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**RESTORATIVE THEATRE:
Using Performance To Support Alternative Approaches To Justice**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Giulianna Lucia Marchese

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Abstract

RESTORATIVE THEATRE: Using Performance To Support Alternative Approaches To Justice

By Julianna Lucia Marchese

Restorative Justice is a process that brings together victims and offenders of crime in dialogue to create consensus around what happened and how it can be made right. Based on the framework of restorative justice and the model for achieving it, two prison theatre programs (Carceral Shakespeare and the New Jersey Prison Theater Cooperative) achieve some aspects of restorative justice for both offenders and the community. I use two criteria to demonstrate this: (1) Does sharing their story through this play, performance, or arts program have a restorative effect for the offender or victim? (2) Does this play, performance, or arts program have a pedagogical or empowering effect for the audience?

Both projects at least partially fulfill these criteria; Carceral Shakespeare satisfies both and a play by the Theater Cooperative partially satisfies the second. The projects take very different approaches and positive lessons can be gleaned from both. I conclude that, for a theatre project pursuing restorative justice to be successful, it must acknowledge systemic problems that lead to crime, provide opportunities for an offender to reflect on their crime, and present an audience with these elements as well as alternative approaches to justice.

Dedication

In no particular order. To Angela Davis and Sister Helen Prejean for setting me down this path. To my people at Red Theater for being my artistic home. To Chicago for making me an artist. To all of the people who took the time to talk to me about their work in prisons. To Chreston for making my short time in California extraordinary—it's only the beginning. To Carl and Rory for being my social life in Santa Cruz. To Loren and Tony for giving me middle child status.

To my parents for indulging my fixations and for only occasionally asking “so when are you going to make money from this?” so that I can occasionally say “I was paid to do this.”

To Dr. Michael Chemers, Dr. Douglas Coulson, and Marianne Weems, whose classes influenced my research in ways that I am not even aware of and whose questions and feedback altered the course of my research now and in the future.

Introduction

In July 2019, then Attorney General William Barr announced that, after a seventeen year hiatus, the federal government would begin executing death row inmates again. Over the following year, the administration hastily executed thirteen people before the 45th president left office. Barr's news was a flashbulb moment for me; I remember exactly where I was when I heard. And I thought, *why are we like this? Isn't there a less hateful alternative? And what could I do as a theatre artist?* My mind would be consumed by this over the next few years. I read every book¹ I could find on capital punishment, solitary confinement, policing, prosecution, and prisons in general—in other words, the most punitive approaches to crime. In Angela Davis' *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, I found the cadence of what I was searching for. Davis ends her book by describing a case in South Africa where two men convicted of murder met with their victim's parents, apologized, and eventually went on to work

¹ Many of these texts formed my worldview approaching this thesis, but I did not use them directly in this research. For that reason, I am listing them here: Prejean, Helen, *Dead Man Walking: The Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty That Sparked a National Debate* (Vintage Books, 1993); McFeely, William S., *Proximity to Death* (W W Norton & Co, 1999); Lezin, Katya, *Finding Life on Death Row: Profiles of Six Inmates* (Northeastern, 1999); Woodfox, Albert, *Solitary: Unbroken by Four Decades in Solitary Confinement* (Grove Press, 2019); Bedau, Hugo, *Debating the Death Penalty: Should America Have Capital Punishment? the Experts from Both Sides Make Their Best Case* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Edelman, Peter, *Not a Crime to Be Poor: The Criminalization of Poverty in America* (The New Press, 2019); Butler, Paul, *Chokehold: Policing Black Men* (The New Press, 2017); Sarat, Austin, *Gruesome Spectacles: Botched Executions and America's Death Penalty* (Stanford Law Books, 2014); Davis, Angela Y., *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Seven Stories Press, 2003); Gray, Ted, *Men Built for Others: Life Lessons from Those Serving Life Sentences* (Crop Foundation, 2018)

for the foundation the parents created in their daughter's name (Davis 114-115). This less punitive approach to justice, I would later learn, is called restorative justice.

In the first part of this thesis, I define restorative justice and use a few organizations to illustrate how the work is done on the ground. Based on what restorative justice demands, I create a test that can be applied to plays, performances, or arts programs with offenders or victims of crime as collaborators. The scope of this thesis is limited to the offender's perspective. I have selected two case studies; both are theatre programs which occurred in prisons. The first is Carceral Shakespeare, when theatre artists work with prisoners to examine and perform plays by William Shakespeare. The second is a play called *Caged*, a piece cowritten by twenty-eight inmates with the guidance of Chris Hedges. I end by creating a theory for how I (or other theatre artists) can use theatre to practice and support restorative justice in the future.

Part 1: Restorative Justice

One can imagine any combination of offender and victim, harmer and the harmed; a shoplifter and the business owner, a domestic abuser and his now ex-wife, the perpetrators of genocide and the families of the people they murdered. Restorative Justice (RJ) is an approach to criminal justice that responds to crime by bringing together offenders, victims, and the community to create consensus around what happened, who was harmed, what needs to happen to restore the lives of those harmed, and how to prevent future harm. These meetings are referred to as dialogues or conferences and the results can be remarkable. They can also vary widely; sometimes a heartfelt apology, forgiveness, or simply the assurance that the offender will not seek to harm the victim further in the future can satisfy the aims of the dialogue. The restoration to the victim may be pecuniary or psychological; changing based on the needs of the individual and the type of crime involved. The restoration to the offender (ie. personal growth, greater empathy, avoiding litigation) and the community (ie. community service, safer neighborhoods) is likewise dynamic. None of these results are explicit goals, allowing for a wide array of restorative results to occur.

Establishing the goals and values of the movement is particularly difficult because scholars of RJ often contradict each other and their stated goals can be vague. My framework is based primarily on two texts; *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* by Howard Zehr and *Restorative Justice and Criminal Justice: Competing or Reconcilable Paradigms?* edited by Andreas von Hirsch and Anthony Bottoms. The important thing to note is that goals and values must remain flexible and then be

reaffirmed with each crime or harm around which the dialogue is taking place.

However, there are a couple of principles to which every organization I have observed remains steadfast; RJ should practice reductionism (Braithwaite 2-3) and be entirely voluntary (Zehr 8-9).

Reduction works on two fronts. Reducing the amount of crime by lowering the odds of a person reoffending also reduces the punishments that are administered. Furthermore, reducing the punishments (that are purely retributive in nature) and focus on consequences that will be rehabilitative for the offender, reduces the amount of crime. Scholars generally agree that “unbreachable upper limits should be placed on the punishment that can be imposed for each type of crime, whether that punishment is imposed by a court or a restorative justice process” (Braithwaite 2). RJ practitioners aim to reduce punishment, recidivism, and crime resulting in an overall less punitive system of criminal justice. It is helpful to think of a reductionist as being in contrast to a retributivist; who may advocate for harsher punishments as a deterrent for crime or who may want to see an offender get their “just deserts².”

