

**‘Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war’:**

**Applied Shakespeare as therapy for military veterans.**

Submitted by Jane Francesca Green to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Drama.

January 2024

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

## Abstract

My PhD thesis focuses on the therapeutic use of applied Shakespeare for combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, and for those who struggle to adapt to civilian life when leaving the military. I analyse how Shakespeare is used as a well-being exercise, focusing on plays, passages and characters. I analyse the overall value of applied Shakespeare for veterans' well-being.

I identify and examine work that takes place in the UK, the US and Ukraine, often collaborative, with veterans and Shakespeare. I include workshops using Shakespearean monologues, and performances at venues such as Shakespeare's Globe, London and the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. I principally work with two veterans' organisations. Soldiers' Arts Academy in the UK has produced Shakespeare plays with veterans and assists them with accessing post-military careers in theatre. It also has links with American and Ukrainian veterans. DE-CRUIT in the US uses mimesis as a healing tool in Shakespeare-based therapeutic workshops. My case studies analyse group work by these organisations, and the post-trauma growth of individual veterans who participated in them.

My research suggests that Shakespeare can be used as an applied theatre practice to help veterans in a number of ways. Firstly, veterans relate to Shakespeare's military characters, some of whom portray combat-related trauma or difficulty with transitioning to a post-military life. Kate Percy's speech in *I Henry IV* includes every symptom of combat PTSD; DE-CRUIT coordinator Stephan Wolfert describes her words as the best description of PTSD in the English language (Wolfert, 2017). Secondly, the language and rhythm of Shakespeare's verse can help veterans to evaluate, reconcile and accept their experiences as part of the therapeutic process. The language is recognisably English, but a step removed from everyday speech. This distance provides veterans with a safe space to express emotions and experiences which could have happened to someone else. Thirdly, participating in theatre-making can replicate the 'band of brothers' familiarity of a military unit, which many veterans miss when leaving the armed forces.

I conclude that applied Shakespeare has a valuable role to play in helping veterans to cope with trauma and psychological issues. While my research

represents an original contribution to knowledge about the use of applied Shakespeare to address mental health issues in a specific and discrete group, it may also subsequently help in the future further design and implementation of Shakespeare-based therapy which could alleviate combat PTSD in some sufferers in other sections of society.

## Table of Contents

<b><u>Chapter</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b>Title Page</b>	1
<b>Abstract</b>	2
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	6
<b>Introduction</b>	8
<b>Literature Review: Combat PTSD</b>	19
<b>Literature Review: Applied theatre and applied Shakespeare</b>	36
<b>Literature Review: The psychological cost of war in Shakespeare</b>	72
<b>Methodology</b>	87
<b>Chapter 1: Case Study 1: Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare</b>	100
<b>Chapter 2: Case Study 2: Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career</b>	136
<b>Chapter 3: Case Study 3: The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans</b>	168
<b>Chapter 4: Case Study 4: 'Improvise, Adapt and Overcome': producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes</b>	201
<b>Conclusion</b>	234
<b>References</b>	247
<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix A: Change of name for researcher, Jane Francesca Wright</b>	284
<b>Appendix B: Ethics application to the University of Exeter</b>	285
<b>Appendix C: Ethics approval from the University of Exeter</b>	296
<b>Appendix D: Participant Information</b>	298
<b>Appendix E: Participant Consent Form 1</b>	305
<b>Appendix F: Participant Consent Form 2</b>	308
<b>Appendix G: List of Illustrations</b>	312



## **Acknowledgments**

I should like to acknowledge and sincerely thank everyone who has helped me with my PhD. In particular, my supervisors at the University of Exeter, Evelyn O'Malley and Pascale Aebischer, have been unfailingly supportive, encouraging, wise and knowledgeable. Their mentoring and feedback on my work has been invaluable and very much appreciated. I wish to extend my thanks too, to other personnel at the University, who have given me help and support in both academic and administrative matters.

I am especially grateful to Michael Dobson, Chris Laoutaris and other staff at my alma mater, The Shakespeare Institute, in Stratford-upon-Avon, for their help and encouragement, and particularly the librarians for their patient assistance on my research trips there.

I have been greatly helped by Amanda Faber at Soldiers' Arts Academy, and Stephan Wolfert at DE-CRUIT. Both permitted me to observe performances, rehearsals and workshops, all of which form an intrinsic part of my case study chapters. Amanda also put me in contact with veterans who have used Shakespeare therapeutically, and who were willing to be interviewed for my research. I would particularly like to thank those veterans, in alphabetical order: Tip Cullen, Neil Davies, Dean Helliwell, Shaun Johnson, Ian Jones, Teddy Kiendl, Philip Milio and his civilian partner Julie Geisler, Robin Seaward and Lee Wilkinson. Jeff Williams of Veterans United Against Suicide (VUAS) was also particularly helpful. My thanks are due too, to veterans whom I have pseudonymised according to their request.

There are veterans who offered both moral support, and invaluable assistance in practical ways throughout my PhD with myriad and diverse military details, such as armed forces slang, etiquette, rank and insight into how soldiers think and feel. They shared with me their experiences of training, combat and camaraderie. They recommended reading and viewing material they thought I would find useful, and I did. They do not form part of my case studies and nor do they want to be named in my thesis; I therefore respect their wishes while offering my gratitude and appreciation.

I offer my profound gratitude to Nataliya Torkut, head of the Ukraine Shakespeare Centre, who graciously found the time and energy to be interviewed

by me via Zoom while her country is at war. I am indebted too, to my Ukrainian contacts who are involved in Shakespeare and who see his work as an inspiration and strength in this time of conflict. I offer them my sincere and heartfelt hope that peace will soon come to Ukraine and all who suffer everywhere because of war.

I acknowledge the beauty of Shakespeare's plays and poetry which have served as an inspiration for me since the age of fourteen.

I thank 'the god of my idolatry' (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.1.156: 891) and 'my soul's joy' (*Othello*, 2.1.181: 2119).

I thank family and friends for their unstinting encouragement and belief in me throughout my PhD.

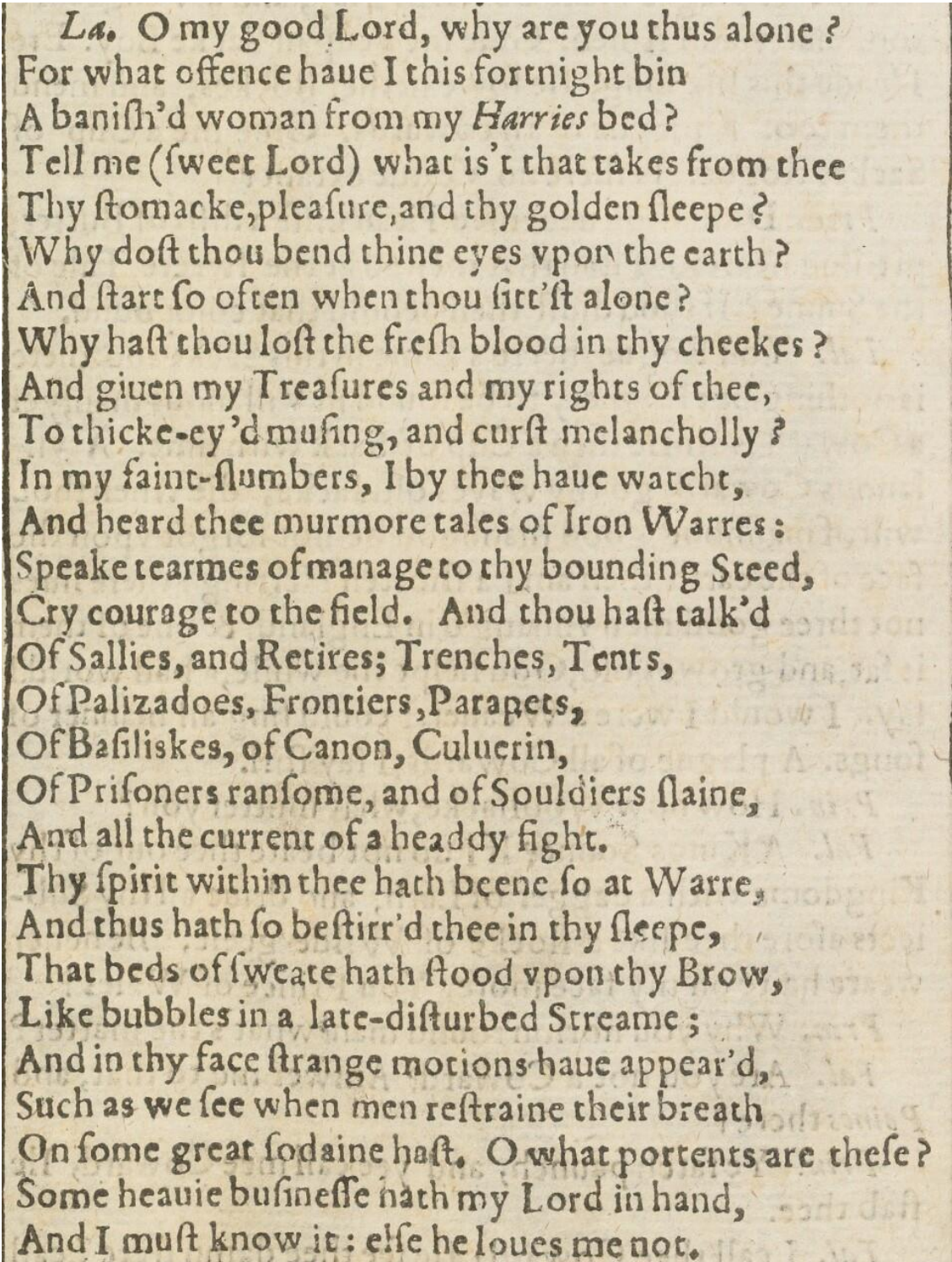
Finally, I should like to make a special dedication. I began my PhD in my married name of Jane Francesca Wright. I have since chosen to use my maiden name of Green, as a tribute to my late parents Alan Green and Henrietta Nicholls, to whom I wish to dedicate my doctorate. Both encouraged me in my love of literature and Shakespeare; despite, or perhaps because, neither went to university, both my mother and father valued education very highly. I owe them, and my maternal grandparents John and Henrietta Nicholls, who were similarly supportive, much love and gratitude.

Jane Francesca Green

## Introduction

'Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war'

*I Henry IV (2.4.50: 1177)*



*La.* O my good Lord, why are you thus alone?  
For what offence haue I this fortnight bin  
A banish'd woman from my *Harries* bed?  
Tell me (sweet Lord) what is't that takes from thee  
Thy stomacke, pleasure, and thy golden sleepe?  
Why dost thou bend thine eyes vpon the earth?  
And start so often when thou sitt'st alone?  
Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheekes?  
And giuen my Treasures and my rights of thee,  
To thicke-ey'd musing, and curst melancholly?  
In my faint-slumbers, I by thee haue watcht,  
And heard thee murmore tales of Iron Warres:  
Speake tearmes of manage to thy bounding Steed,  
Cry courage to the field. And thou hast talk'd  
Of Sallies, and Retires; Trenches, Tents,  
Of Palizadoes, Frontiers, Parapets,  
Of Basiliskes, of Canon, Culuerin,  
Of Prisoners ransome, and of Souldiers slaine,  
And all the current of a headdy fight.  
Thy spirit within thee hath beene so at Warre,  
And thus hath so bestirr'd thee in thy sleepe,  
That beds of sweate hath flood vpon thy Brow,  
Like bubbles in a late-disturbed Streame;  
And in thy face strange motions haue appear'd,  
Such as we see when men restraine their breath  
On some great sodaine hast. O what portents are these?  
Some heauie businesse hath my Lord in hand,  
And I must know it: else he loues me not.

Figure 1: Kate Percy's speech from *I Henry IV*, in Shakespeare's First Folio.



My doctoral research has been inspired by, and is encapsulated in, Shakespeare's words in *I Henry IV*, spoken by Kate Percy, wife of the soldier Harry Hotspur. In her speech, written more than four centuries before the term was officially recognised, she lists the principal symptoms of what is now pathologised as combat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Kate also details the effect that these symptoms have on the sufferer and his family: social withdrawal, sexual dysfunction and/or a disinclination for intimacy, inability to take pleasure in life, insomnia, depression, a hyperactive startle reaction, traumatic dreams and night terrors that relive combat episodes.

My thesis examines how applied Shakespeare may be used therapeutically to help military veterans with PTSD and those who struggle to adapt to civilian life when leaving the armed forces. PTSD is a psychological condition suffered in response to a traumatic event or events; ergo, combat PTSD refers to the specific condition engendered in soldiers as a response to traumatic military experiences. The psychological reaction to trauma caused by combat has been called many names, from 'shellshock' to 'battle fatigue', and 'lack of moral fibre'. The term PTSD was first used in 1980, by the American Psychiatric Association in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III, 1980: 236)*. PTSD can have a profoundly debilitating effect on sufferers and may be life-threatening. At its most severe, PTSD can result in suicide. The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) pledged in September 2021 that, for the first time, it would record official figures on armed forces or veteran suicide (2021, online). By the end of 2023, this reporting had not been implemented. Jeff Williams, who runs the UK-based, informal outreach group Veterans United Against Suicide, estimates an average loss of seventy-five veterans a year to suicide (Williams, 2022).<sup>1</sup> Many veterans who do not develop PTSD also have significant readjustment problems when they leave the military, including alcohol and substance abuse, failed relationships and the inability to get or hold down a job.

There are many ways to treat PTSD, from psychological to pharmacological approaches. My research focuses on applied Shakespeare, which uses the works of Shakespeare in an attempt to treat, empower and heal veterans with PTSD, and to help others to adjust to a new role in their post-service

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<sup>1</sup> Veterans United Against Suicide is not a UK registered charity. It operates informally via its Facebook page and word-of-mouth between veterans.

society. Applied Shakespeare is a branch of applied theatre; the latter is described by Helen Nicholson as constituting ‘forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies’ (2005: 2). Applied Shakespeare is sometimes referred to as dramatherapy, but in general dramatherapy belongs to a distinctly different discipline, whose practitioners are qualified and registered clinicians rather than theatre personnel. Apart from describing what constitutes dramatherapy in my Literature Review, my approach is distinct in its consideration of applied Shakespeare and veterans. I focus on the unique contribution of theatre practitioners to helping veterans with psychological conditions.

I have principally worked with two organisations, Soldiers’ Arts Academy (SAA) and DE-CRUIT. SAA provides arts-based support and help for serving personnel and veterans and their families in the UK. SAA has also been instrumental in facilitating international collaboration on Shakespeare plays, notably between veterans from the UK (including UK-based Canadian and Israeli veterans), the US and Ukraine. SAA was originally formed from an earlier organisation, Combat Veteran Players (CVP), which operated between 2011 and 2017, and had a narrower remit only to produce Shakespeare plays acted by UK veterans for therapeutic reasons. CVP and SAA projects have included performances of Shakespeare plays and related original work at mainstream venues such as Shakespeare’s Globe in London, the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon and theatres in London’s West End. My research examines these Shakespeare projects with British and American veterans, and veterans from Ukraine who worked with SAA prior to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. DE-CRUIT in the US offers Shakespeare-based workshops to veterans for therapeutic benefit but does not stage performances of Shakespeare plays. Instead, DE-CRUIT workshops use Shakespearean and personal experience monologues to express the veterans’ emotions and experiences. My case studies focus on CVP, SAA and DE-CRUIT Shakespearean projects and the post-trauma growth of individual veterans who have participated in them.

## Background

The seeds of my PhD research into Shakespeare and combat PTSD were sown when I had just finished my A Levels in 1979. I had studied the war poetry of Wilfred Owen for English Literature. On a holiday to France and Belgium, I visited a First World War cemetery, not the well-known sites at Thiepval or Tyne Cot, but a small rural burial ground where all the soldiers were French. Many had been my age, eighteen, or younger, when they died. The graves were beautifully tended, and the words of Owen's 1917 poem, 'Dulce et Decorum Est', came to me then and made me cry:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest,  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

(1975: 25-28)

I had used these lines in an examination essay, not blithely, but without the understanding that came from walking among the graves of young men, many of whom had gone to war probably believing in the sentiment of 'dulce et decorum est pro patria mori'.<sup>2</sup> I realised that soldiers, and not just civilians, are casualties of war. I had heard of shellshock, but at that time I did not fully comprehend that psychological wounds can be as severe as (or sometimes more so than) physical injuries. A soldier's life may be ended not only by death on the battlefield, but also by suicide because he or she cannot cope with, to paraphrase Macbeth, the scorpions of the mind that may come in the aftermath of military service (*Macbeth*, 3.2.37: 2588).

Many years later, I had to write a dissertation for my Master of Arts degree in Shakespeare and Theatre.<sup>3</sup> I was then more knowledgeable about the symptoms and impact of combat PTSD. When I read *I Henry IV*, Kate Percy's speech in that play saddened me as deeply as Wilfred Owen's words had done. Lady Percy's husband, Harry Hotspur, appeared to be a classic example of a combat PTSD sufferer. I learned that Kate Percy's speech had been eulogised by American veteran Stephan Wolfert as 'the best description of PTSD in the

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Latin, Owen's line means 'it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country'.

<sup>3</sup> My Master of Arts degree in Shakespeare and Theatre was awarded by The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, in 2019.

English language, and it was written four hundred years ago' (2017). Shakespeare would not have known the term PTSD, but Lady Percy's speech convinced me he had encountered people who showed symptoms that correspond to the modern definition of the condition.

Recently, academic writings on Shakespeare's depiction of war have begun to address the psychological effects of war on soldiers and their families. Alan Friedman's *Shakespeare's Returning Warriors - and Ours* (2022) and Kelsey Ridge's *Shakespeare's Military Spouses and Twenty-First-Century Warfare* (2022) are two examples of this approach. Friedman examines PTSD suffered by modern 'returning warriors' and considers how Shakespeare portrays the difficulties of transitioning back to post-combat society and how through the work of organisations like DE-CRUIT, Shakespeare may be used therapeutically (2022: 132-3). Ridge examines how Shakespearean military spouses demonstrate similarities to the lived experiences of their twenty-first century counterparts in the US; she writes that her book started with a 'fixation' on Kate Percy, whose words reframed how Ridge viewed the entirety of the play (2022: 1). My research, while it includes the subject matter covered by Friedman and Ridge, extends the scope of focus to concentrate on the praxis of applied Shakespeare for veterans in the UK, the US and Ukraine. Research has been conducted into the therapeutic use, in carefully customised workshops, of Shakespeare for veterans in the US by DE-CRUIT, principally by Alisha Ali and Stephan Wolfert at New York University (2016, 2018, 2019). Several UK veterans' organisations, such as SAA and Help for Heroes, have used Shakespeare in a therapeutic context, but evidence and analysis for its practice, success or failure is anecdotal and non-systematic. My thesis is intended to bridge the significant gap between this casual approach and a lack of university-based research in the UK. In addition, my research work adds to the existing work carried out in the US by Ali and Wolfert. To date, there has been no academic research nor writing about the therapeutic use of Shakespeare with Ukrainian veterans, and although my sample is small, it does also address this current dearth.

## **Research questions and aims**

The key questions that my research addresses are:

- 1) What is applied Shakespeare and how is the practice used as a well-being tool or exercise for veterans with PTSD or those transitioning from military to civilian life?
- 2) Which thematically apposite plays, characters and passages from Shakespeare may be used therapeutically for veterans?
- 3) What qualities in Shakespeare's work make it particularly suited to addressing the psychological and lifestyle challenges faced by veterans?
- 4) How does nationhood inform practices of applied Shakespeare in times of peace and war, with both British veterans and in an international collaboration with those veterans who do not share Shakespeare's nationality?

My research aims to identify how applied Shakespeare can help the well-being of some veterans who suffer from PTSD, and others who struggle to transition to civilian life when leaving the armed forces.

## **Chapter Outlines**

The first chapter comprises a tripartite literature review. The first two sections examine what constitutes combat PTSD and readjustment issues; and applied theatre and applied Shakespeare, respectively. I include in the third part of my literature review the works of Shakespeare which are especially relevant to my research. The four case study chapters describe and analyse the praxis of applied Shakespeare with my subject group of veterans. Each case study reflects a different aspect of the praxis.

My section on combat PTSD and re-adjustment issues contextualises my subject group of military veterans. It describes what constitutes combat PTSD, outlining the symptoms, the propensity of veterans to develop it and positions the disorder in an historical context alongside conditions such as shellshock. It examines apposite issues such as moral injury, which may be a contributing factor in the development of PTSD and the concept of just wars. This part of my

literature review also examines the challenges and difficulties that veterans face when transitioning and re-adjusting back to civilian life.

The second section of my literature review firstly focuses on the definition of applied theatre and examines its role in the management of PTSD and other veteran well-being issues. Applied Shakespeare is the branch of applied theatre that underpins my thesis on Shakespeare used therapeutically for veterans. In attempting to answer the question of 'wherefore Shakespeare?', the literature review offers a history of where and for whom applied Shakespeare has been employed. This includes its use in prisons, partly because much applied Shakespeare work has been carried out in custodial settings. Additionally, there are similarities (if not exact comparisons) between prison and the institutionalised life of the military: both are authoritarian regimes with a hierarchical system of operation; those serving custodial sentences or a term of service in the military are required to follow orders or commands when given; and neither prisoners nor soldiers are permitted to abscond or go AWOL (absent without leave) if and when they wish to. Intrinsic to my literature review is an examination of an early modern approach to mental health and melancholy which contextualises my argument that Shakespeare conveyed the psychological effect that war may have upon combatants and their families. Shakespeare was not, however, the only early modern writer who apparently observed the link between theatre used therapeutically to alleviate melancholy. I therefore examine why it is specifically Shakespeare whose work is used in an applied context, which includes the role of Shakespeare's cultural capital, how Shakespeare's language, rhythm and metre specifically can be used to help veterans and the value of simulation and mimesis associated with Shakespeare's work.

My literature review further encompasses the work of Shakespeare as it relates to combat PTSD. I include textual analysis of Shakespearean characters who appear to display what we might now consider to be PTSD and readjustment issues. I have chosen four characters whom the veterans have frequently worked with: Harry Hotspur and his wife, Kate Percy; King Henry V and Coriolanus. This literature review contextualises Shakespeare's resonance for veterans, which is important in illuminating how applied Shakespeare can be used therapeutically.

In the 'Methodology' chapter, I explain who constitutes my research subject group of veterans, how I accessed those veterans and how I structured

my research. My focus has been on veterans who have psychological issues related to their military service, so I describe how the ethics of interviewing vulnerable people and the issue of reflexivity were crucial to my research methods. In total, I engaged with 21 British veterans and one American based in the UK; one Canadian and one Israeli who are all UK-based; nine American veterans in the US and the civilian partner of one of those veterans; and eight Ukrainian veterans in Ukraine. My methodology consisted of observing Shakespeare-based workshops, rehearsals and performances (with some limited, personal participation when I was invited to do so) and conducting semi-structured interviews with veterans and those who work with them. I include reflections on how the researcher may also be impacted by the nature of the information and disclosures learned during the qualitative process. I include the impact on my research of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

There are four case study chapters which constitute the praxis and ethnographic element of my thesis. Chapter One, titled 'Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare', is an historical case study focusing on Shaun Johnson, a Royal Artillery veteran with PTSD who began his theatrical journey with Shakespeare and is now a professional actor. This chapter includes description and analysis of the history and practices of Combat Veteran Players (CVP), an all-veterans acting troupe which focused solely on Shakespeare and with whom Johnson started his Shakespearean journey. The chapter includes analysis of Johnson's time working with CVP and Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA), in addition to independent projects he undertook. I analyse the Shakespeare plays that Johnson has acted in and discuss the characters and language in them that specifically resonated with him. I include an analysis of why acting and the theatrical process in general have been so helpful to Johnson for coping with his PTSD.

This case study chapter also examines the theory of post-traumatic growth and demonstrates why it is applicable to Johnson. In particular, I analyse how his personal development has enabled him to engage in projects independent of veterans' organisations and why this is important.

Chapter Two, 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career', focuses on SAA, and how the organisation's existence and ethos have

enabled some veterans to progress through the therapeutic use of Shakespeare so that they may feel competent and confident to act on the public stage. As the successor to CVP, this study includes background to SAA and a description and analysis of collaborations with Shakespeare's Globe: the *Shakespeare and Remembrance* production performed there in 2018, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 2019 and *The Winter's Tale* in 2023. I include interviews with participating veterans, directors, producers and other theatre professionals with whom the veterans have worked. I focus particularly on the similarities and differences between experienced, professional actors and veterans. I analyse the productions and archival material held by Shakespeare's Globe and SAA.

I analyse the role of Shakespeare's Globe both in collaborating with SAA and reaching out to other communities as described. This includes the question of 'ownership' of Shakespeare. I focus on how Shakespeare's Globe works with community projects to create a fusion of applied theatre and professional performers and creatives. I examine how these community projects have included veterans who often feel like a marginalised or excluded group in theatre.

Chapter Three, 'The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans', focuses on the US-based veterans' organisation of DE-CRUIT. I describe and analyse DE-CRUIT's approach to Shakespeare as therapy, which differs from that of CVP and SAA in that it uses Shakespeare only within its discrete workshop sessions rather than staging public performances of plays. I describe and analyse a series of online DE-CRUIT workshop sessions in 2021, which I observed and participated in. I analyse the materials used in the workshops and discuss how the veterans reacted and responded to the methods used. I also include a follow-up session involving some of the veterans who participated in earlier workshops, who describe the impact and value of attending them.

Chapter Four, "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome": producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes', has, as its title suggests, been changed and defined by the context of the war in Ukraine (and takes the first part of its title from a mantra especially used by the British Royal Marines). I originally intended to focus on international co-operation between veterans from the UK, the US and Ukraine engaging in Shakespeare projects with SAA. The Ukrainian projects were both independent of SAA, and partly initiated and supported by the



organisation. The on-going war in Ukraine has caused the indefinite postponement of a collaborative venture between SAA and Ukrainian veterans of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. SAA's British and American veterans chose instead to work on a production of *Macbeth*, which they sub-titled *A Soldier's Tale*, to reflect their military perspective on the play and to dedicate their performance to their Ukrainian comrades.

In this chapter, I examine and analyse this international theatrical co-operation. I include the Ukrainian veterans' 'Project W' version of *Twelfth Night*, which they had performed in Kyiv in 2019 and about which they subsequently collaborated with SAA to bring the Ukrainian veterans' versions of Shakespeare to an international audience. I describe the SAA weekly workshops, in which the Ukrainian veterans participated before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These workshops initially focused on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and then, after the Ukrainians were deployed to fight in the war, shifted to *Macbeth* to analyse how, by communalising trauma, those sessions assisted veterans to overcome their psychological issues with the practical use of Shakespeare. I analyse how and why Shakespeare is so important in Ukraine and especially now when the country is at war. I also analyse why some veterans feel they are marginalised by the theatre industry and how this impacts on their engagement with it.

The 'Conclusion' summarises my research findings, defines how applied Shakespeare may best be used as a tool to help veterans with combat PTSD or readjustment issues and reinforces the notion that similar models may be tailored and used to help other traumatised groups. I conclude that there has been valuable but limited work done with applied Shakespeare by veterans' organisations in the UK, including a collaboration with American and Ukrainian veterans, and that accordingly, there is scope still for more uses of Shakespeare's unique therapeutic qualities to ameliorate combat PTSD and readjustment issues.

My research offers an original contribution to Shakespeare studies; applied theatre; applied Shakespeare in relation to combat PTSD; and a methodological approach which may be suitable for sensitive and empathic research with vulnerable people. My thesis thus presents new research to argue that applied Shakespeare has a therapeutic role to play in assisting with recovery from PTSD and the transitioning to civilian life. In summary, theatre in general

can replicate the 'band of brothers' familiarity of a military unit, which many veterans miss when they leave the armed forces, but there are experiences unique to engaging with Shakespeare that assist the therapeutic process. These are as follows. Firstly, veterans can empathise with Shakespeare's military characters, some of whom portray combat-related trauma. Many can personally relate to the experiences of war and its aftermath that Shakespeare portrays. Secondly, by being familiar but distant, Shakespeare's language can help veterans to evaluate, reconcile and accept their own experiences as part of recovery and/or readjustment. Thirdly, soldiers often use breathing techniques to calm themselves before they take a shot in combat. Veterans, and theatre practitioners who work with them, employ similar breathing exercises which they use to deliver the rhythm of Shakespeare's verse; they have demonstrated that such techniques can have much value as a calming method for veterans experiencing stress.

## Literature Review: Combat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

‘Tell me, sweet lord, what is’t that takes from thee

Thy stomach, pleasure and golden sleep?’

*I Henry IV*

2.4.34-35 (1997: 1176)

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a psychological condition which may be suffered in response to a traumatic event or events in a person's life; ergo, combat PTSD refers to the specific condition which is experienced by service personnel as a response to traumatic military experiences (American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 2013: 274). My research focuses only on PTSD which is experienced by veterans rather than serving military personnel. PTSD symptoms range from severe depression and hypervigilance to night terrors and episodic flashbacks to the cause of the trauma. Veterans may also suffer from moral injury, a term that describes wounding damage to one's conscience which may provoke shame or guilt. While moral injury is not in itself classified as a mental health condition (it is not catalogued in *DSM-5*, for example), it may develop into PTSD or be a contributing factor to exacerbating the difficulty some veterans have in transitioning from the military to civilian life (Williamson, Greenberg, and Murphy, 2019; Williamson and Murphy, 2021). Re-adjustment to civilian life also does not represent a classifiable psychological illness, but nevertheless can cause severe lifestyle issues such as violence and anger management problems, alcohol and substance abuse, relationship breakdowns and homelessness (Hotopf, Fear et al, 2006; Fear, Iversen et al, 2007; Fulton et al, 2018; Combat Stress, 2023).

### Combat PTSD History

Combat PTSD is not a new condition. Anthony Babington writes of a ‘war neurosis’ occurring among soldiers at the Battle of Marathon (490 BC) during the Greek-Persian Wars (1997: 7). Jonathan Shay similarly cites the literary texts of *The Iliad of Homer* and *The Odyssey* as depicting combat trauma (1994 and 2002). Michael Trimble writes that the development of symptoms not associated

with a 'defined somatic pathology' is an old concept and was recognised in Kate Percy's words about her husband Hotspur in 'Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*' [sic] (1985: 6). Shay and Glin Bennett (2011) also identify Kate's speech in the play as containing an important reference to the condition, of which I shall describe more in the section on the psychological cost of warfare in Shakespeare. The terminology used to describe combat PTSD has varied throughout history: as 'nostalgia' by Austrian physician Josef Leopold; 'irritable heart' during the Crimean War of 1854-56 and 'disorderly action of the heart' in the Boer War of 1899-1902 (Trauma Dissociation.com, online, 2022), with both of the latter, similar terms describing psychological rather than physiological causes for the manifestation of cardiac symptoms, such as rapid pulse-rate, heart pains and giddiness (Babington, 1997: 9). Lars Weisaeth notes that such symptoms had previously precipitated the evacuation of many soldiers from the battlefields of the American Civil War of 1861-1865 (2015: 41). 'Battle fatigue' and 'combat exhaustion' were terms adopted by the US Army in the latter stages of the Second World War 'to remove the last vestiges of stigma from war neurosis' (Babington: 151). Babington quotes an official American report which states "there is no such thing as "getting used to combat"" (151). Combat exhaustion, according to Weisaeth, was gradual in onset and is comparable to what we may today refer to in non-military circumstances as burnout (46). Abram Kardiner uses 'traumatic neurosis' to refer to psychological symptoms arising from combat during the First World War (1941: 6).

'Neurasthenia' was the generally accepted term, given to what we now recognise as symptoms of combat PTSD, prior to the cataclysmic events of 1914-1918, when the word 'shellshock' was introduced and became the dominant noun. Shellshock as an affliction proved to be so prevalent and debilitating that Weisaeth writes 'it had become the signature psychological condition of the war' (2015: 46). The word shellshock passed into the English language as the most evocative and instantly recognisable description of the condition as it was experienced by soldiers in the First World War. Trimble notes that the neologism is owed to Frederick Mott, who in 1919 attributed shellshock to a physical lesion of the brain possibly caused by carbon monoxide poisoning (1985: 8). In his then definitive work on the subject, *War Neuroses and Shell Shock*, Mott wrote that 'shellshock is a useful term if it is limited to cases where there is definite evidence

of a shell or bomb bursting near enough to knock the man down, or to blow him up in the air and cause temporary loss of consciousness' but differentiates between the physical and psychological effects in that 'the psychogenic factor is by far the most frequent and important cause of shock' (1919: 2). The aetiology of shellshock is now generally understood to include exposure both to the exceptionally heavy artillery used during the First World War and the prolonged duration of the battles and life in the trenches, during which soldiers were exposed to frequent bombardment and other horrors. Writing in 1940, army psychiatrist Charles Myers differentiates between shell concussion, which today is called traumatic brain injury (TBI), and shellshock, which is caused by the emotional as well as the physical stress of warfare (quoted in Trimble, 1985: 8). Kardiner makes the distinction between the combat-related condition and traumas caused by peacetime events in that the former 'is in no small measure altered both in tempo and intensity from those that occur in peacetime' (14).

### **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) today**

The internationally accepted criteria today for a clinical diagnosis of PTSD, howsoever it is caused, are provided by the American Psychiatric Association in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. *DSM* is the standard text widely used across the world in relation to psychiatric illness and conditions. It was in *DSM-III*, in 1980, that the term post-traumatic stress disorder was first used (250-1).<sup>4</sup> Wilbur Scott writes that 'PTSD came to be an official psychiatric disorder' because of its inclusion in *DSM-III* (1990: 294). Although it covers the full spectrum of mental health disorders, *DSM* has its origins in the psychoneuroses observed in American service personnel returning from the Second World War. In 1952, the World Health Organisation published its sixth edition of the *International Classification of Diseases*, which was 'heavily influenced by the Veterans Administration and included for the first time a classification of mental disorders.'<sup>5</sup> A variant of *ICD* was subsequently published

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<sup>4</sup> Prior to the publication of *DSM-5*, Roman numerals were used for all editions.

<sup>5</sup> The Veterans Administration, today known as the US Department of Veterans' Affairs, is the US government department that deals with veteran-related matters. It administers health care benefits, assists veterans to transition to civilian life, maintains military cemeteries across the US and works to improve the nation's preparedness for war. Its vision is 'to provide veterans the world-class benefits and services they have earned — and to do so by adhering to the highest standards of compassion, commitment, excellence, professionalism, integrity, accountability and stewardship' (US Department of Veteran Affairs, 2022).

as *DSM*. The current version, *DSM-5* was first published in 2013, following extensive revisions which began in 2000 (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

*DSM-5* does not have a separate category for combat PTSD but includes it within the broader section on trauma-and stressor-related disorders (271-272). *DSM-5* lists as its risk and prognostic factors for military personnel as 'being a perpetrator, witnessing atrocities, or killing the enemy' (2013: 278). PTSD as it appertains to military personnel may be précised as follows:

**A-** Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence, either by directly experiencing the traumatic events or witnessing in person those events occurring to others.

**B-** The presence of one or more intrusion symptoms which begin after the traumatic event/s occurred. These include recurrent, involuntary and intrusive distressing memories and or/dreams; dissociative reactions such as flashbacks or loss of awareness of present surroundings; and intense or prolonged psychological distress or physiological reactions caused by exposure to internal or external cues that symbolise or resemble as aspect of the traumatic event.

**C-** Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event.

**D-** Negative alterations in mood or cognitions associated with the traumatic events and evidenced by two or more manifestations: persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs about oneself, others or the world; persistent and distorted cognition of the cause or consequences of the traumatic events whereby the person will blame themselves for what happened; a persistent negative emotional state of fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame; diminished interest in previously enjoyed activities; feelings of detachment or estrangement from others; an inability to feel positive emotions such as happiness or loving feelings; the sense of a foreshortened future.

**E-** Marked alterations in arousal, such as irritable behaviour and angry outbursts; reckless or self-destructive behaviour; hypervigilance; an exaggerated startle response; sleep disturbance.

**F-** The duration of Criteria B, C, D and E last for more than one month.

**G-** The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in areas of functioning.

**H-** The disturbance is not attributable to another medical condition, nor to the physiological effects of alcohol, drugs or medication.

(2013: 271-272)

PTSD may present with dissociative symptoms, such as depersonalisation, where the sufferer has a persistent sense of unreality of self and feels detached from their body, and derealisation, which causes the sufferer to have similar feelings of detachment and unreality about the world in general. PTSD may present with delayed expression if the full diagnostic criteria are not met until at least six months after the event, although the onset and expression of some symptoms may be immediate. Acute stress disorder (ASD) encompasses the above symptoms of trauma, but those typically last from three days to a month after the traumatic events. If not resolved within that time frame, ASD becomes PTSD. ASD may involve, for example, dreams which contain themes relating to the traumatic experiences; 'in the case of a combat soldier, the distressing dreams may involve being harmed in ways other than combat' (*DSM-5*: 281-282). While traumatic brain injury (TBI) can cause both physical and psychological symptoms resembling PTSD, key differences are that re-experiencing the traumatic event and avoidance are symptomatic of PTSD, whereas persistent confusion and disorientation are more characteristic of TBI (280).

