

Folio

M.Litt./MFA
FALL 2004



MASTER OF LETTERS/MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN SHAKESPEARE AND RENAISSANCE LITERATURE IN PERFORMANCE
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SHENANDOAH SHAKESPEARE



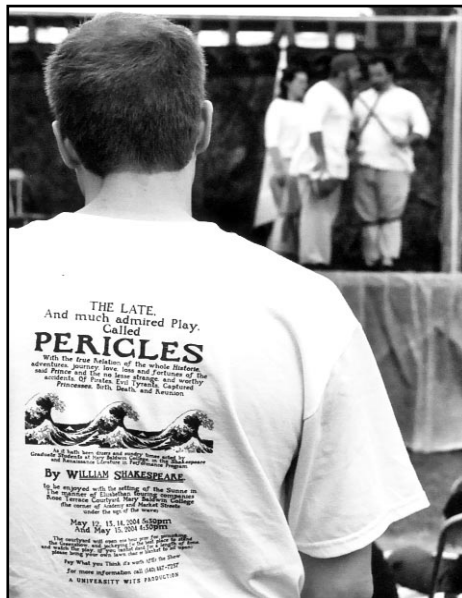
THE UNIVERSITY WITS PRESENT PERICLES

BY MEGAN McDONOUGH, GRADUATE ASSISTANT AND MFA STUDENT

Produced by University Wits, the graduate student organization at Mary Baldwin College, *Pericles* delivered pirates, princesses, and plenty of iambic pentameter. *Pericles* is Shakespeare's fairy tale, following Prince *Pericles'* adventures across the sea as he encounters riddles, love, loss, and some of the most beautiful language ever written.

The play was directed by M.Litt. student Colleen Sullivan with original music by M.Litt. students Dorene Fisher and Angie Barbera. Because it is not included in Shakespeare's *First Folio*, *Pericles* has long been considered a troublesome text. Sullivan edited her own version of the script and documented the journey as her M.Litt. thesis project. Other M.Litt. theses found their way into the production as well. Fisher's original music and Jenna Steigerwalt's curtains and curtain frames also represented their master's level scholarship. The cast was made up entirely of M.Litt.

students (save one significant other) and starred first-year students Jason Narvy as *Pericles*, Laura Flanagan as Thaisa, Sarah Henley as Marina, and Lesley Larsen as Gower.



The students sold t-shirts to help with fundraising.

The University Wits production of *Pericles* was the culmination of a year of intense discussion and collaboration. Beginning with nothing save determination to produce a full-length production based on original staging practices, the University Wits even built the very stage they performed on. The group decided to invest in building an outdoor platform, in the fashion of Elizabethan touring companies, that could take advantage of the beautiful outdoor courtyard at Rose Terrace and could be dismantled and reassembled for years to come.

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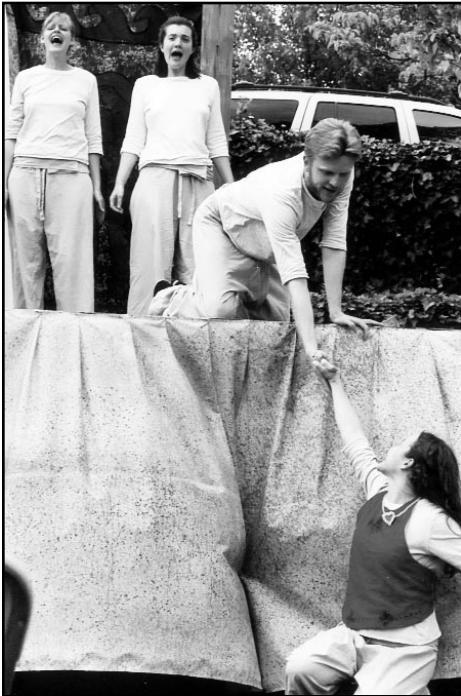
For information about applying to the M. Litt./MFA in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance, contact: Jill Keister, Mary Baldwin College, Office of Graduate Admissions, Staunton, VA 24401
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RECORD ENROLLMENT — AGAIN

Enrollment continues to boom for the M.Litt./MFA program that was begun just three years ago and offered in partnership with Shenandoah Shakespeare. The 52 students enrolled this year include 17 newcomers, as well as the program's first international student — a scholar from England — and seven who will pursue a master of fine arts. Two of the first three students to earn their master of fine arts were rewarded with a ceremonial hooding by actress Dame Judi Dench at the May Commencement. Frank R. Southerington, director of the program and professor of English, said admissions for the program have quickly become very selective, with applicants from around the country.