A reductionist’s principles are well illustrated by the work of Santa Cruz County’s Neighborhood Courts. Funded by the county and operating through the district attorney’s office, this program aims to “reduce recidivism by understanding why offenders offend... ..using restorative principles rather than punitive principles, effectively and efficiently restore the local community...” (“Neighborhood Courts”).

This is primarily a “diversionary” program according to Elaine Johnson, the

² A rival theory to restorative justice is desert theory, also known as retributive theory. Like restorative justice, it claims to have a greater concern for victims than the existing criminal justice system. It is considered the oldest theory of punishment and generally purports that criminal behavior *deserves* punishment because this behavior disrupts the social contract and punishment will bring things back into balance (Starkweather 855).

program's organizer (Johnson). Which is to say, they divert offenders (here referred to as *participants*, rather than *offender*³, in an effort to avoid punitive language for those only guilty of misdemeanors) away from the criminal justice system and toward a greater understanding of how their actions affect others, reducing the odds of the participant repeating these actions (Johnson). Working in tandem with diversionary programs, like Neighborhood Courts, are therapeutic programs such as Victims' Voices Heard (VVH). This organization brings together victims and offenders of violent crime post-conviction. Although these cases first go through a legal court and the dialogues usually happen years after the crime, the program still has a reductionist component. As a part of the preparatory process before a dialogue, VVH has offenders make a list of "everything they need to do to not re-offend and to keep others safe" (Miller 230).

That RJ encourages law-abiding behavior in the future is not purely speculation. A survey of data from the South Australia Juvenile Justice (SAJJ) project for young offenders showed a statistically significant decrease in reoffences.

According to *Restorative Justice and Criminal Justice*, "before the offense that lead to the SAJJ conference, 57 per cent of the [young offenders] had offended at least once. During an 8- to 12-month window of time post-conference, 40 per cent of the

³ Throughout this piece, I will primarily be using the terms *victim* and *offender* to refer to these parties, firstly, because that is the terminology used by the vast majority of the scholarship on this topic and I would like this research to fit neatly into that discourse and, secondly, because of the clarity that the terms provide. For each individual dialogue, just as the goals and values should remain flexible, the terminology should as well. It may be more appropriate to use *participants* to avoid punitive language or reducing a person to one mistake they made. South Australia Juvenile Justice's conferencing project refers to offenders as Young People/Person (YP). The person harmed may prefer to be referred to as a *survivor* and the facilitators should respect that decision. *Victim* and *offender* provide clarity when talking about the RJ philosophy and the dialogues *en masse* because the only commonality amongst the dialogues is the involvement of a victim and an offender.

[young offenders] offended at least once” (Daly 230). Compare this to recidivism rates of those convicted and imprisoned. According to the California Innocence Project, “seventy-three percent of the recidivists committed a new crime or violated parole within the first year” (“Recidivism Rates”). The limitations of comparing these statistics is glaring— data from different ages, judicial systems, and methods of collection are barely comparable. This is one of the major challenges for RJ advocates; much emphasis is put on the provability of the benefits. However, in regards to this dearth of data, it’s worth mentioning, just because the results of a practice are not measurable does not render that practice an unworthy one. I am especially cognizant of this as a scholar of theatre— perhaps the most ephemeral work there is. The arts are unquestionably a positive force in the world; attempting to measure their impact is persnickety⁴. Furthermore, recidivism is only one metric that we can attempt to measure. It is impossible to measure positive outcomes such as ways in which the victim's quality of life improves or the therapeutic benefits for an offender. Like the arts, RJ is an apparent good that defies appraisal.

In the absence of satisfactory quantitative support, let us turn to the qualitative. Neighborhood Courts includes some anonymous testimonials on their website; one participant claims that the program “saved [them] and gave [them] a chance at redemption” when they believed that their dreams of becoming a firefighter were dashed (“Neighborhood Courts”). As for VVH, one offender recognized that the dialogues help victims to “get the trust and security to move on with their life” He goes on to say, “I know from me she has nothing to worry about, nothing to threaten

⁴A separate thesis could be written on the statistics postulating the measurable benefits of the arts.

her anymore. She'll have the ability to walk in a dark parking lot knowing no one is waiting for her" (Miller 55). Another remarkable, if quite unorthodox, story of RJ is that of Allison and James. More than twenty years after violently raping Allison, their correspondence via letters began while James was incarcerated and continued after the formal dialogue was complete. Allison "did not support an early release for James" before the VVH dialogue (Miller 66). After he was released, having served twenty-six of his forty-five-year sentence, Allison and her husband helped James find housing and employment— even providing transportation to job interviews (Miller 66-67).

The voluntary nature of participating in an RJ dialogue is necessary to ensure positive results. In the aftermath of violent crimes, no-contact orders are commonly issued which a victim must consent to have lifted. In Neighborhood Courts, victims are always notified when a participant is going through the program, but never pressured to participate themselves— a practice that is very important to Johnson. Organizations like VVH are "not designed to affect the outcome of criminal cases. In fact, the offenders... ..were already incarcerated (or, in two cases, had finished a prison and probation term), and offenders received no incentive (such as parole or clemency appeal considerations) for their participation" (Miller 7). For some programs, the offender's only incentive to participate in the dialogue is to help their victim and the community heal. Facilitators of therapeutic RJ dialogues believe that this is the best way to ensure that their statements in the dialogue are genuine. In *Principles of Restorative Justice*, John Braithwaite lists some competing values that "can be balanced and rendered commensurate for purposes of practical reasoning

by evaluating their priority according to how they contribute to advancing dominion or freedom as non-domination” (Braithwaite 8). The values that he believes should take priority are non-domination, empowerment, honoring limits, respectful listening, equal concern for all stakeholders, accountability, and respect for human rights (Braithwaite 8-9).

One positive aspect of our current criminal justice system is its high level of accountability to the public. This is noted in *Staging restorative justice encounters against a criminal justice backdrop: A dramaturgical analysis* coauthored by James Dignan, Anne Atkinson, Helen Atkinson, Marie Howes, Jennifer Johnstone, Gwen Robinson, Joanna Shapland, and Angela Sorsby in 2007. Although this article evaluates RJ conferences in the justice systems of England and Wales, many of its statements are applicable to that of the United States. We did, after all, inherit much of our criminal justice procedures from them.

In the article, they write “Howard Zehr has likened the administration of conventional criminal justice to ‘a kind of theatre in which issues of guilt and innocence predominate. The trial or guilty plea forms the dramatic centre, with the sentence as a denouement’” (Dignan et al 7). With their openness and publicity, criminal justice trials are highly theatrical. Accountability to the audience is of the utmost importance; so much so that the major players (the victim and the offender) are relegated to “‘walk-on’ [parts] since it is largely left up to their legal representative to present their case and speak on their behalf.” Thus legal professionals (lawyers and judges) take center stage (Dignan et al 6).

