. The realist renditions offered by the likes of Olivier added an extra interpretive layer that could strain the textual content too far and even diminish its importance. This put the individual actor, and not the language and the ideas, to the fore of the performance. The audience, then, were being asked to respond to a Shakespearian play as well as a British actor's personal reading. For the forthright actor-director, performing Shakespeare demanded a faithfulness to the text—it was not the time for theatrical egotism. The impact of these convergent contexts for Eunice was a combined enthusiasm for education, literature and the arts but at the same time an independent mind and confidence in her capacity to challenge them. As an individual reader she harboured an appreciative but not uncritical mind. So, how were these formative experiences and learning environments brought to bear on her adult reading of Shakespeare?

Act 3: Upstage

One way of further gauging how Eunice interpreted Shakespeare is to consider how she used Shakespeare, appropriating and transforming the texts she had read into a different form. Her short comedy *Upstage* provides such an insight.⁴¹ The play was first performed by the Twelfth Night theatre group in Brisbane in April 1950 when Eunice, aged around 39, was firmly established in her teaching career and had a number of acting and directing credits to her name. It was written, in part, as a protest against the lack of substantial female parts in the little theatre movement that, ironically, was heavily weighted in favour of women who typically made up 80 per cent of group membership.⁴² The young Eunice had written effusively of her favourite Shakespearian heroines as 'charming, loveable women—the two Portias, Desdemona, Cordelia, Olivia, Viola and Juliet',⁴³ and she revisited many of them in *Upstage* with a cast including: Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1594), Desdemona (*Othello*, 1604), Ophelia (*Hamlet*, 1600), Cressida (*Troilus and Cressida*, 1601), Portia 1 (*Julius Caesar*, 1599), Rosalind (*As You Like It*, 1599), Viola (*Twelfth Night*, 1599), Imogen (*Cymbeline*, 1609) and Portia 2 (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1596).⁴⁴ The women were to be dressed in contemporary clothing, while the language moved between Shakespearian English, taken directly from the plays, and 1950s vernacular.

41 Eunice Hanger, *Upstage: A Comedy in One Act* (London: Samuel French, 1952).

42 Fotheringham, 'Shakespeare in Queensland', 226.

43 Hanger, 'The Charm of Shakespeare'.

44 Chronology taken from: Amanda Mabillard, 'The Chronology of Shakespeare's Plays', Shakespeare Online, 20 August 2000, accessed 11 June 2015, www.shakespeare-online.com/keydates/playchron.html. It should be acknowledged that the dates are approximate and relate to the first performances of these plays. It cannot be said with certainty exactly when they were first written.

The play is set in the ‘other world drawing room’ of William Shakespeare in which the women, summoned by the bard himself, gossip and bicker among themselves. It is later revealed that they are to be contestants in the first round of a ‘Miss Shakespeare’ competition, with further rounds, featuring other heroines, to be held later. This made a reference to the popularity of the 1950s beauty pageant, one stage on which women were allowed a presence, if not a voice or much of a personality. *Upstage* is defined by subversiveness. Eunice could have written a play with an all-female cast without reference to Shakespeare, but by drawing upon the iconic figure in English literature, she made her critique from within the same theatrical and literary culture that contributed to the restriction of women’s participation in amateur dramatics in the first place. However, although working from the inside, she chose to use Shakespeare’s characters in a discrete form rather than attempt a feminist reinterpretation of a Shakespearean play. Eunice reinforced her point by extracting and making use of a tension contained within Shakespeare’s own portrayals of women. She juxtaposed Shakespeare’s clever, cross-dressing heroines Viola, Rosalind, Portia 2 and Imogen who, as she directed in the notes preceding and introducing the characters’ entries, were to appear dressed in slacks, with his classic tragic heroines including Juliet, Ophelia, Portia 1 and Desdemona directed to wear evening gowns. The play took up what one character referred to as ‘the prehistoric argument of women’s rights’⁴⁵ as the women debated the advantages and disadvantages of the two modes of femininity represented:

Viola: The boyish figure is the only thing nowadays.

Rosalind: *And* the outlook that goes with it, frank, outspoken—the sporting type.

Juliet: And glamour? ... There was a wave of this flat-chested, outspokenness you mention, it was merely a passing fashion, and nowadays it’s glamour you want.

Desdemona: And the outlook that goes with that.