### **Combat PTSD**

It is axiomatic that military personnel are exposed to events and experiences beyond the range of those of the civilian population. Charles Figley points out that the duration of PTSD symptoms in veterans often relates to the level of trauma witnessed, the combat environment and the individual's own experience and interpretation of the event. He also observes that not every soldier or veteran develops PTSD (2012: 395). The UK 2021 Census, which for the first time included a question on veteran status, reports a figure of 1.85 million veterans living in England and Wales; no figures are yet available for Scotland and Northern Ireland (UK Parliament, 2022). The known incidence of PTSD in UK

veterans in 2014 was 7.4% (PTSD Resolution, 2022). Research carried out in between 2003 and 2018 by the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMRH) at King's College London charted a steadily rising rate of PTSD among serving and ex-military personnel. In still serving regulars with a combat role, PTSD increased from 6% in 2004/6 to 7% in 2009/10 and remained stable at 7% in 2014/16; amongst regulars in a non-combat or support role, PTSD increased from 3% in 2004/6 to 4% in 2014/16. The study also indicated that the PTSD rate for veterans whose last deployment had been in a combat role was 17%, compared to 6% for those in a service role (2023, online). Dr Walter Busutill, medical director at the armed forces' mental health charity Combat Stress, says these figures broadly reflect the cases that he sees, and observes that 'for the first time ever, the rate of PTSD is higher among veterans than serving personnel and the public' (2018, online). It must be noted however, that the prevalence of PTSD is not the entire issue; it is also the severity of its symptoms and how they impact on sufferers' lives, that are crucial.

The US Department for Veteran Affairs (VA) reports a recent downward trend in veteran suicides in the US which broadly mirrors a lessening rate of suicide among the general population. In 2020, 6,146 veterans committed suicide (31.7 per 100,000), which was 343 fewer than in 2019 (2022: 5). The report states that in 2020, suicide was the 13<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death among veterans overall, and the second leading cause among veterans under 45 (5). From 2001 through to 2018, the number of veteran suicides increased on average by forty-seven deaths per year. From 2019 to 2020, there were consecutive reductions, of 307 and 343 suicides respectively, an unprecedented decrease since 2001 (5). In his DE-CRUIT workshops, Stephan Wolfert cites the figure of twenty-two suicides per day amongst the US veteran population, a figure taken from a study the VA released in 2013, which covered the years from 1999 to 2010 (Wolfert, 2020). The VA attributes a fall in veteran suicide since 2018, when it peaked, to the launch in the same year of its National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide (6).

Studies covering UK and US veterans indicate a predisposition to PTSD among some veterans who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Friedman, Schnurr and McDonagh-Coyle, 1994; Figley, 2012; Blossnich, 2014; Stone, 2018; Palmer and Thandi, 2019; Ali and Wolfert, 2018). The most



recent study from Dominic Murphy and David Turgoose for KCMRH found a clear correlation between UK veterans who had mental health issues and ACEs, with 44% of veterans studied (178 of 403) reporting an experience of six or more adverse events in childhood, compared with 24% in the general military population (2019, online abstract).

The most extreme manifestation of PTSD is suicide. In 2020 the MOD confirmed that it did not keep suicide data for veterans of the UK armed forces (MOD, 2020). In 2021, it promised that such figures would be collated, using data collected from the 2021 Census, (which as I have noted above, specifically asked whether the respondent was a veteran), cross-matched with suicide data held by the Office of National Statistics (MOD, 2021). To date, veteran suicide statistics have not as yet been collated and published by the MOD. In December 2022, the University of Manchester published a retrospective cohort study into suicide rates after leaving the UK armed forces between 1996 and 2018. The study linked national databases relating to discharged UK armed forces personnel and all deaths by suicide in the general population. The report's authors, Cathryn Rodway and Saied Ibrahim, found that of the 458,058 veterans covered by the 22-year time period, 1,086 committed suicide (0.2%). The suicide risk was found to be two to four times higher in veterans of both sexes under the age of 25 compared to the general population. Males who had served in the Army and were discharged between the ages of 18 and 34 were at a higher risk of suicide. Male veterans over 35 showed a reduced risk of suicide. Factors associated with reduced risk overall included being married, of a higher rank when serving and deployment on combat operations. Rodway and Ibrahim concluded that the overall rate of suicide in veterans was no higher than in the general population (Rodway and Ibrahim, 2022, online).

### **How PTSD feels to veterans**

A coalition of western countries, led by the US and including the UK, engaged in military action against Iraq (Gulf War, 1990-1991 and Iraq War, 2003-2011) and Afghanistan (2001-2021). Soldiers have historically written war diaries, some of which were subsequently published, detailing aspects of military engagements, but the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have resulted in a veritable plethora of books written by veterans deployed in these theatres of war. Such books reflect

not just the military details of campaign, but what it felt like to be part of missions. Jason Fox joined the Royal Marines in 1992 and served in the Special Boat Service from 2001 until 2012, when he was medically discharged with PTSD. He writes that ‘war was hell but reliving it through the viewfinder of my own emotions felt even worse’ (2018: 116). Brian Wood served with the Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment and in 2004 won the Military Cross for Gallantry in Iraq. He was later subjected to false allegations of war crimes by the now discredited Iraq Historic Abuse Team. Wood experienced PTSD, which he describes as a ‘sort of deep day-dreaming state’ (2018: 142) and writes ‘if anyone had come up to me and asked me if I was okay, I’d have probably told them to fuck off’ (140). Johnson Beharry was awarded the Victoria Cross in 2005 for his actions in Iraq which saved the lives of his comrades at the cost of serious physical and psychological injuries to himself.<sup>6</sup> At his investiture by Queen Elizabeth II, Beharry remarked to her that ‘it’s the injuries that the doctors can’t see that are giving me the most trouble’, to which the Queen replied, ‘they are the ones that take the longest to heal’ (2006: 359). Johnny Mercer, now Conservative MP for Plymouth Moor and Minister for Veterans, served as a captain in 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery. He did several tours of duty in Afghanistan, where in 2010, a close colleague died in his arms. In reference to Afghanistan, Mercer observes that ‘in 2012, more British service personnel took their own lives than were killed in combat. Some of their tales were horrific; descents into substance abuse, homelessness and violence. For some, it was a short trip from the parade ground to the morgue’ (2017: 283). Mercer experienced symptoms of PTSD and felt angry about it, confessing that ‘I couldn’t talk to anyone about it – I felt too ashamed’ (209). There is clearly a cathartic element both to writing these books, and in the knowledge that the experiences described in them may be read by both a military and civilian audience.

Neil Davies, who uses Shakespeare and other arts to help him cope with PTSD, was in the Parachute Regiment between 1965 and 1970 and served in Aden (now Yemen). Davies has written a novel, *Falling Soldiers*, in which his

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<sup>6</sup> The Victoria Cross (VC) is the highest decoration in the British awards system, and is awarded ‘for most conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy’ (UK Ministry of Defence, 2016: 1A-1) Since its inception in 1856, a total of 1,358 VCs have been awarded to 1,355 recipients.

character, a veteran called Eddie describes the post-military reality for many soldiers:

So, what's it like now you're out of the army?

You know, it's like falling off an ocean-going liner. You're all at sea, drowning. So, you grab onto anything that will keep your head above water, but too often the lads grab booze, drugs, any adrenalin highs. But deep down, you know we're all falling soldiers.

(2019: 152)

I will show in my case study chapters that this sense of displacement, of not belonging, of helplessness, has in some degree has been described to me by every veteran I have interviewed for my research.

### **Readjustment issues**

Combat PTSD is an extreme, debilitating and potentially life-threatening mental health issue. However, as I have pointed out above, it is not experienced by most veterans. What is far more common is the struggle to re-adjust from the military to a civilian life (Morin, 2011; MacLean, Van Til et al, 2014; Bashford, Collins and Hasan, 2015; Stern, 2015; Hachey, Sudom, Maclean and Van Til, 2016). Rich Morin reports that in a study of 1,853 US veterans, 27% found the transition process difficult; this rose to 44% of those who had served post-9/11, a period which encompassed deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Psychological trauma while serving was significant as a predictor of future transitioning problems (although it must be remembered that readjustment issues can, and do, afflict soldiers who have never seen combat). Morin writes that 82% of those who did not experience trauma reported an easy readjustment to civilian life, compared to 56% who said it was hard after experiencing combat-related trauma. Overall, 21% found readjustment somewhat difficult and 6% had major problems. Morin reports that veterans who perceived they had a clear mission while serving experienced fewer difficulties transitioning to civilian life than those who did not fully understand their duties and assignments (2011: 1-2).

In 2021, the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) set up Operation Courage, a mental health support service for veterans, service leavers and reservists that is

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<sup>7</sup> 9/11 refers to the destruction of the Twin Towers at the World Trade Centre in New York, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, which were deliberately struck by aircraft flown by terrorists associated with Al Qaeda.

accessed through the NHS (NHS, 2021). The MOD also offers the Transition Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) programme, which it says should be undertaken throughout the soldier's military career (MOD, 2022). IPPD focuses on all aspects of transitioning to civilian life, both practical and emotional. Armed forces charity Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association (SSAFA) conducted research into veteran employment in 2019 in conjunction with Open Reach, the UK's largest private-sector employer of armed forces personnel. Open Reach estimates that 15,000 armed forces personnel leave the services every year. The study of 250 veterans found that 71% struggled to adjust to civilian careers; veterans are out of work for an average of seven months before finding a job in 'civvy street'; while 80% feel they are employable, 68% do not know how their military skills will be transferable; and 44% took a year or more to adjust to civilian life in general (SSAFA, 2019). Clearly, the readjustment issues, like PTSD, can impact on many aspects of everyday life for those veterans who experience them.

### **Moral injury**

One of the key predictors for developing combat PTSD or severe readjustment issues is moral injury (Williamson, Greenberg and Murphy, 2019; Busutill, 2021). Military personnel are deployed in combat where it is overwhelmingly likely they will injure or kill the 'enemy' and/or witness their colleagues doing so; this may also apply to soldiers who are deployed as peacekeepers. Soldiers are, by the nature of their job, placed in situations and required to perform actions 'that go against the grain and against [their] moral and ethical codes and even religious beliefs' (Busutill, 2021). A study of six UK army veterans, carried out jointly by Combat Stress and KCMHR, observed that profound psychological distress can be caused when soldiers' actions, or what they have witnessed, transgress their ethical or moral beliefs (Williamson, Greenberg and Murphy, 2019). The study's key findings were that moral injury has a negative impact on the individual's feelings of self-identity and self-worth; previously religious veterans experienced a loss of faith; and individuals neglected their health or indulged in risky behaviours such as heavy drinking or excessive speeding while driving (Williamson, Greenberg and Murphy, 2019). Moral injury also impacted on employment prospects and contributed towards family problems such as

emotional withdrawal or anger (Williamson, Greenberg and Murphy, 2019). The smallness of this sample and the paucity of other UK-based research on the subject prompted the authors to undertake a further study in 2021, using a larger ethnographic sample of 204 veterans. Their later findings suggested that while moral injury is not a mental health condition *per se*, it can and does lead to the development of psychological difficulties and is significantly associated with PTSD, depression and thoughts of suicide (Williamson and Murphy, 2021).

The issue of moral injury is especially pertinent in the recent example of the military withdrawal by NATO Allies from Afghanistan in 2021. Busutill is, at Combat Stress, treating PTSD cases arising from deployment to Afghanistan. 'They say, we went there, we fought a war. My men died, we struggled. I went there, we got blown up, and now they've given the country away' (Busutill, 2021). Busutill highlights how many soldiers who were deployed in Afghanistan now feel personal betrayal, saying 'I think a lot of the guys thought they did a good job, and they stopped the rebellion by the Taliban. They saved a lot of women from abuse. There was a lot of meaning to that war [...] Why did we pull out?' (2021). Moral injury can occur when soldiers feel guilty about events over which they personally had no control. Charles Bausman writes that it is a creed, ethos and embedded in military culture to 'leave no man behind' although it is not an official military doctrine (2016, online). This ethos, as he points out, refers to wounded and dead combatants and prisoners of war, but it does have wider applications such as the Afghan interpreters and other personnel who helped UK and US troops, and who were left behind after the full evacuation of US military personnel in November 2021.

Moral injury can be triggered when soldiers perceive betrayal by a superior officer or the Government that sent them to war; the element of trust in individuals or institutions is crucial. Hugh McManners, who served in the Falklands Conflict of 1982 in 29 Commando Regiment, now campaigns for medical research to help veterans. He writes of how in battle, servicemen and women 'give their all', trusting that they will be cared for by their Government when things go wrong. McManners says if that trust is not subsequently respected wholeheartedly - 'they [the Government] seem at present to take it for granted' - it is in danger of disappearing (1993: 403). Shay writes about the moral cohesion that is necessary for an army to function and observes 'when a leader destroys the legitimacy of

the army's moral order by betraying "what's right" he inflicts manifold injuries on his men' (1994: 6). Matthew Hoh personalises moral injury further when he acknowledges that the person betraying what is right could be the soldier himself. Hoh writes 'maybe it's you that killed somebody or were ordered to kill. Or maybe it was something tragic you could have stopped and didn't. Guilt and shame are at the centre of moral injury' (2014, online).

## **Just Wars?**

The arms are fair/When the intent of bearing them is just' says Hotspur as vindication before he prepares to go into rebellious battle against his sovereign (*I Henry IV*, 5.2.87-88: 1216). Insofar as my subject group of veterans is concerned, their participation in, and experiences of war (including its psychological consequences) are contextualised by examining the concept and significance of just war theory, although I am persuaded by Chris Brown that in relation to any war the word '*justified* [my italics] fits the situation better' (2018: 207). The ethics of war itself (as with those of life in general) are divided into the teleological and the deontological. An example of teleology, whereby the end justifies the means, is offered by Jeremy Waldron, who writes that 'maybe the horrors of war can be mitigated more decisively by the use of terror weapons on large cities to bring a long and savage war to a speedy end' (2015: 89).<sup>8</sup> A deontological approach argues that the war itself should be right or wrong according to a set of rules which conform to a moral norm, rather than on the outcome of the conflict (Brown, 2020: 319).

Just war theory as we understand and apply it in the twenty-first century has its origins in Christian theology; it is, writes Mark Evans, 'the direct descendant of the Christian just war theory' (2005: 1). John Mattox says that St Augustine of Hippo is regarded as the father of 'what has developed as Western war theory' (2006: 1). Augustine, in response to the sacking of Rome in 410 AD, believed that war was not sinful if it were against a grave wrong that could not be prevented by any other way. He drew on the Bible to justify a ruler, and therefore nation states, going to war, quoting 'For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for

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<sup>8</sup> In my literature review on the psychological cost of warfare in Shakespeare, I point out that the king's actions regarding the citizens of Harfleur in *Henry V*, may be regarded as an example of teleology in combat.

he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil' (Romans, 13.4).<sup>9</sup> In *Summa Theologica*, written in 1485, St Thomas Aquinas set out the doctrine of what reads much like modern just war criteria by stating that wars must be waged by a rightful authority; they must have just cause; and they must be fought with the right intent to promote good and defeat evil (Aquinas, 1485). Only five pages of *Summa Theologica's* two and a half thousand were devoted to the subject of war, and this simplification of complex theory to three tenets is why, writes Gregory Reichberg, 'its fame is attributable to its brevity' (2018: 50).

The secularisation of just war theory has been attributed to the humanist Hugo Grotius at a period in Western history when the modern system of states was evolving (Evans, 2005: 4; Lang, 2005: 60) and just prior to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia which established such a system (Evans, 4). In the late nineteenth and twentieth century several major treaties enshrined the concept of just war into the international law which still applies today. The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 established laws of war and war crimes. The Geneva Conventions, which originated in 1929, but were extensively updated after the Second World War, established international legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war for both combatants and civilians. Post-1945, the United Nations (UN) established that self-defence is the only legally permissible reason for a state to go to war unilaterally without its express approval, and that the offensive state must account for its actions to the UN's Security Council (Evans, 2006: 5).

Paolo Pugliatti points out that 'just', is an ambivalent word, and could mean legally justifiable or morally acceptable, and it is those two meanings that have polarised current debate about just war (2010: 198). Just war theorists are broadly in two camps: traditionalists and revisionists. Traditionalists, such as Alan Walzer, whose seminal work *Just and Unjust Wars*, was published in 1977, are principally led by international law on armed conflict and that, as in the historical examples I have mentioned above, it is only states that can go to war. Revisionists like Jeff McMahan question the moral standing of states and argue that individuals should not fight in unjust wars (*Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: War*, 2020: 1). Just war theory today refers to the set of

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<sup>9</sup> I have quoted from the *King James Bible*, published in 1611, and which therefore was not contemporaneous with Augustine's teachings.

internationally recognised laws appertaining to the reasons for going to war, *jus ad bellum*; the conduct of the combatants during the conflict, *jus in bello*; and what happens in the peace that follows, *jus post bellum*.

*Jus ad bellum* requires a just cause for going to war; that it should be undertaken by legitimate authority (such as a state or entity); that the intention of that state or entity is to achieve the just cause; that the war has a reasonable prospect of success; proportionality, whereby the good achieved by the war outweighs the bad; and that there was no less harmful way to achieve the just cause (Evans, 2005: 12-13). Proportionality, as summarised by Stephen Lee, is about weighing the evil inflicted against the evil averted (2012: 156). Howard Williams, however, asserts that there are no greater evils than war, and that armed conflict that purports to deal with genocide and terrorism is not in itself virtuous; thus, the end does not justify the means (2012: xiii). Williams is influenced by Kantian philosophy, which advocates bringing about the end of war by legal means through the actions of a large and powerful state (2012: xiv).

States, however, may not always have the moral luxury of non-intervention. Mark Evans points out that ‘in the ideal world there would be no war’ but also that ‘in our non-ideal world, war might at times be morally unavoidable’ (2005: 9). In his acceptance speech as winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, former US President Barack Obama addressed the topic of just war in this way:

We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth: We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes. There will be times when nations — acting individually or in concert — will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.

(Obama, 2009)

Some of the veterans in my research served in the 1982 Falklands Conflict between the UK and Argentina. The Falkland Islands are an archipelago off the coast of South America which were colonised by the UK in 1833.<sup>10</sup> The islands now comprise a British Overseas Territory with internal self-government.<sup>11</sup> The islands were invaded in 1982 by Argentina, which sought to establish its claim to

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<sup>10</sup> Anthropological evidence uncovered in the Falklands points to human activity on the islands centuries before European colonisation, notably by the Yaghan people of Tierra del Fuego (Hamley, Gill and Krasinski, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> In a 2013 referendum, and on a turnout of over 90%, Falkland islanders voted by 1,513 votes to three, to remain a British Overseas Territory (BBC, 2013, online).



the territory. The UK is responsible for the defence of the Falklands and the campaign to liberate the islands was fought in harsh conditions by a British Task Force thousands of miles from home; military logistics were correspondingly difficult. In the circumstances, the prospects of British success were not guaranteed (as I note above, one of the main tenets of *jus in bellum* is that a war has to have a reasonable prospect of success), but the challenges encountered by British armed forces did not *per se* make it an unjust war. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, in her justification for military action, argued that 'I'm standing up for the right of self-determination. I'm standing up for our territory. I'm standing up for our people. I'm standing up for international law' (1995: 210). Thatcher's belief in the righteousness of her *casus belli* may help to lessen or mitigate the moral injury suffered by soldiers who fought to liberate the Falklands, although correspondingly, it did not prevent PTSD in Falklands veterans.

*Jus in bello* refers to the conduct of a war, including the behaviour of combatants. Former US president Obama argues that 'where force is necessary, we have a moral and strategic interest in binding ourselves to certain rules of conduct' (2009). *Jus in bello* therefore encompasses behaviour such as the distinguishing between the military and civilians in that the latter should not intentionally be targeted; proportionality, in that any harm done must be in proportion to the advantages achieved; and necessity, which requires that the least harmful means to achieve the military objective should be used (*Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: War*, 2020: 4.1). The difference between traditionalists and revisionists in just war theory becomes especially pertinent for soldiers when they are deployed to the battlefield and become the individuals who kill or are killed. Walzer writes it is problematic that, by the act of fighting, combatants lose their rights to 'life and liberty' even though 'unlike aggressor states, they have committed no crime' (1977: 136). Revisionist David Rodin posits that soldiers fighting in what is deemed to be an unjust war should also be held responsible for participating in it (2002: 167). McMahan cites a revisionist approach on culpability, in that 'it is individual persons, not states, who kill and are killed in war, and that they, rather than their state, bear primary responsibility for their participation and action in war' (2012, online). The King in *Henry V* argues in a similar fashion to McMahan when he engages in conversation with Williams

and Bates on the eve of Agincourt, telling both soldiers that 'every subject's soul is his own' (4.1.164-5: 1485).

*Jus post bellum* is concerned with the aftermath of war following the cessation of hostilities. This tenet did not exercise the minds of early just war theorists, but its increasing relevance today is summed up by Evans who writes that 'the goal of a just war is a just peace' (2005: 9). *Jus post bellum*, therefore, includes considerations such as the rebuilding of the country or countries, war crimes trials, reparations, repatriation of prisoners of war and so forth. PTSD is thus relevant to *jus post bellum*. Stephen Lee argues that if a war is *post bellum* just, those terms will be a fulfilment of the rightful intention (*jus ad bellum*) with which the war began (2012: 287). However, Daniel Brunstetter and Cian O'Driscoll claim that *jus post bellum* does not generate a neat set of principles in the same way as *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, but 'instead is focused on the responsibilities of belligerents in the immediate aftermath of war' (2018: 1). This latter comment encapsulates a problem with the overwhelming majority of just war theory, in that it talks of the responsibility, but not so much about the rights, of those who fight in the wars. The counter-argument is that there should also be a responsibility towards the welfare of combatant 'belligerents' (in itself, a term that may be construed as pejorative if and when used to describe soldiers). The issue of how those soldiers cope and are helped with the aftermath of combat is one which it appears is not sufficiently acknowledged nor addressed in the *jus post bellum* tenet of just war theory.

## **Conclusion**

When Iago says 'Tis the curse of service/Preferment goes by letter and affection/And not by old gradation' (*Othello*, 1.1.34-6: 2101), he is referring bitterly to what he perceives as an unfairness in the promotion process. Despite being an experienced combat soldier, a rank that Iago feels should have been his is given instead to Michael Cassio: 'That never set a squadron in the field' (1.1.21: 2101). Equally, however, Iago's words could apply to combat PTSD; it can indeed be a 'curse of service'. In the peace that follows any war, this profoundly debilitating, sometimes life-threatening mental health condition can be a consequence of military service, and one which has ramifications for the spouses and families of the sufferer as well as for soldiers. Although British and American

soldiers are no longer 'shot at dawn for cowardice' (the military death penalty was abolished in the UK in 1930 and there have been no military executions in the US since 1961), there is no doubt that many of those who were executed suffered from what would now be categorised as recognisable mental health disorders. Official figures would appear to suggest that overall, there is a relatively low incidence of PTSD among veterans, and cohort studies point to no higher a rate of suicide in veterans than for the general public.

A principal intention of the MOD and NHS initiatives, which have been established in the UK in recent years, has been to make acknowledging the problems of PTSD and transition to civilian life, and subsequently seeking help for them, less stigmatised than previously. It is axiomatic, however, that those veterans who present for 'conventional' treatment have already overcome the barrier to seeking help, and by so doing they have made the first step towards the hope of recovery. Other veterans, the numbers of whom it is impossible to quantify, will either eschew such therapy altogether or have previously engaged in it unsuccessfully. My ethnographic studies focus on this latter group, as the Methodology chapter will show. There is, I have learned, a significant difference between 'therapy' and 'therapeutic', which is why my case studies do not examine dramatherapy, but rather the use of Shakespeare *therapeutically*. Why some veterans use the theatrical arts, and in particular Shakespeare, as a method of alleviating and coping with mental health and readjustment issues, and whether they find it efficacious to do so, is a subject that has prompted academic research in the US but which the UK has consistently failed to address. My thesis aims to fill some of that gap.

## **Literature Review: Applied Theatre and Applied Shakespeare**

**'The miserable have no other medicine**

**But only hope'**

***Measure For Measure***

### **3.1.2-3 (1997: 2053)**

Conventional treatments for PTSD have traditionally focused on the pharmacological, with prescription drugs including the brand names sertraline and paroxetine; and the psychological, such as cognitive behaviour therapy and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (NHS, 2022: online). However, it is axiomatic that those treatments may only be used if the sufferer seeks help for their condition, and as applied Shakespeare collaborators Alisha Ali and Stephan Wolfert point out, serving military personnel and veterans are 'highly reluctant to engage in treatment that is premised on the notion that they are mentally ill. Understandably, psychiatric illness is viewed as a sign of weakness within a military system that values and rewards strength' (2018: 259). A different approach is required. My research, therefore, focuses on the use of applied theatre, and specifically applied Shakespeare, to help traumatised veterans and those who struggle to adapt to civilian life. This section of the literature review will provide the context for the praxis chapters of my thesis.

### **What's in a name?**

Terminology varies as to how to describe the practices of applied theatre or applied drama. In *Applied Drama: the Gift of Theatre*, Helen Nicholson writes that both are terms that emerged in the 1990s and they have since been used as a 'kind of shorthand to describe forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies' (2005: 2). Nicholson notes that there is 'no real consensus about how they are used', reflecting the eclectic nature of the styles and ideas from which they are drawn (2).

Where a distinction is made between applied drama and applied theatre, it is often in the difference between process and performance. Philip Taylor

describes applied theatre as having a transformative principle at its heart, but writes that 'unlike applied drama, [applied theatre] is powered by a presentational aspect from skilled teaching artists and actors (2004: 93). Nicholson acknowledges the educational roots of applied drama, writing that it is more about a teaching method, whereas applied theatre is about 'actors-teachers working with students in participatory performance programmes' (3). Nicholson points out that the Greek words *dram* (to make or do) and *theatron* (viewing place) are significant. While careful not to lend unequal weight to either applied drama or applied theatre, Nicholson notes that non-theatrical people tend to equate the word 'theatre' more with *theatron* and its modern trappings of stages, lights, and props (4-5).

My research with veterans supports both *dram* and *theatron*. Applied drama is an apt description for the process which takes place in their workshops and is apposite for the veterans who undertake the DE-CRUIT programme in the USA; they use selected Shakespeare monologues therapeutically to work through their experiences of PTSD rather than to stage a performance as the culmination of the programme. Applied theatre is the manifestation of the finished performance when that is performed before an audience and in a theatrical space; this is germane to the practice of Combat Veteran Players (CVP), which used Shakespeare's plays and the process of acting in them, as therapy for traumatised veterans. CVP's successor, Soldiers' Arts Academy, also puts on full productions, but its remit is less therapeutic and more about bringing veterans together to give them a springboard into the theatre and wider arts industry. Nicholson remarks that the use of applied drama or theatre 'tends to be a matter of habit and choice' (2004: 91), and I have chosen the term applied theatre because the balance of the material in my case studies appertains more to theatrical performance by the veterans. More importantly, the veterans in my research use the term 'theatre' rather than 'drama' when referring to what they participate in. However, in what Michael Balfour describes as an 'exhaustive (and exhausting) debate about definitions' (2009: 348), it is important to note that to marginalised groups and those in need of the therapeutical benefits of applied theatre, etymology and lexical semantics may be largely irrelevant.

Applied theatre, however, differs from dramatherapy. Carlyne Ngara says that participants in the former may or may not be skilled in theatre arts, unlike dramatherapists who usually have theatre-based, and health, qualifications or experience.<sup>12</sup> Ngara includes the pedagogical role of applied theatre, citing 'museum theatre', whereby actors and interpreters in historical costume act as guides at museums or heritage sites (2021, online). Nicholson writes that practitioners in applied theatre are distinguished by their experience of working with community-based participants (2). Taylor notes that 'those who come to the work as spectators or participants have no specific background or necessary interest in theatre form' (2002: 88), which suggests an informality that sets applied theatre apart from dramatherapy. What then, are the features of applied theatre that distinguishes it from other forms of theatre or theatre-based therapy? Why, where and for whom are important questions that help to differentiate between these forms and are integral to the rationale which underpins the engagement by the veterans with applied theatre.

### **Why Applied Theatre?**

As I describe in my case studies, many veterans gravitate to theatre-based arts to help them to cope with their PTSD or readjustment issues. Clearly, it is possible only in a small percentage of cases, such as those who had already pursued a theatre career or training, for those veterans to act on a professional stage as the first step towards rehabilitation and healing.<sup>13</sup> As I also demonstrate in the thesis, the medium of applied theatre would instead appear to incorporate both the use of theatre as therapy, and act as a stepping-stone to a career in the performing arts. I reiterate here that the purpose of applied theatre is predominantly to be transformative and therapeutic, and I have noted above Nicholson's emphasis on these qualities. There is a plethora of other literature to support both Nicholson's assertion, and the inherent benefits to the veterans when engaging in applied

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<sup>12</sup> Dramatherapists in the UK are health care professionals who are registered and regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). They study post-graduate courses that lead to a qualification approved by HCPC, accredited by the British Association of Dramatherapists, and recognised by the Department of Health. Entry requirements are a Bachelor of Arts degree in drama or a psychological health-related subject (British Association of Dramatherapists, 2022, online).

<sup>13</sup> Tip Cullen and Lee Wilkinson are two veterans I interviewed who both had prior, formal theatre training and experience (see Chapter Two, 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career'. The other veterans mentioned in my thesis did not have this background before participating in theatre with CVP, SAA and DE-CRUIT.

theatre. Taylor describes applied theatre as 'powered by a desire to transform human activity through the theatrical medium' (2002: 88). John Somers says there is usually a conscious use of drama approaches to bring about positive change (2006: 91-2). Judith Ackroyd writes of a presupposed intentionality, which is 'to inform, to cleanse, to unify, to instruct, to raise awareness' (2000: 2). Adam Blatner links applied theatre with Moreno's concept of 'sociatry' which 'brought together for healing purposes psychology, psychiatry and sociology' (2006, online). James Thompson writes of the value of applied theatre in assisting the moving on from 'a damaged past' through participatory theatre projects (2003: 202), which seems particularly apt in the context of the veterans. As Ackroyd points out, however, it is not exclusively altruistic, or always used for 'noble, humanitarian means' (5). Applied theatre, for example, can be used manipulatively for unscrupulous marketing purposes, and Ackroyd warns that 'applied theatre is a mighty form, [...] the fire can work for us or against us' (6). While acknowledging its transformative qualities, Michael Balfour similarly cautions that applied theatre can be used in narrow agendas which promote particular types of change or life skills: a case of 'aesthetic engagement being eroded in the service of pragmatism' (2009: 350).

Thompson writes that applied theatre seeks to operate 'beyond the boundaries of theatre buildings' (13). Prior to staging performances in public theatre, CVP's veterans rehearsed and acted in the community space at Oswald Stoll Mansions in Fulham, west London, which is a supported housing site for vulnerable veterans. Importantly, it was to those CVP veterans a familiar, non-threatening and easily accessible venue. Applied theatre thus takes place in diverse spaces such as community rooms and halls, classrooms, care homes, refugee camps, prisons and village backstreets. Taylor mentions museums, art galleries, or housing and industrial sites (2002: 88). Somers cites pupil referral units, psychiatric settings and therapeutic environments for addicts in recovery (2006: 92). Conventional theatre can and does, however, take place in unconventional venues. The Manchester International Festival's 2013 *Macbeth*, for instance, was performed in a deconsecrated church in Manchester. The professional theatre company Antic Disposition performs in cathedrals, churches and country houses. One of its most controversial settings was Leicester Cathedral, where Shakespeare's *Richard III* was performed in 2017 within yards

of the newly interred body of the real King Richard. The Richard III Society regarded the production as distinctly *lèse-majesté* and unsuccessfully tried to persuade Leicester Cathedral and Antic Disposition to stage the play elsewhere (Guardian, 2017, online). As neither of these productions were applied theatre, the 'non-theatre' spaces in which they were performed clearly did not denote their form or focus. Therefore, performance space is important but not in itself exclusively defining of applied theatre.

Audience participation can be intrinsic to applied theatre and venues for applied theatre may incorporate, physically and symbolically, space where the production or performance includes the audience. The Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal created the neologism of 'spect-actor' to denote the dual role of actor and audience; in Boal's Marxist-driven philosophy both are equal, and the audience should not be prevented from a more active participation. Boal writes that 'the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action!' (1979: 135). Nicholson alludes to Boal's politically driven practice of encouraging the audience to use performances as a forum for political or emancipatory purposes (2005: 25). Boal is often credited with inventing Forum Theatre, writes Frances Babbage, but says it is possible to find related practices pre-dating Boal, such as in the comparison she makes with Jacob Moreno's Conflict Theatre, which incorporates audience participation. Babbage notes that Forum Theatre permits an initial degree of distance for the audience before it encourages them to participate more fully (2018: 68). Just as I point out above that conventional theatre can happen in unconventional spaces, so too can audience participation be intrinsic to performances that are not, strictly speaking, applied theatre (although such performances can be transformative in a similar way to applied theatre for the communities which comprise the audience). Robert Shaughnessy writes of the role of the groundlings at Shakespeare's Globe in the process of entrainment (or synchrony), focusing on actor-audience interaction and particularly in relation to the Deutsche Bank-sponsored, schools-orientated production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 2013 (2020).<sup>14</sup> This production represented a pilot study in entrainment at the theatre. Findings were that audience members who felt connected to the actors and performance

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<sup>14</sup> Synchrony refers to a state in which things happen, move or exist at the same time.



had higher levels of engagement with Shakespeare too; a less expected result, notes Shaughnessy, is that 'the more the actors synchronised with the audience, the less they felt at one with their fellow performers' (2020: 28).

Although the behaviour of the groundlings highlighted both positive and perhaps less desirable aspects to audience involvement - 'the positive accounts of the audience [by actors] are shadowed by concerns about its disproportionate, disruptive power' (Shaughnessy, 2020: 38) - spectators at Shakespeare's Globe still have only a limited role in proceedings. Patrick Ebewo takes audience participation further to incorporate works which are wholly instigated, written and performed by the local community. He writes that 'applied theatre stands squarely in opposition to conventional theatre that is elitist in conception' and that elitism occurs because in conventional theatre the plays presented are pre-packaged with no contribution from the audience (2017: 77). However, for the veterans I researched, the audience is important to their type of applied theatre only insofar as working with Shakespeare has given them the confidence to perform on stage in front of the general public and other veterans. Their performances have taken place in prestigious venues such as Shakespeare's Globe and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in London, the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, the Old Vic Tunnels in London and West End theatres such as the Leicester Square and Duchess Theatres.

### **For whom?**

Somers writes that 'unlike most theatre where the performance is presented to whoever chooses to come through the doors, Applied Drama/Theatre usually is done with known populations' (2006: 91-2). Those populations (perhaps 'participants' is a better description), typically constitute vulnerable and marginalised groups. Veterans with PTSD are vulnerable by the nature of their psychological problems and the lifestyle difficulties that their military service has created and exacerbated. As I demonstrate in Chapter Four: "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome": producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes', some veterans also feel they are marginalised by a civilian society, and in particular mainstream theatre, which they perceive as being at worst, hostile, and at best, unsympathetic, uncaring or both, to their post-service plight. It is striking how applied theatre as a transformative medium for prisoners, who too are

vulnerable and often marginalised, can also be read as a paradigm for its use with veterans, because there are many similarities between both groups of institutionalised people.

The work in applied theatre in prisons by James Thompson illustrates this latter observation. Thompson ran drama workshops in HMP Strangeways in 1990. He writes of how prison is an abrupt end to one world and the start of another and proposed that ‘theatre could be the dissonance between worlds, but it could also be the means to a smooth transition’ (2002: 4). This mirrors the similarity between the experience of some veterans who find it hard to adjust from the military world to that of ‘Civvy Street’ and for which some correspondingly seek the therapy of applied theatre. Thompson sees as crucial the process of involving prisoners and probation officers, and of how explaining what prison theatre is about to a group of the latter is as important as workshops for the former. Although the two cannot be totally equated, an understanding on the part of probation personnel as to the value of applied theatre is arguably mirrored for the veterans by the theatre practitioners who have themselves served in the military, and who therefore have a clearer understanding of the subject group with whom they work. Thompson also writes of the dislocation that prison represents to the lives of prisoners and their families, a dislocation that can for some ‘never end and for others still it heals, creating a smooth relationship between their life in prison and their life outside’ (2). This too, has a resonance with the transitioning process that veterans undergo when they leave the armed forces, and it is a significant choice of language from Balfour when he describes veterans as being ‘post-release’ military personnel (2019: 61).