The article goes on to say “restorative justice, by contrast, has been portrayed by its advocates as an exercise in amateur dramatics, in which the parties themselves take ‘centre stage’ in the unfolding drama, leaving little scope for, or indeed need of professional ‘experts’” (Dignan et al 6). RJ also sometimes takes matters of criminal concern and privatizes them. With this, the article notes the adjoining drawbacks:

The problem this raises relates to the risk of partisanship in the way the proceedings are conducted and the need for effective mechanisms to review and rectify any incorrect or unjust decisions. The problem becomes particularly acute when decisions that are taken by criminal justice officials are relatively ‘invisible’ and thus less susceptible to any form of judicial review, which is often the case when cases are ‘diverted’ from the normal criminal justice process to some less formal alternative. (Dignan et al 10)

These dialogues are intimate and emotionally challenging; privatizing them is very appealing for many reasons. Conversely, doing so removes mechanisms of accountability from the process. As mentioned, ‘Equal concern for all stakeholders’ is a core value of RJ according to Braithwaite. He goes on to clarify that the community is one of these stakeholders: “Deals that are win-win for victims and offenders but where certain other members of the community are serious losers, worse losers whose perspective is not even heard, are morally unacceptable” (Braithwaite 10). RJ organizations should include a plan for empowering the community as a stakeholder.

This is the gap that I believe the performing arts have the potential to fill—making RJ a more viable option rather than a trial. The theatre can engage, inform, and empower an audience, while also being a controlled space where offenders and victims have power over their narrative. Although there is a dearth of theatres employing their practice with the explicit purpose of achieving RJ, there are many

theatre artists and programs that work with offenders (usually in the form of a prison arts program) or victims to share their stories with an audience.

The authors of *Staging restorative justice encounters* are examining RJ dialogues through a theatrical lens. I am doing the opposite by looking at plays, performances, or arts programs that involve either a victim or an offender as a main collaborator and determining which of these creative projects successfully achieves RJ (or some component of RJ) and in what ways they fall short. The tests for assessing the success of an RJ dialogue applied by some of these scholars are not adequate for this purpose. For the programs and projects that I plan to discuss, I have devised my own test specific to performances: (1) Does sharing their story through this play, performance, or arts program have a restorative effect for the offender or victim? (2) Does this play, performance, or arts program have a pedagogical and/or empowering effect for the audience?

Regarding the first criterion, a “restorative effect” is a broad set of benefits to the life and/or psyche of the victim or offender. They may be comparable to observable benefits from traditional RJ dialogues— a greater feeling of security for a victim, a greater sense of empathy from an offender, etc. Or they may be effects that fulfill a specific goal stated by an RJ organization. A performance of their story may help a victim to feel more agency over their life or an offender to feel like they have helped an audience to better understand them. This is the first step in reintegrating both victim and offender back into the community.

The second criterion emphasizes the community’s role as a stakeholder and as a larger body that can be positively affected by these projects (or negatively affected,

when done irresponsibly). The community— since we are looking at theatre, *community* and *audience* may be interchangeable, although the community may also include other collaborators on a project who were not directly involved in the crime— becomes aware of and gains a fuller understanding of an issue through the performance. They may be asked to think about how they contribute to a problem or how they might help to solve it. Traditionally, theatre can be a place where an audience passively receives a story and perhaps makes changes in their lives based on that reception; however, contemporary theatre is embracing a post-dramatic style that gives an audience more agency and is more concerned with its position as a stakeholder. This conception of theatre provides some flexibility and greater potential for how we imagine the audience can and should engage in RJ in the theatre. As a stakeholder, the audience/community may help decide what needs to happen for the reintegration of other parties.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will apply this test to two projects: *Carceral Shakespeare* (using multiple secondary sources from different prisons) and *Caged*, a play by the New Jersey Prison Theater Cooperative.

Part 2: Carceral Shakespeare

“Let your indulgence set me free.”
-*The Tempest*, William Shakespeare

Carceral Shakespeare is the term I will use to describe the conglomerate of artists and organizations facilitating performances of plays by William Shakespeare with prisoners as actors. These facilitators face a myriad of challenges in mounting full productions; the limited time per week they can spend with the prisoners or the sudden loss of an actor can derail a rehearsal process. “This is *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, it ain’t Mary Poppins productions” a prisoner named Big G explains (Rogerson et al 1:20:21). Programs take place in medium-security institutions, high-security institutions, and even solitary confinement. These productions breathe new life into Shakespeare's work. In this section, I will be examining the work of three different carceral Shakespeare programs; one in Kentucky, one in Missouri, and one in Indiana. Philomath Films’ documentary *Shakespeare Behind Bars* follows the rehearsal process and performance of *The Tempest* in Kentucky’s Luther Luckett Correctional Complex led by Founder and Producing Director Curt Tofteland. The program shares the name of the documentary. Their mission statement reads, “Shakespeare Behind Bars offers theatrical encounters with personal and social issues to incarcerated, post-incarcerated, and at-risk communities, allowing them to develop life skills that will ensure their successful integration into society.” First and foremost, the program achieves one major goal of RJ. According to their website, Kentucky’s recidivism rate is 40%. For Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB) participants, it is 6% (shakespearebehindbars.org).

Prison Performing Arts (PPA) serves prisoners in Missouri's criminal and juvenile justice institutions. The organization doesn't exclusively focus on Shakespeare, but those texts are a large component. An episode of the NPR podcast *This American Life* follows a group of prisoners in Missouri Eastern Correctional Center as they rehearse and stage *Hamlet* led by Founding Artistic Director Agnes Wilcox. The narrator of the podcast, Jack Hitt, describes how these actors illuminate the text, "...this is a play about a man pondering a violent crime and its consequences performed by violent criminals living out those consequences. After hanging out with this group of convicted actors for six months, I did discover something. I didn't know anything about *Hamlet*" (218 Act V 7:05).

The third carceral Shakespeare program that I will be discussing takes place in solitary confinement at the Wabash Valley Correctional Facility. Laura Bates works with prisoners in the segregated housing unit to examine the original text, create their own adaptations of the plays, and share those adaptations with the wider prison population via a performance broadcast to all 2,200 prisoners in the facility (Bates 35-36).