Portia 1: Men really like you to admire them you know.⁴⁶

In resuming ‘the prehistoric argument of women’s rights’, Eunice placed Shakespearean drama in direct dialogue with contending representations of femininity in early 1950s cinematic culture that were also constructed and expressed through clothing and persona. The superstar female icons of the 1940s and 1950s showed a range of contrasting, but in many respects equally idealised, modes of femininity and female power. Stars such as Marilyn Monroe, Rita Hayworth and Grace Kelly projected images of beauty and goodness or, alternatively, glamour and smouldering sensuality. On film they were cast as either objects of male adoration and desire, or as temptresses distracting the hero from his true love or proper calling. Off-screen, their lives were no less romantic and dramatic. In 1949 Hayworth caused controversy by marrying

45 Hanger, *Upstage*, 21.

46 Hanger, *Upstage*, 19.

a prince and Kelly would later become the Princess of Monaco. Monroe too, despite studying for a degree in literature and art appreciation, was better known for her bombshell looks, tangled love life and tragic end.

There was, however, an alternative mode of female heroism on offer, best represented by the feisty, savvy Katharine Hepburn, who was regularly seen playing strong, articulate female characters, often dressed in trousers. In 1949 she appeared with Spencer Tracy (her real-life partner) in *Adam's Rib*, a story of two married lawyers opposing each other in court, prompting a battle of wits in a bid to win the case. In 1950, she appeared as Rosalind in a production of *As You Like It*, staged in New York's Cort Theatre, playing to full audiences for 148 consecutive shows.⁴⁷ Hepburn, the daughter of progressive parents, was herself an athletic and outspoken modern woman, risking her career with her public condemnation of the anti-communist movement. She lived much of her life independently, refusing to conform to the demands of the Hollywood publicity machine.⁴⁸ The cinematic culture of the early 1950s, then, offered two distinctive visions of femininity, one seemingly hyper-feminised, the other drawing upon qualities more traditionally associated with men. The effect of the latter was, arguably, not to transform women into men, but to create an ambiguous or transient space. In many respects, the androgynous qualities displayed by a figure like Hepburn anticipated, albeit tentatively, a key aesthetic in the subsequent 1960s countercultural revolution and in strands of the emerging feminist movement.

Shakespeare too had written in a context in which notions of gender were a prominent feature in the collective consciousness. He was, after all, the quintessential Elizabethan writer with all of his major works appearing in the decades following the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588) and Queen Elizabeth I's dramatic transformation into a female war leader. This was also a period in which bodily issues (or lack of) were prominent for other reasons. By the 1590s, there was no hope that Elizabeth, then in her sixties, would produce an heir, leaving uncertain the fate of England after her death. Despite, or perhaps because of, this uncertainty, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were a fertile period in literature and the arts, with much of what is commonly associated with Elizabethan culture produced during this time.⁴⁹ To this extent, both the 1590s and the 1950s can be seen as compressing into their cultural forms some consciousness of, and response to, challenges and impending changes to existing social and political structures.

47 In 1955 Hepburn toured Australia with the Old Vic theatre company playing in a number of Shakespeare's comedies, including portraying Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*.

48 Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: Star as Feminist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

49 For example Edmund Spenser, Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe.

In terms of how this was manifested in Shakespeare's plays, while characters like Puck (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1595) showed a playfulness with gendered characteristics as a fairy or sprite, even a boy one, he is rarely manly in a conventional sense. *Merchant of Venice* (1596) was the first to make this device central to the plot and to focus it on a human woman rather than a supernatural being. Portia's cleverness as Balthazar, the young man of the law, provides the play's climax that, despite being described as a comedy, contains intensely dramatic moments, not least in Portia's famous speech concerning 'the quality of mercy'. *As You Like It* (1599) and *Twelfth Night* (1599) followed shortly after and, here again, disguise permitted the women to perform important roles and to address male characters on an equitable footing, something not as evident among Shakespeare's other female characters.⁵⁰ In *Cymbeline* (1609), written and performed six years after the Queen's death and James I's coronation in 1603, Imogen's disguise as Fidele does not have the same narrative significance, nor she the same dramatic presence, of the earlier examples.