Thompson used applied theatre to train participants to work with young people affected by the civil war in Sri Lanka (1983-2009). The conflict was ongoing at the time of Thompson’s work, which posed obvious difficulties for applied theatre as a form of reconciliation. Thompson writes that theatre is inherently different in war situations and that practitioners therefore have a responsibility to ‘understand what relation it had to that conflict’ (111).<sup>15</sup> Thompson had to adapt to the situation in Sri Lanka because, as Ackroyd notes above, theatre can still be a tool for propaganda and ‘those “fighting” for freedom from

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<sup>15</sup> In Chapter Four, “‘Improvise, Adapt and Overcome” – producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes’, I describe applied theatre and applied Shakespeare practices for Ukrainian veterans whose country has been intermittently at war with Russia since 2014.

oppression and those doing the oppressing [.....] the theatre by its very structure will be entering the dispute, not standing outside of it' (112). Such projects can have unexpected consequences. Thompson describes a 'theatre of relief' project undertaken with child soldiers in July 2000, of which the aftermath was the massacre of twenty-four young people in an attack by locals. Thompson's photographs of the participants were used by the Red Cross to identify some of the dead bodies. Acknowledging that the project 'could have been' a catalyst for the massacre, Thompson notes that 'all theatre in these situations must be questioned before, during and after. Even offering relief can easily be participation in war' (113).

### **Soldiers as victims**

Applied theatre undertaken with victims of war is also apposite to my research. However, it is important to understand the full spectrum of who those victims are. James Miller and David Read Johnson acknowledge that 'first, although most sufferers of PTSD are victims, combat veterans are often both victims and perpetrators' (1997: 384). The military conflicts and civil wars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have prompted Nicholson to state that applied theatre practitioners frequently work with 'casualties of this new world disorder' such as 'refugees, asylum seekers, the displaced and the homeless' (11). Thompson, Jenny Hughes and Balfour examine theatre in war zones between the years 2004 and 2007 and cover topics such as theatre as therapy for traumatised children, theatre as stability for refugees and the post-conflict role of theatre in rebuilding cultural relationships (2009). These unilateral approaches do not acknowledge that soldiers, although they may be an intrinsic part of the process that creates some or all the aforementioned groups, may also be considered as victims of war. Whether in the role of combatants or peacekeepers, soldiers will necessarily have participated in or witnessed events that may require a therapeutic solution to enable them to process their experiences and traumas, and thus to re-integrate into civilian society.

This omission of military personnel as victims of war may perhaps be explained by Nicholson's description of applied theatre's 'libertarian history' and 'interest in democratic action and universal human rights' (13). This ethos, if applied only to the subject groups of which Nicholson writes, precludes veterans

because it equates them with being the oppressors rather than the helpers of the oppressed; I will show in my case studies that veterans feel they had a genuine and important role as the latter. A combat soldier has a different role in, and experience of war, to that of a civilian, but the suffering that conflict engenders in both necessitates post-war care and support. Taylor's is an inclusive view in that, 'we have seen how applied theatre aims to capture participants within the art form. The applied theatre then is not powered by a didactic or agit-prop orientation, which often instructs or shocks, but by a desire to allow the theatre form to be the instrument which provokes transformation and participation' (2002: 93).

### **Arts and Well-being**

It may be argued, aesthetes notwithstanding, that theatre, like all the arts, has a duty and responsibility beyond simply providing entertainment, therapeutic or cathartic as that may be in itself. An All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was formed in 2014 to assess the impact that the arts have on health and well-being. Its report was published in 2017. One of its areas of inquiry was PTSD. Soldiers interviewed spoke of the all-encompassing nature of being immersed in a war or battle situation, and the psychological need upon leaving the military for another immersive environment (2017: 112). The arts can provide that environment. The Inquiry interviewed a veteran, Richard, who described his experience by hypothesising that 'the logical, disciplined military left brain had stopped communicating properly with the emotional, symbolic right brain' (2017: 112). Such dissociation could be resolved, Richard conjectured, by forcing what he perceived as the creativity of the right brain to communicate with the practical military skills of the left, arguing for the benefits of engaging in the arts to facilitate personal healing (112). In another interview undertaken for this Inquiry, veteran Jason advocated the use of workshops in art, music and comedy to all personnel when leaving the armed forces, calling the arts the 'notation of our soul, our humanity' and that creativity through the arts would enable veterans to express emotions and re-enter civilian life (113). The APPG notes that Jason's workshops idea 'is a proposal we hope the Ministry of Defence will consider' (113), and further recommends a cross-governmental strategy to deliver health and well-being through the arts and culture (2017, Short Report: 10). The APPG notes that

'While the evidence base for the use of the arts in the aftermath of trauma has yet to be fully established, there are some compelling practice examples', citing Combat Veteran Players as an instance of the use of Shakespeare to help traumatised veterans (2017: 112).

## **Finance**

'For I can raise no money by vile means' (*Julius Caesar*, 4.2.126: 1574). There are certainly, as the APPG points out and I will show in my case studies, 'compelling practice examples' for using the arts to heal trauma, but as I also demonstrate, funding those practices is by no means easy and has become increasingly harder since 2020. Although the Covid-19 pandemic represented a largely unforeseen and rare set of circumstances, it had significant repercussions for the funding of arts-based therapy for veterans. I mention in a footnote in Chapter One (109) that the military charity, Help for Heroes, had to curtail its residential therapy programmes, including those that used the arts, theatre and briefly, Shakespeare, because of a lack of revenue specifically caused by the pandemic. Provision of those therapies by Help for Heroes has not yet been revived. Aside from the set of problems caused by Covid-19 and notwithstanding the incalculable value of the arts as therapy, funding workshops, rehearsals and performances is an ever-present problem to address for the organisations that I researched. Combat Veteran Players (CVP), the forerunner of SAA, relied principally and initially on goodwill from the charity STOLL, which provides housing for ex-servicemen and women. STOLL permitted CVP to use for rehearsals, free of charge, its communal space at Sir Oswald Stoll Mansions in Fulham Road, south west London. CVP director Jaclyn McLoughlin later obtained funding for productions from various military charities such as Help for Heroes; mental health charity, Arts and Minds; and Never Such Innocence, a charity established in 2014 to educate young people about the impact and legacy of the First World War (Combat Veteran Players, 2016).

When Amanda Faber joined CVP in 2015, one of her initial concerns was that funding seemed to be piecemeal and largely unstructured. Faber recognised the need to bring a more professional stance to fund-raising, in particular being able to access corporate sponsorship and grants from foundations and arts donors. One of Faber's first tasks was, therefore, to merge CVP with the new

organisation of SAA and to incorporate both into a Community Interest Company (CIC). CICs, as the title suggests, are companies that undertake activities for the benefits of communities, which, incidentally, they have in common with applied theatre. CICs exist not purely for profit, but any profit which is made is expected to be used to further the aims of the CIC rather than, as with a traditional company, its shareholders and investors. CICs differ from charities in that the former are businesses, whereas the latter are not. Being a CIC enabled SAA to apply for Government grants, philanthropic donations and investment from social impact investors. These include funding from Arts Council England to finance national and international tours for plays including *Soldier On*; and specific grants for productions like *Richard III* from military charities such as Help for Heroes, ABF The Soldiers' Charity and The Poppy Factory; the RSC and Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose. Military organisations that support SAA on, crucially, a continuing basis, include The Veterans Foundation charity and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust; these consistent and regular grants enable planning and growth to take place. Adequate funding is, however, still an omnipresent problem for SAA, whose remit is to provide free workshops and stage productions on a regular basis. I describe the repercussions of this struggle for funding in Chapter Four: 'Improvise, Adapt and Overcome: producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes'. These include practicalities such as the inability to fund rehearsals for a proposed production of *Macbeth* and the wider issue of potential tensions that can arise both through lack of funding and of how some veterans object to what they described to me as 'using them' as a way of sourcing money from military charities.

The other organisation with whom I worked closely is DE-CRUIT in the US. Its founder Stephan Wolfert approaches the securing of funding from the stance of cost-benefit to the veteran community and wider society. In particular, he points out that 10% of all males in US prisons are veterans, many of whom he believes suffer from PTSD; Wolfert quotes from US Department of Justice figures of an average annual cost of \$47,000 per veteran incarcerated and an annual total cost of \$11.75 billion (Wolfert, 2021). Wolfert thus cites the importance of cost benefit when applying for funding. DE-CRUIT relies heavily on grants administered by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), an independent federal agency that is the largest funder of the arts and art education in communities across the US

(NEA, 2023). Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network is an initiative of NEA, which in partnership with the US Departments of Defense [sic] and Veterans Affairs, seeks to improve the health, well-being and quality of life for military personnel and veterans exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers. In partnership with the Mid-America Arts Alliance (MAAA), NEA's most recent grant to DE-CRUIT was an undisclosed sum in 2023 (MAAA, 2022). DE-CRUIT also receives grants from arts-based philanthropic organisations such as the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund in New York and solicits donations through the DE-CRUIT website and at performances of Wolfert's one-man production, *Cry Havoc!*

In addition to offering its free Shakespeare workshop sessions to veterans across the US, DE-CRUIT also requires funds to stage productions that will raise both awareness of PTSD and DE-CRUIT's own profile. Wolfert quoted a figure of \$225,000, for example, needed in 2022 to produce the three, two-hander Shakespeare-based productions that he acted in with his wife, Dawn Stern.<sup>16</sup> This figure breaks down into \$75,000 each for producing a two-week run at Theatre Row's Studio Theatre in New York City and the filming and editing of each show; with another \$75,000 required to pay for repairs and maintenance on the DE-CRUIT vehicle which takes the workshops to locations across the US (Wolfert, 2023). As with SAA, the struggle to raise funds regularly can curtail expansion, in particular, Wolfert's plans to make the DE-CRUIT programme a workshops a transferable model which is taught to veterans who then disseminate the programme more widely across the US.

### **Applied theatre and veterans**

Much work done with veterans involving theatre is more accurately categorised as dramatherapy rather than applied theatre, perhaps reflecting an overarching and persistent emphasis on clinical solutions to the mental health problems from which veterans typically suffer. Miller and Read Johnson describe the use of clinical therapists in a four-month residential programme in the US for Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD (1997: 384). The programme, run by the Veterans Affairs Medical Centre, focused on process, practice and performance: playing in

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<sup>16</sup> *The Head of Richard, Make Thick My Blood and She-Wolf*. See Chapter Three: 'The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans' for more detail on these productions.

an imaginative world of drama; learning effective coping behaviour through role-playing; and preparing autobiographical theatre for audiences (384). The therapeutic process involved the three phases of rage, shame and empathy for the veterans to work through (385), with the aim of encouraging the exploration of feelings and relationships 'within a play space that models tolerance' (394). This process is called therapeutic enactment, whereby the participants act out an event in their lives in a way that is therapeutic to them.

The Veterans Transition Programme (VTP), devised by psychologists Marvin Westwood and David Kuhl, also uses a retreat-based approach for Canadian veterans. In 2015, it initiated, in what George Belliveau describes as a fusion of theatre and group therapy, a play called *Contact! Unload!* (2015: 46). The play was devised and performed by veterans as a collaborative venture with psychotherapists at VTP and played across Canada between 2015 and 2017, with one performance in London in November 2015. *Contact! Unload!* is based on the lives of veterans from the war in Afghanistan who have PTSD, and like VTP, uses therapeutic enactment, which Westwood describes as 'an action-based group approach for helping people revisit hard things in their lives' (2015, online). Belliveau observes that the motivation for the veterans who took part in *Contact! Unload!* was partly an interest in theatre, but principally that they wanted to educate the public, governments and fellow veterans about mental health, and that many were telling their stories for the first time (2019: 46). The transformative value of *Contact! Unload!* also reached its audiences, with Westwood reporting that the play was a catalyst for several audience members to come forward for help with their PTSD (2015, online).

Belliveau writes about theatre having the potential to develop skills such as leadership potential, personal mastery and competence, because he believes that veterans who suffer from trauma 'often experience significant barriers to such skill development' (49-50). It is more accurate to say that applied theatre does not develop such skills in the veterans so much as it enables skills already in situ to be rediscovered and adapted for civilian life. I will demonstrate in my case studies that veterans have many transferable skills which are ideally suited to theatre, and that, contrary to Belliveau's assertion, military personnel acquire such qualities and abilities as part of their service.



The VTP initiative was taken to Australia in 2012 as a ten-day residential programme. Michael Balfour writes that it was not about re-enactment, re-exposure or reproducing a traumatic event, but rather its function was to 'externalise the internal' (2014: 168). The programme draws on elements from Moreno, but key differences include a group-building process before the enactment, and akin to what I, if not Balfour, would describe as a military-style debriefing process afterwards (168). There is also an emphasis on the active role of the witnessing group as having an important role to play (168). This group witnessing focused on servicemen helping servicemen because 'there is a strong common bond (and some competition) between people who have served that comes from a shared culture' (178). Balfour acknowledges the limitations of the programme, in that combat stress does not totally go away (179), but the programme demonstrated the way in which performance processes can safely enable veterans to confront and process their feelings of helplessness by 'providing them with a different relationship with the traumatic event' (179). This distancing from the trauma is a crucial element of applied theatre, and as I will show, one which makes the use of Shakespeare especially apt.

### **Applied Shakespeare**

Wherefore Shakespeare? The definition of applied theatre, as I have noted above, is rooted in what Nicholson describes as dramatic activity that is 'specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies' (2005: 2). Therefore, it follows that applied Shakespeare refers to a specific branch of applied theatre which uses Shakespeare's works to benefit, empower and act as a therapeutic tool for the groups which use it; 'when these two fields converge, the results can often be transformative for those involved' writes Robert Shaughnessy (2019: 1). Ros King argues that Shakespeare's plays create worlds which describe and evoke feelings which are 'like but not identical to one's own' and thus lend themselves to 'Shakespeare-themed therapeutic and educational programmes around the world' (2017: 74). My explanation of what constitutes applied Shakespeare is what happens when Shakespeare's characters, together with the language, rhythm and metre of the verse and prose with which they are brought to life, are used vicariously by traumatised groups such as veterans, as a way by which they can remember, evaluate, reconcile and accept their own life

experience and traumas as part of a therapeutic process. The dramatic exercise which they embark upon in applied Shakespeare allows them an historical and linguistic distance to process their emotions safely. Historical distance transpires because Shakespeare wrote about military events and traumas which happened four centuries before the veterans had similar experiences. Linguistic distance occurs because Shakespeare's characters give today's veterans a voice to use, a language that is recognisable, but which expresses thoughts and feelings differently; there is, to use an oxymoron, a familiar remoteness about it.

Just as the terms applied theatre and applied drama are used interchangeably, lexical semantics have been similarly employed to describe applied Shakespeare. 'Voluntary sector Shakespeare' was used by convenor Michael Dobson about a conference held by the Shakespeare Association of America in 2012, which included three applied Shakespeare papers among its principal content of amateur dramatic performances.<sup>17</sup> Michael Jensen's label of 'service Shakespeare' (2013: 2) for applied Shakespeare is apt in this context and it could be extended to 'military service Shakespeare' in the context of veterans. Susanne Greenhalgh defines 'social Shakespeare' as practices in which Shakespeare and social work interact to bring about change, and conflated dramatherapy with Shakespeare in her portmanteau word, 'Shakestherapy' (2018: 79). The Applying Shakespeare Symposium, held in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2018 and the first of its kind in the UK, only included applied Shakespeare content. These various and varying labels reflect the relative newness of recognition of the discipline.

I mention these symposia because they are important as early forays into giving prominence to forms of applied Shakespeare. Participants in these applied Shakespeare projects varied across the spectrum of age, gender, ethnicity and social situations and circumstances. They ranged from prisoners, disadvantaged inner city young people, military veterans and elderly people in care homes. Amy Scott Douglass compares the latter two groups, arguing that 'when it comes to Shakespeare outreach programmes, both soldiers and seniors are perceived by program administrators as being highly deserving and meritorious, and yet, nevertheless, under-served by arts programs and undervalued by society' (2012:

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<sup>17</sup> The Shakespeare Association of America and Soldiers' Arts Academy, the veterans' organisation with which I work, share the same initialism. To avoid confusion, I refer to both by their full titles throughout this section.

1). My case studies focus on veterans who work with dedicated organisations that were set up to understand and empathise with the specific and abstruse problems that military personnel face when leaving the armed forces. Veterans I have interviewed often feel marginalised and overlooked or ignored as victims of war by practitioners and writers in applied theatre outside of their own dedicated veteran groups.<sup>18</sup>

Three papers were presented at the 2012 Shakespeare Association of America's conference which encompassed the definition of applied Shakespeare.<sup>19</sup> Yu Jin Ko described a production of *Macbeth* performed in 2005 as part of the *Shakespeare Behind Bars* programme at the Luther Lockett Correctional institution in Kentucky (2013: 1-14). Jensen presented a reading of an abridged version of *Twelfth Night* with a group of early-stage Alzheimer patients, as an exercise in building self-esteem (2013: 1-10). Isabelle Schwartz-Gastine described a production based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Théâtre du Bout du Monde which was performed in the Maison des Pratiques Artistiques Amateurs in the Saint-Germain district of Paris in 2010. This production paired professional actors with amateurs who had participated in workshops held in a primary school, a centre for the homeless, an assisted living home for the elderly and a hospital ward for patients with mental illness (2013: 1-13). There are obvious points of similarity, and an apt comparison with *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2019) and *The Winter's Tale* (2023) at Shakespeare's Globe, which I analyse in my case study of Soldiers' Arts Academy (Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy – Shakespeare as therapy and a career'). Both the French and UK productions had professional actors working alongside amateurs for whom Shakespeare represented a form of therapy; both performed in prestigious spaces within a capital city; and the origins of these productions were workshops that took place in non-theatrical spaces. The Théâtre du Bout du Monde reaches out internationally to both performers and audience. Similarly,

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<sup>18</sup> My case study focusing on a veterans' production of *Macbeth* in Chapter Four: "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome"—producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes' includes perceived marginalisation of veterans within the theatre industry.

<sup>19</sup> Applied Shakespeare and amateur-performance Shakespeare are not necessarily the same. Amateur performance can and often does take place as part of applied Shakespeare, but a performance of a play by the local amateur dramatics' society at the village hall, does not fall into this category. The Shakespeare Association of America's conference largely concentrated on amateur productions of Shakespeare in the US, the UK and Europe; these constituted theatre in the community, the principal intent and value of which was entertainment. The papers to which I have referred were later published in *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare Appropriation* in 2013.

and reflecting the truth that war and conflict are by their nature global, my research focused on veterans from the UK, the US and Ukraine, who are working both in their own countries and collaborating as a 'band of brothers' in arms and Shakespeare.

The 2018 Applying Shakespeare Symposium in Stratford was co-hosted by The Shakespeare Institute, the University of Kent and Guildford School of Acting, to bring together scholars, actors and practitioners and participants from applied theatre. Speakers included actors Ben Spiller and former Royal Shakespeare Company actor, Kelly Hunter, and the Governor of HMP Nottingham, Phil Novis. The plethora of papers presented, and which correspond to some of the focus of my research, included 'Shakespeare's Comedies', which used theatre as a tool for reconciliation in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, performed by ethnically segregated young people, incorporating victims of war (Milatović-Ovadia, 2019: 29-41); applied theatre that uses spaces outside a formal education setting for working class students who may otherwise be alienated by Shakespeare and has similarities with the SAA project, Shakespeare's Soldiers, which took veterans into inner-city schools; and Shakespeare in prisons, which includes a collaboration between students at Emory University, Alabama, and prisoners at Monroe Correctional Facility in Washington State (Cavanagh and Rowland, 2019: 54-64) and the setting of HMP Leicester, to explore the ways in which Shakespeare can enable those who are imprisoned to expand their space (Mackenzie, 2019: 65-76). There are striking similarities between veterans and prisoners, particularly with relation to how difficult being institutionalised makes the transitioning process to post-military or post-prison life.

### **Custodial Shakespeare**

Much applied Shakespeare has been enacted in prison or custodial settings (Shailor, 2011, 2013; Pensalfini, 2016). Cicely Berry, who was the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) voice director between 1969 and 2014, did pioneering work in the 1980s, beginning with Shakespeare workshops for prisoners at HMP Long Lartin in 1982. Berry, in conjunction with the RSC, sought to make a film based on *Julius Caesar* with prisoners at HMP Dartmoor, in 1984; an early example of applied Shakespeare but one which did not come fully to

fruition until 2012 in South Africa due to an inability to secure funding in the UK (Pensalfini, 2016: 18). As with the veterans in my research, language was a significant tool in Berry's approach. Rob Pensalfini notes that she 'was interested in taking Shakespeare into prisons to see whether prisoners' responses to his heightened language might help them to become more articulate about their own ideas and feelings' (18). Pensalfini credits Berry with crossing boundaries between the 'high culture' of the RSC and the 'pessimal state' of prisons, and significantly, of crossing the line between professional performance and applied theatre (16). Crossing this line is, of course, also the intention of applied Shakespeare practice with the veterans, particularly those to whom Shakespeare had always been inaccessible, irrelevant or both.

One of the best-known applied Shakespeare projects in a custodial setting is Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor, a project which between 1989 and 1991 comprised *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* performed at Broadmoor Hospital by the RSC, *King Lear* by the Royal National Theatre and *Measure for Measure* by an amateur dramatic group, The Wilde Theatre Company. Actor Mark Rylance instigated the performance of *Hamlet* in Broadmoor, an idea which had its roots in a dramatherapy conference Rylance had participated in at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he said that attendees at that conference 'got talking about how the [Shakespeare] plays created catharsis or healing and transformation' (1992: 27).<sup>20</sup> One delegate was Murray Cox, a consultant psychotherapist at Broadmoor, and Rylance was especially interested in how Cox's patients had experienced some of the extreme actions and emotions that actors enact on stage. Rylance's comment that 'it is a shame that they are not able to see them [Shakespeare's plays in a conventional theatre setting]' (cited in Cox 1992: 27) was the root of his suggestion to perform *Hamlet* at Broadmoor (notwithstanding a certain irony of Hamlet's view that 'Denmark's a prison' – 2.2.239: 1696).<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding too, the ethical considerations of performing violent scenes which may have mirrored some of the patients' own offences, the Broadmoor project enabled those patients to experience, as Brian Cox remarks,

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<sup>20</sup> There are not, to my knowledge, extant records, transcripts or ephemera of this conference at The Shakespeare Centre, in the archives of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, which administers the Centre, nor in the library of The Shakespeare Institute.

<sup>21</sup> It should be emphasised, however, that Broadmoor is a secure psychiatric hospital for those who have committed serious crimes while suffering from mental disorders: it is not a prison.

not just entertainment but expiation (1992: 53). Murray Cox, who edited the book *Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor*, recognises that Shakespeare provides an aesthetic distance for the patients to relate to the character and thus accommodates a reflective scrutiny (1992: 128). This scrutiny has its problems. The ethical issues raised are similar to those appertaining to traumatised military veterans in my case studies; connecting with stage characters can provide distance but it can also trigger disturbed feelings. The similarities between veterans and people in prisons or secure hospitals are again significant. My case study which describes a veterans' production of *Macbeth* in Chapter Four demonstrates their palpably military perspective on the play. This compares to Rylance's remembrance of a conversation with Murray Cox in which the latter told him about Broadmoor patients studying *Macbeth* for an O Level exam who had said 'when I killed someone it wasn't like that, or it was exactly like that'. Rylance comments that 'these people really have experienced some of the things that we actors pretend to do in plays' (27). The same can apply to veterans. My case study about Shakespeare's Globe Theatre's work with veterans describes how director Martin Leonard worked closely with SAA well-being personnel to ameliorate any trauma caused or catalysed by the performance.

Prison informed director Phyllida Lloyd's trilogy of Shakespeare plays performed at the Donmar Warehouse between 2012 and 2016. All three plays were performed by the same all-female cast and were set in women's prisons: *Julius Caesar* (2012), *Henry IV* (2014) and *The Tempest* (2016). Lloyd contextualises her work by commenting that when she took *Julius Caesar* into HMP Holloway, she workshopped it with a group of prisoners and asked them whether the play spoke to them. Lloyd said that 'after the first couple of weeks of looking at the play one of them said "We've decided that this play is highly suitable for us"'. Lloyd continued by saying 'I think it was because their obsessions were the same as those of Brutus and Cassius: freedom and justice' (in Malies, 2021). In 2017, *The Tempest* was staged to an audience of female prisoners at HMP New Hall, enabling the women to watch, as Matthew Reason writes, 'a version of themselves on stage, filtered and projected through the lens and language of Shakespearean drama (2019: 86). Reason also observes that 'it was spoken in Shakespearean language that was at a distinct remove from their own' (101), which mirrors the importance of distancing for the veterans too.

Another significant project in a custodial setting was 'Let's Change the Story' in 2020. Funded by Arts Council England, it explored women prisoners as part of the criminal justice system. Led by Charlotte Scott, prisoners in HMPs Styal and Eastwood Park participated in workshops and adapted *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to reflect their own life experiences, particularly those of domestic violence. Plays included were *The Taming of the Shrew*, which contains domestic abuse; *The Winter's Tale*, which focuses on male violence and mother and child separation; *Pericles*, with an emphasis on sex trafficking and incest; *Macbeth*, to explore female grief; and *Othello*, with male violence and murder. Scott remarks that the project did not seek to bring culture to the oppressed, but to allow the voices of women prisoners to be heard. Pointing out that Shakespeare's characters are often 'transgressors, oppressed or excluded', Scott sees those characters as 'companions in crisis' and encouraged the prisoners to explore how they would talk to victims of male violence and oppression such as Desdemona and Emilia (2020, online).

Drama, by its nature, creates a pretend world, but one which can reflect painful life experiences. Geese Theatre UK is a company of practitioners who work solely with prisoners, young offenders and patients in secure hospitals. Clark Baim, who established the company in 1987, devised a 'drama spiral' which uses role play as a framework for therapy in group workshops (2018: 131). The spiral consists of six rings of differing intensity and the second ring reiterates the efficacy, indeed the requirement, for using a 'one step removed' process (136).<sup>22</sup> Baim explains 'one step removed' as second ring process, using scenes, characters and plots which are fictional and distinct from the participants' own experiences and issues (131-178). This one step removed approach precedes the more painful third and fourth rings which encompass fictionalised personal stories before moving on to personal disclosures of events and traumas. Although the drama spiral is not followed precisely as described by Baim, deliberate distancing is, as I will show, used by groups who work with Shakespeare and veterans.

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<sup>22</sup> The first ring involves group-building creative activities, such as song, dance or writing, to facilitate trust and communication (Baim, 2018: 148-149). Successive rings build in intensity and personal disclosure, until the sixth ring is reached where participants stage scenes depicting their personal stories which are difficult and unresolved (159-163).

Geese Theatre UK has roots in the original Geese Theatre Company in the US, which worked in prisons. Also in the US, the Shakespeare in Prisons Network (SiPC) was founded in 2012 by Peter Holland, Curt Toffeland and Scott Jackson, with a mission statement of bringing 'Shakespeare to incarcerated populations, through on-going classwork, education and performance and to instil vital skills for social re-entry' (SiPC, 2021, online); in this latter respect their work fulfils a function which is also needed by many veterans. SiPC is an affiliation of prison programmes across the US, of which Shakespeare Behind Bars is a member. In editing the *Borrowers and Lenders* issue in which the Shakespeare Association of America's 2012 conference was covered, Jensen remarks of Yu Jin Ko's paper that it made him weep to read the Coda (2019: 2).<sup>23</sup> In it, Ko describes the Shakespeare Behind Bars programme and the hope it gives to prisoners, offering a way to give the prisoners' lives what Ko calls a moral dignity (12). Ko writes of realising why prisoner-actors could not join him for dinner after the performance; actors in the 'free' world are able to leave the stage after their performance in a way that prisoners cannot (12). The rationale behind the Shakespeare Behind Bars programme is 'allowing incarcerated, post-incarcerated and at-risk communities to develop life skills that will ensure their successful integration into society' (Shakespeare Behind Bars, 2021, online). The parallel to the veterans who struggle to adapt to civilian society after they leave the armed forces, is striking.

### **Wherefore Shakespeare? An early modern approach.**

If applied Shakespeare exists to create a positive, transformative experience, it follows that a transformation apposite to my subject group is mental health. Shakespeare was not familiar with terminology such as anxiety, depression and PTSD, but his plays suggest a cognisance of many of the symptoms and consequences of these conditions. Melancholy was a general early modern definition of psychological conditions that, as contemporary writing indicates, encompassed the emotions of sadness and depression. There appeared to be, judging by contemporary literature and casebooks of practising physicians (Timothy Bright, 1586; Levinus Lemnius, 1561; Richard Napier c.1600s; André du

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<sup>23</sup> Jensen's response to the Coda is possibly the reason why that paper was included whereas 'good proposals had to be turned down because so many were about Shakespeare in prisons' (2019: 1).



Laurens, 1594; Robert Burton, 1621; and Shakespeare's son-in-law, Dr John Hall, 1611 onwards) a veritable epidemic of melancholy in early modern England, linked to social class and gender and provoking physical and psychological symptoms. Du Laurens connected melancholy and intellect, as he quoted Aristotle 'In his *Problemes* sayth that melancholics are most wittie and ingenious' (1594: chapter 3, 85), which suggests a form of kudos inherent in suffering from the condition.

Two of the most notable early modern texts on melancholy were written by Timothy Bright and Robert Burton. Bright, a physician, published his *Treatise of Melancholie* in 1586, making it contemporaneous with Shakespeare's writing. Greg Wilkinson writes that it was 'in Shakespeare's day, the most important work on the subject [of melancholy]' (2019: 214). Bright writes of 'the strange effects it [melancholy] worketh on our minds and bodies', describing symptoms such as 'feare, sadness, desperation, teares, weeping, sobbing, sighing' (Bright, 1586: xvii). Another seminal early modern text was Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholie*, first published in 1621. It is obviously not a text with which Shakespeare was familiar, but it did encapsulate much of the contemporary thinking about melancholy of which Shakespeare would have been aware. Burton calls melancholy an 'Epidemicall disease', remarking that 'so few there are that feele not the smart of it' because it is 'so universall a malady' (Democritus Junior to the Reader 1621: 70). Angus Gowland writes of the *Anatomy* that 'it served its purpose as an encyclopaedic source of knowledge that presented the fruits of European medical-scientific learning about melancholy in a clear and accessible form' (2006: 295). These texts, I argue, serve as evidence that melancholy was recognised and acknowledged in early modern literature as a disease suffered by a not inconsiderable proportion of the population. This lends weight to Stephan Wolfert's assertion that there is therapeutic value to veterans in knowing their trauma-related suffering existed four hundred years ago (2021).

As to a possible cure (or at least, a way of alleviating Burton's universal malady), Thomas Heywood recommended theatre as a treatment for melancholia in *An Apology for Actors* as part of a wider justification for the genre of comedy. Melancholics, wrote Heywood, should watch a comedy 'to moderate the care and heaviness of the mind, that they may returne to their trades and faculties with more zeale and earnestnesse' (1612: F4). His rationale is that comedies

complement the cathartic role of tragedies in providing the audience with more light-hearted entertainment, serving to provide an uplifting and healing experience. I shall return to Heywood's ideas in my case study of international collaboration between veterans, including those from Ukraine who performed a version of *Twelfth Night* in 2019, and had planned, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with veterans from the UK and the USA in 2023. Comedies were deliberately chosen to facilitate healing for both their performers and audience.<sup>24</sup>

### **Shakespeare and melancholy: role play as therapy**

Shakespeare was cognisant of theatrical performance's capacity to lift the spirits, as is evident in one of his earliest plays, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592), and in his last, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613-14). In the former, Christopher Sly is ostensibly required to watch a play because, according to the Messenger:

Your honour's players, hearing your amendment,  
Are come to play a pleasant comedy,  
For so your doctors hold it very meet,  
Seeing too much sadness hath congealed your blood  
And melancholy is the nurse of frenzy.  
Therefore, they thought it good you hear a play  
And frame your mind to mirth and merriment,  
Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life.

*The Taming of the Shrew*, Induction 2, 124-131 (148)

Sly suffers not from melancholy but inebriation, and the recommendation to watch a play is an elaborate prank on the part of the nobles for their own amusement. The audience, for whom the recommended treatment is presumably intended, does not see Sly after the Induction scenes. Arguably however, the Messenger's words represent either hubris on the part of the playwright to recommend his work as having more value than mere entertainment, or an appreciation of what theatre could achieve beyond its obvious entertainment

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<sup>24</sup> There is no military content in *Twelfth Night*, but as I describe in Chapter Four: "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome" – producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes', the proposed director of a Soldiers' Arts Academy production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Teddy Kiendl - himself a military veteran – has strong views on how that play may be interpreted in the light of the aftermath of war.

remit of a 'two hour's traffic of the stage' (*Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue: 12: 873). In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Shakespeare offers the healing potential of mimesis through role play. John Casson writes that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* contains scenes of 'enormous historic significance: they are the first such scenes I have been able to discover in which drama is used therapeutically' (2007: 3). A subplot is the story of the Jailer's Daughter who falls in love with Palamon and loses her wits because she knows Palamon cannot marry her. Her suicide attempt in a lake reed bed sees her rescued by the Wooer, to whom she is affianced. The Wooer seeks the advice of the Doctor because of the girl's increasingly erratic behaviour, and after witnessing delusional symptoms, the Doctor remarks: 'How she continues this fancy! 'Tis not an engrafted madness, but a most thick and profound melancholy' and 'I think she has a perturbed mind, which I cannot minister to' (4.3.41-42 & 4.3.50-51: 3260). However, the physician decides to try. His ministrations, rather than encompassing conventional early modern methods such as drugs or purging, take the theatrical form of role play. The Jailer's Daughter is persuaded to act out a role with the Wooer whereby she becomes increasingly intimate with him, believing him to be Palamon. This approach appears to work. She is willingly bedded and wedded by the Wooer, and all apparently ends well even if the casuistry employed is not to the taste of our twenty-first century sensibilities.

Such theatrical role play, including the staging of masques and anti-masques, was not confined to Shakespeare. Other early modern playwrights such as John Fletcher, John Webster, Thomas Middleton, Philip Massinger and John Ford used the device, and the theme was apparently so significant to Fletcher that he included it in four plays he wrote in the years between 1612 and 1622: *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, co-written with Shakespeare (1613-14); *The Mad Lover* (1616); *The Nice Valour* (also titled *The Passionate Madman* (1615-16) and *A Very Woman* (1619-22), the last two of which were written in collaboration with Middleton and Massinger respectively. Drama used therapeutically is intrinsic to the plots of Ford's *A Lover's Melancholy* (1621) and Richard Brome's Carolean comedy, *The Antipodes* (1636). In these plays an individual or group of characters use role play, which could also encompass the participation of the melancholic character (it is pertinent to note that all the delusions and melancholy in these plays happen to fictional characters and provide an uplifting and healing

experience for their real-life audiences). The reasons why applied Shakespeare is now practiced rather than applied Fletcher, who arguably could stake an equal if not greater claim if we consider the significance of drama to heal in his writing, are manifold.

### **Shakespeare and Cultural Capital**

An intrinsic reason as to why we use applied Shakespeare and not applied Fletcher et al, is the cultural capital surrounding and associated with Shakespeare. Familiarity with, and appreciation of Shakespeare's works, which may encompass attending performances at the theatre or quoting apposite lines in speech or written work, are considered to imbue the person doing so with a desirable form of cultural capital (Dobson, 1993; Lanier, 2002). Cultural capital is a sociological concept coined and defined by Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>25</sup> The notion of cultural capital, writes Bourdieu, presented itself to him as 'as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes' (1986: 243). From these pedagogical roots, Bourdieu subdivided cultural capital into three categories: embodied, which is acquired through socialisation and education; institutionalised, which encompasses cultural capital that can be measured and recognised such as university degrees; and objectified, which refers to the type of material possessions a social group has or acquires (243).

Cultural capital includes a gamut of inter-related elements, including language, accent, material possessions, academic degrees and, in relation to Shakespeare, tastes in literature or music. Elizabeth Hutcheon points out, in reference to Bourdieu's work, that 'a knowledge of literature is linked to cultural capital is nothing new (2019: 102). In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu acknowledges what he calls 'a socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class'. (1984: xxv). Shakespeare is often considered to be, in terms of cultural capital, a high watermark of literary taste – being what

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<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu first defined cultural capital in his 1973 paper, 'Cultural reproduction and social reproduction' and later published in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984).

Douglas Lanier calls '*the* [author's italics] icon of high or "proper" culture' (2002: 3), and to use Bourdieusian logic, also the preserve of the middle classes.

The relationship between applied theatre and its Shakespearean sibling, is, as in many families, a difficult one, perhaps partly because of the notion of cultural capital. The dichotomy inherent in this applied theatre relationship is expressed by Robert Shaughnessy, who writes that 'the encounter between a canonical cultural force that has been both revered and contested, and work that frequently characterises itself as egalitarian, inclusive and anti-elitist, is by no means a straightforward one' (2019: 2). By definition, everyone acquires a form of cultural capital, but its association with class, and by extension elitism, is strong and often disapproving. Shamus Raman Khan argues that cultural capital conveys the sense of belonging to an elitist group, which allows members of such a group to exercise vastly disproportionate control over, or access to, a resource (2012: 361). David Swartz points out that while culture provides the grounds for human communication and interaction, it is also a source of domination and it thus 'embodies power relations' (1997: 1). Ricardo Abad contends that cultural capital can reinforce inequality when it assists or hinders a person's social mobility, and gains value when it can be converted to economic, political or academic power and achievement (2017: 160). Cultural capital invests the elite with a symbolic power, and the bearers of this power are thus imbued with *habitus*, defined by Bourdieu as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions (1972: 72), or the socially inculcated habits, abilities and qualities of character which we all possess (Abad, 160). Loic Wacquant writes that habitus can be traced back to Aristotle's notion of *hexis*, meaning an acquired and entrenched state of moral character that guides our feelings, desires and actions, and notes that Bourdieu redefines habitus as a mediating notion that explains the way that society becomes 'deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways which then guide them' (2005: 318).