The draw to Shakespeare for those facilitating this work can seem myopic at first. The American Theatre's obsession with Shakespeare is partly the evergreen themes, partly the eloquent poetry, and partly elitism. Why insist on training prisoners in Shakespeare when many other plays, both relevant to the prisoner's lives and more digestible, have been written? But it is the difficulty of the text (and the notoriety for its difficulty) that makes Shakespeare the perfect endeavor. For PPA's production of

Hamlet, a prisoner named Paul served as the assistant director and had this to say about the challenge:

The first two or three acts I thought, oh no, there's no way. There's no way we're going to get this thing down and go and do a live performance and-- doing a soliloquy that's two pages long, I thought there's-- no, no. This is impossible. But what we're learning here, I guess, from performing it and hearing it done time again, was the "It'll be OK. It'll work out." (218 Act V 5:59)

A staggering number of prisoners in America (70%) do not have a high school degree (“GED and High School Diploma”). As we can see from these programs, it is not for lack of intelligence, but more likely because, as teenagers, their educational institutions did not show them that they were capable of accomplishing difficult things. By tackling Shakespeare, they learn that they can do difficult things. A stated goal of SBB is that a participant will “develop a positive self-image and increase self-esteem” (Tofteland 219).

After receiving praise from the rest of the cast and audience on his performance as Laertes in PPA’s *Hamlet*, James Word said “it made me want to be better. Not just in acting. I mean, it just opened up a whole world for me, you know? Like, man, if I apply myself, I can pretty much do whatever I want” (218 Act V 30:42).

For inmates held in solitary confinement, the stimulation that Shakespeare provides is especially vital. According to facilitator Laura Bates, “the intellectual challenge of Shakespeare’s text helps them to retain their sanity in an insanely harsh environment” (Bates 39). “Shakespeare saved my life” one inmate in supermax said (Bates 41).

Having dramaturged Shakespeare plays, taught Shakespeare to undergraduates, and now studying the work of organizations that produce Shakespeare in prisons, I will share this observation which informs my analysis in part; there is a significant difference in the way undergraduates and prisoners engage with Shakespeare. This observation is obvious and echoed by facilitators of carceral Shakespeare, but I would like to go deeper. As a part of a course on theatre history, my students read *The Tempest*— the same play produced in the documentary Shakespeare Behind Bars. My students (who are much younger than the men in the documentary) found their way into the text by talking about colonialism, sexism, and other systematic issues in society. The prisoners, on the other hand, were moved by the themes of betrayal, forgiveness, and love— in other words, interpersonal conflicts.

I think that there are two reasons for this. Firstly, prisoners have experienced these things to a degree that youthful undergraduates have not. Their lived experience is closer to that of a fictional Shakespeare character than the average person, let alone one so young. Facilitators encourage this type of introspection: Tofteland encourages his actors to ask “Who is this character? Why does he feel as he does? What prompts his actions? What does that have to do with me?” He goes on, “We always engage in reflection on how the words resonate within the inmate’s mind, heart, and soul” (Tofteland 216).

The second reason for the difference in engagement is the current situation of the prisoner and the mission of the institution holding them. While my students wished to use these texts to criticize society, the prison ideally— and this is

emphasized by Warden Larry Chandler in the documentary— is preparing the prisoner to integrate back into society (Rogerson et al 7:20) and it may be that the institution does not want to open that can of worms. Thus, carceral Shakespeare facilitators encourage self-reflection through the text rather than criticizing the world they hope to reenter. Tofteland is adamant about following the rules of the institution and aligning your mission as an artist with its mission. “As artists, we are driven to bend the rules. We chafe at the idea of control over our creative process. Prisons, on the other hand, are all about control.” He later adds, “you and your program must support the institution and live within its world” (Tofteland 218). So carceral Shakespeare is not starting revolutions from within the prison walls, but if it attempted to do so, it would simply no longer exist. Tofteland ties his program to the later part of the Kentucky Department of Corrections’ mission; “to provide opportunities for offenders to acquire skills which facilitate non-criminal behavior” (Tofteland 218).

Through a RJ lens, there are both benefits and drawbacks to this approach. RJ requires this self-reflection on the part of an offender and carceral Shakespeare is very successful at this. Read further for examples. But we should also consider the drawback; an RJ process looks holistically at an offender's story, considering everything that brought them to commit that crime. Although carceral Shakespeare successfully encourages prisoners to reflect on their interpersonal relationships—mothers, fathers, lovers, etc.— it ignores the systematic issues that also contributed to the prisoner’s position— racism, sexism, and the criminalization of poverty.

Part of the reason for carceral Shakespeare's success rate of positive influence— note the extraordinary reduction in the recidivism rate cited earlier— is the pool of participants that the programs tend to attract. As Hitt explains, “most of the inmates who audition for Agnes tend to be, you know, actor-y people-- the theatre-types of prison” (218 Act V 11:54). These are prisoners who are taking advantage of educational programs offered to them in prison, suggesting that they would be self-motivated regardless of the material offered. This exemplifies one very important RJ value— that the program is voluntary. The reduction in the recidivism rate can likely be contributed to a multitude of factors— the actual carceral Shakespeare program being just one, but the documentary and podcast both show how this specific program can attract some unlikely participants.

When SBB suddenly has to recast the role of Antonio in *The Tempest*, Big G and Sammie convince Rick to join the cast. Rick was serving a life sentence with no chance of parole. Given his situation, Rick had little motivation to follow the rules of prison since he would never see a parole board. “Seeing the guys get up there and they create this whole 'nother world. You know, they're portraying women. And I was like, man, and I got to be a part of something like that, you know,” Rick shares (Rogerson et al 41:30). Big G brought Rick into the cast because he remembers what it was like when he entered prison and his “mentors” taught him about prison life by telling him how to get drugs or loan cigarettes. Big G wants to be a different kind of mentor for Rick. It's important to “mentor them in the right direction,” he says (42:21). Rick affirms his commitment to following the rule so that he doesn't let his castmates down. He says he's not going to go to The Hole— solitary confinement.

“He's not gonna go into the hole because he's different now than he was six months ago,” Big G says (43:28). Their resolve is short lived, however, because Rick is sent to The Hole for loaning cigarettes so he can get his tattoos finished and the role of Antonio has to be recast again.

In PPA's production of *Hamlet*, the role of Horatio is played by Derrick "Big Hutch" Hutchison. Hitt describes Big Hutch's menacing appearance and crime. According to Big Hutch, he is at the top of the prison hierarchy and the rest of the cast is at the bottom. He says he is a blue whale, “that mean I control the killer whales, and I can eat up the minnows if I want. And I mean, that's how it is. Most of the guys in *Hamlet*, they're minnows. I mean, I don't normally would associate with them” (218 Act V 13:01). He examines his character, insisting that Horatio and Hamlet are not good friends because they don't communicate well and share truly personal details, in other words, “I think he a chump. I mean, he supposed to be cool with Hamlet. And they're best friends. But I think Horatio is just somebody-- a sounding board for Hamlet” (15:05). He even identifies what he sees as a plot hole and explains that many of the characters in the play are similar to the types of people he sees in prison. His literary criticism constantly belies his tough exterior. Big Hutch sees the production to completion. Hitt shares “the real surprise for me... was Hutch”(52:02). He takes his time delivering his last and most famous line. “Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest” (52:36).