DRAMATURGE JOINS M.LITT/MFA FACULTY

Through the invaluable efforts of M.Litt./MFA students, the Wits raised over \$3,000 for the stage, costumes, paint, and props, all of which will be retained by the group for future productions. The new stage consists of nine individual platforms that can be rearranged to suit the needs of any project, and the curtains and curtain frame are also fully adaptable.



Jason Narvy, as *Pericles*, reaches out to Laura Flanagan, *Thaisa*.

The production used over 70 yards of fabric and seven 8-foot poles to create the various atmospheres of each scene and incorporated the absolute minimum number of props, reusing almost every piece. In the spirit of an Elizabethan touring troupe, the base costumes allow the actors to easily slip into different roles simply by adding a costume piece. The base costumes, together with the separate pieces, serve to highlight the language of the play. Above all, the language of *Pericles* dictates every decision of the production. While the University Wits production of *Pericles*, like the play itself, is the conclusion of a long journey, the production is only the beginning of a long and prosperous marriage of scholarship and practical stagecraft.

Dr. Jacquelyn Bessell, or “Jaq” to those who know her, has joined the ranks of M.Litt./MFA as its newest full-time professor. With her vivid red hair, easy smile, and Audrey Hepburn style, she brings a fresh and young eye to an equally young program.

“She’s a charmer — young, bright, enthusiastic, and very engaged in what she does,” said Michelle Whytal, administrative assistant for the M.Litt./MFA program.

Bessell, raised in England, earned her B.A. in English language and literature from the University of Birmingham, England. She went on to earn her master’s in English and her Ph.D. in dramaturgy and dramatic



Jacquelyn Bessell

literature from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.

She comes to Mary Baldwin from the University of Utah Department of Theatre where she was an assistant professor in the Actor Training Program. Prior to that, she was an acting coach at the British Institute for Chinese Martial Arts. She coached national champion wushu artists and gymnasts in acting for theatre and film. She also served as resident acting coach for the institute’s summer program of classes for stuntmen and

women. Bessell even worked at Shakespeare’s Globe in London where she was the head of research.

Bessell will teach Advanced Acting, Design and Choreography, and a colloquium on acting and directing during the 2004–05 academic year.



IAGO & FRANK

BY LAURA FLANAGAN,
M.LITT. STUDENT

Before I was accepted into the program, Frank Southerington called me for a telephone interview. I learned two very important things over the phone: One, that you can distract Frank indefinitely by dropping the name “Iago;” two, that students are able to create their own opportunities for theater. I can attest to that! From *Hamlet* to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wits’ End*, *Pericles*, *Macbeth*, bunches of scenework ... I wouldn’t know what to do with my spare time if I had any.

The best part about the constant activity is that I’ve been able to combine my classwork with my stagecraft. Audience interaction seems so obvious once you’ve experimented with it and felt the energetic response. Now that I’ve been in three plays at the same time, I have the highest respect for Elizabethan actors. There is a world of difference between learning something in a classroom and learning through firsthand experience. I’ve been lucky to have both.

WHAT’S UP FOR THE UNIVERSITY WITS

— IN —

2004–2005

SEPTEMBER 24, 25
24-Hour Theatre Project

OCTOBER 10
Dramaturgy Workshop

NOVEMBER 7
Staged Reading of *Duchess of Malfi*

DECEMBER 7 – 12
Mainstage: *King John*
Directed by Mark Mannette

JANUARY 25 – 30
Wits’ End New Play Festival

MID-FEBRUARY
Women’s Play Festival
Events TBA

MARCH 13
Audition Workshop

APRIL 3
Theatre Criticism Workshop

MAY 10 – 15
Mainstage: *The Winter’s Tale*
Directed by Jeremy Fiebig



WORKING WITH GILES BLOCK AT THE GLOBE

BY CATHY BROOKSHIRE MFA '04

From the beginning, Mary Baldwin College's Master of Letters/Master of Fine Arts in Literature and Shakespeare in Performance has provided students with unique, top caliber experiences; both in the scholarly world of the academic and the pragmatic world of live theatre. The program offers us not only numerous opportunities to study and train with many of the world's top Shakespearean scholars and practitioners, but, as you will see below, to prepare and present our own work on the international stage.