Eunice's preferred mode of femininity is made clear. *Upstage* gives an explicit advantage to the slacks-wearers. For example Imogen, referred to as an 'accidental' slacks-wearer, remarks, 'girls in slacks are strong-minded, they take their futures into their own hands', implying that women in this mode (and this apparel) could carry, even command, a story alongside their male counterparts. The play also has the slacks-wearers, led by Portia 2, the first and most audacious of the slacks-wearers, doing the most to disrupt protocol, interrupting speeches, refusing formalities and, as the stage directions firmly instruct, laughing frequently, even mockingly, at the use of Shakespearian language. By contrast, the girls in gowns see their futures as inextricably interwoven with their corresponding males, often resulting in a tragic demise, as Desdemona sighs dismally: 'Yes, it's a man's world and when your man doesn't want you anymore, or when he's dead, you might as well be dead'.⁵¹ Without a man, then, female presence on the stage was not only unnecessary, but also impossible. Reinforcing this, the gown-wearers chastise the slacks-wearers for their disrespectful behaviour. Here it is Juliet—perhaps Shakespeare's most iconic tragic-romantic heroine and, supposedly, the epitome of childlike innocence and femininity—who takes the role as instigator. The somewhat cynical depiction of Juliet in the play further reveals something of Eunice's position. Far from innocent, she is presented as acutely conscious of the sexual power contained within her form of femininity and wields this as a tool to achieve what she wants (see Juliet quote above). In this sense, the debate is more about the most effective form of femininity for the manipulation of men than it is about the mode most empowering for women.

50 This is not to imply that other of Shakespeare's females do not have strong roles *as females*. Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*, 1606), Beatrice (*Much Ado About Nothing*, 1598) and Kate (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 1590) all have strong characters and powerful speeches but these are often framed in a combative mode, as a form of inter-gender sparring rather than as a reciprocal conversation.

51 Hanger, *Upstage*, 16.

The action comes to a climax when Portia 2 and Juliet go head-to-head over Romeo who, it is revealed, has been secretly courting Portia 2 on the side. Portia 2 argues that instead of coquetry and misery, she has offered him ‘frank honest friendship as well as love’.⁵² This time, however, the clever noblewoman is not triumphant. Juliet reveals that she knows that in *The Merchant of Venice* Portia 2 deliberately selected the song that played in the background as Bassanio, her would-be lover, was forced to choose a bride by casket lottery. Her shrewd choice of song (‘Tell me, where is fancy bred’) stirred memories that prompted him to correctly pick out the casket that bore her name. This is the secret that Juliet threatens to reveal to ‘Will’ (Shakespeare) who, we are told, thought the song ‘a happy accident’ (in the actual play the episode is indeed left ambiguous⁵³) and did not suspect Portia’s sleight of hand. That Portia 2 is horrified by Juliet’s threat and gives up Romeo to her rival to protect her secret makes two suggestions: that the playwright himself would not be happy to learn that such female cleverness and subterfuge had been used against him and also that, for Eunice, subversion could go only so far. It could not amount to total defiance.

This was not the only jibe to be levelled at the great bard, and more particularly his elevated position in literary culture. Not only is his name consistently shortened to the informal and familiar ‘Will’, there are numerous innuendos to his own lack of fidelity to his wife Anne Hathaway, his slovenly habits as a writer and his tendency to waste his money at *The Mermaid* tavern.⁵⁴

The characters also discuss the trajectory of his career knowingly, for example:

Juliet: Did it work out alright?

Imogen: Perfectly Juliet. I had a happy ending. I belong to the last period.

Portia 2: I don’t. I had a happy ending but we middle period girls worked for it. I consider I earned my happiness.⁵⁵

This discussion develops into literary critique. Portia 1 (the loyal wife of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*), a gown wearer, argues that the cleverness, comedy and happy endings of the slacks-wearer’s plays are ‘common place’, ‘potboilers’, and a product of Shakespeare’s later period when he was past his best.⁵⁶ It is, she continues (perhaps to articulate the views of a dominant literary establishment), the tragedies that really matter. This the slacks-wearers reject in a storm of animated protest with Viola claiming to have the best poetry, Rosalind the best prose and Portia 2 the best

52 Hanger, *Upstage*, 31.

53 William Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, Act 3, scene 2.

54 Hanger, *Upstage*, 24.

55 Hanger, *Upstage*, 14.

56 Hanger, *Upstage*, 18. Here it must be assumed that she is referring to *As You Like It* (1599) and *Twelfth Night* (1599), as *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) appeared before *Julius Caesar* (1599), *Hamlet* (1600) and *Othello* (1604), although not before *Romeo and Juliet* (1594).

laughs, all significant advances on the heavy-handedness of the tragedies. As Imogen says: 'There's quite as much thinking in comedy as in tragedy you know', to which Portia 2 adds (one suspects with pointed meaning): 'And more social criticism'.⁵⁷

The most telling critique of all comes at the very end of the play when the imminent arrival of the man himself is announced, although he is never actually seen. This is done through the full quotation of Milton's 'Epitaph on Shakespeare' (1630) which begins with the lines:

What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones?
The labour of an age in piled stones?
Or that his hallowed relics be hid
Under a starry pyramid.⁵⁸

In this poem, Milton, writing in the first half of the seventeenth century, was concerned to honour Shakespeare and elevate him to the position of literary deity beyond mere 'mortal monuments'. Yet, albeit unwittingly, the epitaph also offers an alternative reading, one that appears to anticipate and critique something of the 'bardolatry' that was to follow. The poem goes on: 'Then that our fancy of itself bereaving, does make us marble with too much conceiving'. This line addresses the dangers of idolisation that risked paralysing, or turning to marble, the receptivity of what Shakespeare did best—writing and staging plays. The closing lines further reinforce this: 'That kings for such a tomb would wish to die'. A king who prefers death and an elegant monument rather than life and action is not a good leader of people. The choice of Milton's epitaph is a powerful and revealing conclusion to the play. Given that Eunice was an experienced teacher of the liberal arts, it is unlikely that it can be seen as anything other than a deliberate, expressive choice.

While subversion was the play's dominant mode, like Portia 2 it stopped short of total defiance. The humour depended largely on caricature that required an in-depth knowledge of a character's essential dramatic traits, playfully parodied but fundamentally respected. In the play, Ophelia is frequently made to exclaim 'oh yes I'm *dying* to hear it' or 'I'd have gone simply *mad*'.⁵⁹ Lady Macbeth is suitably bloodthirsty, Imogen artless and Portia 2 quick-witted; all are captured with precision according to type, enhanced by a skilful interweaving of direct lines and speeches from the plays into the otherwise 1950s vernacular dialogue. This obvious expertise applied not only to the plays but also extended to the biographical-historical context of Shakespeare the man, to subsequent scholarly critique of Shakespeare-the-myth and to Shakespeare's presence in contemporary theatre and cinematic culture, such as Olivier's film version of *Hamlet*, released in 1948. Through these layers of intertextual reference, *Upstage* demonstrated a thorough knowledge not only of Shakespeare but also of the whole discursive and performative apparatus surrounding him.

57 Hanger, *Upstage*, 18.

58 John Milton, 'Epitaph on William Shakespeare' (1630).

59 Hanger, *Upstage*, 12, 14.

However, the most important aspect of *Upstage*, was that it retained a comedic outlook and did not tip over into satire. As a literary strategy, comedy may play with and subvert norms; it may, as Imogen and Portia 2 acknowledge, be critical, suggesting the need to look at a situation and laugh at its silliness or irrationality. But the general mood is redemptive rather than the bitter, cynical humour of satire. The reader or viewer can laugh along with the hapless protagonists, knowing that with each disaster they will pick themselves up, dust themselves down and, hopefully, learn a lesson. They may even triumph in the end. While *Upstage* teased at the reverence placed upon the bard, it did so affectionately, never dismissing him out of hand. Arguably, the purpose here was to act as a corrective to the rereading of Milton's epigraph, the warning that idolisation obscured what Shakespeare really was: the player's playwright, who wrote robust stories for a wide audience. For Eunice, with her passion for his rich use of language, in which was encoded all manner of human experiences, this was the Shakespeare she wished to reclaim for women actors.

Epilogue

What can be drawn from Eunice's rereading of William Shakespeare? From a young age her disposition as a reader was shaped by two combining and contending modes: receptive and critical. She brought these to bear on her reading of Shakespeare, encountering him both as a rich intellectual resource and also as part of a dominant literary and theatrical culture that provided women with limited opportunities to participate. In her rereading of Shakespeare, she utilised his literary status but also subverted it to make her point. At the same time, as a playwright and actor, she demonstrated a deep knowledge of and appreciation for his work. In this way, Shakespeare was at once a teacher-mentor and a point of critical departure for Eunice and the young women of the Twelfth Night amateur drama group.

Eunice Hanger was one individual and it is not wise to extrapolate her experiences to all Australian readers of Shakespeare. What she demonstrates is the complexity experienced by Australians encountering English writers and the extent to which reading was a continually negotiated and localised activity. These writers and their works were inscribed with loaded messages of power relations but they were also sources of intellectual and emotional stimulus, addressing large and abiding human questions. Reading could be both, and almost simultaneously, a restrictive and emancipatory activity, shaped by and struggling between multiple, overlapping sociocultural, political and personal contexts. In Eunice's case, the struggle had a relatively happy ending. Moving deftly between inspiration, appreciation and critique, she used Shakespeare as a platform to forge a space for her own voice, contributing, as she did so, to a wider process of cultural challenge and social change.

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