This is a function that carceral Shakespeare shares with RJ. The diversionary RJ process catches people before they fall between the cracks. Where diversionary

organizations keep offenders out of courtrooms and steer them away from reoffending, carceral Shakespeare sometimes catches unlikely participants and redirects their energy positively. It may not catch everyone, but it's groundbreaking for those it does. The program pulls in tough guys and shows them the depth that they are capable of. Big G explains this phenomenon, "I've often thought that a bunch of convicts would make good actors because they're used to lying, or you know, playing a role. But, um, it's the exact opposite of that because it's to tell the truth and to inhabit a character" (Rogerson et al 27:13).

In a chapter written for *Performing New Lives*, Tofteland provides a list of SBB's goals. Perhaps the most important among them for the purposes of RJ is "that a participant will... ..take responsibility for their crime" (Tofteland 219). In the documentary, several of the actors share the crime that put them in prison— many of them tearful as they do so. They also connect their lives, crimes, and personal struggles with characters or lines of text.

Big G and Sammie, both in prison for murder, connect to the character Caliban. In a rehearsal where Tofteland helps Big G, who plays Caliban, find the physicality of the character, Tofteland says "Caliban's angry, right? He's basically an angry personality" (Rogerson et al 25:31). Now, this is a very ungenerous interpretation of the character. What you do not see them discussing is why Caliban is angry— that he was enslaved by visitors to his island and the play's larger commentary on colonialism. But, as noted before, these programs stay away from criticisms of society.

But Big G and Sammie move beyond the physical actor training in this rehearsal and point out that Caliban “doesn’t think of himself as a monster” (26:53). Big G listens as Tofteland elaborates on their discovery, “His external may be monstrous, but he still feels. And he still hurts, and he still grieves” (27:04). To Big G, Caliban represents “a large percent of the population on the yard” as well as himself (24:39).

Early in the documentary, Sammie describes the sexual abuse he experienced as a child beginning in first grade. He then shares something that I think speaks volumes about how he connects with Caliban. “And so all this here pain and anger and frustration that's lived inside of me, I had no outlet for. And so I just shut all this out, but inside there's all this rage, this anger” (9:10).

Sammie goes on to describe his crime. He had a relationship with a woman named Carol, who, according to Sammie, became abusive in a way that reminded him of his father. They broke up and began seeing each other again four years later after Sammie married another woman. Carol became more demanding of his time and they had a fight which resulted in Sammie strangling Carol to death (10:48). “I really have to fight to, to see the goodness in me,” Sammie says (10:19). In the rehearsal with Big G, he remarks about Caliban after seeing that Big G portray the character with a monstrous physicality, “he has true, real feelings, and... ..he’s been hurt” (26:58).

Prospero is played by an actor who, had he not been imprisoned, probably would have joined the theatre regardless. Hal often lends his insight to other actors in rehearsal, even when it’s not wanted. “Curt [Tofteland] mentioned that *The Tempest* was kind of the third in this little trilogy because of the theme of forgiveness, and I

was drawn to Prospero, not because he's the title character or anything, but because he is the one who has to work through the forgiveness" (2:27).

Hal was raised in a fundamentalist Christian church and, from a young age, he suspected that he was gay. In spite of this, he followed expectations, got married, and had a daughter. He began "sneaking around" and began believing that he was going to hell. When they found out that Lisa, his wife, was pregnant, she became overwhelmed and, as Hal puts it, "she started acting just like my mother." He dropped a hairdryer in the bath she was taking. For ten years, people believed that it was an accident (49:03-52:11).

In a conversation between Hal and Red, the actor playing his daughter Miranda, he shares how he relates the Prospero and Miranda relationship to his own history with his daughter. Miranda's mother is not present in *The Tempest*. "If Prospero hadn't had Miranda, he probably would've just jumped out of the boat. Rotten carcass of a boat and just drown. Just killed himself. Miranda provided him the only reason to live, and I can identify with that." Hal felt like, after killing her mother, he "had to stay around to take care of her." He "was the only one, only one left" (28:36).

The first actor to join the cast as Antonio is Leonard. He describes his character as "a villain who doesn't get what he deserves" (19:03). When Leonard is sent to The Hole, he begins digging into the text in his cell and finds that Prospero's lines in the last scene resonate with him. "As you from crimes would be pardoned be, Let your indulgence set me free" Leonard recites contemplatively (35:36). He interprets the word "indulgence" to mean "to redeem someone." In a deeply affecting

scene, you hear the interviewer ask— the only time you hear the voice of the documentary makers— “so why are you here?” And after a very long silence, “I sexually abused seven girls” (37:14).

Leonard’s hope was to complete the treatment program, leave prison, and do something positive with his life so that “somebody can look at the totality of my life, and maybe have the scales balance” (38:23). But Leonard never made parole. According to a cast update from SBB’s website, Leonard died in 2016 after struggling with cancer (“Documentary Cast Updates”).

In PPA’s *Hamlet*, some actors also connect characters to their lives: James Word says “Coming into Act IV, [Laertes] was very angry, violently angry. And I can identify with that, and I can play that role very well, because I’ve been playing that role all my life” (218 Act V 31:46). Word doesn’t explicitly connect his character’s actions to his specific crimes, but his character causes him to reflect on criminal behavior generally.

And Laertes, he falls into the manipulation. And he becomes a bad guy for a little while because he's being deceitful now. You know, I never really looked at it, and it's somewhat cowardly. And I can relate that to my past life as a criminal. To put a gun in somebody's face, that's an unfair advantage. You know, and that's a cowardly act. That's what criminals are. We're cowards. You know, when we're criminals, we are cowards (32:30).

Some connect the text more directly to their crimes. Danny Waller, who played the ghost of Hamlet’s father, chose the character because “the words jumped out” at him. When he reads the ghost’s lines, he thinks of his victim. Waller recites “Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched, cut off even in the blossoms of my sin, no reckoning made, but sent to my

account with all my imperfections on my head." He adds, "and it was pretty much the same way with him. He was taken before his time" (218 Act V 36:06).

A vital component of RJ that, you'll notice, is missing from all the programs I discuss in this and the following sections is the coming together of a victim and an offender. But whether it is a theatre project pursuing RJ or a normal RJ dialogue, this can never happen following a murder. The most an offender can do is meet with the family of the victim. This production of *Hamlet* provided something for this actor which a typical RJ dialogue could not; a spiritual connection to his victim, a victim he embodies. "I'm the body up there. But the words are coming from mostly, uh— William Pride, the man that I killed. He's mostly the one talking" (218 Act V 36:30).

Like the RJ dialogues, results vary widely. But, Shakespeare's words are remarkably adroit at bringing out these reflections. For that reason, I believe that carceral Shakespeare satisfies my first criterion. *Does sharing their story through this play, performance, or arts program have a restorative effect for the offender or victim?* Although it falls short in acknowledging systematic failures that lead to certain crimes, it succeeds by asking offenders to deeply reflect on their life and crime and take responsibility for their actions. It also teaches offenders skills that will serve them and their community upon release.