As a member of the first class of Mary Baldwin's new M.Litt./MFA program, I went from serving as a volunteer and eager onlooker of the first Blackfriars Playhouse Conference to presenting my first paper to an international crowd of Shakespearean experts at the 2003 conference. The program introduced me to numerous renowned scholars and theatrical artists such as Andrew Gurr, Dr. Frank Hildy, Tom Berger, David Glass, Tiffany Stern, Drew Frasier, Jan Powell, and Mark Rylance. On the pragmatic side of the equation, I was the first M.Litt. dramaturge for the Blackfriars Playhouse serving in that capacity for both the resident company's production of *King Lear* and the touring company's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

The cap to all my firsts, however, occurred this summer when, as a brand new MFA graduate, I served as the first master intern to Giles Block, Master of the Word at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. While there, I worked text analysis and performed research for *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Measure for Measure*. I participated in David Glass' workshop on original pronunciation with the cast of *Romeo and Juliet*. I also choreographed three falls for two members of the *Much Ado About Nothing* cast, and was part of the team that worked the move of all three productions from the outdoor Globe

to Hampton Court. This extraordinary adventure came about in a way that no other program could make possible.

In 2002 I participated in several master classes at MBC on text analysis led by guest lecturer Giles Block. This was Block's first visit to MBC, and many of us were fascinated by his singular approach to text; one which combined the scholarly approach to text we had been studying for two



The Globe Theatre, London

years with a professional director's eye toward the needs of the Shakespearean actor. Those master classes merely served to whet my appetite for a clearer understanding of Block's work, and I decided to find a way to study further with him.

I contacted him through Judy Cohen, assistant director of the office of International Programs at James Madison University. Although he was busy in Japan at the time directing a production, Block looked over my resume and letter of interest, exchanged several lengthy e-mails with me about the level of my work, and finally, in the late winter of 2003, agreed to have me work with him on the 2004 London Globe season. My training at MBC was immediately put to the test. Block had me perform extensive research on the clothing of the Poor Claires as he prepared for the Globe's production of *Measure for Measure*. During the winter, summer, and fall of 2003, he and I remained in close e-mail contact discussing textual issues on all three Globe productions.

May 1, I arrived in London in the evening to chilly weather and a typically overcast sky. May 3, I visited the Globe for the first time to see their annual William Poel Festival. This turned out to be the perfect introduction to what would be my home for the next three months.

Simon Callow introduced this year's festival. Dozens of young actors from drama programs throughout the United Kingdom performed scenes from Shakespeare on the Globe stage throughout the day. The Globe was packed, and the audience was cheerful and receptive. The day ended with an inspiring address by actor/artistic director Mark Rylance. Seeing the enthusiasm with which these young actors tackled Shakespeare in a space designed specifically for his work was the perfect way to begin my internship at the Globe.

Thus began an event-filled three months as I attended individual and group text sessions as well as daily rehearsals with all three casts. I often spent 12-hour days at the Globe doing research for Block, exploring obscure passages in the texts with the actors and directors, and attending music, dance, and technical rehearsals.

Thanks to my training at Mary Baldwin, I was not only an eager onlooker to the creation of world-class theatre, I was also a valued contributor. I left London at the end of July with a greater understanding of Shakespearean text, original staging, costuming, and pronunciation practices, as well as material for several articles. My internship has also helped me to make numerous invaluable contacts on the international level. I urge all M.Litt./MFA students to take full advantage of the unique opportunities to study our craft that Mary Baldwin provides. Our program's blending of the academic with the pragmatic prepares us for work in a way no other program makes possible.

LIVING SHAKESPEARE: VISITING SCHOLAR ENCOURAGES EMOTION

BY DAWN MEDLEY

If you want to impress Tina Packer with your acting, you're going to have to put soul into the lines you're reading from Shakespeare.

The words might sound way too exaggerated, your voice could crack or give out by straining to convey the extreme emotion, and it might not be pretty — at least the first time through — but if you're trying, really trying, to understand what you're saying instead of just saying it, Packer's round, genuine smile will let you know you've got it.

Students in Mary Baldwin College's unique Shakespeare studies program saw Packer's smile often during her intensive, two-week residency at the college this past spring.

Packer's training at the Royal Shakespeare Company, her work as an actor, director and teacher, and her initiative to create Shakespeare & Company — one of the country's most successful performance and educational troupes — “made Shakespeare really belong, for the first time, as much to women as it does to men,” said Ralph Cohen, MBC professor of English and executive director and co-founder of Shenandoah Shakespeare.

“She changed the way people think about Shakespeare theatre directors and producers,” he added.

Working with students in the advanced acting class of the master's



Tina Packer

program, Packer encouraged them to overact, to move wildly, to breathe, to think about the words — anything to make them feel as if they are living the bard's plays, not simply acting in them.

Packer tried out one of her favorite exercises with the students at the

speech, breathless and grinning, he was rewarded: “OK, that's better. Can you feel the difference?”

After a round of monologues, students massaged their faces, their jaws, and their necks, and exercised their voices with a series of moans and groans, forcing them to be uninhibited.