The veterans who are the subject of my research acquire the cultural capital of Shakespeare through their immersion in his plays in workshops and performances that they have participated in. As I mention in my case studies, their introduction to Shakespeare via the education system was not, in general, a positive one. In terms of how Shakespeare fits into the broader cultural capital

equation, education is a pertinent example to use, because it directly connects both to the experiences of those veterans and to Bourdieu's original hypothesis about education and cultural capital. The teaching of Shakespeare in secondary schools in England is compulsory and has been since 1987 when the National Curriculum was first introduced.<sup>26</sup> This compulsory study has been referred to by Jonathan Bate as a political act which 'transforms him [Shakespeare] into the guardian of the value system of the established powers' (1997: 187). Sandeep Purewal writes that compelling schools to teach Shakespeare reinforces traditional societal boundaries which dictate that only those from a certain class may be considered intelligent or cultured (2017: 28). Even prior to the literature requirements placed by the National Curriculum, Alan Sinfield saw the emerging method of the testing of Shakespeare in schools as part of a right-wing agenda to reinforce and promote the desirability of a white, middle-class, south-east England cultural norm (1985: 262). Beyond secondary education, when the student deliberately chooses to study Shakespeare, an obvious institutionalised manifestation of Shakespeare's cultural capital is the possession of a degree which specialises in his work. Bourdieu refers to an academic qualification as 'a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture' (1986: 246).

Such views as espoused by Bate and Sinfield above reinforce the notion that Shakespeare can be used by the education system as an ideological instrument to uphold elite or privileged groups, or to perpetuate inequalities and discriminatory practices. This cultural agenda extends beyond Britain, a typical example being the export of Shakespeare as pedagogical cultural capital in Asia, which is the subject of Ricardo Abad's essay based around the teaching and value of Shakespeare at the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines. He remarks that 'Shakespeare has operated as cultural capital in the Philippines for over a century' and that the Ateneo is for most Filipinos 'a synonym for elite education'. (2017: 159). There has, however, been a paradigm shift in thinking towards using Shakespeare as a tool for literature students better to understand the interaction between cultural capital, power and class partly because, as Hutcheon describes it, 'his influence penetrates both elite and popular culture'

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<sup>26</sup> Key Stage Three in the British National Curriculum requires, for example, that pupils should learn two Shakespeare plays (Department of Education, 2014: 15).

(2019: 102). Lanier had earlier concluded that ‘it’s obvious Shakespeare is everywhere in popular culture’ (2002: 3). While referring to Shakespeare’s work as the ‘quintessential case of an elite, canonical cultural oeuvre’, Pat Thomson and Christine Hall do acknowledge that Shakespeare also appears in popular art forms (2022: 861). There is an argument, they write, that Shakespeare belongs to everyone, and cite the RSC as instrumental in extending that belonging to those who cannot afford to attend expensive performances, and to those who may not be proficient in the English language (861).<sup>27</sup> My research with veterans using Shakespeare therapeutically endorses both the concept of ‘belonging’ and how, in the case of the Ukrainian veterans about whom I write in Chapter Four, the issue of English not being the first language of participants is addressed.

As I will show, the realisation that they can and do ‘belong’ with Shakespeare owes nothing to the veterans’ early lives, and almost entirely to their involvement with the organisations that have helped them to process their traumatic experiences in the military through Shakespeare. ‘Belonging with’ and ‘understanding’ Shakespeare are linked but not necessarily the same. Ros King writes of the feelings of pride and achievement, ‘even amazement’ that American veterans felt when working with Shakespeare as therapy in sessions run by Milwaukee-based Feast of Crispian, in that ‘Shakespeare’s words fascinated those veterans, whether or not they felt they fully understood them’ (2017: 73). As I will demonstrate in my case studies, the veterans I have interviewed, without exception, told me that they hated Shakespeare at school and could not understand it (Helliwell, 2021; Johnson, 2021a; et al). In the case of ex-paratrooper, Neil Davies, his antipathy he said, stemmed from ‘inverted snobbery from a very poor education’. Davies, who did not attend a grammar school and left full-time education at fourteen, said that, correspondingly, ‘Shakespeare did not seem to be for me’ (Davies, 2022). I include Davies’s comment here because it is endorsed by King, almost verbatim, when she cites typical remarks made by prisoners and schoolchildren from ‘tough areas of east London’ she has worked with. When defining the mystique of Shakespeare, King reports of “the sense that he is “difficult” and therefore “not for the likes of me”” (73).

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<sup>27</sup> The RSC’s Shakespeare Nation initiative is a community participation programme run by the RSC and partner theatres, aimed at engaging with people who have little or no experience of Shakespeare, either as a theatre-goer or performer (RSC, 2023, online).

Sandeep Purewal writes that the issue is not necessarily Shakespeare's relevance to young people, but how he can be taught in the classroom for 'maximum student engagement' (2017: 28). Purewal suggests bringing the plays to life through performance (32). Paige Reynolds concurs, stating that Shakespeare's plays were not written to be studied in an English classroom (2012: 163). Robert Shaughnessy notes that Deutsche Bank's Experiencing Culture programme for London secondary schools, which is an annual collaborative venture with Shakespeare's Globe, is designed 'to offer their audiences, many of whom may never have entered a theatre before, a first taste of Shakespeare in performance' (2020: 24-5). Richard Spencer advocates taking Shakespeare out of the classroom and treating his work as a script, and as 'a blueprint for performance' (2007: 4). This approach to Shakespeare is typified by the work of Meladrama, an organisation set up in 1995 to run affordable acting classes for young people in the north west of England. In 2018, Karl Falconer, in conjunction with Meladrama, ran Shakespeare workshops with working-class children in Manchester. All initially had negative impressions of Shakespeare, much as many veterans did as I will show, as being difficult, boring or irrelevant (2018: 45), but enjoyed the practical aspects of the workshops. Responses included: 'It made me less reluctant to study his [Shakespeare's] works' and 'I now see Shakespeare as being accessible and not just for special drama schools in London' (46). Falconer demonstrates that Shakespeare does not have to belong to one particular social class – or rather that Shakespeare does not necessarily *exclude* [my italics] another social class – because his accessibility is rooted in being able 'to allow learners to develop a relationship with the work that is defined through their own terms' (49). Falconer also points to the value of Shakespeare's language, its 'emotional extremity' (50) as providing 'a mask through which performers can engage with emotions and scenarios that are both distant from and familiar to their own' (50).

### **Nationhood or not?**

As I will show in my case studies, none of the British veterans I have worked with cite Shakespeare's nationality as a reason, primary or otherwise, to engage with his work or that that is why they have derived benefit from it. However, Shakespeare would appear to occupy a unique place in the British psyche.



Shakespeare, writes Parmita Kapadia, 'is a badge of English superiority' (1999: 2). Pat Thomson and Christine Hall posit that 'The Bard is positioned as synecdoche for British culture' (2022: 861. A *Place for Pride* poll in 2011 asked of which symbol of Britishness people were the proudest. Shakespeare topped the poll, with 75% agreeing that 'I am proud of William Shakespeare as a symbol of Britain', followed by the National Trust and the armed forces in joint second place with 72%.<sup>28</sup> The poll prompted former Shakespeare Centre and RSC librarian Sylvia Morris to comment that 'I do think it odd that, given how popular Shakespeare is both in this country and across the world, there is no National Shakespeare Day [her capitalisation]. Is he so omnipresent that we don't need one?' (Morris, 2011, online). Shakespeare as an over-arching symbol of Britishness and pride in the country is an interesting concept given that he was born English, and that his canonical status as the 'Bard' did not happen in his own lifetime.

Michael Dobson writes of Shakespeare first occupying the 'centre of *English* [my italics] literary culture' between the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and David Garrick's celebratory Shakespeare Jubilee in 1769 (1992: 3), and that from the Enlightenment onwards 'Shakespeare has been as normatively constitutive of British national identity as the drinking of afternoon tea' (7). In documenting this elevation to status of National Poet from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, Dobson traces Shakespeare's rise from the playwright whose work was watched, and presumably enjoyed, by groundlings at the Globe Theatre just as it was by Queen Elizabeth I at specially arranged court performances, to Garrick's hyperbolic use of *Romeo and Juliet* in his utterance at the climax of the Shakespeare Jubilee: "Tis he! 'Tis he! "The god of our idolatry"" (6). Dobson contends that the cultural capital attached to Shakespeare may be seen in the light of those quasi-religious words from *Romeo and Juliet*, a view that Harold Bloom's eulogising of Shakespeare's work as 'secular Scripture', and of the man himself because 'if any author has become a moral God, it must be Shakespeare' would appear to share (1999: 3). In connection with cultural capital, Dobson cites the epilogue to Thomas Cooke's 1739 play, *The Mournful Nuptials*, which

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<sup>28</sup> A total of 2,086 British citizens online and in focus groups were polled for the Demos report by YouGov, between 4-9 May 2011. The full results were Shakespeare on 75%; the National Trust and armed forces, both on 72%; the pound sterling on 70%; the NHS on 69%; the monarchy on 68%; the BBC on 63%; sporting achievements on 58%; the Beatles on 51%; the British legal system on 51%; and Parliament on 47%.

categorises those who appreciate Shakespeare as the ruling classes who follow the Church of England as ‘they who are born to taste’, in comparison to ‘the tasteless vulgar’, who prefer John Wesley and Harlequin (7).<sup>29</sup>

For soldiers who are not religious, and/or whose nationality is not British, there is evidence that it is the identification with the elements of Shakespeare’s text that point to an understanding of combat, that resonate and are important. Adam McKeown, a lieutenant-colonel in the US Marine Corps reservists, was posted to Djibouti, East Africa, in 2005 as part of an anti-terrorism operation. While he was there, McKeown, who is also professor of English at Tulane University, New Orleans, set up classes in Shakespeare for young reservists in the Djibouti army, to whom *Henry V* particularly appealed. As I similarly found in my case studies, it was in McKeown’s experience the belief among the Djibouti reservists that Shakespeare understood the lived experiences of military life that is significant. McKeown relates those soldiers’ identification with the St Crispin’s day speech, ‘we happy few, we band of brothers’ (4.3.60-67: 1500), observing that ‘so strongly does this speech continue to resonate among soldiers that the camp sergeant major had it posted on his office door’ (2009: 2). McKeown further describes Shakespeare as having an ‘aura in which he lives on as the secular prophet of the English-speaking world’ (3).

That latter comment from McKeown may be hyperbolic, and an echo of Bloom’s ‘secular Scripture’ remark above (2009: 3). However, Nancy Smith-Watson, who works with traumatised American military veterans, also reiterates the value of Shakespearean text which, while it may imbue the veterans with cultural capital, is more important for its therapeutic abilities. Her Milwaukee-based organisation, Feast of Crispian, runs drop-in sessions for veterans which use passages from Shakespeare and the ‘collaborative practice of theatre’ to help them to process their trauma and to recover from it (2022, online). In Smith-Watson’s view, ‘many of us lucky enough to stand on a stage and speak the beautiful poetry of William Shakespeare have a deeply rooted faith that it makes

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<sup>29</sup> In similar fashion, and with work done in France in the 1960s, Bourdieu distinguishes three areas of taste represented by music and paintings, which he argues correspond to educational levels and social class (1984: 8). Thus, enjoyment of ‘legitimate’ (or highbrow) works and artists such as *The Art of Fugue*, Brueghel and Goya, increases with educational level and thus educational capital. ‘Middle-brow’ taste ‘brings together the minor works of the major arts’, such as *Rhapsody in Blue* and Renoir, and is more commonly appreciated by the middle classes. Finally, there is the ‘popular’ taste of the working classes, represented by no mention of paintings and the rather snobbishly described light music or ‘classical music devalued by popularisation’, such as *The Blue Danube* and songs ‘totally devoid of artistic ambition or pretension’ (8).

us better people' (2019: 38). Smith-Watson's comment is illuminating, given that her group, and approach to the verse she uses, both transcend Shakespeare's nationality to concentrate on the merits of his wordcraft. Perhaps one explanation for this transcension lies in a belief espoused by Sofia Muñoz-Valdivieso, that in the twenty-first century it is globalisation that is significant, going beyond mere nationality. She points to Shakespeare as a global brand in itself and argues that Shakespeare's cultural capital 'keeps on circulating more energetically than ever' because 'the present globalisation of culture is producing a parallel globalisation of the playwright' (2017: 68).

## **Language**

As I will show in my case studies, my research indicates that there is an unexpected analogous connection between the concept of Shakespearean language and an esoteric version of slang which many members of the armed forces and veterans routinely use. On a broad linguistic level, phrases from Shakespeare permeate idiomatic conversation to an extent which few other writers have achieved. Consciously or unwittingly, Shakespeare's words, phrases and neologisms have passed into the common currency of the English language, and the pervasiveness of Shakespeare in this context is not necessarily connected to education levels. My research shows that soldiers and veterans often, and literally, speak their own language, having an association and affinity with words and phraseology collectively known as military slang. Military slang, writes Valentina Georgieva, 'originates in the mess hall or the battlefield' and, additionally that 'it's a tongue which few civilians can understand' (2015: 10). Military slang should be differentiated from military jargon or terminology, which describes the language used on an operational basis, such as giving orders or commands. Peter Mitchell describes military slang as facilitating 'everyday interpersonal relations between military personnel' (2014: 57). Similar to how Shakespearean neologisms contributed to expanding and enriching the English language, recent armed conflicts have also added to the lexicon of military slang, such as 'armour-barma', which refers to a method of checking for improvised explosive devices (IEDs); 'Butlins' as the nickname for the British army base, Camp Bastion in Afghanistan; and 'Terry' to refer to Taliban fighters (Hornak, 2014, online).

Language is an important element of military bonding, and especially when, as Mitchell points out, military personnel come from different social backgrounds (55). Military slang thus serves as a way of recognising that the speaker is or was in the military, making veterans instantly recognisable as having served in the armed forces to their fellows. Many veterans continue to use military slang after they have left the armed forces. Another of its functions is that soldiers often use such slang to express their emotions. Military slang has variants between the branches of the British armed forces and the use of specific words and expressions its own hierarchy, a kind of military social capital. 'Boot-neck' slang, for example, is the preserve of the Royal Marines (who are known as 'boot-necks', or Royals) and the UK's Commando Force, both of which are considered to constitute elite combat forces.<sup>30</sup> Soldiers' vernacular expressions are not confined only to war and killing; as with Shakespeare's words and language, they permeate everyday speech. For example, in boot-neck parlance, Shakespeare spun a hoofin' dit, meaning that he told a good tale. Former Royal Marine Tip Cullen, whom I interviewed and write about in Chapter Two, used that expression to me in relation to Shakespeare (Cullen, 2021). From my research, Shaun Johnson is another notable example of a veteran who uses words and expressions derived both from Shakespeare and military slang in his everyday speech and did so to me in all our interviews (2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c and 2023).

However, just as some Shakespearean language may offend twenty-first century audiences when perceived as racist, sexist or homophobic, the same applies to military slang, which is, writes Georgieva, 'littered with opaque references and punctuated by thick coarse expletives' (19). It should be remembered that the latter is not in common circulation but is used only (or principally) among fellow military personnel or veterans and in a context whereby those to whom such language is addressed appreciate its familiarity (even though

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<sup>30</sup> United Kingdom Special Forces (UKSF) comprise units such as the Special Air Service (SAS), the Special Boat Service (SBS), the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR) and the Special Forces Support Group (SFSG). Elite UK forces are generally considered to be the Parachute Regiment and Royal Marine Commandos. There are also elite units, which comprise highly trained personnel whose job it is to carry out high risk missions. They work with Special Forces, and include 29 Commando Regiment, Royal Artillery, which is an army regiment that provides artillery support for 3 Commando Brigade, Royal Marines. Within 29 Commando Regiment is 148 Battery, also known as Meiktila, which supports UKSF as well as 3 Commando Brigade and is unique in that it comprises personnel from both the British Army and the Royal Navy. Accordingly, its serving personnel and veterans borrow slang from both those branches of the armed forces and the Royal Marines.

it is equally important to note that some of those personnel may still be offended by it). The essence of military slang is exemplified by the comment from former army captain Patrick Hennessy, who says that ‘the British Army has a particular tradition of black humour’ (in Hornak, 2014, online). A typical example of such humour comes from Cassidy Little, a veteran who worked on *Shakespeare and Remembrance* and *Soldier On* and is currently an ambassador for SAA. His career as a Royal Marine ended when he sustained life-changing injuries in Afghanistan in 2011, including the loss of his right leg below the knee when an improvised explosive device (IED) was triggered. Little frequently quips that he is a soldier who is constantly AWOL; in this case, referring not to the acronym’s usual meaning of absent without leave, but to acting without one leg.<sup>31</sup>

Little’s comedic comments do not represent an isolated case. Many veterans cope, and coped, with extreme situations using black humour, which may also incorporate references to the enemy or the act of killing. Barry Buddon’s book, *Bootneck to English Dictionary*, contains the caveat ‘the easily offended need not read. If you are offended by any aspect of this publication, then drop [me] an e-mail with your delivery address and concerns and I’ll send you a handwritten letter telling you that I don’t care’ (2021: copyright page). Importantly, Buddon qualifies this by commenting that using military slang helps as a coping mechanism, because ‘if we are able to depersonalise and make light of some horrible situations, we will be better suited to continue operating, keeping each other alive and keeping sane’ (2021: copyright page). Lee Wilkinson, whom I interview in Chapter Two, said to me that ‘I joke about committing suicide, as part of using military black humour, but “to be or not to be” could very easily become reality for many veterans’ (Wilkinson, 2021). As with Shakespeare and the distance that separates it from everyday language, a similar detachment inherent in the specialised words and expressions used by the military, has a distinct and important psychological value.

This ‘distancing’ is crucially important. When veterans use Shakespeare therapeutically, it is important that the language used as an intrinsic part of this process should have at its core the ability to heal, to assuage, to ameliorate. In

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<sup>31</sup> I personally heard Little say this, during the SAA workshop reading of a play by Dale Reynolds, *No Other Man’s Land* in February 2021. *No Other Man’s Land* focuses on the experiences – both the same and different – between soldiers who fought in the First and Second World Wars, and modern-day military personnel. The subject of missing limbs was raised, to which Little made his AWOL black humour quip.

order to do this, the language employed needs to be at a sufficient distance from the veteran's own experiences so that it does not exacerbate trauma, but also has to be recognisable and 'usable'. Research conducted by Alisha Ali of New York University in conjunction with Stephan Wolfert of DE-CRUIT offers important empirical evidence supporting the reasons why Shakespeare's language is used by the veterans undergoing their programme. Shakespeare's veterans use 'heightened verse that is at once linguistically distinct from the clients' own language and experientially close to the clients' own traumas' (Ali and Wolfert, 2016: 61). Elsewhere, anecdotal evidence for the efficacy of using Shakespeare's verse in applied theatre practices is provided by Nancy Smith-Watson, who refers to Shakespeare as providing 'big language for big emotions. Rhyme, metre and metaphor work uniquely in the brain – differently from factual language – they activate the very parts of the brain that get switched off after trauma' (Smith-Watson, 2019: 39). Shakespeare is intense language to express the intense emotions veterans feel because of their trauma. 'Shakespeare's metaphors' observes Smith-Watson, 'describe the experiences of love, of loss, of hurt and anger in terms that teach the body to feel again' (39).

The rhythm of Shakespeare's language can work in a practical sense too for veterans, most of whom are unfamiliar with acting techniques and training. While it is important to realise that Shakespeare wrote in prose, and other rhyming schemes (*Macbeth*, for example, uses trochaic tetrameter for the chanting of the Weird Sisters, and only one play, *Richard II*, is written entirely in verse), I will show that iambic pentameter is cited both by veterans and theatre practitioners as having a particular usefulness and appeal. Ali and Wolfert note that a therapeutic effect is achieved by focusing on the rhythm and breathing techniques necessary to deliver iambic pentameter, observing that 'Shakespeare's language is delivered in the rhythm of our natural human heartbeat, a rhythm that encourages the speaker to invoke authentic voice, resonance and breath' (2016: 62). DE-CRUIT deliberately chooses passages in iambic pentameter for its workshops. The importance that DE-CRUIT places on rhythm is echoed by Shakespearean actor and director Kelly Hunter, who runs workshops for autistic children. These groups focus on drama games and use the Hunter Heartbeat Method to soothe the children. Hunter explains that 'the game is based upon the rhythm of the heartbeat taken from the iambic pentameter of

Shakespeare's verse, and is shown to have a calming, almost meditative effect on the children' (Hunter, 2014: abstract). Emma Seppala's study of twenty-one American veterans who acquired PTSD following tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq, found that symptoms were alleviated by relaxation and breathing techniques which used Sudarshan Kriya yoga (2014: 397-405). For veterans who have been exposed to combat-related trauma, it is therapeutic to use drama-based breathing techniques before they even begin to work on Shakespearean verse, as I will demonstrate in my DE-CRUIT case study.

## **Conclusion**

As I have shown above, early modern playwrights were aware of theatre's potential to heal melancholy. They too wrote in iambic pentameter – the apparently soothing rhythm of the human heartbeat. Other writers, of Shakespeare's era and beyond, created rich and diverse characters who experienced war, trauma and a gamut of related human emotions. Yet it is applied 'Shakespeare' that has become a distinct branch of applied theatre, Shakespeare that is used in veterans' groups (among others) to transform, heal and inspire. The reasons are multi-dimensional and include his general familiarity; his words and phrases that have passed into the common currency of the English language in a way that no other writer has achieved; Shakespeare's cultural capital and status as England's 'national poet' (although as I will later show, this latter is not as important for veterans as I had initially assumed); the depth and richness of his characterisation and the sense that, irrespective of our age, race, gender or social background, and whatever life experiences we enjoy or suffer, Shakespeare has already understood and brought them to life on stage. For my subject group, the veterans who use applied Shakespeare, there is clearly an affinity with Shakespeare that arises from their belief that he understood their esoteric military experiences and emotions, which include combat trauma and the difficulties of transitioning to a civilian life.

## Literature Review: the psychological cost of war in Shakespeare

‘And sleep/In the affliction of these terrible dreams/That shake us nightly’

*Macbeth*

3.2.19-21 (1997: 2588)

One of my principal research questions focuses on examining why and how Shakespeare may be used to resolve veterans’ service-related psychological issues. One answer lies in an analysis of what Shakespeare wrote about war, not military details of battles like Agincourt (*Henry V*), nor the Spanish blades of which soldiers dream (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.5.84), but of the psychological effect war had on combatants and their families. Military psychiatrist Eric Meyer writes that ‘therapies for depression and PTSD should be adjusted to account for military culture’ (2015: 29). When using Shakespeare therapeutically, it is axiomatic that his relevance to veterans should reflect not merely a military culture, but a specific aspect of it: mental health. Shakespeare’s work that appears to recognise how psychological problems affect soldiers therefore is an important inclusion in my literature review.

Two characters encapsulate the symptoms and effects of PTSD on sufferer and spouse: Harry Hotspur and Kate Percy in *I Henry IV*. Pistol in *Henry V*, and Iago in *Othello* display signs of moral injury, which is often a precursor to PTSD.<sup>32</sup> Battle shock, a more immediate effect of violent combat, may be seen in King Henry in *Henry V*. The profound difficulties that some soldiers experience when leaving the military for a civilian life are illustrated by the eponymous character in *Coriolanus*. Veterans I have interviewed and observed have worked with Hotspur and Kate, Henry and Coriolanus, as the case study chapters will show. I therefore present in this Shakespearean literature review an analysis of those characters which is, I argue, essential to understand the therapeutic role of Shakespeare that I describe and analyse.

Shakespeare was not a military chronicler and nor is there any evidence that he served in the military, although Lieutenant-Colonel Tim Collins, who commanded the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment, during the Iraq War of 2003,

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<sup>32</sup> I describe the concept of moral injury in the section of my literature review which describes PTSD.



is convinced that Shakespeare's knowledge of soldiers and combat does betoken personal military experience. Speaking as part of a question and answer session at the launch of Amy Lidster and Sonia Massai's book, *Shakespeare at War: A Material History*, on 18 October 2023 at the National Army Museum, London, Collins said that 'it's the way Shakespeare speaks [about military matters], he couldn't just fabricate it, he couldn't just have listened to someone in a pub and replicated it' (2023). Lidster and Massai's book focuses on how Shakespeare is used in times of war rather than how he represents war and there is no mention in it of PTSD. George Macdonald Fraser, author of the Flashman novels, served in Burma in the Second World War, and when reading *Henry V* was told by a Sergeant Hutton that Shakespeare must have served as a soldier because 'ye know them three – Bates, an' them, talking afore the battle? Ye doan't git that frae lissening in pubs, son. Naw, 'e's [Shakespeare] bin their' (1993: 128).

What is indisputable is that Shakespeare did begin his career as a playwright during the reign of Elizabeth (1558-1603), when for most of those years England was at war with Spain, France, Ireland and the Low Countries. War was, therefore, an omnipresent reality for Elizabeth's subjects. Ros King writes that Shakespeare 'cannot but have heard, seen and read about its [war] effects' (2008: 128). Adam McKeown writes that 'crowding Shakespeare's theatres and the London streets outside were people who had been deployed or were about to be deployed, people who had lost loved ones or would, people who carried in their hearts the memory of war or the fear of war' (2009: 6). Many soldiers of Elizabeth's reign would have survived combat to be veterans during the peaceful years that James I occupied the throne, and a scenario may be imagined where a veteran would 'strip his sleeve and show his scars' in those taverns, while reminiscing about commanders in the field who 'Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered' (*Henry V*, 4.3.47 & 55: 1500).

However it was that Shakespeare did learn about combat, it is certain that the subject of war permeates his plays. So steeped in military references is his work that even in *Romeo and Juliet*, a play primarily associated with the tragedy of young love, Mercutio in his Queen Mab speech talks of a soldier dreaming about cutting foreign throats and awakening 'frighted' at those images (1.4.82-88: 885). Charles Edelman calculates that thirty-five of the thirty-six plays in the First Folio contain references or allusions to war and its after-effects, weapons or

soldiers (2000: 411-414).<sup>33</sup> Shakespeare's writings did, in respect of the military, represent 'the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.504: 1702). However, Shakespeare's depiction of war often took a markedly different approach that was rare among early modern writers. Matthew Woodcock estimates that approximately two hundred military books were printed in sixteenth century England, many by serving and ex-soldiers, which concentrated on practical battlefield skills such as geometry and surgery (2016: 159). The emotional aspects of combat were not considered in these works. Woodcock points out that 'whereas modern writings and reportage on war are obsessed with what warfare feels like, and the thoughts and responses it triggers, early modern military autobiography is predominantly concerned with actions and the reputations gained through those actions' (2016: 163). Yuval Harari concurs that 'Renaissance [military] memoirs simply ignore the experiential side of war (2004: 19).

Poets and dramatists did, however, write about the lived experience of war, and focused on the emotional aspects of combat and the trauma it can evoke. Soldier poets, Shakespeare's contemporaries like Thomas Churchyard (c1520-1604) and George Gascoigne (1525-1577) wrote about their participation in military campaigns. For both, their personal experience of combat affected them sufficiently to warrant inclusion in their poetic works. Gascoigne's *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*, which Felicity Hughes says features largely autobiographical content (1997: 3), includes the lines: 'Why said I then, that war is full of woes/Or sour of taste, to them that know it best' (Gascoigne, 1575: stanza 180. 1-2). Shakespeare, however, further explored the consequences of being a soldier a stage further by detailing the psychological cost that had only been hinted at in *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis* and Churchyard's *A Tragical Discourse*.

### **The significance of Kate Percy**

In *I Henry IV*, a play which begins and concludes with battles of rebellion, Shakespeare includes a speech which encapsulates how war may affect

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<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Edelman identifies military language or allusions to war in *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Venus and Adonis*, *A Lover's Complaint*, *Sonnet 107* and the collaborative works, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Pericles* and *Edward III*. I further suggest that although it appertains to civil rioting rather than war, Scene 6 in *Sir Thomas More*, contains (semi-military) references to weapons and rebel captains. This scene was written and amended by 'Hand D', which is supposed by scholars to be that of Shakespeare: John Jowett says that 'Hand D' is, 'identified with strong probability as William Shakespeare' (Jowett, 2011: 18).

participants emotionally. The character whom Shakespeare uses to articulate such responses to trauma is not a soldier, but a military spouse whose husband has been psychologically affected by war. Kate Percy, wife of Henry Hotspur, is, I contend, the fulcrum around whom the basis of the argument that Shakespeare recognised combat trauma should swing. Kate thus becomes the vehicle by which Shakespeare's audiences are shown the psychological reality of warfare. This is important for two major reasons. When used for therapeutical purposes, Kate's words show the myriad similarities between the feelings engendered by combat that are experienced by veterans today, and the vicarious distance that is vital in allowing them to process and cope with their emotions because it is not the soldier himself or herself who is giving the Shakespearean speech.

Kate has fifty-seven lines in the play, of which twenty-eight give a detailed description of what reads remarkably like the condition we now recognise as combat PTSD. Hotspur has symptoms that could be taken from the pages of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* as I quote above: isolation and withdrawal; sexual dysfunction and feelings of detachment and estrangement from loved ones; depression and persistent negative emotional states; and lack of interest or pleasure in activities that were once important and enjoyed. The following lines correspond to *DSM-5's* Criterion D:

O my good lord, why are you thus alone?  
For what offence have I this fortnight been  
A banished woman from my Harry's bed?  
Tell my sweet lord, what is't that takes from thee  
Thy stomach, pleasure, and thy golden sleep?  
Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth  
And start so often when thou sitt'st alone?  
Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks  
And give my treasures and rights of thee  
To thick-eyed musing and curst melancholy?

(2.4.31-40: 1176)

Hotspur experiences insomnia, nightmares or fragmented sleep; hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startle response (Criterion E):

In thy faint slumbers I by thee have watched,  
And heard thee murmur tales of iron wars.

(2.4.41-42: 1176)

Kate is so familiar with the battlefield descriptions that Hotspur cries out in his sleep that she uses the correct military terminology of the time:

Of palisadoes, frontiers, parapets,  
Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin,  
Of prisoners' ransomed, and of soldiers slain.  
And all the currents of a heady fight.

(2.4.46-49: 1176-7)

Hotspur has distinct physiological symptoms, such as night sweats caused by his nightmares:

Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war  
And thus hath so bestirred thee in thy sleep,  
That beads of sweat have stood upon thy brow  
Like bubbles in a late-disturbèd stream.

(2.4.50-53: 1177)

Hotspur cannot relax:

And in thy face strange motions have appeared,  
Such as we see when men restrain their breath  
On some great sudden hest.

(2.4.54-56: 1177)

Kate's evocation of so many PTSD symptoms indicates that if the terminology were not contemporary to Shakespeare, the condition was. Veterans who have, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, published writing, both online and in print, on their experiences of war relate to the significance of Kate Percy's speech regarding combat trauma. American veteran Jeff Eastman's blog identifies the meaning, if not the character to whom it refers, when he writes 'Shakespeare knew about PTSD, King Henry IV had it' (Eastman, 2021, online). Iraq veteran L.J. Townsend says that '*Henry the Fifth Part One*, [sic] written around 1597, includes a vivid and accurate description of the symptoms of PTSD' (2017: 6). In an important sense, it does not matter that these writers identify the wrong character or play; they are correct in what is significant to them, a realisation that what they suffered existed four hundred years ago too and was worthy of mention on a public stage.

Shakespeare's recognition of combat trauma is acknowledged by American psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, who asks 'when a soldier is broken by combat, what breaks? In *I Henry IV*, it is the mental health of the most formidable fighter among the rebels against the king: Harry Hotspur' (1994: 165-6). Shay, who has worked with Vietnam veterans suffering from severe and chronic PTSD, also argues that, in Kate's speech, 'Shakespeare gives an account 'of what seems very much like the symptoms of PTSD' (1994: 165). Michael Trimble acknowledges Shakespeare's inclusion of what he calls post-traumatic neurosis in a play he erroneously calls *King Henry IV*, but which is obviously *I Henry IV* (1985: 6-7). Glin Bennett describes the speech as 'an account of what could be called PTSD four centuries before the condition was formulated and years before the word stress acquired its present usage' (2018: 255). Daryl Paulson and Stanley Krippner observe that 'Hotspur became melancholy, became socially withdrawn and began talking in his sleep following a bloody battle in which he lost his kinsmen' (2007: 8). This identification of Hotspur as a character who exhibits numerous signs of psychological trauma and distress is notable for its perspicacity, perhaps not unsurprisingly given that Trimble and Bennett are psychiatrists and Paulson and Krippner are psychologists; Paulson is also a Vietnam veteran whose clinical speciality is combat PTSD.

However, my literature review identifies that much academic writing on Hotspur has not yet considered what psychiatrists, clinicians who work with veterans and veterans themselves who have first-hand experience of combat, acknowledge. Even the experiences of soldiers returning from two world wars did not provoke in writers such awareness in the immediate decades that followed those conflicts. E.M.W. Tillyard says that Hotspur 'teases his wife outrageously, bringing her to the verge of tears with his rebuffs, maddening her with his off-handedness [...] there is no real cruelty in his roughness' (1944: 290). Paul Jorgensen remarks only that Hal's perception of Hotspur 'hints at something affected about the youth's behaviour' (1955: 244), and that 'His [Hotspur's] wife seems undismayed by his curt way with her and his attitude towards love' (244).

Later writing on Hotspur offers only limited analysis of his psychological condition. Although Patricia Cahill acknowledges that Kate's speech 'evokes performance of trauma,' she describes Hotspur's behaviour as evoking 'an image of a man so completely under the sway of martial impulses that his speech and

movement seem to occur independently of his will' (2008:1); I contend that Hotspur's behaviour is indeed a result of his military training and practice but could also encompass PTSD. Nick de Somogyi similarly attributes Hotspur's nocturnal utterances to being so thoroughly *au fait* with military life that he recites details of it in his sleep (1998: 161). A.D. Nuttall explains Hotspur's behaviour towards Kate by comparing the treatment of women in *Julius Caesar*, writing that 'in the ultra-male world of Rome's military society [...] women play no direct part in the real business of the drama. There is a mild pre-echo of this in the English martial milieu of *I Henry IV*, where we see Hotspur's wife excluded from her husband's bed and from the deliberations of the rebellious lords' (2007:189). Ros King, while acknowledging that Iago in *Othello*, and Pistol in *Henry V*, may have PTSD, does not do so with Hotspur, describing him only as 'hot-headed, warlike Harry' (2019: 67). Theodor Meron points to Hotspur's extreme anger, acute sensitivity and habit of over-reacting, but does not attribute these in whole or part to PTSD (1998: 127). David Derrin sees Hotspur primarily as a comic character, calling him and his attributes 'comic', 'puerile fantasy' and possessing 'laughable deformities of the norms of the adult male sapiens' (2019: 90). Roberta Barker draws on Polonius's words in *Hamlet* (2.2.379-81) to describe Hotspur as 'tragical-comical-historical' (2003: 289) concluding that 'the most important lesson of the fortunes of Hotspur may lie in his irreducibility to either the romantic or the ridiculous (307).

Perhaps in response to the numbers of British and American military personnel who have returned from conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, academic writing is now gradually beginning to reflect awareness of the psychological impact of war on the combatant's family. Alan Friedman writes that Kate Percy's 'extraordinary insightful complaint to him [about his behaviour] enumerates in excruciating detail Hotspur's PTSD symptoms' (2022: 46). Friedman draws on Shay's analysis of Hotspur's symptoms (see above) and Wolfert's praise of Kate's description of PTSD (see above), concluding that there are 'few PTSD symptoms that Hotspur fails to manifest or Kate to articulate' (47). Kelsey Ridge observes that Kate describes what a twenty-first century audience would recognise as PTSD and says that Kate realises her husband's mind 'cannot leave the war behind – externally he appears at home, internally he remains in the field' (2022: 72-4). I agree with Ridge's analysis of Kate's perspicacity about a man she knows

intimately, but an average modern audience may not, as with the BBC's *Hollow Crown* production of *I Henry IV* (2012), even be permitted to hear Kate's speech in full.