As for my second criterion— *Does this play, performance, or arts program have a pedagogical or empowering effect for the audience?*—, carceral Shakespeare often has two audiences: the public (family and patrons of the theatre who support the organizations) and an audience of fellow inmates. Hitt describes *Hamlet's* audience,

“The audience tonight is a mix of St. Louis' artistic elite. It's a theater crowd-- polite, well-dressed people. Many of them have helped fund this production” (218 Act V 53:20).

After thirty-seven weeks of rehearsal, SBB shares their production of *The Tempest* with a public audience. As the audience members enter the performance space, the actors and stagehands hug their friends and family (Rogerson et al 1:20:50). Although they wear costumes, their prison uniforms show underneath. In *Hamlet*, the gravedigger's shovel must be represented by a cardboard cutout (218 Act V 47:43). Not to deride the effectiveness of theatricality, but these inflexible design elements keep the audience's consciousness within the prison walls. They are constant reminders of the actor's situation. But this does not hamper the performance. In fact, it informs it. *Hamlet* director Agnes Wilcox speaks of the feeling in the audience:

When Claudius is in the chapel and speaks about his sin and his regret and his ability to undo it, it broke my heart. Because the man playing it felt all of those things fully. And you know, I know these guys have deep regrets. But it was palpable. The audience was stunned. You could hear a pin drop. And that was especially true with the inmate audience. He says, oh, my offense is rank. It smells to heaven. It hath the primal, eldest, curse upon it. A brother's murder. (218 Act V 38:06)

The public audience learns about life in captivity and empathizes with these men as they soliloquize on their regrets. But the larger impact may be on the actor's fellow inmates. *The Tempest* was performed for the rest of the Luther Lockett population and then toured to other prisons. As Wilcox notes, the performances for

inmates provide a similarly cathartic experience for the audience as it does for those actors.

Part 3: *Caged*

“The soul is like bones, if it ain’t set right it won’t heal right.
Grieve, son... grieve, grieve, grieve.”- *Caged*

The play *Caged*, published in 2020, was the collaborative work of twenty-eight incarcerated men in East Jersey State Prison. The play centers around Omar Moore, an approximately thirty-year-old Black man who is incarcerated for a murder he did not commit. The first half of the play takes place outside the prison, where you meet Omar’s family; his mother has cancer, his father is addicted to drugs and gambling, his sister has served time herself, and his younger brother helps Omar with his drug trade (although, Omar insists that he follow a different path). The second half takes place in prison, where the audience witnesses some of the horrors of prison life. Throughout the play, a projection of Omar’s son, Zaire, at different ages is shown before scenes. This serves as a timeline for the audience, showing Zaire at ages two, five, seven, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, and nineteen indicates how much time has passed since the last scene. It also symbolizes how much of life slips away when a person is locked inside. At the end of the play, Omar leaves prison having served out his seventeen year sentence. But he has lost everyone; his sister returned to prison, his brother was killed in a shooting, and his mother died of cancer. He runs into his father, who appears to be homeless, before Omar goes to look for his son. In a class led by Chris Hedges, the play started with scenes written by each individual inmate about their own experiences in and out of prison. Hedges quickly found the skill and profundity in the inmates’ writings and saw the potential for a producible work of theatre.

My stacks of twenty-eight scenes written by the students each week, the paper bearing the musty, sour smell of prison, rose into an ungainly pile. I laboriously shaped and edited the material. It grew, line by line, scene by scene, into a powerful and deeply moving dramatic vehicle (*Caged* 8).

There are two versions of the script that warrant attention. The first one I do not have access to because it was only performed in the prison and was not published. According to Hedges, it had twenty-eight characters— one for each student. Hedges writes, “the play, as it was originally written, was more concerned with giving every student a voice than functioning as a dramatic production” (*Caged* 11). I do know that some of the best writing was cut in the process of developing the final script. Hedges shares one of these scenes in his introduction to the published script; a monologue in which we only hear the inmate's side of a phone conversation. The inmate, a product of a rape, tells his mother that he confessed to the crime to keep his brother from being charged with murder. “Come on Ma, if Bruce went to jail you would've never forgiven me. Me, on the other hand, I wasn't ever supposed to be here. *Pause*. I'm sorry Ma... I'm sorry. Don't be cryin'. You got Bruce. You got him home. He's your baby, Ma” (*Caged* 11).

Hedges was determined to shape the stories of each of these men into one cohesive narrative, following a central protagonist; a vision that he made clear to the writers, his students. “We had to find a narrative,” Hedges insists (mediasantuary 12:05). He interviewed a formerly incarcerated man he met in a group he ran out of a church in Elizabeth, New Jersey. This man had been falsely convicted and, after his brother raised the money for an attorney, was acquitted and released. Rather than

devise from the material that he had already received from his students, Hedges suggested they build the play around this man's story.

Hedges then took the play outside the prison and found an “artistic home” to produce the it— Passage Theatre in Trenton, N.J. Both Hedges and the artistic director felt that the play needed to be workshopped into a more cohesive story, further consolidating characters and honing in on one individual protagonist. But, in doing so, more was lost from the piece than gained— which I will come back to later. It is helpful to give some background on Hedges and how he came to this project. A journalist who spent many years as a foreign correspondent, Hedges is a widely published author and staunch anti-capitalist. He is not, however, a theatre artist. His closest experience with the theatre arts is his marriage to a classical actress, Eunice Wong. He taught the class through a Rutgers University program in which inmates can earn a college degree while serving time. Hedges calls it a class “on drama” (mediasanctuary 2:20). He says that “the course revolved around plays by August Wilson, James Baldwin, John Herbert, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Miguel Piñero, Amiri Baraka, and other playwrights who examine and give expression to the realities of America's Black underclass as well as the prison culture” (*Caged* 7). What I find notable about this list, aside from the fact that they are all male writers of color, is that they all more or less conform to the type of Aristotelian dramatic structure that Hedges, a white man, finds superior— the structure that he insisted the second version of the script should take. This is the published version of the play that I summarized earlier.

From what I can tell, the impulse to follow one character through a play is a hang-up that only the artistic director and Hedges possessed. It displays a failure of imagination and a colonial attitude toward playwriting to require this kind of structure. Especially when the alternatives hold so much potential. Consider the success of plays like *Until the Flood* by Dael Orlandersmith or *Fires in the Mirror* by Anna Deavere Smith; both of these plays focus on the community and are told with many characters having their own unique experience. Both of these plays also would have served as better models for structuring the writing of the twenty-eight inmates into a producible play.