The draw of notable Shakespeare scholars and teachers like Packer gets notice from students.

“She's the reason I took this class,” said Angie Barbera, a student in the program.

Mary Baldwin students directly experienced Packer's teaching and directing prowess, but she is also an accomplished actor, producer, and author. Her second book is a tool for young readers entitled *Tales from Shakespeare*; she also co-wrote *Power Plays: Shakespeare's Lessons in Leadership and Management*.

Still, she is modest about her long-lasting influence on students like those at MBC.

“The only thing I can do is to hope to give them the experience of speaking Shakespeare with their whole bodies so that they really feel and embody the words,” she said.

“To make Shakespeare live in the present, you only have that one moment to connect with the audience. The audience gets it or they don't get it. I want to show the students how to perform it so their audience gets it.”

Dawn Medley is the assistant director of communication for Mary Baldwin's Office of Communication, Marketing, and Public Affairs



Packer works with students in the Blackfriars Playhouse.

beginning of their second week with her: She instructed them to pause and think at the end of each line in the monologues they chose.

“Breathe, Rick. Breathe,” she prompted student Rick Blunt while he worked on a scene from *Henry IV Part I*. His baritone voice boomed from the balcony of downtown Staunton's Blackfriars Playhouse, the only authentic re-creation of Shakespeare's indoor theatre.

Packer's robust British accent answered from the stage: “Breathe and think,” she paused for his line and repeated with increasing urgency. “Breathe and think!”

When Blunt reached the end of the



MFA GRAD TELLS ALL

BY NANCY BEALL, MFA '04

When I show friends the Blackfriars Playhouse, I proudly point out the plaque on the bench at the actors' entrance announcing a gift from the first M.Litt. class at Mary Baldwin College: Nancy, Laura, Cathy, and Brian. A year later, three of us soldiered on to receive our MFA (the fourth chose a slower route). We were lucky enough to actually meet Dame Judi Dench at our graduation this last May of 2004. One of the original overseers of Shenandoah Shakespeare, she had been planning to come to Staunton since Shenandoah Shakespeare first arrived. Yes, she is as kind, lovely, and charismatic as you can imagine.

Why were we all three ladies of a

certain age from Harrisonburg? Cathy Brookshire already was teaching theatre at James Madison University, had her own young company that put on Shakespeare plays for high schools, and wanted her MFA.

I moved here with my family in the summer of 1996 from northern California — only a four hour drive from Ashland, Oregon. We were accustomed to a high-quality Shakespeare fix at least once a year. When we were considering Harrisonburg as a place to relocate, a Shenandoah Shakespeare Express banner caught my eye, assuring me that the Bard had followed us back East. I became an SSE groupie, took a graduate course at JMU taught by co-

founder Ralph Cohen, and leapt at the chance to join the Board of Trustees. Thus I was fortunate enough to be in on the renaming of SSE to S2, the move from the 'Burg to Staunton, and to finally a graduate course which suited my interests and skills.

The third pioneer of this fine program of "Master of Fine Arts in Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature in Performance," Laura Dansby, was my colleague in community theatre. She just happened to visit on me during that first week when I had gone to orientation but not yet started classes. She was enrolled before the day was through. We are all pleased to have completed this adventure "because we still can."



"HAVE PATIENCE, AND ENDURE"

BY ANNE PLEISS, M.LITT. STUDENT

By joining the M.Litt./MFA program within its first five years, we take on the responsibility of establishing the program's reputation. While it is an exciting opportunity, it is also, like most responsibilities, hard work. Like all graduate students, we must prove ourselves to our instructors and peers. This fledgling program, however, also requires us to work alongside these judges to create a program known for its academic and artistic excellence.

This work is made more difficult by numerous distractions — movies, shopping, parties, cleaning toilets. Even the most mundane tasks draw us from our studies and delay that paper one more day.

One idea, however, should always call us back to the books. In the words of Aretha Franklin, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T." Three types of respect should motivate our studies — respect for the text, respect for ourselves, and respect for others.

Respect for the text is something each of us possesses; otherwise, we would not be here. I do not have to

tell you that the text deserves the best reading, the best analysis, or the best performance. We are here because we understand the genius of the text and want to undergo training to improve our treatment of the cannon.

We owe it to ourselves to nurture this desire. After all, we did not come to Staunton to shop or go to movies; we could have done that without writing out a tuition check to Mary Baldwin. We saw how this unique program could fit our individual interests, and we wanted to take part in the amazing opportunities the program offers. We need to make the most of our experience by participating fully in those academic and artistic opportunities that come our way.