The character of Kate also serves to show how PTSD affects not only the soldier but the people around them. Studies show a concomitant link between the mental health issues of veterans and similar problems suffered by their partners, (Murphy, Palmer, Hill, Ashwick and Busuttil, 2017; Murphy, Spencer-Harper and Turgoose, 2019). Ex-commando Hugh McManners writes that 'the spouses of PTSD victims complain of coldness and lack of tenderness or care' (1993: 370) and that the anxiety that can save a soldier's life in battle by making him more alert, can make life back home unbearable 'for family as well as sufferer' (371). Minister for Veterans Johnny Mercer, who served in Afghanistan, relates his own experience when writing about his marriage in that 'intimacy was off the table – I could not even consider it' (2017: 268). Johnson Beharry separated from his wife weeks after his Victoria Cross investiture, citing the trauma of his war experiences as causing difficulties in his marriage (BBC, 2005, online). Kate and Hotspur are intertwined psychologically in that the actions of the husband have consequences for himself and his spouse, as can be true for veterans and their partners today, as the case study chapters will show.

### ***Henry V: Shakespeare's portrayal of jus in bello***

Paul Stevens writes of *Henry V* that 'Shakespeare's drama has played a central role in Anglophone representation of war. It is woven into the fabric of our culture' (2021: 221). In my literature review section on combat PTSD, I describe how *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum* are the three tenets by which many argue that war should be conducted. *Jus in bello* is the soldier's principal area of involvement; Jeremy Waldron points out that 'most laws in *bello* are self-administered by individual soldiers and their unit commanders' (2015: 86). In *Henry V*, where the gruesome realities of battle are starkly portrayed in brutal language, Shakespeare posed the philosophical dilemma of how war should be conducted by those most closely involved in its execution. My research will show

that veterans identify strongly with Henry's battlefield dilemmas and that the play has great resonance for them because it nuances military violence.<sup>34</sup>

This latter is encapsulated in Simon Barker's comment that 'Harfleur invites us to consider the real difference between military conflict and civilian ethics' (2007: 137). The teleology of war is at play in Henry's harsh and apparently uncompromising ultimatum to the Governor of Harfleur as to the consequences for its citizens if they do not surrender. Henry says that: 'The gates of mercy shall be all shut up' (*Henry V*, 3.3.87: 1480) and: 'Your naked infants spitted upon pikes' (3.3.115: 1480) is a specific threat that the English soldiers will engage in infanticide. The audience may only speculate that Shakespeare's Henry would have carried out these threats, but perhaps as a good commander in the field he offers such a brutal ultimatum to save the lives of his already battle-weary soldiers by declaring: 'The winter coming on, and sickness growing/Upon our soldiers, we will retire to Calais' (3.3.132-3: 1481).

Henry spares more than his own men. When surrender has been achieved, he orders: 'Use mercy to them all' (*Henry V* 3.3.131: 1481) towards Harfleur's inhabitants. Theodor Meron points out that mediaeval law permitted different treatment for combatants and civilians in captured territory or on the battlefield, and those who were the conquered inhabitants of a besieged city, writing that 'in a city taken by storm almost any licence was condoned by the law [...] The prospect of this free run of his lusts for blood, spoil and women was a major incentive to a soldier to persevere in the rigours which were likely to attend a protracted siege' (1993: 102). R. Scott Fraser believes that Henry's single line about showing mercy is lost and unimportant when compared to his previous violent rhetoric (2008: 78), but I disagree. Henry's insistence on mercy displays an understanding of what is now referred to as *jus in bello*, apparent also in his execution of Bardolph for stealing from a church, and his decree that 'there be nothing compelled from the villages, nothing taken but paid for, none of the French upbraided or abused in disdainful language' (3.6.100-102: 1486).

There are vital differences, in a militaristic sense, between Harfleur and Agincourt. Scott Fraser points out that the former event is a siege, and the latter

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<sup>34</sup> In my chapter on Shaun Johnson and post-trauma growth achieved through applied Shakespeare, I examine *Henry V* from the perspective of the veterans acting in their productions of it, rather than this interpretation of how Shakespeare uses it to show *jus in bello*.



is a battle (2008: 80), and I note above that different rules applied to each. On hearing the alarum partway through the battle of Agincourt that tells Henry he has not yet won, he issues the command:

But hark what alarum is this same?  
The French have reinforced their scattered men.  
Then every soldier kill their prisoners.  
Give the word through.

(4.6.35-38: 1504)

John Sutherland argues Henry's actions constitute a war crime (2000: 109). Fluellen condemns the raid by the French on the English camp for a flagrant breach of *jus in bello* in that: 'Kill the poys and the luggage? 'Tis expressly against the law of arms' (4.7.1-2: 1504), to which Gower replies: "'Tis certain there is not a boy alive. And the cowardly rascals that ran from the battle ha' done this slaughter' (4.7.4-5: 1504). Henry gives the order to kill the prisoners before he hears about the raid and there is no textual indication that he knew about it beforehand. Meron posits that Henry believed that because the battle had not yet been won, the captured prisoners still posed a threat to his men, and thus he did not violate mediaeval legal standards (1998: 193). Nicholas Hytner, who directed a National Theatre production of *Henry V* in 2003 against a backdrop of the Iraq War, poses a more balanced question: 'Henry V – hero or war criminal? Both' (in Lidster and Massai, 2023: 218).

There is an aspect to Henry's actions which corresponds to psychological trauma. The 2012 BBC television series *The Hollow Crown* did not acknowledge the existence of PTSD in Hotspur. In contrast, in *Henry V* (which was part of the same series), director Thea Sharrock informs the character of Henry, and ergo his 'war crimes' order to kill the prisoners, by showing the impact that battle trauma has on him. In Sharrock's production, Henry gives the order to kill the prisoners when he discovers the death of his cousin, the Duke of York, and contrary to Shakespeare's text, speaks his 'I was not angry' line before he issues the death sentence on the French (4.7.47: 1505). Ramona Wray points out this order is therefore primarily understood as the 'post-traumatic associations that gather about Henry in the battle scenes' (2019: 12), and rather than being an act of gratuitous cruelty, it can be seen as a 'catastrophic error emerging from

exhaustion and stress' (12). The trauma that Henry suffers is a culmination of Harfleur and Agincourt in Sharrock's interpretation, addressing battle shock rather than PTSD. This adaptation recognises combat trauma, evidence that Shakespeare can, and does, reflect twenty-first century issues and problems.

A modern parallel is available in the case of British Royal Marine, Sergeant Alexander Blackman, who shot and killed a badly wounded Taliban insurgent in Afghanistan in 2011 and was subsequently court-martialled and convicted of murder as a war crime in 2013. Prior to sentencing, a psychiatrist concluded that Blackman may have had an undetected combat stress disorder (General Court Martial, online, 2013). At appeal in 2017, Blackman's conviction was reduced to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility because he was suffering from the recognised mental illness of adjustment disorder (Court Martial Appeal, online, 2017). Adjustment disorders 'may be diagnosed following a traumatic event when an individual exhibits symptoms of either acute stress disorder or PTSD that do not meet or exceed the diagnostic threshold for either disorder' (*DSM-5*, 2013: 288). Sharrock's interpretation of Henry thus has parallels with modern military diagnoses and experiences.

### ***Coriolanus*: a struggle with readjusting to civilian life**

No character in Shakespeare more perfectly illustrates the pitfalls and potential tragic consequences of such transitioning back to civilian life as Caius Marcius (who for his achievements in combat becomes Coriolanus). Coriolanus therefore represents an apt choice of character to work with by veterans who have similar readjustment struggles. Paul Jorgensen writes that 'Coriolanus is possibly Shakespeare's most complex study of a military character' (1950: 28). I concur with this observation and argue that it is partly because Coriolanus is represented as a man vastly more suited to military life than the civilian, political one that he later assumes. As such, he straddles both worlds, which is an experience common also to modern day veterans. Like many of those veterans, (and all of those whom I interviewed except one), Coriolanus has known no prior adult occupation before becoming a soldier. Coriolanus's disconnect with his post-military life in many examples mirrors that of veterans who, as I will show in my case studies, described to me emotions ranging from bewilderment and inadequacy to anger and rage, that they felt when required to integrate into a

civilian society (Davies, 2022; Johnson, 2017, 2021a; VET-PTSD/1, 2021, VET-PTSD/2, 2021; Williams, 2022a; Wolfert, 2022)).

As a soldier, Caius Marcius has shown exceptional bravery on the battlefield and is awarded the agnomen of Coriolanus for his achievement at Corioli. Glory and achievement then begin rapidly to unravel. In relation to Coriolanus, Katharine Eisaman Maus asks 'to what extent does excellence in battle translate into other forms of meritoriousness?' (1997: 2785) and the answer is that for this character, it is obvious that it does not. Marcius's new title marks more fundamental change than nomenclature. As Marcius he fought for the patriotic concept of Rome rather than its people, declaring that: 'As for my country I have shed my blood' (3.1.80). As Coriolanus, he is expected to serve the Roman Plebeians, and he is singularly ill-equipped to do so. Prior to Corioli, Marcius has made obvious his contempt for the common people, partly because unlike him, they are not willing to shed their blood for Rome:

What would you have, you curs  
That like not peace nor war? The one affrights you  
The other makes you proud.

(1.1.157-159: 2797)

This attitude on the part of Coriolanus does not augur well for any future relationship with the people.

Robert Ormsby observes that the psychological risk for Coriolanus comes not from war, but from 'exposure to public life' (2014: 231). Maus writes that Coriolanus's 'military prowess is not merely irrelevant to peacetime employment, but indeed renders him politically incompetent or even dangerous' (1997: 2878). In that peacetime, Coriolanus is persuaded to stand for election as Consul. He has brought vicarious honour to Rome's citizens, and the Plebeians could have embraced him not only for the war hero that he was, but also for the merit of what he was not: a professional politician. Outside his military milieu, however, Coriolanus is particularly uncomfortable with, even hostile to, the necessity of a politician becoming public property, with himself as a representation both of the body politic, and – literally - through the Plebeians' demands to see the wounds of his body corporeal. Wounds are honourable, the physical marks by which a soldier's valour is judged and proved, but Coriolanus is too proud to allow himself

to become a public spectacle. Although he is prepared to do so in private, Coriolanus refuses publicly to show his war wounds – ‘his marks of merit, wounds received for’s country’ as the Second Citizen describes them (2.3.153: 2824) - in the marketplace as custom and the people expect. Although some of the Plebeians construe this denial as mockery and contempt, Coriolanus is nevertheless chosen to be Consul. The Patricians distrust Coriolanus, sensing his unsuitability for civil elevation to Consul. Bereft of his military status, and particularly the certainty of his role within the Roman army, Coriolanus’s life then spirals into a bewildering world of disconnect and dissociation, which for him – as with many modern veterans - will have disastrous and fatal consequences.

The dramatised depiction of Coriolanus, when viewed as a classic case of a soldier who cannot readjust to civilian life, affords the character much value to some of the veterans engaging with Shakespeare that I have interviewed and observed. Passages from the play are, for example, supplied by Stephan Wolfert to veterans in DE-CRUIT sessions. For several of those veterans (about whom I write more in Chapter Three: ‘The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans), it is Coriolanus’s rage that is the dominant emotion they identified with. It is the impotence of such rage and anger, expressed by Coriolanus in and against the civilian world, that encapsulates their own post-military feelings. Feelings of another kind are also pertinent to perceived similarity between Coriolanus and veterans. Coriolanus becomes emotionally estranged from his wife Virgilia, his mother Volumnia and his son, saying: ‘But out, affection!/ All bond and privilege of nature break/Let it to be virtuous to be obstinate’ (5.3.24-26: 2861). Like Hotspur, Coriolanus prefers to be alone, evidenced by his words ‘As of a man were author of himself/And knew no other kin’ (5.3.36-37). Brian Parker attributes Coriolanus’s solitude to his military career, writing that ‘Martius’s exultant sense of uniqueness [...] is not only a cause of prowess in war, but itself a result of war, of surviving many confrontations with death’ (1994: 64). Coriolanus thus becomes a character whom veterans can relate to when confronting their own emotional frigidity.

Attributing a lack of empathy to having engaged in combat, J. Kelly Nestruck calls Coriolanus a brute and suggests that this may ‘in part [be] owing to PTSD from his campaign in Corioles, which his new nickname must instantly trigger’ (2018, online). I disagree with that assessment, for two reasons. Firstly,

Coriolanus displays brutish behaviour before Corioli in his contempt for the Plebeians and their struggles with the famine. Secondly, and more importantly for any association of Coriolanus with PTSD, Nestruck's comment implies a direct connection with PTSD and brutishness, which is not necessarily just nor accurate as a generalisation for all veterans. It is, I argue, more likely that the seeds of such brutishness may have been sown in the childhood of Caius Marcius, because Shakespeare depicts him as having had a mother, Volumnia, who took more joy and pride in war than in giving birth to a son whom she was 'pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame' (1.3.11: 2801). Volumnia understands, whereas Coriolanus does not, the significance of her son's wounds belonging not only to him but to the people of Rome in whose service he has acquired them. She and Menenius even count those wounds, observing that Coriolanus has acquired two more in his latest battle. 'Now it's twenty-seven' says Menenius and: 'Every gash was an enemy's grave' (2.1.141: 2814).

The significance of Volumnia in the context of veterans is that adverse childhood experiences may play a significant role in the acquisition of military-based trauma in later life, as I have already pointed out in my literature review section on combat PTSD. Janet Adelman writes that Volumnia lives through her son, and that his warrior role is her creation (1992: 152). Greenblatt observes that 'the suite of traits brought forth by his upbringing – a proneness to rage, a merciless penchant for bullying, an absence of empathy, a refusal to compromise, a compulsive desire to wield power over others – helps to explain Coriolanus's success in war' (2018: 166). A potential identification with what veterans may perceive as Coriolanus's childhood experiences could in turn help them to deal with the consequences of their own troubled childhoods that may have caused, or be exacerbating, their post-military psychological problems.

## **Conclusion**

In contrast to the plethora of early modern manuals on the techniques of war, Shakespeare shows the emotional aspects of soldiers' lived experiences of combat. Thus for veterans to engage with some Shakespearean characters is to engage with, and process their own feelings and emotions engendered by their service. My thesis begins with Kate Percy's speech because her lines offer a virtually exhaustive list of symptoms; it is, as it were, a medical document in early

modern dramatic form. Through Kate, Shakespeare's audiences, both at the time of writing and since, are made familiar with how military trauma manifests itself in, and informs the actions, of the warrior Hotspur. Kate thus sets the scene for the characters in later plays such as *Pistol* and *Iago*, who give an insight into aspects of combat which cause or exacerbate such symptoms, such as the shame and guilt caused by moral injury, and how that condition may be provoked by betrayal of the individual soldier by the military or political system. The psychological repercussions of war present themselves in the actions of a field commander like King Henry V, which informs a discussion on war crimes, both on stage and in real theatres of war. *Coriolanus* embodies the struggle that many soldiers have in adjusting to a civilian world when they leave the military.

As I demonstrate in my case studies, theatre practitioners who use Shakespeare when working with veterans often choose speeches and passages which incorporate these characters. There are concomitant dangers in choosing characters intimately associated with war, and sometimes the choice is to move as far away from Shakespeare's portrayal of battle and conflict as possible; some of the comedies serve an important role in this distancing. However, an acknowledgment of Shakespeare's recognition of an aspect of 'the curse of service' (*Othello*, 1.1.34: 2101) is an essential component of engaging veterans with his work.

## **Methodology**

**'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't'**

***Hamlet* (2.2.203-4: 1695)**

'Methods don't come first, research questions do', writes Bill Gillham (2000: 17). My first task was to establish my research questions as stated in my Introduction. My methodology then consisted of gathering qualitative data about my subject group of military veterans, which included the use of semi-structured interviews, the observation of applied Shakespeare workshops and some participation by me in them, and the observation and analysis of Shakespearean productions in which the veterans had been involved. This mixed approach enabled me to gather factual information about the veterans, to hear about their experiences in the way best suited to how they wished to impart them, to watch how they engaged with Shakespeare and to assess how therapeutic this process was for their well-being.

### **Subject group**

The UK veterans on whom my research is focused comprise the following demographic. Apart from one veteran who served in Aden (now Yemen) and Cyprus, all the others had been variously deployed to, in chronological order of those wars and conflicts, Northern Ireland, the Falkland Islands, Iraq or Afghanistan. The American veterans served in Vietnam. The Ukrainian veterans served in Ukraine. None have learning difficulties, and none are in custody. Some veterans I worked with more closely, interviewing them several times, or observing them in numerous workshops and performances; others I encountered less frequently, as they attended workshops perhaps only once or twice. Where I have their consent to do so, I have named them. I personally engaged with 21 British and American veterans who worked with Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA): 17 male and four female. All are from a white ethnic group. Their ages are typically 40-60, and outside that range the youngest is 35 and the oldest 76. Seven veterans, all in their 30s and 40s, participated in the DE-CRUIT workshops I describe in Chapter Three, and 54 in the follow-up session, including those from the workshops I observed (I do not include in this total the workshop leader, Stephan Wolfert, who is also a veteran). The Ukrainian veterans whom I include

in Chapter Four numbered eight in total. Their age demographic ranges from late 20s to early 40s. All are white.

It is important to caveat my research by stating I am aware that my sample group of participants does not include, nor therefore directly represent, ethnically diverse groups because all the British and Ukrainian veterans and civilians I interviewed and observed are white. All the named American veterans and civilians are white, as are the Canadian and Israeli veterans, respectively. I do not mention the ethnicity of the DE-CRUIT participants because I was specifically requested by those veterans not to compromise their identities by including personal details (which included ethnicity). Therefore, one of the limitations of my research is that I cannot compare the experiences of white veterans with those from other ethnic groups. Those experiences, by definition, include the core elements of my thesis: the veterans' military service; the trauma they sustained and/or their struggle to adapt to civilian life; the efficacy, or otherwise, of the therapeutic use of applied theatre and specifically, applied Shakespeare; and the relevance of Shakespeare's work and his own ethnic identity to those who do not share the latter.

I chose not to include serving military personnel in my research.<sup>35</sup> The organisations with which I worked are geared principally towards veterans, which made access to research subjects possible. In addition, PTSD can take many years to develop, so was more likely to occur in veterans than in currently serving soldiers (the Ukrainian veterans had served in 2014, and, when I first encountered them, they had not expected to take part in active service again); veterans cannot struggle to adjust to life outside the armed forces while still serving; and the logistics, including permission required from the MOD, would have made research difficult and protracted.

My prior knowledge of veterans' arts-based organisations became my starting point to find my subject group. In addition to enabling me to study how SAA and DE-CRUIT use Shakespeare therapeutically, both organisations acted as a gateway to veterans who were willing to participate in my research. SAA introduced me to veterans who had worked with Shakespeare, found it to be therapeutic and who wanted to speak to me about their experiences. SAA

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<sup>35</sup> The Ukrainian participants were not serving personnel when I commenced my research.



approached the veterans initially on my behalf. I therefore did not personally choose the age, gender nor the ethnicity of the participants. I met in person and had telephone conversations with SAA's chief executive officer, Amanda Faber, to propose and discuss the research I would be conducting, and I liaised with her regarding materials such as participant information sheets, which outlined the nature and purpose of my research, and what I would require of the participant, and consent forms to be signed by each veteran who agreed to take part (see Appendices C, D and E). I supplied these documents to SAA and, suitably modified to reflect that workshops took place in the US, to DE-CRUIT, to distribute to the veterans they identified as willing to take part.

DE-CRUIT, as I have mentioned, is based in the US, which meant that contact with personnel or veterans took place on email, or on the online video-conferencing platform, Zoom. DE-CRUIT operates differently to SAA because it does not put on public performances. I was invited to observe a four-week programme of eight workshop sessions in September and October 2021. These sessions were held online because of Covid-19 restrictions on in-person meetings then being in place in the US. I had preliminary conversations via email with the workshop leader, Stephan Wolfert. I had previously contacted Wolfert when writing my MA dissertation and, like Faber, he was keen to be involved in my PhD. Wolfert gave me permission to be present at workshops, to take notes and to use this material in my thesis. Wolfert also agreed to be named in my thesis. Attendees gave permission to me to observe, participate and write about the sessions in my thesis. In accordance with their requests to be pseudonymised, I agreed, therefore, that all the DE-CRUIT participants would be given pseudonyms in my writing. Similarly, those attendees did not wish me to attribute to individuals specific details of their gender, age, ethnicity and branch of service, although they did agree that I could mention how many participants took part in total in sessions, and also to break down that number by gender only.

My methodology was designed to learn about the veterans' experiences of using Shakespeare therapeutically; why they gravitated towards arts-based organisations for veterans which engage in Shakespeare; their participation in workshops and performances; the type of audience they performed to (a 'closed' audience comprising only members of their group; semi-public, which allowed a selected audience of family and friends; or fully public); and the benefits or

otherwise they felt they have obtained from the practice of applied Shakespeare. Questionnaires and interviews were the background and precursor to observing and analysing the applied Shakespeare work that the veterans engaged in.

My methodology was designed to elicit from the veterans factual details of age, gender, branch of the armed forces served in and rank achieved. The caveat was that where requested, such information would be kept confidential because some details, such as service dates and deployment areas, could be sensitive to veterans, the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the US Department of Defense [sic] (DOD). However, this information is useful for a researcher to know because the nature of warfare in, for example, Northern Ireland, was different to that of the Falklands Conflict, which may inform the type of trauma experienced. I needed to elicit from the veterans their experience of having combat PTSD and/or readjustment issues; medical treatment, both conventional and alternative, they had undergone or were undergoing for their condition; and any arts-based therapies they had undergone or were undergoing.

It was important to make my research intentions clear verbally as well as in writing. For example, before conducting personal interviews, I checked with the veteran that he or she thoroughly understood why I was interviewing them and how the material would be used. Group participants were told at the beginning of each session that I would be observing them and reminded of why I was present and what I intended to do with the material gathered. Appertaining to group sessions, I needed to ensure that the whole study of proceedings would not be stopped if one participant did not want their personal involvement to be included; if they indicated this at any stage then I agreed not to make notes on anything that related to that individual. All participants were informed that they had the right to request, without prejudice or having to give a reason, that I remove my observations from the study if they subsequently changed their mind about being included. None have done so.

The pseudonymising and confidentiality of all participants is assured when appropriate and/or requested. I have, with their permission, named veterans who have participated in public performances, as all are a matter of record in theatre programmes and other ephemera, advertising and so on. I offered to use pseudonyms for those veterans if they wished; none have requested this. Where I have used secondary source material that names participants, such as press

coverage of their theatre work, I have also quoted names. Other veterans who requested it, and without exception those who participated in the DE-CRUIT workshops that I observed, are pseudonymised when referred to in my thesis. My ethical procedures were approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Exeter (see Appendix B).

I began my research proper by distributing to the veterans (via SAA and later, DE-CRUIT) the participation information sheets and consent forms, as described above. Reasons to adapt my methodology, while still adhering to the terms of my ethics agreement, became apparent however, from an early stage.<sup>36</sup> My initial intention to provide veterans with a structured questionnaire, to be followed by less formal interview/s, was superseded by practice. From initial conversations with veterans who contacted me, I learned that most preferred me verbally to describe the nature and purpose of my research rather than – as one put it – having to wade through pages of explanatory notes. Gillham points out that complex human experiences are not something that people can speak glibly about in an organised fashion (2000: 16). Although veterans wanted a broad idea of the topics we would cover beforehand, most did not require a formal list of questions, generally preferring to chat informally to tell their stories, with a little prompting from me. I chose therefore to use semi-structured interviews, principally because they made the veterans feel more at ease. Nigel Newton considers the principal strengths of semi-structured interviews to be that they permit spontaneity (2010: 2) and allow individuals to disclose thoughts and feelings which are normally private (6-7). Semi-structured interviews enabled me to explore issues that I had not initially identified, but which were pertinent and relevant to the veterans. There were, however, challenges to be negotiated.

Newton points out that the semi-structured format permits the interviewer to bring pre-conceptions to the interview and to ask leading questions (4-5). The latter was especially pertinent to the danger of asking directly about their PTSD or psychological issues, and thereby triggering distress. For the veterans' well-being, I realised that the best approach was to ask *how* they work with Shakespeare rather than directly *why*. It was preferable to allow them to mention

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<sup>36</sup> I checked that any adaptations to my methodology were covered by my original ethics agreement from the Ethics Committee of the University of Exeter. It was confirmed by ethics officer, Mark Slater, that the use of semi-structured interviews and my role as a dramaturg were covered by this agreement (email from Mark Slater, dated 16 December 2022).

and talk about their PTSD or readjustment issues within the parameters of our conversations – and they did – than for me to risk triggering them with overtly intrusive questioning. I must stress, however, that all the veterans who participated in my research were made fully aware that the subjects of PTSD and the difficulties of transitioning from military life would be included in our conversations. Some veterans I interviewed told me that they had or have PTSD and how the condition manifested itself but requested that I did not include those details in my thesis. While including their input about performing Shakespeare, I have respected their wishes regarding the sharing of their psychological issues. It also quickly became apparent to me that ‘therapy’ was a word that some veterans felt uncomfortable with. Therefore, to have asked them directly if they needed therapy was not conducive to putting them at their ease and establishing a rapport: as D. Soyini Madison writes, ‘without relationships, there is no ethnography’ (2005: 2).

### **Reflexivity**

Before commencing my research, and with ethical practice in mind, I considered the importance of reflexivity. Reflexivity is defined as the thoughtful, analytic self-awareness of researchers’ experiences, reasoning and overall impact throughout the research process, and that both researcher and those researched affect each other during their interactions (Haynes, 2012; Berger, 2013; Dodgson, 2015; Grove, 2017). I have a profound respect for the military; my father was a veteran, and I have personal friends and loved ones who served in the armed forces. I was therefore aware that I had life experiences and preconceptions about veterans and the military. However, I did not attempt to pretend to know at first-hand what it is like to serve. I am familiar with military slang that many use, but I do not employ such terminology in my conversations with veterans. This is partly because I wanted to be respectful towards the veterans and feel that, as a civilian, I have not earned the right to use their esoteric language. As a researcher, it is also important to keep a critical distance between myself and my subject group. ‘Speaking their language’, both figuratively and metaphorically, may have partly negated this distance by embedding myself too deeply in a communicative form of military culture. This latter possibility did, however, raise the crucial question of to what degree was I an observer or a participant in the research process.

In attempting to be objective in my approach, this was a significant matter. Mike Crang and Ian Cook define a participant researcher as one who immerses themselves in the community being researched, and that to be just an observer implies a detached sitting-back and watching the process as if the researcher were not there (2007: 36). Madison writes that the researcher is a 'participant observer or a performance witness' (2005: 3); in my case, the latter was often literally true. When watching performances given by the veterans, objectivity included trying to be an audience member without my knowledge of the psychological background of the veterans taking part. Workshops, however, were more intimate and interactive. My research required an 'intersubjective' approach. Intersubjectivity refers to a shared understanding that grows through interaction between, in this case, researcher and researched (Given, 2008: 468; Gunzenhauser, 2013: 59), and Crang and Cook argue that for participant observation, the goal should be to develop this intersubjective understanding (37).

Intersubjectivity was especially apposite when theory became praxis, and I was present at the veterans' workshops. When I was invited to attend DE-CRUIT workshops, it was with the proviso that I did not just watch and take notes. I was expected to participate, albeit on a limited basis. The veterans, I was told by workshop leader Stephan Wolfert, would feel 'spooked out' and that there was something 'creepy' about the process if I did not participate, almost as if I were spying on them. No such request was initially made about SAA workshops, and I began this part of my research by observing only. However, as the SAA workshops progressed, I was invited to be a dramaturg on the planned production of *Macbeth*, to which I agreed.<sup>37</sup> This request demonstrated an increase in trust and acceptance by the veterans working on it. Aside from a genuine desire to be involved at this level, and a passion for *Macbeth* itself, to have rejected the offer to be dramaturg may have risked the perception of a lack of commitment to the group being researched (Bryman, 2015: 439). Thus, researchers' and participants' roles are not fixed but develop during the projects (Raheim, 2016: 10). I did, however, ensure before agreeing to act as a dramaturg that this role was fully covered by my ethics agreement with the University, which it was.

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<sup>37</sup> I describe what this role constituted, and how it originated and developed, in Chapter Four: 'Improvise, Adapt and Overcome': producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes. I also clarified that I had ethics approval for this role (email from ethics officer Mark Slater, dated 16 December 2022).

## **The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine**

My plans for in-person interviews were curtailed before they could begin. The Covid-19 pandemic necessitated several lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, and Shakespeare workshops conducted by SAA have since remained online only. This meant my research has had to be almost entirely conducted on Zoom, phone or email. This presented both disadvantages and opportunities. The former encompassed not being able to watch workshops or performances in person, meaning that interviews risked being stilted and constrained, as both interviewer and interviewee adjusted to the demands and limitations of technology. The principal advantage of virtual platforms was that I had access to more veterans, and more frequently, than would have been possible had they or I had to travel to meetings. This was especially pertinent regarding DE-CRUIT's workshops in the US. Virtual sessions meant that veterans could participate from across the continent. Split screens worked tolerably well when I was observing online performances or workshops but tended to detract from any spontaneity that could have arisen from being able to ask questions or engage in conversation in a room full of people, as would otherwise be the case.

The SAA *Macbeth* production for which I acted as a dramaturg also highlights the necessity of adapting to changing circumstances partway through research. In June 2020, prior to beginning my PhD, I attended as a private guest a showing via Zoom of a production of *Twelfth Night*, staged by Ukrainian veterans. The event was organised by SAA and was intended to lead on to a joint production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2022/23. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, just weeks after workshops began, meant the Ukrainians were subsequently deployed in combat roles to defend their country. I was then in the process of having participant information sheets and consent forms translated into Ukrainian. Ethnographic research, however, necessarily involves adapting to contingencies and re-designing research 'on the hoof' (Crang and Cook, 2007: 132). My adaptation required me to include only material about the Ukrainians that was either in the public domain, or which I have since been able to obtain through some very limited email contact. I then focused on the veterans' change of play to *Macbeth*, the production of which they dedicated to their Ukrainian comrades.

## Researcher well-being

I have during my research listened both to harrowing and distressing accounts of combat from the veterans, and the effect that PTSD had had on them. However, research conducted while a conflict was ongoing had a far more profound impact on me. I heard, during the *Twelfth Night* presentation and the initial *A Midsummer Night's Dream* workshops I attended, the personal stories of Ukrainian veterans, and felt a connection to them, not least because of a shared love of Shakespeare. When those veterans were deployed to combat areas, I did not subsequently know if they were alive and fighting, alive and captured by Russian forces, or dead. I conducted an interview via Zoom with Nataliya Torkut, a professor of Shakespeare who is based in her hometown in Ukraine, and our conversation took place while she could hear shelling in the background. I did have the option of ceasing the part of my research that appertained to the Ukrainian war and veterans but made a conscious decision to continue. I did this for two reasons. Firstly, it afforded me the opportunity to access an abundance of rich material from veterans who had derived considerable benefit from engaging with Shakespeare, and whose stories I felt it was important to relate. Secondly, as an academic researcher, I was aware that I needed to maintain an intersubjective approach to my work, and to stop one aspect of my research because of external circumstances in Ukraine would, I felt, have been unprofessional.

Having made the decision to continue, it is important to acknowledge also that it has been difficult, if not impossible, to detach myself entirely from the reality of the Ukrainian war, or to prevent it from having a negative effect on my emotional well-being. I needed to 'step back' from my feelings, which was essential both for the integrity of my research, and my own mental health. Claudia Malacrida argues that in comparison to research dealing with the emotional aspects of qualitative research on research participants, relatively little focuses on how the researcher is impacted (2007: 1334). The Ukrainian veterans, civilians and academics with whom I engaged became, if they ever were, not just research subjects, but human beings in great peril. In March 2023, while drafting my case study which included the Ukrainians, I learned that several combatants had been killed in action. In April 2023, I was told the names of some of them. *Requiescant In Pace* to them, and all casualties of war.

Knowledge and insight thus become responsibilities that go beyond a doctoral thesis. Malacrida writes that students engaged in a study of mothers with disabilities reported many negative responses to the qualitative data gathered, such as guilt, anger, a sense of voyeurism, inadequacy, panic and sorrow (2007: 1335-6). Personally, I am frustrated that more is not being done on a wider level to help veterans, but also – without arrogance or hubris – I feel justified in my research topic if it ultimately proves to be helpful to those who suffer because of their engagement in combat. My feelings, while not important as are those of the veterans, still had to be addressed, and particularly as they appertained to the ethical dimensions of my research.

### **Ethical considerations regarding the veterans**

Psychologists Zoe Boden and Susanne Gibson write that feelings should neither be ignored, nor allowed to hold sway in the researcher's ethical practice but should be worked with as a moral guide to action (2015: online). Rosalind Edwards and Melanie Mauthner describe ethics as 'the moral deliberations, choices and accountability of the researcher during the research process' (2002: 14). Ethical practice can be described in protocols at the beginning of a study, usually as part of the approval process, but this 'procedural ethics' is not necessarily sufficient for ensuring ethical practice because during research ethical decisions often present themselves in more subtle and unexpected ways than initially identified (Guillemin & Gillan, 2004: 263). My methodological approach has been strongly guided by the ethical considerations of working with vulnerable people. In fieldwork, writes Christian Franklin Svensson, it is relevant to consider what constitutes being vulnerable (2016: 5), and in the context of my research this meant adults who had been traumatised by or who struggled to adapt to civilian society because of their military service. I was mindful that my questions, however innocuous they seemed to me, had the power to trigger distress in my subject group. These relived experiences can have profound psychological effects on those who trusted me sufficiently to relate their stories. My primary concern was that in seeking to improve the understanding of, and concomitantly, the treatment of combat PTSD and readjustment problems, I should not cause, however inadvertently, anguish to people I wish my research to help.



I am not a psychologist and neither do I have training or experience in counselling. I was therefore guided in my approach by SAA and DE-CRUIT. Those organisations have advised, asked to be consulted and occasionally warned about potential consequences of research and publication. For their help, I am profoundly grateful, and I know that, in military parlance, the organisations employ trained psychologists to 'have the veterans' backs' (to take care of them) if any distress does occur. It was mutually agreed that I should liaise with SAA's well-being officer, Nick Shatford, and particularly that should any in-person, face-to-face interviews take place, he should be present outside the interview room to deal with any issues or problems that might arise. All my interviews were subsequently conducted online, both because of Covid-19 restrictions and the geographical practicalities of where both the veterans and I were located. When I arranged interviews, I asked each veteran if they required the virtual presence of Shatford, and none did. Additionally, all were made aware that they could access SAA personnel, including the services of Shatford, if required, before or after engaging with me (or indeed, at any time if needed). I agreed to keep confidential any details veterans disclosed to me that they wished to be kept private; the exception was that I reserved the right to break confidentiality and inform Shatford or any other relevant SAA personnel if I had been told anything which, in my judgment, constituted a danger to the participant or other people.

There are some final points I should like to note regarding the ethics of my research. I have not included some material I obtained. This is at the behest of the persons who supplied it. This material was given in confidence and not for publication, and I have respected those requests.

My PhD has been self-funded, principally with a doctoral loan from Student Finance England. I chose not to seek funding from relevant military charities. I did not want to compromise the direction of my research, and nor would I have felt justified in accepting money which would otherwise have been spent on veterans.

## **A note on terminology**

The term applied theatre is often used interchangeably with applied drama. I include an explanatory note about this in my literature review. I refer to applied theatre throughout my thesis.

I use the word 'soldier' as a synecdoche for those people who serve in the armed forces. Most of the veterans in my research are male and so I use the pronoun 'he' generically unless I am specifically referring to a female soldier. No veteran I have spoken to has expressed the preference for the pronoun 'they'. I do however, use 'they' when referring to veterans who wish to be pseudonymised, and where mention of their gender could possibly lead to their identification.

The words 'war' and 'conflict' or 'armed conflict' may be used interchangeably. It is generally recognised that a declaration of 'war' is a formal act issued by a national government to pronounce that a state of war exists between that country and another. In relation to the opening of hostilities, Article One of the 1907 Hague Convention (III) provided that 'the contracting Powers recognise that hostilities between themselves must not commence without previous and explicit warning, in the form either of a declaration of war, giving reasons or of an ultimatum with conditional declaration of war' (2010, online). René Värk notes that 'after the Second World War, the international legal regulation moved away from the subjective approach to war (it is war if all States declare it is war) to the objective approach to war (it is war if there is actual fighting between States, regardless of how they qualify the situation) (2017: 27). Hedley Bull defines war as 'organised violence carried on by political units against each other. Violence is not war unless it is carried out in the name of a political unit; what distinguishes killing in war from murder is its vicarious and official character (2012: 178). Equally, violence carried out in the name of a political unit is not war unless it is directed against another political unit rather than against individuals (178).

A 'conflict' usually refers to an officially undeclared war, which includes armed hostilities, such as the Falklands Conflict between the United Kingdom and Argentina in 1982. The Imperial War Museum refers to the Falklands Conflict as 'a short, undeclared war between Argentina and Britain over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands' (Imperial War Museum, online, 2022). I have, in my thesis,

used the terms by which the wars and conflicts I mention are generally referred to.