Along with Hedges, Boris Franklin— one of the twenty-eight men who was released and continued work on the script— writes an introduction for the published script. His justification for cramming all their lived experiences into one was to say that this experience— the criminalization of poverty— is all of their story (*Caged* 24). But a more effective way to highlight this theme and this shared experience is to tell each of the stories that are unique to them. Each of the men writing for this play has a compelling, individual story. They are not themselves stereotypes, but the amalgamation of their lives through these characters and the washing away of those stories resulted in a stereotypical portrayal.

In an article on staging trauma, Nikki Owusu Yeboah explains how emphasizing the community, rather than the individual narrative is a more effective way to communicate how the people with trauma relate to the systems responsible for it. She does this in her play, *The (M)others*, by including many characters who share a similar experience (in this case, losing children to police violence).

I posit that theatre makers should deemphasize the singularity of the individual's experience and instead place the victim, perpetrator, and traumatic episode within the larger, complex system of power and dominance in which trauma unfolds. We must make a connection between the trauma people experience individually and its relationship to dominant culture. Only then can we start to see trauma as a tool of dominance and political oppression (Yeboah 149).

The work of Yeboah, Orlandersmith, and Smith demonstrates how nonessential an Aristotelian play structure is, not only to be considered *good theatre* but to convey a message about a specific systemic injustice. This message is top of mind for Hedges and his mission would have been better accomplished with a broader concept of theatrical structure.

At an event hosted by The Sanctuary for Independent Media, Hedges spoke publicly about the class; how he came to teach it, the play creation process, and what he feels is required for the conditions of prisons to change. Hedges began teaching in prisons before his class became affiliated with Rutgers. Before he taught an accredited class, he was a part of a small cohort of academics who would teach classes and print off certificates at home to give to the inmates for their files so that a parole board would see that they were using their prison time wisely (mediasanctuary 1:04).

Hedges' speech starts with an indictment of our justice system. Because it is a powerful rebuke and because it is germane to understanding Hedges' perspective going into this project, it is worth sharing at length:

Most people in the American prison system never get a jury trial and that's not an accident. That's by design. 94% of the people in

our prison system— and let's acknowledge that we have the largest prison system in the world— 25% of the world's prisoners and we are 4.4 roughly percent of the world's population. So they don't get a jury trial and they are coerced— and I don't use the word coerced lightly— they are coerced into accepting a plea. How does that work? They stack you with a series of charges most of which they know you did not commit... ..and so you have a kind of negotiations between the public prosecutors who never spend more than fifteen or twenty minutes on a case and the defense attorneys, the public defense attorneys, and people even if they are innocent of the crime to which they are charged are forced to plea out, because if they don't then all of those charges are leveled against them and one of the tragedies in the prison system is that... ..those with the longest sentences invariably did not commit the crime because they still believed because they were innocent they could go to court and get a fair trial— and in fact when you go to trial because the system is designed to make sure that you don't go to trial— because if everyone went to trial the entire system would break down it's not capable of carrying out that number of jury trials— they have to make an example of you and the example becomes they give you these horrific sentences enhanced sentences life plus fifty kind of stuff... (3:53)

He tells multiple stories about men in his class who were wrongfully convicted or whose sentences were vastly disproportionate to their crime. Hedges' framework for this class and his work with prisoners is, firstly, about the systemic injustices that they have faced. He repeats this sentiment often in multiple speeches and interviews: “the entire system has been gamed against them” (3:35).

Notably, the resulting play is about a Black man who is punished for a crime he did not commit. This ostensibly places this theatre project outside the scope of RJ. If the men in this class are wrongfully convicted or there is no victim, the prisoners are more victim than offender. A RJ lens can then be used to approach the systemic harm done to them as prisoners. But for the reasons I explained earlier, the published script does this poorly.

Furthermore, it is quite certain that many of the men writing this play did commit a crime. Firstly, let's look at the state of New Jersey, where this project took place, and parse out some of the data available. Since 2013, nineteen people have been exonerated and released from NJ prisons. Combined, these innocent people lost a total of 465 years of their lives to the prison system (Tableau Software). I mention this to highlight that, although the number of exonerations seems low and the true number of wrongful convictions is unknowable, the impact on those erroneously convicted is devastating. I return to the theme of qualitative results over quantitative from Part 1; the extremity of the harm to the individuals is more potent to me than the statistics on the number of people affected by the phenomenon. And the lowness of the number of exonerations and the broad estimates we do have on wrongful convictions, some estimate between 2-10%, suggest that a class of twenty-eight prisoners would have guilty offenders.

But, of course, not all crimes have victims. Every year, the New Jersey Department of Corrections issues an Offender Characteristics Report. In 2013, they reported that, of all the inmates in the East Jersey Prison, 88% were serving time for violent offenses; 47% were convicted for homicide, 27% were convicted for robbery⁵, and 6% were convicted for sexual assault (Lanigan 9). Taking all of these statistics into consideration, it is almost certain that some of the writers in this class have legitimate victims. Seeing themselves through the avatar of a character who is innocent may indicate a lack of readiness to partake in a RJ dialogue.

I want to caution against any dichotomies here; it is both fraught to think of all twenty-eight men as innocent or all twenty-eight men as guilty. This further supports

⁵ Robbery is distinguished from theft because the offender directly interacts with a victim.

my argument for the original script with twenty-eight characters and the impact it might have had. Each inmate has a unique story. Some are eligible for RJ, some are not.

When Hedges decides that he wants to form his student's scenes into a complete play, he also decided that he needed more time with his students. "I'm allowed to add another class to the weekly schedule if students need remedial help and so— being a bit of a tyrant, I didn't get permission from anyone in the classroom— I signed all twenty-eight students up for remedial help. They did whinge and groan a bit but they all showed up. So we were doing two classes a week" (11:36). Students who signed up for the class hoping to learn and get some credit toward their degree, found themselves— and I think I will use Hedges' own word here to highlight the hypocrisy— *coerced* into spending more time than they had planned to commit⁶.

Furthermore, in addition to the story that Hedges decided would structure the play, Hedges brought in another interview he conducted with "a member of the black liberation army" who was arrested for "expropriating money from a capitalist bank for the movement" and getting into a shootout with police (24:26). Hedges says that "in order to keep sane he would have conversations with great revolutionaries like George Jackson and he said 'I reached a point where I was sitting alone in my cell and I felt like George Jackson was sitting there with me' and I knew that we had to

⁶ There is more to be said here about the hypocrisy of pointing out the labor abuse in prisons, which Hedges goes on to do, and then using their labor— and writing is labor— to produce a script that they likely don't receive payment for. Nowhere is it mentioned whether these men were paid a commission or if they make royalties on the sale of the published script. I speculate that they were "paid" in college credit.

incorporate that story into the play and so I spent six hours interviewing Ojore” (25:57). Ojore became one of the largest characters in the published play.