But with every great opportunity comes a catch. Everyone in the program sacrificed something to get here: Time with family and friends, a city you loved, a job you loved, a regular paycheck. Most of the sacrifices we made affected more than just ourselves; the program is full of

unsung heroes — parents, spouses, significant others, children, and friends who are making sacrifices along with each of us. I do not know about anyone else, but those people are my greatest motivation. I want to make sure that each lonely night, lean paycheck, and holiday spent apart are worth it.

When my fiancé and I parted last summer, Ben told me, "Do your best." On those days in the last year when fatigue, loneliness, and laziness told me to give up, Ben's voice saying "Do your best" drew me back to my office.

We all have our Bens — people who respected us enough to let us pursue our love of the text, people who expect to see us make the most of our time here, and people who deserve to see our best work come to fruition. I propose that we all work together to make certain that each paper, performance, and lesson that comes out of this program fosters a positive reputation. A reputation that will, in time, make our collective sacrifices worth the undertaking.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
ACT IV, SCENE I

VISITING FACULTY

Leaders in the world of theatre are once again coming to Mary Baldwin's Shakespeare program to share their knowledge and expertise. Among the visiting faculty is JP Scheidler, the resident fight director for Shenandoah Shakespeare. He is a certified teacher with the Society of American Fight Directors and has taken master classes with Bill Irwin, Rip Torn, Barry Lubin, Marco Luli, and at the Laban/Bartenieff Institute. JP will be teaching a theatre movement class.



JP Scheidler



Kate Burke

Kate Burke, associate professor of voice and speech and head of performance in the University of Virginia Department of Drama, will teach the Acting, Voice, and Accent class. A member of Actor's Equity Association, some of her acting credits include roles at the American Conservatory Theatre, the American Repertory Theatre, the Iowa Playwrights Festival, the Barksdale Theatre, and Ft. Worth Shakespeare in the Park.

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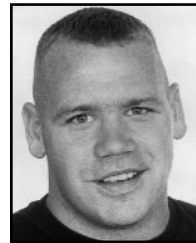
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FROM JOCK TO THESPIAN: RICK BLUNT

Why did Rick Blunt decide that Shakespeare was the way to go? His sisters told him. "I always knew it was cool — my sisters told me so." Oh, and the fact that he fell in love with Juliet.

This jock, who played football, tennis, and wrestling, and majored in history at the University of St. Francis in Illinois, remembers the poignant moments when he realized that theatre, and more specifically Shakespeare, was what he wanted to do. The first was sparked when a touring troupe came to town to perform *Romeo and Juliet*. Not only did he fall in love with Juliet, he remembers the troupe bringing the audience into the performance — Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, perhaps?

His other pivotal moment was when he was watching a performance and one of the characters was having such difficulty untying a rope to tie up another actor. The other actor improvised to help cover. Watching



Rick Blunt

this moment gave Rick his outlook on acting, "Don't be afraid of what goes wrong."

This desire to not be afraid led him to play Boris in *You Can't Take it With You* and then Christopher Sly in *Taming of the Shrew*. He's been in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* three times, twice as Bottom and once he had the opportunity to play Wall with Shenandoah Shakespeare — a unusual occurrence for students. His goals are to get his M.Litt. and MFA in acting and become an acting coach.

His advice for students interested in the program is to remember that this is a young program; it's still a work in progress. But, because it is so new, students will have the opportunity to be part of the creative process as well as benefit from more personal attention. Also, if you're interested in being a part of the program, come and see Staunton, come and see Shenandoah Shakespeare. Get to know the community, meet Frank Southerington (director of the program and MBC English professor) and Ralph Cohen (co-founder of Shenandoah Shakespeare and MBC professor).

OLD SPACE, NEW USE FOR M.LITT.

Neal Sansovich is thrilled. As owner of the Masonic Building in downtown Staunton he couldn't have better tenants to rent out the Masonic Temple on the top floor. "It's wonderful to have the sound of students using the space creatively. I didn't want to have to break up the temple and overdevelop it. This is definitely a win-win situation."

Built in 1896, the Masonic Building was

originally home to the Freemasons. Its temple or lodge — on the fifth floor of the historic site — is encased in stained glass, fluted columns, and has a Greek Revival interior, according to Sansovich. The building, rumored to be haunted, is now home to the University Wits and No Shame Theatre.

The University Wits is the M.Litt. student-formed group of troubadours and will be using the space for rehearsals and performances. No Shame Theatre, founded by Todd Ristau, assistant professor of theatre at MBC, will also be using the space for performances.

No Shame and the Wits will be in good company — Shenandoah Shakespeare's new offices are located on the floor below.



Masonic Building is located at 13 West Beverley Street.