## Chapter One: Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare

'Go to their graves like beds'

*Hamlet*

4.49.52 Q2 (1997: 1729)

Applied Shakespeare, as discussed in my literature review, exists to offer positive benefits to those who engage with it, and that used therapeutically it can help to induce, encourage and foster post-trauma growth as an intrinsic part of the healing process. When I began researching Shakespeare and combat PTSD for my Master of Arts' dissertation in 2018, the first veteran whom I encountered was Shaun Johnson. Johnson is now a professional actor and is enthusiastic – even evangelical – about the positive aspects of working with Shakespeare. Johnson's journey with PTSD, Shakespeare and post-trauma growth are intertwined, and I offer this case study as a notable example of a veteran for whom applied Shakespeare has helped exponentially, both to confront and control his PTSD and as a catalyst to the post-trauma growth necessary to embark on a professional acting career.

Johnson's involvement with Shakespeare is inextricably linked with that of Combat Veteran Players (CVP), a company of actors set up in 2011 specifically to use Shakespeare as therapy for traumatised veterans. Johnson was a founding member and took major roles in all CVP's productions from 2012 to 2017.<sup>38</sup> CVP introduced Johnson to Shakespeare when he had tried conventional and non-conventional therapies for PTSD and had twice attempted suicide. In this case study, I analyse how each Shakespeare play Johnson has performed in offers an insight into the different aspects of how and why each production has helped him, which may offer a potential direction, or at least some suggestions, for the use of applied Shakespeare for other traumatised individuals and groups. More controversially, and with possible repercussions for the benefits of theatre as therapy, Johnson feels distressed and excluded by some recent adaptations

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<sup>38</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2012), *Henry V* (2013), *Hamlet* (2014), *Twelfth Night* (2015), *Richard III* (2016) and *The Comedy of Errors* (2017).

of Shakespeare which appear to him to undermine the value he has derived from his performances.<sup>39</sup>

### **Johnson's military background**

I met Johnson in person prior to Covid-19 restrictions and have conducted several telephone interviews with him since.<sup>40</sup> Johnson was born into a British army family and apart from the death of his mother when he was five, he said that his childhood was happy. Acting in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* would later prove to be a catalyst to the unlocking of deeply buried trauma relating to his mother's death. It was inevitable, Johnson said, that because of his family background, he would join the Army. It was also to replicate the excitement of his early years spent in military bases around the world (Johnson, 2021a). In this latter, Johnson does not entirely fit the pattern of men and women enlisting in the armed forces to escape an unhappy or traumatic childhood.<sup>41</sup> However, following the loss of his mother, the wider 'military family' became ever more important to Johnson. The veterans I have interviewed refer to the armed forces as being a family to which they belong, both when serving and afterwards. Similarly, veterans told me that in spirit, they never entirely leave the military, and some expressed unhappiness and anger at being referred to as 'ex-military'. This mindset can, as I will show, have repercussions for assimilation into civilian life.<sup>42</sup> For Johnson, leaving the familiarity and security of the armed forces meant he struggled to cope with the psychological aftermath of his military service.

Johnson joined the Royal Artillery in 1983, signing on for twenty-two years. On the 10th of December 1983, within weeks of enlisting, a bomb exploded at his barracks in Woolwich, south London. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) claimed responsibility for the attack, which injured five people and caused minor damage to the building. 'From that moment, if there was [sic] an imaginary switch on any soldier, mine went on then' Johnson said in an interview with film-maker Jamie

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<sup>39</sup> In Chapter Four: "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome": producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes', I analyse in detail this potential clash of ideologies between theatre and the military, and what the implications are for both sides regarding applied theatre and applied Shakespeare.

<sup>40</sup> 9 March 2020, in person, at STOLL, 446 Fulham Road, London, SW6 1DT. Telephone conversations on 6 March 2021, 19 June 2021, 26 May 2022, 17 August 2022, 12 November 2022 and 12 May 2023.

<sup>41</sup> In my literature review of combat PTSD, I have described the work of researchers such as John Blosnich, who find that some individuals enlist in the military to escape adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and unfavourable home life conditions. I have shown that studies also indicate a predisposition to PTSD among some veterans who suffered ACEs.

<sup>42</sup> See also the section of my literature review on combat PTSD.

Isbell, titled *How the Stage Saved a Soldier* (Johnson, 2017). Johnson said he realised that, even on home soil, soldiers were a target, and the only way to cope was 'to make light of it' (Johnson, 2017). This attitude, he told me many times, is common among serving personnel. In 1985, Johnson was posted to west Belfast, the first of two tours of duty in Northern Ireland. In 1987, he returned to London for mainly ceremonial duties as part of the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, before being medically discharged in 1995 with an injury from which he lost part of his hand.

Post-military life was hard to cope with. Describing his deployment to Northern Ireland, Johnson said that, in his experience, 'the normal daily routine [was that] soldiers got shot, soldiers died' (Johnson, 2017). Military life was all Johnson had known, and the outside world was an alien place. Other veterans often told me how facile the civilian world appears to them, where people worry about the price of groceries rather than whether they might imminently be blown up or killed. These are typical responses to questions that about life outside the military:

I'd gone in the Army at seventeen. I was used to having my whole life mapped out on a day-to-day basis. When I came out – bang, all that stopped overnight, and I didn't have a clue. Suddenly, you have to make your own decisions. Suddenly you have to think about stupid stuff like registering with a doctor because all that is taken care of in the Army. Suddenly you don't think about your next deployment and what might happen. In a way that's a relief but it also takes you away from what you've been used to for years, what you've planned for. It's disorientating. That's why I drank – that, and to forget.

(VET-PTSD/1, 2021)

Another veteran said that transitioning from a military life was harder because civilians did not understand what he was experiencing:

I could see people looking at me as if I was [sic] stupid, like a child who couldn't fend for himself. In all honesty, although I'd been taught to kill and seen some pretty horrible things, a child is pretty much what I was.

(VET-PTSD/2, 2021)

This immense disconnect can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Veterans do question why if they can deal with the horror and adrenalin of combat zones, they should struggle to cope with shopping in a supermarket. There is a distinct feeling too, that civilians do not – cannot – understand. 'I couldn't communicate with

civvies; my jokes didn't resonate with them' said Johnson (2017). Experiencing this alienation is more common than PTSD but is nonetheless difficult and debilitating. Johnson relates that at a minute after midnight on the day he left the Army, he received a text from a friend saying 'Welcome to the world, *Mister Johnson*' [my italics]. 'I cried my eyes out' Johnson admitted (Johnson, 2017). The loss of military identity is one important reason why veterans seek out, or have recommended to them by other veterans, organisations like CVP, Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA) and DE-CRUIT. It is at such organisations, where they can be among fellow veterans, that they feel that loss will be genuinely understood.

Emotional attachment of any kind seemed impossible for Johnson, who told me that 'I didn't know how to feel anymore. I had no time for empathy when doing my job in the army and it carried over into my life after I left' (Johnson, 2021a). His 'soldier's switch' was still on. Johnson entered a period of 'end-exing' ('end-ex' is the military term for the end of an operation or deployment). This included throwing away most of his military memorabilia, which he now regrets, apart from his cap badges and medals.<sup>43</sup>

It is not uncommon for veterans to have one experience that happened during their deployments that is particularly difficult to forget. An incident which occurred in west Belfast still haunts Johnson's dreams:

A woman came up to me and grabbed my combat jacket. I was more concerned at that point about the safety of my rifle – on operational tours of duty, I trusted no-one outside the military family band of brothers. The IRA terrorists had taken her old man, an off-duty soldier, downstairs to execute him. They told him he wouldn't need his slippers where he was going. They called him 'pal'. They shot him. If our patrol had arrived just a few minutes earlier, he might be alive today.

(Johnson, 2021a)<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> This has been an action described to me by other veterans. They cannot bear any tangible reminders of a previous life they perhaps did not want to leave (particularly those who were medically discharged), and often struggle to move on from. Medals are an important exception to what is discarded, worn at Remembrance parades and services to commemorate comrades killed in action or who committed suicide. 'I wear my medals' one veteran told me, 'for those who cannot' (VET-GEN/1, 2021).

<sup>44</sup> Interviews I have conducted with Johnson, and which are mentioned in my thesis, relate to work specifically done for my PhD. Those interviews took place on 6 March 2021, 19 June 2021, 26 May 2022, 17 August 2022, 12 November 2022 and 12 May 2023. I have not used, except where indicated, any material gathered for my Master of Arts dissertation. Some material about Johnson used in this thesis was already known to me from previous interviews; however, I replicated our relevant conversations for my PhD.

This story illustrates the reality of serving under Operation Banner.<sup>45</sup> Johnson's story has strikingly domestic elements and is related in matter-of-fact, sometimes staccato language. This type of language and delivery act as a form of distancing, which helps to process a traumatic incident because it could be happening to someone else. The concept of distancing becomes especially relevant, as I will show, to engaging with Shakespeare. The starkness of the language also resembles a 'sit-rep', or situation report, which details aspects of a military operation, including its aftermath. Consequently, there are no feelings of emotion detectable in the words of the narration, which does not imply a lack of empathy from Johnson, but rather demonstrates a survival-based need to disengage from what had happened. The most cursory analysis of Johnson's words will show that the soldier's training, or 'wiring' as Stephan Wolfert of DE-CRUIT describes it, comes to the forefront in a practical sense (Wolfert, 2021). Johnson displayed regret and guilt when relating the consequences of the timing of his arrival at that scene. Overhearing a woman with a similar Belfast accent talking near him in a London pub many years later, caused a flashback to the incident and triggered PTSD. This flashback, at which he broke down in tears, made him ashamed. 'From then on, I battled mental illness for twelve, maybe thirteen years, without being able to tell anybody about it. I didn't understand what was happening to me' (Johnson, 2021a). Johnson did not even tell his father, who had completed seven operational tours of Northern Ireland. There existed, Johnson said, 'an old way of thinking, the Victorian way, that you should man up and get a grip' (Johnson, 2021a). There is a striking parallel with veteran Neil Davies, who was discharged from the army in 1979 with PTSD and could not talk to his family about his trauma until 2018 when he performed in *Shakespeare and Remembrance* at Shakespeare's Globe.<sup>46</sup>

Johnson's PTSD and his isolation worsened. He told me 'our mind is our best friend and worst enemy. My mind turned against me. A voice inside my head told me I was useless, and I listened to it' (Johnson, 2021a). Johnson began to search the internet for methods of suicide and said that 'I was infatuated by it

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<sup>45</sup> Operation Banner was the name given to the British armed forces' operation in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Although the term post-traumatic stress disorder did not come into existence until 1980, Davies was medically discharged with symptoms that would now be diagnosed as PTSD. See Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career', for a fuller description and analysis of *Shakespeare and Remembrance*.



[suicide]' (Johnson, 2017). In that 'infatuation' Johnson was not alone among fellow veterans. Jeff Williams served as a Royal Marine in 42 Commando for twenty-two years, including in the Falklands Conflict of 1982. He founded and now runs an informal outreach group, Veterans United Against Suicide (VUAS), which began keeping suicide figures in 2018, coincidentally the same year that the University of Manchester's data on veteran suicide, published in its 2022 cohort study, stopped.<sup>47</sup> VUAS publishes suicide figures on social media, notably Facebook, and Williams says that to his knowledge, sixty-three British veterans committed suicide in 2021 (Williams, 2022a) and thirty-nine in 2022 (Williams, 2023), but believes there will have been many more that have gone unacknowledged.<sup>48</sup> He is unconvinced by some of the data in the Manchester report, especially questioning the finding that deployment on combat operations represents a reduced risk factor for suicide:

To say someone is less likely to commit suicide if they have served in a war zone is absolute rubbish. Guys are sent to war and the aftermath is never taken into the equation. You are a lucky person if you get off scot-free from that [having been in combat] – the brain cannot easily cope if you kill someone or see your mate killed. It gets you when you leave [the military] and you become a veteran.

(Williams, 2023)

Johnson described his first suicide attempt:

I went home after a Christmas party at which I had been drinking and laughing and joking. I said to myself that the people at the party wouldn't see me again. I didn't expect to be found; it wasn't a cry for help. I wasn't drunk, I knew what I was doing. At three in the morning, I thought, let's do this. *I checked under my car for bombs* [my italics], then I drove to a quiet spot. I attached the flex from my Hoover to the exhaust. I remember the CD was playing a favourite track of mine, *Child in Time*, by Deep Purple. I thought, I'm ready now. I switched on the engine. I must have drifted off. Then it was chaos. Two girls, going to a party, saw the car. I was unconscious. They dragged me out. I remember them crying and screaming. I was taken to a police station for my own safety. I never saw the girls again.

(Johnson, 2021a)

Civilians may think it extraordinary that Johnson, who was about to drive away to commit suicide, checked under his car for an explosive device. I have spoken to

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<sup>47</sup> The section of my literature review on combat PTSD includes the Manchester cohort study.

<sup>48</sup> Veterans United Against Suicide is not a registered charity. It mainly operates on social media platforms and via word-of-mouth between veterans.

several Operation Banner veterans who, many years after their deployment to Northern Ireland, still do this. Ex-commando Hugh McManners mentions the practice as something 'that's in your head all the time. You can't get rid of it' (1993: 414). The habit, acquired through necessity, has become so ingrained that veterans cannot break it. It is further evidence of the depth and endurance of military training and a mindset which soldiers carry even after leaving active service.

Johnson attempted suicide again by taking an overdose of sleeping tablets and was told by his doctor that there had to be a reason for his life if he had twice tried but failed to end it. Johnson contacted Combat Stress, a charity established in 1919 in the aftermath of the First World War, and which now provides support and treatment to veterans with complex mental health issues. Johnson felt 'at home' for the first time since leaving the army (Johnson, 2021a).<sup>49</sup> Although he praised the art-based work veterans did as part of Combat Stress's therapy, 'painting was not for me' (Johnson, 2021a). However, it was at Combat Stress that Johnson met American actress Jaclyn McLoughlin, and for both it was the embarkation on their journeys to explore Shakespeare as rehabilitation for PTSD.

### **Combat Veteran Players**

Combat Veteran Players was the first UK theatre company solely to use applied Shakespeare for military veterans and to cast only veterans in its productions.<sup>50</sup> It was initiated in 2011 by McLoughlin to provide 'resources for ex-Service members seeking rehabilitation through Applied Theatre' (Combat Veteran Players, 2016, Facebook online). In common with DE-CRUIT and its founder Stephan Wolfert in the US, CVP was the creation of one person who is neither a clinician nor a dramatherapist. McLoughlin took a Master of Arts degree at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London, in 2008. Her interest in military veterans was sparked by personal reasons:

I had seen a relative of a friend of mine return from Afghanistan and struggle quite a bit. With that in mind, I wrote an essay for a Research Methods course in my MA that suggested the use of Shakespeare as a

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<sup>49</sup> I contacted Combat Stress for information and to conduct interviews. However, it is not the charity's policy to engage with students, including those at doctorate level.

<sup>50</sup> My research has not found another company in the UK which fits this description.

resource in military mental health. It was suggested to me to take the essay one step further, which was how the work began.

(McLoughlin, 2021)

McLoughlin directly approached Dr Walter Busutill, the director of medical services at Combat Stress. Busutill arranged for McLoughlin to access rehearsal space at Sir Oswald Stoll Mansions in Fulham Road, south west London. STOLL is a charity that provides housing, on that site and others, for ex-servicemen and women, acknowledging that 'Some veterans struggle to adapt to civilian life when they leave the Armed Forces' (STOLL, 2021, online). The housing complex incorporates communal areas such as the community hall and health and well-being room, which provided space for McLoughlin's initial foray into applied Shakespeare with veterans.

### ***A Midsummer Night's Dream: confronting Shakespeare for the first time***

McLoughlin initially formed a Shakespeare reading group. This consisted of ten male veterans, only two of whom had encountered Shakespeare before. The play McLoughlin chose was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>51</sup> McLoughlin hypothesised that Shakespeare might be efficacious for veterans with PTSD because of her own experience with the breathing techniques she was taught when she trained as an actress, and said 'it was a thought I had, basically, because I was thinking breath control of delivering the verse would sort of physically manifest itself, as far as calming a heart rate' (in Donnelly, 2015).

I have referred in my literature review to Shakespearean actor Kelly Hunter employing the rhythm of iambic pentameter to calm autistic children, as part of her Hunter Heartbeat Method, and refer to Wolfert in Chapter Three, whose DE-CRUIT group uses the same metre for calming reasons. Hunter uses Shakespeare not for educational reasons, but rather to challenge directly the

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<sup>51</sup> Caution should be exercised when recommending Shakespeare principally based on rhythm and metre. Shakespeare did not write entirely in iambic pentameter (and other early modern writers also wrote in blank verse, which I describe in more detail in my literature review). *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, contains differing types of verse patterns: prose, spoken by the Rude Mechanicals, principally to denote that they are artisans; trochaic tetrameter for the fairies, which was the metre used for other supernatural creatures by Shakespeare, possibly in collaboration with Thomas Middleton, for the chanting of the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*; and for Ariel's beginning to his song, 'Full fathom five thy father lies' in *The Tempest*; and the blank verse of iambic pentameter for everyone else. It was primarily the latter metre, with its touted resemblance to the human heartbeat, that McLoughlin wanted to test as a healing tool.

children's dissociation of mind and body (Hunter, 2015: 1). There was no initial intention on McLoughlin's part either, that the veterans' group would engage in pedagogical exercises of analysing text and characters. The purpose of Shakespeare's prosody was originally only to evaluate McLoughlin's theory about the calming effect of 'proper breathing' to deliver verse. 'It wasn't until I was further into the work that I saw the therapeutic – not 'therapy', as I was always very clear about that – impact of so much else' (McLoughlin, 2021). 'So much else' meant stressing the value of how characters resonated with the veterans; in this, McLoughlin's work bears a marked similarity to that of DE-CRUIT, which also requires veterans to identify with the experiences of Shakespeare's characters to achieve a therapeutic effect. McLoughlin stressed the importance of the group setting, where participants worked together as a team and maintained a high bar of expectation and skill. Johnson emphasised military pride in 'doing a good job', corroborating McLoughlin's observation that 'pride, confidence and camaraderie were at the core of our rehearsals' (McLoughlin, 2021).

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was perhaps not an obvious choice to persuade soldiers to engage with Shakespeare. However, McLoughlin wanted a play that was far removed from military service, and which would provide an opportunity for laughter. 'I was looking for a real distance in the script [...] and a text that works with fairies and love potions and fairy dust and mistaken identity, all of that together was quite distinctly removed' (McLoughlin, 2012, online). The therapeutic value of laughter was imperative; as McLoughlin explained, 'Laughter is always the best medicine, and our first play was one that I wanted to be sure allowed for silliness on stage' (McLoughlin, 2021).<sup>52</sup>

Such was the enthusiasm of McLoughlin's veterans for the *Midsummer Night's Dream* project, that after several reading sessions she said they decided they wanted, and were ready, to stage a full performance in front of a public audience. This represented a quantum leap for the troupe but fitted with the ethos of the Old Vic Tunnels in London, an arts and performance venue which utilised redundant space underneath Waterloo Station. The Tunnels' remit was to connect with local communities by providing an accessible venue for new artists and

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<sup>52</sup> McLoughlin's views on the play differ markedly from those of former Special Forces operative in the US Army and theatre director Teddy Kiendl, whose opinion is that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* encompasses dark themes like the aftermath of combat and the spoils of war. See Chapter Four: "'Improvise, Adapt and Overcome": producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes'.

projects and to extend the reach of the Old Vic's work (Spacey, 2013). In 2010, McLoughlin's veterans, now named the Combat Veteran Players, were offered a three-year residency at the Tunnels.<sup>53</sup>

CVP's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was, to my knowledge, the first production in the UK to be performed at a professional or semi-professional venue to a paying audience by an entirely ex-military, amateur cast. As an ensemble piece, it had great intrinsic value to veterans who were familiar and comfortable with the *modus operandi* of working together as a unit. A veteran I interviewed said that 'Muggles can never fully understand that bond' (VET-GEN/1, 2021).<sup>54</sup> McLoughlin's venture was at this stage experimental, with no knowledge of what the reality would be for the veterans when they were required to perform for an audience.

In his first experience of acting Shakespeare in public, Johnson played Lysander. Shakespeare had previously been anathema to Johnson, who commented that 'I didn't get what it was all about at school, and to me it was just for RADA-type luvvies like Olivier' (Johnson, 2021a). Johnson went into the first reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and asked, 'how do you even read this stuff – and why?' (Johnson, 2021a). At this stage the crucial element was working with fellow veterans, and the 'how' and the 'why' developed into Johnson being genuinely enamoured of both the language and the play. Ian Wainwright, a project producer at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), watched a performance and approached Johnson about becoming part of the Open Stages programme in Stratford-upon-Avon. This was a collaborative venture run by the RSC between 2014 and 2016, with a hundred amateur theatre companies across the UK (RSC, 2022; Wainwright, 2022). Johnson was invited to Stratford to participate in workshops which included voice training with the RSC's voice director, Cicily Berry, and was humbled by the opportunity of working with practitioners whom he refers to as 'the best in the world' (Johnson, 2021a).

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<sup>53</sup> This residency was truncated by the venue's closure in 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Military slang, meaning civilians. It is not necessarily used in a pejorative sense but can especially refer to how civilians cannot truly understand the military mindset. Muggles is not a neologism that first appeared in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels, although its use there does denote people set apart from the rest, in this case those who have magical powers. The military can be said to be set apart from civilians in many aspects of their culture, training and experiences.

Johnson's acting experiences with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* gave him the confidence to embrace the challenges of Open Spaces because 'theatre became therapy (Johnson, 2021a). It appeared to be so for other veterans who performed. For Vernon Scott, it was a way of forgetting about his past and what he described as the darkness and the dark clouds. 'Doing these plays [...] you don't really have time for the darkness to come up in your mind that always terrorises you' (in *UK Vets at the Vic*, 2012, online). Peter Biggs saw performing as a 'chance to live again. To be accepted into a group of people that are like-minded. Given that opportunity to prove more or less that you can function again' (in *UK Vets at the Vic*, 2012, online). Ian Ford served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers for fifteen years but was initially intimidated about acting on stage. He said that 'I never thought I would be doing something like this, to step out in front of people, it was pretty terrifying but now it's all over and done. I am absolutely over the moon' (in *UK Vets at the Vic*, 2012, online). The experience of participating in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, through all the stages of sight-reading, rehearsals and performances which went beyond McLoughlin's initial remit, did appear largely to bear out her rationale of using Shakespeare therapeutically with her fledgling troupe.

An early indication of this therapeutic value to Johnson came when he recalls calmly playing cards in the Green Room at the Old Vic Tunnels before the performance started; meanwhile, he says:

Jackie [McLoughlin] ran around like a headless chicken. She was amazed we didn't seem nervous. With typical squaddie humour, one of us said to her, 'you should stand in Belfast with someone chucking petrol bombs at you – *that's* something to be nervous about'.

(Johnson, 2021a)

Johnson's comment offers a different perspective to that of Ford, who was terrified prior to going on stage, but nevertheless highlights an important issue intrinsic to working with vulnerable people. CVP had rapidly grown from being an academic research tool to a rapidly developing theatre company, but this leap-of-faith progression had limitations, risks and dangers. The limitations posed by working with veterans who, as actors, were untrained and inexperienced, risked a performance at a public venue that exposed this inexperience. The dangers, which were more significant, were that pressuring the veterans to perform, and/or

that any disappointment engendered by not performing well, could have triggered PTSD symptoms. CVP had a clear duty of care, and how this was addressed becomes more apparent when McLoughlin chose the next Shakespeare play for the veterans, *Henry V*.

### ***Henry V*: confronting memory of real military combat**

*Henry V* debuted at the Tunnels in 2013 and in the same year played at the Dell, Stratford-upon-Avon and the Duchess Theatre in London's West End.<sup>55</sup> McLoughlin judged that the veterans had demonstrated their capability of involvement in a full production in front of an audience, and that they were enthusiastic to repeat the experience. Her choice of *Henry V* is notable from a therapeutic point of view, however, because the play represented moving out of the comfort zone that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had provided with its ethereal light-heartedness and humour. *Henry V* confronts issues deeper and more directly pertinent to those who have served and particularly who have seen combat.<sup>56</sup> Although McLoughlin stressed that *Henry V* was a careful progression because 'it would undoubtedly raise emotions that *Midsummer* wouldn't' (McLoughlin, 2021), the choice was a profoundly risky one. It was an exponential elevation from an academic exercise in breathing techniques and a light-hearted fairy romp, to a distinct pushing of the boundaries to powerful and potentially disturbing scenes and dialogue related to war and concomitant maiming and death. I have mentioned before that McLoughlin was an actress and not a clinician. McLoughlin therefore worked with Nick Shatford, a counsellor who

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<sup>55</sup> *Henry V* encompasses many different perspectives on military service, nationhood and war. I have therefore included discrete aspects of its relevance in different chapters, i.e. in my literature review section on applied theatre and applied Shakespeare, I address the notion of Britishness and nationality which may inform the veterans' appreciation of *Henry V*. In my literature review section on the psychological cost of war in Shakespeare, I examine the play's depiction of the conduct of war and how this relates to just war theory, the moral injury of soldiers and the impact of this on PTSD. In this chapter, I concentrate on Johnson's and other veterans' experiences of performing in *Henry V*, particularly the psychological, and the concomitant safeguarding issues it involved.

<sup>56</sup> Veterans who participated in an applied Shakespeare session at a residential arts-based therapy programme run by Help for Heroes in 2018, studied passages from *Henry V*, including this scene which depicts the night before the battle of Agincourt. Ceri Lawrence, a dramatherapist who organised the session and chose the passages to use, told me in an interview conducted for my Master of Arts degree research, that the veterans were naturally drawn to the play. 'One veteran said it was like "'soldiers talking to soldiers, we recognised ourselves, we have to do what we have to do"'. Another participant said that "Shakespeare really conveyed this character [Henry] who knew what he was doing was right" (Lawrence, 2018). Help for Heroes no longer offers art or theatre therapy, because of the loss of revenue caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

specialises in military mental health, whom she had met at STOLL. Shatford was present at all CVP's rehearsals and performances.<sup>57</sup>

The intensive RSC workshops that Johnson attended in Stratford gave him the techniques and confidence to play the protagonist in *Henry V*, but it required a different type of psychological preparation to Lysander (Johnson, 2021a). Johnson feared that the play's content would evoke long-buried memories and trigger flashbacks and nightmares (Johnson, 2021a). Prior to the start of rehearsals, Johnson expressed trepidation but also anticipation. 'When we get together and start working on *Henry*, is it going to bring anything back? We are doing a lot of battle scenes, we put a lot of energy into this. Away go the jokes, in comes serious acting. So, I think for all of us, the Combat Veteran Players, it's a big challenge. We are looking forward to it' (Johnson, 2012). There were times however, when the stress and pressure of learning lines and acting became overwhelming for some participants. Neil Norman noted that during rehearsals 'there were issues with absenteeism, a tantrum or two, and a veteran who self-medicated with alcohol the night before' (Norman, 2013, online). Ford, who had acted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and who had been part of the first troop of soldiers to uncover a mass grave in Bosnia in 1995, reflected that for CVP '*Henry V* is a dangerous choice, if only because Shakespeare got it so right. The early rehearsals were fraught as they dredged their memories of combat' (in Norman, 2013). The ethics of working with a vulnerable group like military veterans dictates there should be not only a realisation that those veterans may be triggered by such memories of combat, but also an understanding of how to deal with any incidents if they arise. Although CVP did have Shatford in place to do this, other production issues presented potential flashpoints. McLoughlin only cast veterans and there were no understudies. Amanda Faber of Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA), which inherited CVP's productions and actors, later said that both these casting practices contributed to stress and pressure on those who did take part (Faber, 2021).

Coming from real theatres of war, veterans relate to the dilemmas, choices and experiences that Shakespeare portrays. David Wilkins, who served in Northern Ireland, found therapeutic value in acting out some of the experiences

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<sup>57</sup> I describe Shatford's specific role with the veterans in more detail in my case study of Soldiers' Arts Academy, the successor to CVP, in Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career'.



related to his deployment, and refers to his mind when he said that 'there are areas we can't or don't want to go into, but we can use some of it in the performance' (in Norman, 2013). Working together in rehearsals and performances was, however, a crucial factor in how and why potentially disturbing psychological moments could be safely diffused. A key reason why drama is used as a therapeutic tool for soldiers is that it replicates the discipline, structure and camaraderie of the military unit (Ali and Wolfert, 2016: 61). In no other Shakespeare play is this more evident than in *Henry V*. The weapons and tactics employed in modern wars are not directly comparable to Agincourt, but various aspects of the play strike a chord with soldiers now. Johnson was reminded of being on patrol in Northern Ireland and said that just like the fears expressed by Williams and Bates (4.1.128-136: 1494), he too could have lost limbs, and his life, on active duty (Johnson, 2021a). On delivering the St Crispin's Day speech, Johnson said that 'I clench my fists and I'm talking to a bunch of soldiers back in unit. I'm remembering when I was a young soldier going out on ops, our rallying call. It reminded me just how it was' (in Clark, 2013). This speech could still be given by a captain before a battle to raise morale and instil camaraderie. Giving soldiers the feeling of 'we are all in this together' - inherent in the meaning of 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers' (4.3.60: 1500) - helps them consciously and subconsciously, to bond with Shakespeare too; they believe Shakespeare understood what they experienced and how it made them react and feel. There is a sense among veterans who work on the play that the importance of the phrase is that it is said at all.<sup>58</sup> It reinforces the camaraderie and cohesion of a military unit, from the lowliest of ranks up to the commanding officer. Ford reiterated this when he commented that:

Soldiers are soldiers - the rank structure, the drunken soldiers, it's all the same. I'd seen it in Bosnia. The captain in tears, scared. I'm proud to be English. There is nothing different about us now to the guys in *Henry V*. Shakespeare shows that soldiers aren't just killing machines; they have emotions which is why we are all so fucked up. I want us to show the audience that soldiers aren't all bad. I hope we can give that to the audience.

(in Norman, 2013)

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<sup>58</sup> The veterans with whom I work do not take offence that 'sisters' are not mentioned in this context, although as I will show in Chapter Three: 'The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans', Stephan Wolfert does call veterans who participate in DE-CRUIT sessions, brothers and sisters.

No veterans I personally interviewed, nor others that I mention in my thesis, explicitly expressed pride at their nationality as did Ford. My research has established there is little or no conscious connection between Shakespeare's nationality and that of the British veterans. Veterans I have spoken to do, however, frequently cite 'band of brothers' as representing one of the most significant and empathic lines and meanings in Shakespeare. Johnson explained that 'the band of brothers thing in the military, we experienced things together and got over them together', and he drew a parallel with acting when he emphasised that 'on stage, just as we did in the military, we have each other's backs, and that can be rare in civilian life' (Johnson, 2021a). Androcles Scicluna, one of the first veterans to work with McLoughlin, called CVP itself a band of brothers and cites the group comradeship as more important than learning acting skills (in Donnelly, 2015). As a dedication to the men he served with in the 1982 Falklands Conflict, Cameron March writes that 'the words you have all heard me say many times before are still true today....'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers' (in Sickelmore, 2021: 241). March's words were published by Royal Marines Corporal Tony Sickelmore, who compiled a book of memories relating to the involvement of Lima Company, 42 Commando Regiment in the Falklands. Sickelmore reiterates how valuable the concept of band of brothers is to military personnel when he writes of the therapeutic value of the camaraderie he and others experienced when returning from the South Atlantic on the *SS Canberra*:

To this day I am convinced that our slow, alcohol-fuelled journey home prevented many guys from suffering PTSD. Of course, some guys still suffer, but the leisurely voyage back to England allowed our minds and bodies to slowly adjust from the days on the battlefields; the alcohol helped to release pent-up shock, anger and a whole host of emotions. There was many a night, walking around the upper deck getting some fresh air before bed, when if you stopped still and listened, if you listened hard enough, was that another guy crying.

(2021: 222)

The unobtrusive way in which Sickelmore observed these emotions evokes Henry who, disguised by a cloak, walks around the camp to visit his men on the eve of the battle of Agincourt (4.1.41-211: 1492-6). Significantly, these coping strategies aboard the *SS Canberra*, which echo Johnson's words above - 'we experienced things together and got over them together' - relate to serving personnel, for whom, as with Williams and Bates, it was possible immediately to

share experiences and traumas. Forty years on from fighting in the Falklands, Jeff Williams is still haunted by his combat experiences in the South Atlantic and told me that that PTSD can develop after eight years or forty-eight years following combat trauma (Williams, 2022a). Williams posted on his Facebook page about the feelings evoked by embarking on a family holiday, writing that he experienced a 'really strange sensation leaving Southampton on a ferry and not going to war. I don't understand why I'm feeling so much anxiety. Head full of memories' (Williams, 2022b). Williams's VUAS group enables British and American veterans to support each other, both in person and online if they cannot cope with post-military life and especially if they are suicidal. Again, this reinforces why many veterans gravitate towards military charities and organisations when, post-service, they do not have their 'band of brothers' safety net to fall back on.

Playing a warrior king like Henry V required Johnson to 'dig deep' into his military experiences (Johnson, 2021a). There were sombre moments. Johnson said 'it struck me that a casting director, Jeremy Zimmermann, who was with us in the Green Room, asked why we weren't joking and high fiving which he had expected of a group of soldiers. The play was just too intense for us to joke about, it took a lot out of us' (Johnson, 2021a). I revisited these experiences with Johnson in a later interview. Johnson admitted, however, that he was triggered less by *Henry V* than by acting in *Soldier On*, a play set in the aftermath of the Afghanistan war.<sup>59</sup> '*Soldier On* was too modern and too real. There is a scene in it where a bloke smashes up his kitchen, I did that in real life' (Johnson, 2002b). This reiterates the value of distancing that Shakespeare provides, because although the military experiences about which he wrote, and which the veterans share, are traumatic, they are also historic in a way that *Soldier On* was not. The Shakespearean distancing is akin to a one-step-removed process, as described by Clark Baim, which uses scenes, characters and plots which are fictional and distinct from the participants' own experiences and issues (2018: 131-178).

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<sup>59</sup> *Soldier On* is a play which asks 'what happens when a company of ex-soldiers becomes a company of actors? A theatrical band of brothers. Although it's not a cure-all, the bonding, the humour, the theatre of war helps to put them back together again – as a company of veterans and actors rehearse a play about a company of veterans and actors. Although worlds apart, they begin to realise there are more similarities between military life and the theatre than they bargained for, building a powerful new world of their own. This is a heart-warming story about surviving the forces and PTSD, and what happens when you leave the military "family"' (Soldiers Arts Academy, online, 2021).

### ***Hamlet*: confronting personal loss through Shakespeare**

The intensification in the choice of Shakespearean plays arguably reached its apogee in the 2014 production of *Hamlet*, perhaps because of a general perception that it is not a play which can be undertaken by actors not confident in their ability. That McLoughlin chose it is testament to how far she believed the veterans had progressed and suggested how ambitious they were becoming. 'I knew they were ready for that level of challenge – in every way – by then' (McLoughlin, 2021). This assessment required striking a balance between the level of acting ability that McLoughlin believed was required to perform *Hamlet* and safeguarding the veterans' welfare by not pushing for too much, too quickly. In contrast, Johnson felt that the troupe was both confident and competent enough to take *Hamlet* (and other plays) on a longer run, and that McLoughlin was being over-protective in not allowing this, or for BBC cameras to film behind the scenes at rehearsals for a proposed documentary (Johnson, 2022b). McLoughlin felt, however, she had built up a sufficient level of trust between herself and the veterans to approach an iconic theatre to collaborate with. CVP's production of *Hamlet* was the first manifestation of co-operation between applied Shakespeare for veterans and Shakespeare's Globe in London. CVP staged a public performance of *Hamlet* there after working with Shakespeare's Globe Education practitioners on text, characterisation, sound and movement. There was an emphasis on personal skills such as self-confidence and self-expression, which have a wider value beyond the stage for veterans struggling with mental health issues.

*Hamlet* is recognised more as a familial drama than an ostensibly military play but does ask some profound questions about the nature and purpose of war, and ultimately its futility. *Hamlet* is rarely performed in its entirety, and often the lines cut are those which relate to its overtly military content.<sup>60</sup> Fortinbras demands safe conveyance for himself and his army across Denmark from

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<sup>60</sup> When the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* is used, it offers an important military dynamic to the play rather than it being a principally domestic, revenge tragedy incarnation. It adds substance to Lukas Erne's theory, with which I concur, that extant variants of *Hamlet* suggest it was written to be read as a literary text as well as to be performed on stage (Erne, 2003: 104, 220). Giorgio Melchiori also argues that 'behind Q2, there is a play for the closet, not the stage' and that it represents a deliberate choice by Shakespeare to write *Hamlet* 'as a new form of literary work that would take its place among the poetic achievements extolled by the wiser sort' (Melchiori, quoted in Erne, 2003: 234).

Norway en route to a military campaign in Poland. Hamlet enquires of the Captain as to Fortinbras's intentions and is answered in some of the most anti-war language that Shakespeare wrote:

Truly to speak, and with no addition,  
We go to gain a little patch of ground  
That hath in it no profit but the name.