All of this begs the question: *Who was this for?* The goal of Hedges was never RJ oriented. He was not concerned about students with crimes that had legitimate victims and asking those students to reflect on those parts of their lives. He was not even truly compelled to tell the story of the students in his class— he found stories that he thought were more compelling for his political argument outside the class. He was most concerned with having a product which he considered *good theatre* that would support his ideology and he could then share with an audience. Hedges is interested in the revolution but not particularly concerned with the individuals that comprise that revolution. He states:

I believe the only solution to mass incarceration are nationwide prison strikes that demand that those inside prisons earn the minimum wage instead of, in states like New Jersey, twenty-two cents an hour or, in states like Georgia, nothing. Over one million American prisoners work for for-profit corporations and indeed, in states like California, they are telling labor-intensive employers you don't need to produce your products in Bangladesh or Vietnam we have a bonded labor force and they can't strike and you don't pay them for sick days and you don't have to pay social security and if they're unruly they disappear (51:18).

Hedges makes many excellent points here. The for-profit prison model incentivises the mass arrest and incarceration of people— primarily men of color. What I take issue with is placing the burden of fixing the system on those abused by it.

It is not the responsibility of the prisoner to change the prison system. It is the responsibility of free individuals. The responsibility of the prisoner is to make parole

and get back to their families. Hedges can afford to be uncompromising in his principles. The consequences for prisoners are very different from those facing Hedges, whose book sales might be bolstered by his unwavering resolve.

Hedges' criticisms are not just valid, they are vital. But he can do this work without using the labor of these men and possibly making it harder for them to make parole. According to the DOC, all twenty-eight of these men are eligible for parole⁷ (Lanigan 16). There are always ethical concerns when working with prisoners— they are literally a captive population— so it is paramount that their interests are protected. At best, Hedges was careless with this responsibility.

This project thoroughly fails my first criterion. Some aspects of the project may be restorative for the prisoners: RJ should recognize how an offender's past, including systemic failures, have lead them to a crime. Sharing this with an audience can give an offender the feeling that they have helped their community better understand them. However, this project sidestepped the stories of the actual offenders and prioritized the stories of people outside the class. The resulting fictional protagonist, Omar, embodies the systemic failures that the writers and Hedges wish to highlight, but is devoid of the humanity that is vital to the conversation around these failures— a humanity that the real stories of the twenty-eight inmates would have captured. Furthermore, a project that does not ask the offender to reckon with their own mistakes and the harm that they caused does not meet the demands of RJ.

⁷ The report from the DOC shows that 0% of prisoners in East Jersey Prison are ineligible for parole (Lanigan 16). Meaning that all twenty-eight of the students in the class will eventually see a parole board.

As for the revolution, the play partially passes my second criterion. Hedges describes the audience's response to the play, which he says was sold out every night: “four minutes into that play, I heard sniffing and weeping and finally sobbing for the entire ninety minutes. Their song is our song it's a song about us as a society, a society that has failed the most vulnerable among us, a society whose protean forms of racism and slavery have never changed” (49:59). *Caged* shows the audience a world without RJ, the one we mostly live in. Hedges and the play *Caged* make an excellent case for RJ intervening sooner in the process. Before the convictions that put these men in prison and even before the crime, when many of these men were dealing with misdemeanors— a common preamble to the incarcerating offense. But it does not present RJ as an alternative, which is necessary to thoroughly consider this play pedagogical for the audience.

Conclusion

In my own practice, I hope to utilize the best of both of these programs and create theatre that satisfies both of the criteria I have set.

1. Does sharing their story through this play, performance, or arts program have a restorative effect for the offender or victim?

During this inquiry, I made an unexpected discovery regarding the types of texts that are most useful for projects pursuing RJ. *Caged* shows that when tasked specifically with reflecting and writing about their lives, offenders are likely to steer away from the crime they committed. Further, when given plays that are chosen because of the overt similarities they have to the offender's life, they are less likely to make unexpected discoveries in the text. Shakespeare has a unique aptitude for RJ, because offenders may not expect to find themselves in 16th/17th century characters, but when they do, they discover connections to both their crime and their life as a whole.

Furthermore, systemic failures that lead an offender to commit a crime should be called out and examined. Carceral Shakespeare tends to focus on the granular, interpersonal relationships that shaped an offender's psyche— usually abusive parents. But just as impactful to a person's psyche is their positionality in society and the challenges that it presents. Where carceral Shakespeare falls short, Hedges' endeavors are carelessly excessive. It is not useful to the offender to, as you offer this societal critique, foster a sense of cynicism about the society that the offender hopes to reenter. Saying that "the entire system is gamed against them," however valid the sentiment, does not inspire law-abiding behavior. To meet my first criterion, a project

should both help an offender express to an audience/community how all the aspects of their life influenced them, who they are beyond the most terrible thing they have ever done, and how they plan to course-correct so that they can exist on the outside with us without reoffending.

2. *Does this play, performance, or arts program have a pedagogical or empowering effect for the audience?*

To meet my second criterion, the project should invite the audience to think about systemic failures and question their place in them. They should also see the full humanity of an offender. Finally, to fulfill this criterion to the fullest extent, a project should show an audience alternatives to our typical approach to crime. Both of my case studies fulfill this criterion to some extent; carceral Shakespeare is apt at showing an audience the full humanity of an offender and what they are capable of and *Caged* presents an audience with systemic failures that they may be complicit in. But neither project presents an alternative to our justice system's approach to crime. What would it mean for an audience to witness a RJ dialogue? Perhaps it would broaden their ideas about how to handle an offense in ways that do not involve courts or, if it is post-conviction, how to avoid punitive consequences.

In my summation of RJ in Part 1, I alluded to the unique potential that post-dramatic theatre has to aid RJ. Some of the most empowering and pedagogical performances I have seen have been post-dramatic. This will surely inspire much of my work going forward, both in research and in practice.

This inquiry primarily focuses on the post-conviction offender and their relationship with themselves, the institutions they are held in, and a select audience. The future of this research will examine every combination of stakeholders; victim/offender, victim/audience, and (continued research into) offender/community.

The most obvious missing component here is the victim's perspective. RJ is partly defined by the victim's participation in the process. Although this thesis focuses on projects with offenders at the center of the collaboration, I have designed this test to apply as aptly to theatre projects with victims as collaborators. The future of this research will do just that.

I plan to put my research into action with the help of my own theatre company (Red Theater of Chicago) by engaging with people affected by crime. Red Theater's mission is to *make theatre by putting people first* and the company is very enthusiastic about this work.

My vision for the future of this research is a RJ process that brings together an offender and a victim as collaborators and uses theatre to fully engage the community in the problems and solutions implicit in a crime. It appears to be a pie-in-the-sky idea due to the heavy nature of the work and the care it requires, but— as I have studied RJ dialogues and their incredible results— this kind of project seems, not only possible, but the logical conclusion of this research.

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