(4.4.9.7-9.9 Q2: 1728-9)

These lines touch on the issue of just war and moral injury which I mentioned in my literature review of combat PTSD, in that soldiers often need to feel that their service and sacrifice has been for a laudable cause.<sup>61</sup> McLoughlin cannot recall using Q2, citing that the passage of time has made her recollections hazy. However, and had those lines been omitted, it was probably because of how long it would have made the play rather to exclude potentially disturbing content (McLoughlin, 2021). That is an assessment based on theatrical needs rather than psychological requirements. It contrasts the approach of McLoughlin, who had never served in the military, to that of Vietnam veteran Teddy Kiendl, who approaches Shakespeare from what he calls the soldier's point of view.<sup>62</sup> Arguably however, the riskiest element for CVP performing *Hamlet* was not its military content, but its allusion to suicide. Hamlet does not have PTSD, but does display symptoms of bereavement-related depression:

I have of late – wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth, forgone all customs of exercise, and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame, this earth, seems to me a stale promontory

(2.2.287-90: 1697)

When Hamlet says that death is a 'consummation devoutly to be wished' (3.1.65-6: 1705), he becomes, to the veteran who thinks the same, a character with whom they can identify because Hamlet articulates that most private and profound final

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<sup>61</sup> The military intervention in Afghanistan, which many who served there believed brought stability and safety to Afghan society and women in particular, is one example of a war where veterans felt they had engaged in just combat. Jeff Williams of VUAS told me this in an interview in 2022, and also of the aftermath of that conflict for many veterans he speaks to. 'Some of those who served out there have moral injury, they ask why did we do it? They feel bad about the situation they left behind. The media has been falling over itself to murder [sic] Boris Johnson over a couple of parties in Downing Street during lockdown, but they aren't asking how many women were raped in Afghanistan last week because the Taliban are now back in full control. The media can just drop it when it suits them and move on to other things, veterans can't (Williams, 2022a). The reference to Boris Johnson relates to accusations made against the then Prime Minister, that he held or attended parties in Downing Street that were forbidden during Covid-19 restrictions.

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Four: "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome": producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes'.

way out of their own personal sea of troubles.<sup>63</sup> Johnson, who had twice attempted suicide, said there was much in the play about self-harm that he could directly relate to (Johnson, 2021a). For CVP's production, Johnson was cast as Hamlet. As with *Henry V*, Johnson was proud to be given leading roles, particularly because, reiterating the value of Shakespeare used therapeutically, it helped his self-confidence (Johnson, 2021a). Nick Clark, in an article in *The Independent*, listed Johnson as one of the best actors to have played Henry, along with Jude Law, Jamie Parker, Kenneth Branagh, Mark Rylance and Adrian Lester (Clark, 2013). Hamlet was a challenging role on several levels, and for Johnson it was the personal aspects of the play rather than the military which were significant. I mentioned above that Johnson's mother died when he was a child, and *Hamlet* therefore has a particular resonance because of the mother-son relationship it portrays:

When you leave the military, you come out devoid of emotion. I hated affection; I especially had a problem with cuddles. When I had to play Hamlet embracing his mother it made me feel sick. I fucking hated it. I stormed off stage and Jackie didn't initially know why.

(Johnson, 2021a)

Such triggering has potential dangers, but Johnson found the process of acting in *Hamlet* to be cathartic:

The 'to be or not to be' soliloquy took me back to attempting suicide, of course it did, but it also helped me to confront it. It [the soliloquy] helped me to cope with all those emotions, worries and problems of connection. It was a privilege to speak such beautiful, meaningful language. It injects back into your soul and life something you've lost.

(Johnson, 2021a)

Soliloquies are intensely personal monologues, delivered by a character alone on stage and shared with the audience. Thus Johnson was opening up, through the words of the Shakespearean character of Hamlet, about his profoundly terrible, personal experience of attempting suicide. Johnson combined this what he called 'quiet reflection of my situation' with the reassurance that he could do so in the presence of fellow veterans. It was a valuable safety net. 'The healing

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<sup>63</sup> DE-CRUIT uses this soliloquy specifically to explore the issue of suicide (see Chapter Three). So too did Help for Heroes, and Ceri Lawrence said that veterans especially related to Hamlet's words because 'the soliloquy asks whether life is worth living, and that is a very common question that PTSD sufferers ask. The value is also in that across the centuries people have had the same feelings about suicide, and one participant said that PTSD is not so big and scary if it has been going on for years, and that Shakespeare recognised that' (Lawrence, 2018, quoted in Wright, 2019).

process was working through things together [with other veterans]. It made it much easier to play that scene afterwards because of being with the veterans and the support that gave me' (Johnson, 2021a). BBC Radio London was a sponsor of the production, and Johnson remembered having a conversation with a broadcaster (whose name he cannot now recall) who remarked on the exceptional unity that he saw amongst the CVP actors. The broadcaster 'said he noticed in us something that civilian casts don't have, a bonding on stage that saw us covering each other's backs all the time' (Johnson, 2021a). This echoes Johnson's observations and contributes to the therapeutic aspect of veterans performing Shakespeare together.

### **Shakespearean comedy: mind-fragmentation and catharsis**

After initially encountering Shakespeare with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Johnson acted in two other Shakespearean comedies, playing Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* in 2015 and Angelo in *The Comedy of Errors* in 2016.<sup>64</sup> The comic roles of Malvolio and Angelo sandwiched Johnson's portrayal of Richard III (see below), and Johnson said that 'Malvolio is my absolute favourite character. I wasn't chained to a serious character when I played him. I loved wearing the yellow stockings and putting on a silly smile. *Twelfth Night* and *The Comedy of Errors* were fun' (Johnson, 2021b). Johnson's allusion to fun means that the two plays provided more light-hearted acting opportunities for him than did the histories or tragedies, although the role of Malvolio is not entirely comic and allusions to mental illness and the darkness of Malvolio's prison cell could be potentially triggering for veterans with PTSD.<sup>65</sup> They did not, however, trigger Johnson, because he concentrated solely on portraying and enjoying Malvolio as a comic figure. Prior to going in stage in *Twelfth Night* at the Leicester Square Theatre, Johnson gave an interview to *The Times* in which he paid tribute to his role of Malvolio and the importance of giving a good performance of it. 'This has got to be good – Shakespeare is art, and you can't abuse that' (Johnson, 2015).

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<sup>64</sup> *The Comedy of Errors* was CVP's only production in the US. It differed from its UK incarnation only in that it was a different group of performers with different experiences, pasts and cultures, but otherwise, 'the work was the same and the focus on skills, high standards and group camaraderie and enjoyment were still at the core' (McLoughlin, 2021). Since *The Comedy of Errors*, McLoughlin has, for family reasons, had no further involvement in theatre practice.

<sup>65</sup> Malvolio is locked up in a dark room, ostensibly to cure him of his 'midsummer madness' (3.4.52: 1801) that Olivia believes causes his inappropriate behaviour towards her.

'Abusing art', as I show later in this chapter, informs Johnson's views on what he considers to be unwarranted revisionist approaches to Shakespeare's work, which differs to how he perceives a military approach to producing plays.

Johnson's words about Malvolio and *Twelfth Night* represent his military ethos which requires him always to give of his best, but also point to the therapeutic value Johnson found in Shakespearean comedy. 'The comedies are equally as important as the tragedies, you can still 'mind-frag' with a comedy' (Johnson, 2021b). Johnson used the word 'mind-frag', his abbreviation of mind-fragmentation, extensively to me when describing his psychological condition, referring to it in typical soldier-speak as 'a trendy word for saying my head is up my arse' (Johnson, 2021a). Mind fragmentation for Johnson is a coping mechanism for his trauma. It is the enablement of his thoughts, traumatic experiences and emotions to be 'switched off' and compartmentalised in his mind, in his case facilitated by playing a Shakespearean role, and is a form of dissociation (Hontjens, Dorahy and van Wees-Cieraad, 2013). Dissociation is a disconnection from the self and/or the outside world which is commonly experienced by traumatised people (*DSM-5*, 2013: 272). Dissociation is described by behavioural psychologist Shahram Heshmat as 'a psychological exit from the horror of the traumatic event' (2021, online). Psychologist Bessel van der Kolk writes that 'dissociation is the essence of trauma. The overwhelming experience is split off and fragmented' (2014: 77). Thus, dissociation can suppress painful memories until it is safe to express them. In Johnson's case, his 'mind-frag' suppressed his own traumatic memories either until a trigger brought them to the fore or a safe space was provided to express them. The trigger for Johnson was, as I have mentioned, overhearing an accent years after experiencing a highly traumatic experience. Johnson 'loses himself' or dissociates when playing a role, thus the stage becomes the safe space for expressing his mind-frag.

Johnson's definition of mind frag is important because it denotes a way of processing and coping with his traumas which is distinct from catharsis. Sarah Dewar-Watson notes that the word catharsis 'signifies a therapeutic process' (2018: 95), citing Aristotle's view of tragedy espoused in *Poetics* (1449b24-28) that catharsis should arouse pity and fear to purge gloomy emotions such as these from the spectator. William Owens too, sees a role for comedy in achieving



catharsis by inducing ‘a surfeit of good feelings which bubble over into laughter’ and thus observing that ‘though tragedy and comedy use different means, their ends are exactly the same, the purgation of negative emotions’ (1997: 323-4). According to its translator, Richard Janko, the mediaeval manuscript, *Tractatus Coislinianus*, says, in Section 9.34, that the function of comedy is to arouse pleasure and merriment through the representation of laughable actions (1987: 52), and that *Tractatus Coislinianus* makes it clear that the aim of comedy is catharsis (169). Janko offers a succinct but memorable summation that catharsis in tragedy ‘has pain as its mother. Comedy has laughter as its mother’ (42-43), Whether what it achieves represents catharsis, mind-fragmentation or both, Shakespearean comedy appears to have immense potential for applied Shakespeare for veterans. Its potential therapeutic qualities informed not only the choice of Shakespearean comedies by McLoughlin at CVP, but also the productions engaged in by Ukrainian veterans’ Project W, which I describe in Chapter Four.

### ***Richard III*: adapting Shakespeare**

*Richard III* was CVP’s final production in the UK. By 2016, CVP was being absorbed into Soldiers Arts Academy and *Richard III* was billed as a production by SAA of ‘the Combat Veteran Players’ (Combat Veteran Players, 2016).<sup>66</sup> Performances were held at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in June 2016 and at Leicester Square Theatre in July. CVP also performed an extract in the Knot Garden at New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, in the presence of the Prince of Wales, as part of the quadricentennial commemorations in 2016 of Shakespeare’s death.<sup>67</sup> The production was deliberately revisionist; the programme notes offer a military perspective towards a character’s traits and behaviour that are perhaps not obvious to a civilian audience: ‘Richard Plantagenet, a soldier par excellence, fails to transition to the soft life at the court of his brother King Edward IV and follows a twisted path until he eventually becomes one of Shakespeare’s most compelling villains’ (Combat Veteran Players, 2016).<sup>68</sup> The choice of *Richard III* was a fitting one for veterans who

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<sup>66</sup> See Chapter Two: ‘Soldiers’ Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career’.

<sup>67</sup> Now King Charles III, following the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, on 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Sir Thomas More wrote of Richard that ‘no unskilled captain was he in war, for which his disposition was more suited than for peace’ (1513: 37). The same may be said for Coriolanus.

declare an affinity with Shakespeare's maligned monarch, although the origins of this attraction are not immediately obvious.

Richard is the Shakespearean role that Johnson most identifies with and is most proud of performing. For Johnson, as for Wolfert (see Chapter Three), Shakespeare's Richard was influential in helping him better to understand and cope with his PTSD. Johnson invested more into this character than any other he played, undertaking a year of research into the life of the real Richard, which included finding places where he may have lived or stayed. The character was not 'fun' in the way that Malvolio was. 'I became Richard, to get his physicality almost wrecked me after twelve months of investment and research. As an actor, I had to know what he was all about, that's all part and parcel of being an actor' (Johnson, 2017). There was, however, more involved than thespian motivations. Johnson's research was part of a visceral discernment of Richard driven by the need of one soldier to understand and explain the actions of another. It did not matter that Shakespeare's Richard is a stage character; to Johnson, he was palpably real, the genuine Plantagenet king utterly subsumed by Shakespeare's invention. 'I felt genuinely sorry for him [Richard], I felt his pain when he was slain. He did his duty as a soldier to fight that last battle' (Johnson, 2021b).

Johnson played Richard as a soldier transitioning between two different worlds. Costumes included the civilian Richard in an evening suit, clutching a glass of champagne, and the erstwhile warrior in military dress. Cap badges are immensely important to soldiers as their identification with, and allegiance to, the regiment or corps in which they serve, representing the bond between fellow members.<sup>69</sup> Johnson incorporated Royal Artillery cap badges in Richard's crown, including one Johnson wore in Northern Ireland. Those badges indicate a meticulous attention to authentic detail by the theatre company's costume department, but they essentially represented the fusion of Johnson's past and present lives, and because of his PTSD, it showed bravery to wear his badges again. Johnson's choice to do so was *therapeutic*, not *therapy*. Johnson also wore his service medals on stage, and those awarded to his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. The military family background, common to both Johnson and Richard, provided another powerful link between actor and character.

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<sup>69</sup> I have been told this by several veterans: VET-GEN/1 (2021); Dean Helliwell, 2023; Jeff Williams, 2022.

The strong resonance of *Richard III* with veterans requires a character analysis of Shakespeare's Richard to understand this affinity, important not just for the purposes of the play, but better to understand why veterans may be so drawn to Shakespeare. The non-military, and general, view of Richard is polarised.<sup>70</sup> Shakespeare's text is not flattering, drawing heavily as it did upon the writings of Sir Thomas More.<sup>71</sup> Why then, should this seemingly appalling murderer command so much empathy from veterans when the charisma of soldiers like Henry V and Harry Hotspur have a more natural appeal to military personnel?

The historical Richard was a soldier, but Shakespeare did not portray his character as suffering from PTSD. Shakespeare does, however, extensively refer to Richard's deformity. Richard copes with his disability with cynical acceptance and self-deprecating insouciance, a black humour similar to that used by veterans as a coping mechanism for their traumas. As with many veterans, Richard's humour masks an emotional problem in addition to his physical disability. 'I pointed to my head when Richard mentions his deformity. I wanted his deformity to be not in his body but in his mind' (Johnson, 2021b). Johnson's portrayal probed the scars of deep-seated trauma and psychological wounds. 'We couldn't and didn't want to write his character differently, but we could use him to highlight the issue of mental illness' (Johnson, 2021b). Driven by the life experiences of the veterans, the way in which CVP's version of *Richard III* was conceived and performed also has significance for Johnson's future views on adaptation and the work of Shakespeare's Globe. Johnson's portrayal acknowledged Richard's dilemma as a returning soldier who is expected to cope seamlessly with his new

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<sup>70</sup> It is indubitably the legacy of Shakespeare on which the public's negative view of Richard is drawn. Within Shakespeare's history plays, writes Philippa Langley, 'Richard emerged as one of the England's most consummate and appalling villains' because 'Shakespeare, more than any other, has shaped our reactions to this deeply controversial monarch' (2013: ix).

<sup>71</sup> More wrote of Richard that he was 'little of stature, ill featured of limbs, crooked-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard-favoured in appearance, and such as is in the case of lords called warlike, in other men called otherwise. He was malicious, wrathful, envious, and from before his birth, ever perverse'. Although anthropological analysis of Richard's skeleton indicated idiopathic scoliosis, it also revealed evidence of combat-acquired wounds, and soldiers injured during their service understand and empathise with this (and thus physical disability howsoever caused). The view when Shakespeare was writing was often that physical deformity mirrored moral corruption. Katherine Schaap Williams comments that 'in the Elizabethan period, disability was often viewed as a sign of moral impairment' (2016: online). Stephen Greenblatt suggests that although Shakespeare 'does not repudiate his culture's belief that bodily deformity signalled moral deformity, the play insists that society's reaction to Richard's deformity is the root condition of his psychopathology' (2018: 56-57). John Jowett writes that the enduring description by More reinforces Richard as 'a tyrant whose physique reflects his criminality' (2000: 16). We now reject such assessments, yet soldiers are told to 'get a grip' (Johnson, 2021b), as if PTSD is a manifestation of cowardice and therefore that their mental suffering is their own fault.

life. There is a parallel with modern veterans whose re-adjustment to civilian life results in self-destructive behaviour and a general feeling that they cannot fit into the new world in which they find themselves post-military service.

### ***Shakespeare and Remembrance: original work inspired by Shakespeare***

Johnson's first work entirely with SAA was *Shakespeare and Remembrance*. This production used applied Shakespeare in Baim's 'one-step-removed' approach to coping with emotions and experiences, by incorporating scenes, characters and plots which are fictional and distinct from the participants' own experiences and issues, before moving on to personal disclosures of events and traumas (Baim, 2018: 131-178). *Shakespeare and Remembrance* at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, in November 2018, combined Shakespearean tragedy, history and comedy. The production consisted of veterans performing Shakespeare monologues and Shakespeare-inspired original work about their own military and psychological experiences; I give a fuller description and analysis in Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career'. The opening piece of *Shakespeare and Remembrance* was based on the Rude Mechanicals' metadrama in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with occupations changed to reflect the veterans' former military regiments and ranks; Johnson was Snug the Gunner. Johnson also contributed a personal monologue, *Mind-Frag*, consisting of his emotions and thoughts on his psychological condition, interspersed with extracts from *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*. Johnson chose the passages personally, rather than having them assigned to him by a director, to reflect what Shakespeare especially meant to him; that was the *raison d'être* of the production. Johnson told me his reasons for choosing the passages that he did (2021a). *Macbeth* sums up the emotional numbness, and sense of life's ultimate pointlessness engendered by PTSD when he says: 'It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing' (*Macbeth*, 5.5.25-27: 2613). These lines encapsulated what Johnson thought of his own life at one point, as Hamlet's 'For in that sleep of death what dreams may come' (*Hamlet*, 3.1.68: 1705) reflected Johnson's desire to commit suicide. The intervention of the two girls who interrupted his first suicide attempt was commemorated by Johnson quoting Hamlet:

There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all.

(5.2.157-160: 1751)

Johnson concluded *Mind-Frag* by singing Feste's song from *Twelfth Night*: 'Come away, come away death/In sad cypress let me be laid' (2.4.50-65: 1787-8). For Johnson, the opportunity to be creative with Shakespeare, to combine his own story and the experiences of characters with whom he felt empathy, was immensely therapeutic. The approach of *Shakespeare and Remembrance* shared a similarity with DE-CRUIT's workshops, as I will explain in Chapter Three: 'The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans', where veterans write their own monologues in addition to working on Shakespeare passages, the main difference being that DE-CRUIT's exercise is confined to workshops and not expanded into a stage production.

*Shakespeare and Remembrance* represents Johnson's last major work at Shakespeare's Globe. When working on the production, Johnson was asked by an in-house theatre practitioner whether there was ethnic minority diversity among the actors taking part.<sup>72</sup> This was an appropriate enquiry for Shakespeare's Globe to make in accordance with the company's core ethos, which acknowledges that as an iconic and leading cultural organisation, it has a responsibility 'to learn and grow, but also to contribute artistic work and education programmes that illuminate and challenge the many ways in which conscious and unconscious bias, racism and oppression operate and proactively work towards their eradication' (Shakespeare's Globe, 2023, online). The question, and the theatre's statement, also reflects what Paul Prescott calls the 'contemporary reality of the multicultural and heterogeneous Globe audience' (2005: 366).

However, Johnson was angered by what he saw as an implication that racism could have been involved in the selection of veterans chosen to act, and felt that the question, which did not mention female or disabled veterans, was potentially divisive:

There was a consternation that we did not have black actors, that we were deliberately not being inclusive. My answer was that it was not a racist thing, simply that the proportion of black military personnel is relatively

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<sup>72</sup> Johnson told me the name of the person who had asked the question but requested that I did not publish it.

small. I don't discriminate on the grounds of race or anything else, and neither has any soldier or veteran I have ever served with or known since.

(Johnson, 2022a)

In respect of diversity, Government figures indicate that the UK armed forces have, over the past three decades, experienced a steady increase in the intake of personnel from ethnic minorities. The total of UK military personnel as of 1 April 2023 is 152,400, of which 14,320 self-identify as being from an ethnic minority (the Ministry of Defence excludes white minorities in this total).<sup>73</sup> The percentage total of personnel from black, Asian and mixed ethnicities is currently 10.1% (adjusted to reflect the exclusion of white minority groups), up from 1% in 2000 (Kirk-Wade and Mansfield, 2023: 16). The number of female military personnel, currently 16,450, has also increased in almost every year over the last three decades. In 1990, females accounted for approximately 6%, in 2000 it was 8%, and in 2023 it is 11.5% (15). In 2021, the Government set a target for females to account for 30% of intake by 2023 but has not set a corresponding target for ethnic minority recruitment (4).

Johnson is personally passionate about inclusivity across gender, race and class and sees Shakespeare as a way of achieving inclusivity and non-discrimination among marginalised groups. He includes in this the racially and culturally diverse children who participated in Shakespeare's Soldiers, a veterans' outreach project that in 2015 took Shakespeare as applied theatre into inner city London schools.<sup>74</sup> He explained:

We wanted to connect with kids who had probably never themselves connected with Shakespeare much before and couldn't see the point of it – much like I had been. We wanted to show, as roughed up squaddies doing it, that Shakespeare wasn't just for posh people and academics.

(Johnson, 2021a)

The veterans used Malvolio from *Twelfth Night* and Banquo from *Macbeth*, and encouraged the children to read, perform and talk about what they had learned. A key benefit, Johnson observed, was that 'kids could be kids. They opened us to us. You could see the child in them. Teachers wouldn't get that

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<sup>73</sup> Ethnic minority figures are: 48% Black; 27% Asian; 17% Mixed; 8% Other (White Minority).

<sup>74</sup> See 'Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career' for more analysis of the Shakespeare's Soldiers project, which was run by SAA.

response' (Johnson, 2021a). Oaklands School in Bethnal Green, east London, participated in the project, and one of the teachers involved, Talim Arab, said 'as a teacher witnessing my students work with the actors, utilise their advice, and act upon it, then perform with confidence and fluency, is in my opinion, the most authentic acting class a student can experience' (CVP, 2015).<sup>75</sup> A principal value for the veterans was that Shakespeare's Soldiers took them out into the wider community as part of their transitioning back into the civilian world. For Johnson, a sense arose from the project that perceptions of 'inclusivity' or 'discriminatory', are labels counterproductive to the aims and achievements of Shakespeare's Soldiers in cutting across barriers of race and class. A single example, such as Shakespeare's Soldiers, of course cannot address, nor offer solutions to, an existing lack of diversity in the UK armed forces. Neither can it, nor other applied Shakespeare projects, currently produce ethnic minority veterans where, because of the heavily white-dominated make-up of the UK armed forces in the past, relatively few currently exist. Efforts are being made in education and the theatre to address the issue of the legacy of empire. Decolonisation of the military, which has historical links to imperialism as a tool of reinforcement, is a structural issue which is beyond the scope of theatre to address. What could be done in relation to applied theatre and applied Shakespeare, however, is a wider and sustained encouragement of ethnic minority, as well as female and disabled veterans, to create and participate in projects they see as relevant to their own military experiences, therapeutic requirements and other post-service needs.

The children who participated in the Bethnal Green project were part of a multicultural mix of people who live in that area of London. A topic which provokes much discussion in today's theatre, applied or conventional, is that of race and the concomitant legacy of European empires. In 2020, Shakespeare's Globe held a Shakespeare and Race Festival. A podcast entitled 'How do we decolonise Shakespeare?' started with the premise that is necessary to do so. Playwright Steven Kavuma said that 'in terms of education, and secondary school, primary school and drama school, Shakespeare has always been told as it's something that belongs to white people' and that drama schools perpetuate this because 'the way it [actor training] has always been done suits white people' (2020,

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<sup>75</sup> CVP and this website do not now exist. Details of the Oakland School project, and the quote from Tahib Arab, are taken from notes I made for my Master of Arts dissertation in 2018.

online). Federay Holmes concurred with this assessment, stating that 'Shakespeare has over time, over centuries, been harnessed, hijacked and bridled by powerful groups, white guys basically' (2020, online). In 2021, as part of a decolonising Shakespeare project, Shakespeare's Globe held a series of seminars, the first of which debated *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Speaking at the seminar, Vanessa Corredera from Andrew University, Michigan, stated that the trope of dark and fair in the play could be seen as a 'racialising element' and that every Shakespeare play is a race play as whiteness is a part of all his works (2021, online). Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe at the time, Michelle Terry, spoke of 'my own sort of legacy of this white supremacist view of it [Shakespeare]' (2021, online). These are controversial assertions based on the whiteness of Shakespeare and his work and are strongly held views of those who espouse them.

A salient problem arises however, when assessing what is required to decolonise Shakespeare. Kavuma advocates breaking apart texts and starting afresh, to ask and address to whom plays should relate, and says that 'we need to look at Shakespeare as if Shakespeare is an unknown playwright in order to do Shakespeare properly' (2020, online). Nour el Gazza and Shani Bans suggest putting more scholars of colour at the forefront of Shakespearean studies, and el Gazza wants more colour-conscious casting in Shakespeare productions (2020, online). For Hasanna Mousa, it is necessary 'to dissolve Shakespeare's high cultural identity to make him more accessible to people from different backgrounds (2020, online), a comment with which Johnson would concur viz-a-vis Shakespeare's *Soldiers*.<sup>76</sup> In practice, decolonisation is not a single nor a simple process. Holmes points out there is a huge difference between making a piece of work look like it has been decolonised by ensuring a diversity of bodies and voices on stage, and actually decolonising it (2020). Ambereen Dadabhoy doubts that Shakespeare can be truly decolonised because he is so entrenched in 'colonial and imperial methodologies and violences [sic]' (2020, online).

The decolonisation issue arose with Johnson because of the question he was asked (although decolonisation, as Holmes states, is not just about casting). I discussed the subject with Johnson, and it is important to stress that is it not

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<sup>76</sup> See my literature review of applied theatre and applied Shakespeare, which addresses Shakespeare's cultural identity, nationhood and cultural capital.



decolonisation *per se*, of Shakespeare's work that he objects to. In typical military fashion, he was, however, forthright in his views. Johnson said:

The Globe is working through their folios to rewrite Shakespeare. I am stunned. I'm horrified by it. Where does this madness stop? What will be next? What are they doing with Shakespeare's works? I am deeply offended. In my quote to *The Times* I said that Shakespeare is art, and you can't abuse that. Well, they [Shakespeare's Globe] are abusing it now. I am indebted to Shakespeare, truly indebted to the joy he brings to everyone, irrespective of who or what you are. He saved my life. We shouldn't agonise and worry about what he wrote, just enjoy the language, the beauty and the art.

(Johnson, 2022a)

Productions are about different perspectives, and SAA's *Richard III* put a military-inspired emphasis on Richard's mental 'deformity' without needing to change any text (which would be anathema to Johnson, and many others). Johnson makes the distinction between warning an audience about discriminatory language, which he would endorse, and changing or omitting such language altogether (Johnson, 2022a). In directing *Titus Andronicus* at Shakespeare's Globe in 2022/3, Jude Christian chose to change some words to reflect a twenty-first century perspective on pejorative language; there is a greater emphasis on calling Aaron 'black' rather than a Moor or 'raven-colour'd' (2.3.83: 396) because the word black in this context more strongly highlights racial prejudice. Christian argues that this change of language was necessary because 'the racism in the play is masked by Shakespeare's language. What we've done is show clearly what the words meant in Shakespeare's time' (in Simpson, 2022).

Christian's version of *Titus Andronicus* uses a form of adaptation, as do all the Shakespeare productions that Johnson has been involved with. However, Johnson deliberately and passionately used the strong and emotive word 'abuse' in the context of Shakespearean alterations at Shakespeare's Globe. Johnson says often that 'Shakespeare saved my life' (Johnson, 2021a). It is not hyperbole. He absolutely believes it, and in many ways it is true. Johnson reveres Shakespeare because at a point in his life where he had attempted suicide twice and had failed to conquer PTSD with other treatments or therapies, Shakespeare offered him – literally – a lifeline and has supported him since with an ongoing mental health battle. Consequently, anything Johnson sees as iconoclastic or that to him diminishes Shakespeare, goes to the core of how valuable he has found

working with the texts and characters. It is important to stress that singling out decolonisation as the cause of his ire does not imply that Johnson is insensitive to the issues surrounding European imperialism. It is simply that the decolonisation of Shakespeare's works is a major project which Shakespeare's Globe is currently engaged in, and which Johnson sees as being the reason why, in his opinion, Shakespeare's works are being unnecessarily changed. The apparent paradox is that Johnson does not, and neither does any other veteran I have worked with, expect Shakespeare's plays to be set in amber, never to be adapted in, for example, the way they did themselves with *Richard III*, or any other Shakespearean play to which they can bring their military perspective and experiences. The answer, when attempting to explain this viewpoint, is to reiterate that Johnson et al used Shakespeare as therapy, and those military adaptations as done by CVP are what he used to cope with his PTSD when, as I have shown above, other approaches and treatments did not succeed. Therefore, to Johnson, CVP's type of adaptation is permissible, even desirable, whereas others, like Christian's *Titus Andronicus* which change the text, are not.

My observation on Johnson's reasoning does not solely apply to him. Other veterans I have interviewed now enjoy Shakespeare although they previously hated or did not understand it. However, because initially they, like Johnson, used Shakespeare for well-being reasons, there is always the likelihood of resistance to changes or, more particularly, criticism, that those veterans perceive undermines what was valuable to them. Shakespeare as they performed it, at that time when they reached out to it and which helped them, is crucially important. That is their touchstone, as it is Johnson's. If a person is 'saved' by an abstract such as religion, or in this case Shakespeare, they may become angry and defensive when they perceive that what is so important to them is being decried, devalued, mocked or changed. It should also be noted that when veterans perform Shakespeare (or any script from any playwright) and they think it has been 'messed about with', it may be analogous to not following rules or obeying orders (Johnson, 2022b). As with the perspective that veterans put on Shakespearean characters to reflect their experiences, so too may they do so in this context.

I revisited the issue with Johnson in a later interview. Johnson said he is not influenced by Shakespeare's nationality or for being the 'National Poet', but

simply awed by the language, plots and characters with whom he can identify, and the sheer joy of performing Shakespeare. For Johnson, it is crucially important to put Shakespeare's plays into historical context:

Shakespeare was writing about the period he lived in, or which had gone before, so it [Shakespeare's Globe] is distorting history, it's cancelling culture. I feel insulted, as a beneficiary of Shakespeare's work, by those who tell me what I should think about Shakespeare.

(Johnson, 2022b)

What Johnson objects to is presentism, described by Carla Dente as a 'mode of historical analysis whereby concepts and perspectives developed in the present are surreptitiously and anachronistically projected onto the past in order to interpret it; a logical fallacy leading to the passing of moral judgements which can only be avoided through the slightly lesser evil of moral relativism' (2013: 99).<sup>77</sup> There are no neat binaries in this issue. In practice, Johnson and other veterans I interviewed, including some who are non-British, do not see Shakespeare as an instrument of colonial oppression or a representation of British superiority (although this may in some circumstances or opinions be the case, it does not mean that applied Shakespeare cannot be used to heal trauma, nor detract from its ability to do so). American Vietnam veteran and theatre practitioner Teddy Kiendl, about whom I write in Chapter Four, deplores what he calls 'revisionist thinking - which doesn't work about Shakespeare in general and including his nationality' (2022). It was not apparent in my interviews with the veterans, including Johnson, that they see their race or culture as being superior. This does not imply they are unaware of, or uncaring about those issues. It would be wrong, factually and morally, to impute motives to the veterans that do not exist, or (which would be insultingly patronising) to infer that they are ignorant of such possibilities. I mention in my 'Methodology' chapter that I have only included veterans whose ethnicity is white. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that I cannot know how veterans from other ethnic groups feel about how they are represented in the theatre, in Shakespeare's original work or in adaptations of it.

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<sup>77</sup> Moral, or ethical, relativism concerns itself on a philosophical level with the differences in moral judgments or opinions across different peoples and cultures (and it should be emphasised that the military is a distinct culture). Descriptive moral relativism refers to the disagreement about what is right or wrong but without judgment being passed on the differing viewpoints. Meta-ethical moral relativism states that in those disagreements, no party is either right or wrong. Normative moral relativism takes the latter a stage further, in that because nobody is fundamentally right or wrong, opposing behaviour and views should, therefore, be tolerated (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2018, online).

However, it cannot be overstated that to those veterans whom I did interview and observe, is that Shakespeare represents a way of processing their trauma through drama, and that correspondingly, Shakespeare works in a unique way for them. This view is, I believe, immensely significant because it may be fundamental to understanding what Shakespeare represents *overall* when used therapeutically, in contrast to an evening's entertainment at the theatre or the drafting of an academic paper on literary theory. This goes to the core of why Johnson objects to changes made by Shakespeare's Globe but does not see his own presentism or adaptation from a military viewpoint in the same way.

Johnson clearly feels that despite the value he has gained from working with Shakespeare's Globe in the past, to continue to do so would be hypocritical. He said that 'the Globe is where it started for me, the Globe made me, but I can't on the one hand feel that what they are doing is wrong and yet on the other hand, embrace it by working with [them] again' (Johnson, 2022a). Johnson feels hurt by Shakespeare's Globe because in his view it is hurting Shakespeare too. By stepping away from Shakespeare's Globe, Johnson is practicing a type of distancing that will help him process the disappointment and sense of loss he feels from detaching himself from a theatre that he once held in the highest esteem.

### **Post-Shakespeare and post-trauma growth**

In 2019, Johnson auditioned for RSC Learn, which was looking for new actors; he had been talent-spotted at *Shakespeare and Remembrance*. Johnson performed a monologue from *Richard III* for the RSC's then Artistic Director Greg Doran, who praised Johnson for carrying on when he forgot some lines. 'My military training kicked in there, the army taught me to carry on and work through it' (Johnson, 2022b). This was a valuable boost to Johnson's morale and confidence in his ability as an actor. Although since 2019 Johnson has not auditioned for, nor performed in any Shakespeare production - the Covid-19 pandemic curtailed those RSC's plans - Shakespeare continues to be the platform from which everything else he does has been launched (Johnson, 2022a).

This platform is also built on post-trauma growth (PTG). Central to the work undertaken by veterans' organisations is the stimulation of PGT. Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun first used the expression in 1996; previous terms included 'perceived benefits', 'positive aspects' and one which fits closely with the way in which veterans use applied Shakespeare, 'transformation of trauma' (2004: 3). Research on psychological growth after trauma is burgeoning, according to Crystal Park and Vicki Helgeson (2006: 791), and Tedeschi and Calhoun describe PTG as referring to the 'positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances' (2004: 1). PTG can co-exist with PTSD because PTG does not seek to deny deep distress, but rather it posits that adversity can bring about positive changes in understanding oneself and others (*Psychology Today*, 2022, online).

Tedeschi and Calhoun posit that 'post-trauma growth is not simply a return to baseline – it is an experience of improvement that for some persons is profound' (2004: 4). This profound improvement applies to Johnson. Shakespeare was the starting point for a professional acting career that has since encompassed stage roles in *Soldier On* (2018) and on television in *Grantchester* (2020). For several years now, Johnson has been receiving psychological support from Combat Stress, who suggested that some diversification away from mental health issues would be efficacious. *Grantchester* especially represented this. Mental health will continue to be an important motivation in Johnson's choice of projects, but he acknowledged that he needs to ensure he has space in his life and mind to engage with different subjects and priorities. Johnson called this 'the squaddie thing of "squaring away", of putting things away in their rightful place. That's what my personal website is, a way of squaring things away' (Johnson, 2022a). Squaring away, in this context, also relates back to Johnson's definition of mind-frag, and how useful acting is to him as a coping mechanism.

However, Johnson is still involved with veteran-based projects. During Covid-19 lockdowns, he recorded podcasts with fellow veteran Neil Davies called 'On Parade', which reached out to veterans who were isolated and unable to access their usual face-to-face art or therapy sessions. Johnson is a communicator for 'Hats Off to Bootsie' (HOTB), a charity whose remit is to enable veterans overcoming homelessness and mental trauma (the two often are connected) to be regarded as positively as those who are overcoming physical

injury. In 2021, Johnson directed a stage production for HOTB, *The Terminus*, whose central character is a vagrant and war veteran with PTSD called Boney. It explores, says the charity's website, how veterans pay the price for military action (HOTB, 2022). HOTB and Johnson have made a short film, again about homeless veterans, entitled *Service No Longer Required*. Writing is important to Johnson, a skill developed by his involvement in *Shakespeare and Remembrance*. His Shakespearean ambition is also to be part of projects for the National Theatre, having already worked with the RSC and Shakespeare's Globe (Johnson, 2022a). Away from stage and film, Johnson is engaged with Guitars for Vets, which uses music as a therapeutic tool to bring veterans together worldwide by providing them with free guitars and lessons. These projects demonstrate progression from a reliance on working with veterans' organisations, to the ability for Johnson to be involved in independent ventures as a significant part of his post-trauma growth.

Johnson's mission is to disseminate information and enthusiasm for how Shakespeare can have enormous therapeutic value to a group who by training and culture find it difficult to reach out for help with their psychological problems. Johnson is proud of having the opportunity to help veterans to engage with Shakespeare. 'My doctor said there must be a reason for my life [after Johnson attempted suicide twice], and helping veterans and others is a big reason. I talk to veterans now who start off being terrified of Shakespeare's language like I was, but I fell totally in love with it, and I want to portray that to others' (Johnson, 2021a). 'Others' encompasses not just veterans, service personnel and their families, but civilians too. Johnson is a vocal, passionate and committed advocate of Shakespeare as a medium for positive engagement and through his work with Shakespeare's Soldiers, is adamant that a model of applied Shakespeare that can work for veterans, can be equally efficacious for other traumatised, marginalised and misunderstood sections of society.

Part of post-trauma growth can be cultivated by an aesthetic appreciation of the arts, and especially where little or none existed previously. The value of the arts, and in particular Shakespeare, to Johnson is profound:

Shakespeare has enabled me to do not just all of this [arts-based] stuff, but to rebuild my life. When I'm on stage I don't have to be me, the guys [fellow veterans] don't have to be themselves. Applied theatre, applied Shakespeare – call it what you will - is an affirmation to yourself, for your

self-worth, to stop putting yourself down, and I said all this to the kids we worked with as part of Shakespeare's Soldiers.

(Johnson, 2022)

For Johnson, Shakespeare has provided a valuable and remarkable therapeutic benefit, but he is not cured of PTSD and never will be. 'I am constantly looking for new projects. I'm scared to stop being busy, as I don't know what will happen to me if I do' (Johnson, 2022). Prescription medication is still required alongside the drama and arts-based projects and, Johnson thinks, probably always will be. There are no quick fixes nor easy cures for the traumas or psychological issues that are the price many soldiers pay for their service.

As an exploration of applied Shakespeare for veterans, CVP pioneered its specific model in the UK, and had many successes; Johnson said that 'those days were fun and I wish we could have them back' (Johnson, 2022b). However, and as with any therapeutic model, there are distinct limitations to what Shakespeare can achieve in a healing context. It will not work for every veteran who struggles with psychological issues, and CVP's work had lessons to learn about triggering, well-being and aftercare when dealing with vulnerable people. Availability of applied Shakespeare resources is another problem. Johnson's journey with Shakespeare began with a unique organisation that does not now exist, and which has not been replaced since with an equivalent all-Shakespearean, all-veterans acting company. I argue that this does not imply a lack of success in the model, but rather that being at the forefront of applied Shakespeare for traumatised veterans, CVP laid the groundwork for others to follow.

## **Chapter Two: Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career**

**'Then a soldier,**

**Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard**

**Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel'**

***As You Like It***

**2.7.148-150 (1997: 1622)**

Combat Veteran Players, as I pointed out at the end of Chapter One, has not been replaced in the UK by an all-veterans, exclusively Shakespeare acting company, and there is currently in the UK a dearth of organisations for veterans that offer therapy for combat PTSD and re-adjustment issues specifically through the arts and on a continuing basis. Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA) is a multi-disciplinary, arts-based community interest company (CIC) which offers opportunities and a safe space for veterans to process their psychological issues.<sup>78</sup> SAA was established in 2016 to assist recovery in this way, and additionally, to facilitate post-trauma growth and transformation in its members by providing a practical stepping stone into a career in the arts. SAA evolved from Combat Veteran Players (CVP), which was founded by Jaclyn McLoughlin in 2011 as the first UK theatre company solely to use applied Shakespeare as therapy for military veterans.<sup>79</sup> Unlike the work of its predecessor, SAA has a wider artistic remit than just applied theatre and does not work solely with Shakespeare. SAA has, however, forged close ties with Shakespeare's Globe, initiating joint ventures that incorporate community theatre with applied Shakespeare for veterans. SAA has also taken applied Shakespeare into schools under the banner of Shakespeare's Soldiers, a project designed to help both veterans and schoolchildren. This chapter will offer a case study of SAA, in which I describe SAA's history, examine its work and practices in relation to Shakespeare, analyse primary source material comprising interviews with SAA personnel and veterans and evaluate how useful SAA's resources are to veterans

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<sup>78</sup> Despite the 'soldier' in its name, Soldiers' Arts Academy is open to all branches of the armed forces.

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter One: 'Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare'.



who struggle to cope with the psychological legacy of their service in the armed forces.

### **Soldiers' Arts Academy**

SAA's website states that the organisation primarily exists as a:

Not for profit organisation which gives serving and former military personnel a route into the arts. It may be part of a recovery process; it may provide training for a step into a new industry; or it may simply be there to help support the transition into civilian life.

(Soldiers' Arts Academy, 2021, online)

Many veterans join via word-of-mouth from others who use the organisation's facilities. SAA maintains permanent offices and recreational space in London's Euston Road where it offers a casual drop-in capability for all its activities. It provides free, professional-led workshops in playwriting, poetry, theatre, dance, guitar playing, singing, photography and film. This varied programme allows veterans to find which of the arts suits them best, with a view to both therapy and post-military career possibilities. Veterans may access as many workshops, and for how long, as they wish. Other SAA services include one-to-one mental health resources such as mentoring and well-being support and counselling, with drop-in hubs in London, York, Nottingham, Exeter, Salisbury, Edinburgh and Manchester.

SAA evolved from when, in 2015, CVP's McLoughlin met theatre producer Amanda Faber at a reception at Goldman Sachs where McLoughlin was trying to secure corporate funding for future productions. Faber subsequently joined CVP and worked with McLoughlin on *Twelfth Night* (2015) and *Richard III* (2016).<sup>80</sup> Faber immediately recognised that CVP, whose raison d'être was to be a transformative vehicle for veterans, itself appeared to require some adaptation to move forward; this particularly included accessing adequate and reliable funding with which to stage productions. When, for family reasons, McLoughlin moved back to the US in 2016, Faber set up SAA, becoming its CEO, and instigating several major changes in how the new organisation operated. As an organisation

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<sup>80</sup> I have described these performances more fully in Chapter One: 'Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare'.

dedicated to veterans' welfare and their post-trauma growth, Faber saw it as important for SAA to expand CVP's legacy by forging theatrical partnerships which both challenged the veterans' creativity and offered the possibility of post-service careers in the arts. Faber incorporated the Shakespeare work and operatives initiated by CVP into SAA and established an on-going collaboration with Shakespeare's Globe as an important example of theatre-veteran partnerships.

### **Community Shakespeare: SAA and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre**

Since 2018, SAA has worked with the Shakespeare's Globe, a collaboration that has its roots in the latter's commitment to theatre in the community. Matilda James, who was head of casting at Shakespeare's Globe from 2018 until 2020, says that the SAA project was part of a new voyage of artistic and logistic discovery for the theatre:

The question we were asking back in 2018 was what is the point of Shakespeare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How is he relevant? We reference him to life, art, activism and lived experiences, and believe Shakespeare is for everyone, but how can we justify that standpoint? We decided one way to do that would be to bring [Shakespeare] to communities who may never have worked with him, so we then asked ourselves what the Globe should be doing to facilitate that.

(James, 2021)

Shakespeare's Globe began this outreach programme by selecting varied London-based community arts organisations. One of the earliest ventures in its inclusivity mission was with veterans. In 2018, there were nationwide commemorations taking place for the centennial of the ending of the First World War, and James says that Shakespeare's Globe wanted to mark the anniversary. The theatre's education department had previously worked with CVP in 2014 on *Hamlet*, and James and director Martin Leonard approached its successor, SAA, about staging a production. Previously in 2018, SAA had produced a play called *Soldier On*, the details of which I give in the previous chapter. Written by veteran and actor Jonathan Lewis and featuring a cast of veterans and professional actors, *Soldier On* explored the theme of combat PTSD, and played in London's West End and regional theatres. Shakespeare's Globe personnel were invited to rehearsals of *Soldier On* at the STOLL Buildings and were impressed with the

quality of the veterans' acting. Passages from *Titus Andronicus* – 'stuff that was famously about war' (James, 2021) – were handed out and worked on.<sup>81</sup> James observes that 'even in those very early days we could see the correlation between Shakespeare and PTSD, and how he [Shakespeare] could be therapeutic' (James, 2021). Applied theatre, and specifically applied Shakespeare, were about to be brought to the big stage.

### ***Shakespeare and Remembrance***

The first, and most significant piece of applied Shakespeare for veterans at Shakespeare's Globe was a collaboration with SAA on *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, which was performed on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018, the centenary of Armistice Day, at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse.<sup>82</sup> *Shakespeare and Remembrance* was a major project for SAA, a ground-breaking production because it challenged the veterans not only to learn and perform Shakespeare, but also to initiate their own original work that confronted their trauma issues. In Chapter One, I describe the involvement of veteran Shaun Johnson in the production. He had acted in Shakespeare plays before and had also publicly shared details of his PTSD, but some veterans who took part in *Shakespeare and Remembrance* had never before spoken about their experiences, in public or private. The production, billed with the subheading of 'the harsh and boist'rous tongue of war' (*I Henry IV*, 4.1.49: 1347), consisted of a series of scenes which combined some of Shakespeare's most powerful words on war with the voices of veterans and serving military personnel who were performing their own monologues. Leonard asked the theatre's education department to supply suitable passages from Shakespeare, but says veterans were free to choose their own material if they wished. Leonard ran a workshop prior to auditions, which concentrated on voice work, rhythm and ways of approaching the text. A company was then put together, made up of veterans who 'had good energy and good stories to tell. Some people responded well to certain texts, others wanted to

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<sup>81</sup> The STOLL Buildings, in south west London, comprise a complex of residential accommodation and community spaces for veterans.

<sup>82</sup> The Sam Wanamaker Playhouse is situated at Bankside, on the South Bank of the Thames, and is an indoor theatre which forms part of Shakespeare's Globe. In style and layout, it is based on the Blackfriars Theatre, an indoor venue in which Shakespeare plays were performed from 1608 by his company of actors, the King's Men.

focus on their own work' (Leonard, 2021). The objective was to tell those stories, in whatever way felt most comfortable and relevant to them.

The use of a prestigious venue like the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse was appreciated by the veterans who felt honoured to be given such a platform to talk about their experiences (Faber, 2021). Military banners and photos of those taking part were hung in the foyer, and regimental coats of arms were given by several SAA members to display in the Green Room. On the day of the performance, Shakespeare's Globe held two minutes' silence at 11.00am to commemorate the war dead and all the veterans came together on the stage to observe it. James said that 'we kept the atmosphere quiet and reverent' (James, 2021). A quiet space was provided throughout the day for the veterans, some of whom were nervous at the prospect of acting to an audience, while others said they found it easy compared to experiences they had had in the military (Leonard, 2021). It indicates a sign of trust in Leonard that the veterans felt able to express thoughts and feelings which are often kept private or shared only amongst themselves. Shakespeare's Globe personnel were mindful that they were not dealing with professional actors, who knew each theatrical and technical process, and James credited the rapport that Leonard built up with the veterans for the smooth way that the day of the performance was handled. SAA also had its own well-being officer Nick Shatford present, with whom Leonard worked closely throughout.

There were moments when some veterans may not have been able to perform, but contingency plans to 'rejiggle the programme' were in place (James, 2021). CVP had never used understudy actors, and I write more below about Faber's insistence on their importance. Therefore, for *Shakespeare and Remembrance* some understudies read from a script when it was necessary for them to perform at short notice. Faber's observations of veterans engaged in theatre convinced her that understudying would be second nature to many. 'Military training prepares soldiers to learn the roles of their superiors in case they must step into their shoes in the heat of battle, it prepares them to be very good actors, they are adaptable' (Faber, 2021). My research shows that commandos have an expression for this adaptability: 'Improvise. Adapt. Overcome'. Faber related this ethos also to a specific theatrical requirement, in that 'soldiers can pick up dance routines very quickly because they can march' (Faber, 2021). It

must be remembered that the veterans, some of whom had never acted in public before, were about to admit openly on stage that they had PTSD. They were willing to share their traumas, not during a one-to-one appointment with a psychologist, but in front of a paying audience in one of the most famous theatres in the world. That required courage and professionalism.

I watched the live performance of *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, and I was also granted access to an archival recording of it three years later for the purposes of this study. The audience for the performance consisted largely of veterans and friends and family of the performers. The set was simple, without props, and as the house lights were dimmed, military drum rolls sounded a sombre and portentous note. The performance began, not with words from Shakespeare, but those of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, from the 'Ring out, wild bells' canto in his elegy, *In Memoriam*:

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,  
The flying cloud, the frosty light,  
The year is dying in the night,  
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die  
[.....].  
Ring out the thousand years of war,  
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

(1850: 1-4 & 27-28)

The first scene that was performed in *Shakespeare and Remembrance* was not, however, associated with war. The veterans chose an extract from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the Rude Mechanicals are rehearsing the Pyramus and Thisbe scene for their performance at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. The occupations of the Rude Mechanicals were adapted to suit military personnel; for example, Shaun Johnson, who had served in the Royal Artillery, was Snug the Gunner. War and service then became the dominant theme of the event, with the veterans describing, both through the words of Shakespeare and their own, their often-traumatic combat experiences. The courage to do this on stage was exemplified by a female veteran, Kate Philip, a captain attached to an infantry company at Camp Bastian, Afghanistan, who lost her left leg below the knee during a tour of duty. Her passage from *Henry V* evoked memories of her own experience of talking to her troops at three o'clock in the morning before a

patrol. Unfamiliar with the play before rehearsals for *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, she told the audience that ‘this passage gripped me instantly and took me back to Helmand Province [...] I loved Shakespeare’s description of the sights and sounds of the battlefield in the early hours of the morning’ (Philip, 2018). The words to which she is referring are:

Fire answers fire, and through their paly flames  
Each battle sees the other’s umbered face.

[...]

The royal captain of this band.

Walking from watch to watch, tent to tent.

(Chorus, 4.0.8-9 & 29-30: 1490-1)

Soldiers are highly trained for their deployments, but Philip told the audience she was still scared. ‘I had to inspire confidence in my team. I needed “commander’s confidence” such as that shown by Henry’ and on which Philip drew for inspiration and courage to perform on stage. After losing her leg, Philip said she ‘reclaimed my identity when I was part of a military team again and with this performance today – one team, one family’ (Philip, 2018). It is salutary to remember that Philip had participated in a theatre of war many times, but it was the first time that she had ever acted on stage or told her story in public.

Another veteran who performed in *Shakespeare and Remembrance* but had never acted before was Neil Davies. He served in 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment between 1965 and 1970, seeing active service in Aden (now Yemen), Cyprus and North Africa. After leaving the army, Davies engaged in reckless behaviour, including drug-taking, and attempted suicide because of PTSD. Prior to being introduced to SAA by fellow veteran Shaun Johnson, Davies had just finished PTSD therapy at St Pancras Veterans’ Clinic, London, where he met Johnson. For Davies, SAA literally offered a lifeline. Faber asked Davies to audition for *Shakespeare and Remembrance* and sent him a selection of Shakespeare speeches. Davies says those from *Titus Andronicus* particularly evoked ‘churning memories’ of war (Davies, 2021). Although sceptical about Shakespeare, he was asked to write his own performance piece around that evocation ‘to banish the tears of remembrance. Instead of reaching for drugs like I used to, I reached for a pen, and I wrote, and I got it out of my system’ (Davies, 2021). It is striking that it took Davies from 1970, when he was discharged from

the army with PTSD, to 2018, to find that theatre and more specifically Shakespeare, worked as therapy for him, having tried both conventional treatment and what he ironically describes as 'self-medication' (Davies, 2021).<sup>83</sup>

Davies was the last performer at *Shakespeare and Remembrance* and admitted to going on stage with his knees knocking. The following comment by Davies exemplifies the self-esteem that may come with acquiring the cultural capital of Shakespeare and the ability both to understand and perform it. Davies, who had hated Shakespeare at school (due, he told me, to 'inverted snobbery'), said that 'this is the great Bard and I'm doing it. *There's a pride that I'm doing Shakespeare* (my italics). The rhythm is a bit like going on parade, it syncs with your brain patterns in your head. You get that, you feel comfortable, then you can get into the words' (Davies, 2021). Davies said that his lines from *Titus Andronicus*, 'hit me here' (by which he meant his heart) because 'we lost lads, we lost the war [in Aden], and nobody cared' (Davies, 2021). Titus says:

Hear me, grave fathers, noble Tribunes, stay.  
For pity of mine age, whose youth was spent  
In dangerous ways whilst you securely slept.

(3.1.1-3: 402)

Davies explained that the lines 'For two and twenty sons I never wept/Because they died in honour's lofty bed' (3.1.10-11) resonated with him because twenty-two is the size of a platoon, and he could immediately identify with that military unit. That Titus could be presented as a sufferer of combat PTSD is also plausible, and Davies especially connected with the concept of self-harm. Self-harm induced by PTSD takes many forms; for Davies et al it was drugs and alcohol, for Titus, it is perhaps the willingness to have his hand lopped off by Aaron. Although ostensibly this act of mutilation was requested by Saturninus as a prerequisite to releasing Titus's captured sons, Martius and Quintus, a PTSD-informed reading is of Titus inviting punishment for himself.

Leonard reiterated that Davies was good at connecting *Titus Andronicus* with what he had personally experienced. 'His sense of futility about war and how soldiers are perceived as the bad guy, was very powerful' (Leonard, 2021). There

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<sup>83</sup> Although Davies's symptoms supported what would now be a diagnosis of PTSD, this description was not used as a medical term until 1980. See the section in my literature review for a detailed explanation of PTSD.

are parallels to be drawn between this negative and one-dimensional perception about the military, and another character in the play, Aaron. On the surface, Aaron is an adulterous malefactor, who colludes in the rape of Lavinia and tricks Titus into severing his hand, yet Aaron may also be read as a study in how Shakespeare developed depth and humanity in an unlikely character. Just as within *Titus Andronicus* may be seen the seeds of *Hamlet* as a revenge play, so too is there is a distinct foreshadowing of Malcolm's self-denigrating speech in *Macbeth* (4.3.58-67), when Aaron talks of the day:

Wherein I did not do some notorious ill  
As kill a man, or else devise his death.  
Ravish a maid or plot the way to do it.

(5.1.127-129 (424))

From early in the play, Aaron appears to be the irredeemable villain, a caricature who can be categorised as easily and lazily as a soldier can be perceived as being just a state-sponsored killer. Yet nothing in Aaron's malevolent contribution to the proceedings prepares the audience for the caring, solicitous father he becomes. He speaks tender words as he cradles his newborn son (4.2.174-177: 417) and begs Lucius to save the child rather than himself (5.1.53-58: 423). John Russell Brown writes of Aaron's 'courage and primary concern for his son' (2001: 28). Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen cite Aaron's words 'Is black so base a hue?' (4.2.71: 414) and his paternal care for his child as evidence that the character's 'black pride and paternal affection undo the ancient racist equation of darkness and evil' (2017: 1618). David Sterling Brown writes that overall, and especially in defence of his son, Aaron's black pride 'is a precursor to modern racially focused movements such as Black Lives Matter' (2018: 139). The agathokakological aspect to Aaron's character elevates him from a shallow and clichéd villain to a man capable of selfless thoughts and acts. Veterans can identify with this characterisation of Aaron because they say that soldiers too are not devoid of humanity and compassion (Johnson, 2022a; Helliwell, 2021). Soldiers generally do not start armed conflicts and, although my ethnographic sample is small, no veteran I have spoken to either enjoyed or glorifies war. They assert that they are not mercenaries, but soldiers sent to do a job and they fight for their country, or a cause their country's leaders believe is worthy of going to war about. They are also, as Johnson and Helliwell pointed out, human beings,



and are angered that they are sometimes dismissed as ‘thick squaddies’ (Johnson, 2022a; Helliwell, 2021) or mere ‘killing machines’ (Ford, in Norman, 2013; Helliwell, 2023).

Davies interspersed lines from *Titus Andronicus* with a personal monologue, ‘The Patrol’. His own writing was replete with adult, military humour, and was based on the true story of an eighteen-year-old soldier with whom Davies served:

The bullets are flying around, and I suddenly hear him groan. I turn around thinking he’s been hit and that I had to get the Medikit, and he’s w\*\*king, j\*\*king off under fire. He says he is getting in touch with his humanity and that he wasn’t going to go out and die without having a w\*\*k first.

(Davies, 2018)

With a wink to the audience, Davies continued ‘that was the most traumatic thing I’ve ever seen and probably that’s what gave me PTSD’ (Davies, 2018). Davies repeated that story in a podcast, ‘On Parade’ with Shaun Johnson and American veteran Stephan Wolfert, which was broadcast on 7 August 2020. Wolfert remarks that ‘only we [fellow veterans] would laugh at that because we get it’ (Wolfert, 2020). The series of podcasts were hosted by Davies and Johnson and were informal chats that discussed issues facing veterans in civilian life. The use of nicknames – Davies is Taff and Johnson is Johnno – reflects both the way that soldiers often have soubriquets and that the podcasts were intended for military personnel.

Reflecting on *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, Davies said that working with Shakespeare was profound:

The words of Shakespeare shook something loose in my mind, and I found that the experience had a cleansing effect. It unblocked memories buried deep. I found it much easier to talk about experience within the context of a Shakespeare production. You can’t get better than the Bard as a cover for confessions.

(Davies, 2021)

Davies found both performing and sharing his experiences to be cathartic:

I felt cleansed, at peace with myself. For a couple of weeks afterwards [acting in *Shakespeare and Remembrance*], the memories I had buried of the war times bubbled up. It was empowering to reconnect with myself,

and I felt I had become whole again, probably for the first time since serving in the army.

(Davies, 2021)

Significantly, sharing those experiences meant more than just with fellow veterans. After the production, Davies was joined by close friends and his two sons, to whom he had never spoken about his military experiences and traumas. Davies is not alone in this; many soldiers and veterans do not share their experiences with family or friends. Two veterans whom I have interviewed, Shaun Johnson and Dean Helliwell, did not speak of their own combat experiences to their fathers, both of whom also served in the military. When Johnson tried to discuss his PTSD with his father, he had told him to 'man up' (Johnson, 2021). Helliwell, who joined the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment in 2006 and served in Afghanistan, related to me that:

I was kicked out of the Army in 2012 for drinking. Alcohol was the only thing that helped me to sleep. I couldn't switch off when I went to bed, I'd have millions of random thoughts that led into more graphic stuff, things I'd seen and done. It still happens now.

(Helliwell, 2021)

Helliwell now uses Shakespeare to distance himself from such thoughts and quotes from *The Tempest* to describe and express his feelings through Ariel's words: 'Hell is empty, and all the devils are here' (1.2.215-216: 3062). Helliwell's involvement with SAA has also given him the post-trauma growth to pursue a part-time acting career.

The psychological help and support given to Davies by SAA has proved to be a springboard for myriad activities in the arts. Davies's subsequent achievements are examples of the type of progress SAA hopes to assist in facilitating. Davies has written a novel, *Falling Soldiers*, about veterans with PTSD, and is currently working on a sequel which he hopes can be adapted as a six-part television series. Davies found that sometimes macabre military humour helped him to cope when in the army and told me that 'on my last tour we had a sweepstake so that whoever was killed last had a good burial' and adds 'seeing twenty-eight guys killed in one day is still with me half a century later' (Davies, 2022). Performing stand-up comedy is now an important part of his post-trauma growth.

Davies is also the Chair of the Veterans' Help Group at St Pancras, for which he co-ordinated the writing of a play about PTSD that group members performed in local GP surgeries. This is a relatively rare example of applied Shakespeare in the community, both for its focus on the psychological needs of veterans and one which may also have a wider application for PTSD howsoever caused. Davies was instrumental in persuading Shakespeare's Globe's Touring Company to perform *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for veterans living at the STOLL Buildings, on 7 September 2021. This was part of the theatre's first neighbourhood tour, offering free performances to local community organisations (STOLL, 2021). Davies is convinced that Shakespeare gleaned valuable military knowledge and insight from engaging with his own local communities:

London was full of soldiers returning from wars, and many worked in taverns, warehouses, and the docks near the Globe. So, William would come across them every time he went out for an ale or two, and would hear tales, banter and regrets. And for a great artist, it's listening which is important.

(Davies, 2022)

The symbiotic nature of the relationship between Davies, a soldier who had returned from war, and the twenty-first century Shakespeare's Globe, is summed up by Leonard:

Neil having the last scene was important to us because he started by saying that he had always thought Shakespeare wasn't for him. The way that he then made it relevant to his life summed up what we were trying to do with our community theatre projects.

(Leonard, 2021)

As I point out above regarding Davies, the element of cultural capital associated with Shakespeare means that veterans often feel a sense of pride and achievement in 'getting' something as difficult and previously inaccessible as Shakespeare was to them. It is an empowering experience for them. Davies said:

'Being a part of Shakespeare is an affirmation that I'm as clever as the guys who went to grammar school. I think there is a great untapped artistic endeavour buried in the hearts of soldiers, and the Globe can help to untap it.

(Davies, 2021)

Viz-a-vis such untapped potential, James observed of the *Shakespeare and Remembrance* veterans that ‘some were thinking about theatre as a step in their profession, others not’ (James, 2021). At the time of the performance, Tip Cullen, a former Royal Marine with thirty years’ service and who had achieved the elite status of a Mountain Leader in the corps, had already trained as an actor with the Actors Wheel Company at Plymouth Marjon University, from where he was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in acting. Cullen said to me that ‘I’m an Irishman, so very much a storyteller – I love spinning a dit - and as a Royal Marine I also gave lectures, which is very much a type of performance. I am an actor because many of my friends can’t be’ (Cullen, 2022). By this latter remark, Cullen means his deceased military colleagues, which echoes a comment from an unnamed veteran I quote in Chapter One, who said he wears his medals because his fallen colleagues cannot (VET-GEN/1, 2021).

For *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, Cullen narrated a family story about his great-grandfather Thomas Cullen, who joined the Royal Irish Rifles in 1915 and fought on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (1 July 1916). Thomas, narrated Cullen, ‘was a good Irish Catholic boy who wanted to fight for King and country and was posted to France on 31 March 1916, three weeks before the Easter Rising of 1916’ (Cullen, 2018).<sup>84</sup> Thomas Cullen is commemorated at the Thiepval Memorial for the British and South African soldiers who died on the Somme and who have no known grave. Having paid tribute to his great-grandfather, Cullen then told his own story as a soldier, and the continuity of his family in the military. As with other personal narratives that were delivered in monologue form, Cullen interspersed lines from Shakespeare, in this case, Young Clifford’s poignant words to his dead father from *2 Henry VI*:

Wast thou ordained, dear father  
To lose thy youth in peace, and to achieve  
The silver livery of advised age  
And in thy reverence and thy chair-days, thus  
To die in ruffian battle.

*II Henry VI* 5.3.45-49 (285)

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<sup>84</sup> The Easter Rising (or Easter Rebellion) of April 1916, was an armed insurrection by Irish nationalists in protest at British rule in Ireland. The six-day conflict, which began on Easter Monday in Dublin, killed 485 people, and ultimately paved the way towards the creation of an independent state, the Republic of Ireland, in 1922.

These Shakespearean lines were in particular reference to the deployment of Cullen's son, also a Royal Marine, to Afghanistan, and Cullen's fears as a father for his child's safety. He interspersed them with his own words, such as 'my son phoned home on the night of his first patrol in Afghanistan, and he sounded like a wee boy' Cullen recalled. 'Love, learning, guilt, blame all came over me. I cheated the Ferryman so many times, was he going to seek payment by taking my son?' (Cullen, 2018). There was a definite sense of Cullen achieving catharsis with his recital, and having evoked family connections, both past and present, to do so.

In relation to his wider military family, Cullen said that theatre and specifically Shakespeare, are therapeutic because 'arts are a way of getting vulnerable people back into society' (Cullen, 2022). He argued that theatre has a very specific role and value, because 'when you're on stage you "own" theatre. In a film, it is the director who owns it far more'. Cullen's opinion is that Shakespeare offers a 'world of possibilities [because] Shakespeare is believable, contemporary, the feelings and thoughts of human beings back then when he wrote are the same as now' (2022). Cullen is passionate about mental health issues, both for veterans and wider society. Since *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, he has forged strong links with SAA, of which he is currently a trustee, and he also has acted in several SAA productions, including *Soldier On*.

*Shakespeare and Remembrance* represented SAA's first theatrical venture that was truly independent of CVP. It proved too, that SAA was able as a fledgling organisation to persuade a prestigious venue like Shakespeare's Globe to risk putting on a public production by largely untested veterans on the iconic night of the centenary of Armistice Day. *Shakespeare and Remembrance* also epitomised the value that SAA can provide to those and other veterans of accessing theatrical opportunities. The relationship between SAA and veterans is symbiotic, representing one of the organisation's major strengths. For SAA, it makes the task of personnel like Faber easier because the veterans possess certain attributes which favour their development as theatre performers. Faber told me about the specific qualities and transferable skills that military service has instilled, and which are applicable to an acting career, with 'things like, covering for the person next to you, and showing up prepared, did not need to be taught to military personnel, that was just a way of life to them' (Faber, 2021). Faber's

view of the veterans' engagement with Shakespeare in particular appears to reiterate what I have found in my overall research:

Shakespeare makes the soldiers feel safe about letting out emotions that they often keep repressed because they are too afraid of the consequences. Too worried to let them come to the surface. They find the language helps them access the emotions in a safe way.

(Faber, 2021)

The importance of Shakespearean language to veterans, as cited by Faber, appears to endorse my proposition that Shakespearean language is both recognisably English and thus intelligible (albeit it with some guidance). It frees the veterans from using everyday language which may prove too traumatic a medium by which to relate their experiences. Faber also told me that veterans find 'Shakespeare's subject matter distant enough from their own experiences to allow them to explore their own feelings (Faber, 2021). This conforms to Baim's 'one-step-removed' rationale that I have described in my literature review (2018: 136).

Faber quoted feedback from veterans who took part in various Shakespeare productions with CVP and SAA, including *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, but who wish to remain anonymous:

When I do Shakespeare, I stop being me and become someone else. Then when I go back into me, I feel better.

(quoted by Faber, 2021)

Some plays in modern English are too close to my own experiences, they are too painful. Because Shakespeare is a funny language it is a safe place to express emotions.

(quoted by Faber, 2021)

The 'expression of emotions in a safe way' is fundamental to how SAA operates. The triple elements of SAA's mission statement, and what it offers to members, make it a unique organisation for veterans in the UK. There is an implicit understanding that when veterans access its services, SAA personnel are aware of the distinctive needs and requirements of those who have served in the military. Workshop leaders, who are all professionals in their artistic fields, undergo training modules given by Combat Stress. This training enables them to recognise trigger signs for potential mental health problems, including suicide.

Leaders can then report their concerns in confidence to SAA's well-being officer, and psychologist, Nick Shatford. In particular, an emotional dip after the highs of being in a production is potentially dangerous for a veteran with PTSD or other mental health issues. They can access SAA support if this, or any other problem occurs. A pattern also emerges whereby a veteran will secure a professional role (often having been helped by SAA to obtain a theatrical agent), and then feel deflated or depressed when they are unable to secure another acting job. They can then return to their SAA 'family' for ongoing support.

In Faber's experience there appears to be a reluctance within the wider military charity sector to show confidence in the therapeutic efficacy of the arts and ergo, to offer anything other than limited and ad hoc provision. Exceptions to this include the Royal British Legion (RBL) which runs Bravo 22 Company, a 'Recovery Through Arts' programme. This includes classes in sculpture, poetry and dance, in addition to theatre.<sup>85</sup> The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) uses music not therapeutically (or at least, not directly) but as a fund-raising and awareness tool, by staging concerts by prominent military bands. Help for Heroes did offer arts-based therapy, including Shakespeare-based work, before the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated the closure of its residential homes and, consequently, such programmes that were offered as part of rehabilitation. Funding, or more precisely the lack of it, is an ever-present problem for charities and organisations like SAA, which is why Faber puts much emphasis on showing potential sponsors that SAA can stage professional quality productions. Faber told me that some organisations called using the arts 'a nice little hobby' (Faber, 2021), which tends to imply that more work needs to be done (my research is included in that) to present the benefits of arts-based therapy.<sup>86</sup>

Combat Stress currently does not use the arts in any way. Its approach is to offer mainly clinical support to its members, concentrating time and resources in facilitating access to conventional techniques to alleviate PTSD, such as cognitive behaviour therapy and eye movement desensitisation reprocessing

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<sup>85</sup> Bravo 22 Company brings together wounded, injured and sick (WIS) military personnel in an applied theatre initiative. It was created in 2011 by theatre producer Alice Driver to give military personnel new skills and experiences and to 'improve confidence, self-awareness and motivation to support an individual's recovery and the transition into civilian life; (Royal British Legion, 2021, online). Bravo 22 Company's first major production was *The Two Worlds of Charlie F*, a play based on the experiences of soldiers who had served in Afghanistan, written by Owen Sheer and produced by Amanda Faber. Bravo 22 Company has not, and does not to date, included any Shakespeare as part of its programme.

<sup>86</sup> Faber requested that I did not name those organisations.

(EMDR). When veterans choose to access Combat Stress, they do so in the knowledge that it is a charity which exists specifically to focus on veterans' mental health. Similarly, the RBL's Bravo 22 project states that it is a 'recovery through the arts' programme, which again implies that veterans accessing it have a physical or mental condition to recover from. Ergo, the first step to use the services of these charities is for veterans to acknowledge they have such issues. SAA's approach is different. Some veterans may gravitate to SAA, or initially say to SAA personnel that they do, purely because it is a way of accessing the arts for pleasure or for a future career path. When they work with SAA, with its triple remit of offering access to the arts for learning, pleasure and career training opportunities rather than purely as a vehicle for recovery, veterans are not required to confront their psychological problems if they do not wish to. Faber calls SAA a 'restorative and recovery space' and says that veterans 'come here not to be specifically asked about their problems, and it may take years for some to express themselves' (Faber, 2021). Nicola Shaughnessy writes about the requirement for practitioners of applied theatre to care about the communities they work with, so that such work 'has conscience, integrity and commitment' (2012: xiv). As a researcher, I too had to practice those qualities, and be mindful not to trigger anxiety or stress. Consequently, it was a delicate balance for me to ensure, as per my ethics agreement, that the veterans were fully aware, both in advance of and during my observations and interviews, that my remit to study veterans working with Shakespeare did include the specific issues of PTSD and readjustment.

### **Shakespeare's Globe and *The Merry Wives of Windsor***

In 2019, Shakespeare's Globe's community theatre programme continued with the involvement of a group of SAA veterans again, in addition to theatre companies Clean Break and the London Bubble Theatre Company.<sup>87</sup> This project, which 'opened up our stage in a different way' (James, 2021) drew together both professional and non-professional actors to collaborate on *The*

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<sup>87</sup> London Bubble Theatre Company aims to create a more equal and connected society through theatre. Promoting equal access to arts and culture, its core aim is to engage people in the arts so that they can express themselves creatively. London Bubble Theatre Company does not have an auditorium, preferring in applied theatre fashion, to performing in spaces that suit particular projects (London Bubble Company, 2021, online). Clean Break is an all-women's theatre company dedicated to inspiring debate and improving the lives of women who have been in, or who are at risk of going to, prison (Clean Break, 2024, online).



*Merry Wives of Windsor*. The production, directed by Elle While, was part of the theatre's summer season and meant that the veterans would be involved for a full run. Seven SAA members took part: Tip Cullen, Tom Leigh, Mike Prior, Dean Helliwell, Steve Morgan, Leanne Coupland and Charlotte Green. Green was not a veteran, but her parents served in the military. As with *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (and later, *The Winter's Tale*) brought together different ranks and branches of the armed forces, and as James pointed out, 'in the military they wouldn't necessarily work together but here they did. Theatre brings people together' (James, 2021).

There were obvious challenges in mixing the repertory company of Shakespeare's Globe with the veterans, not least of which was scheduling rehearsals. There were no personal auditions, just a group workshop with the theatre's casting team. As with *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, I watched an archival recording for the purposes of my research. This production had a 1920s theme, and Leonard created a 'pre-show' for the amateur performers, whereby they were seen to be doing jobs or domestic tasks as the audience arrived. These activities for the 'Windsor Locals', as the veterans were described, took place all over Shakespeare's Globe, such as in the seats and foyer areas, and included a gardener watering the real plants on the set and people hanging out washing.<sup>88</sup> Leonard likened it to a festival atmosphere and 'like going to a concert' (Leonard, 2021) and James explained that the veterans were 'the "downstairs" people to the "upstairs" ones on stage' (James, 2021). The veterans did have a group performance on stage, cast as the community members dressed as fairies who play a trick, directed by Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, on Falstaff in Act 5. As part of Shakespeare's Globe's intent about inclusivity in the production, the veterans took part in the curtain call and the traditional jig at the end of the performance.

Both Leonard and James pointed to how the veterans took ownership of the roles they were assigned or created. 'Ownership' said James, 'is not just about words but of how the actors fit the characters and that was as true of the veterans as it was for the professional performers' (James, 2021). There could not be, of course, the same ownership of the production as with *Shakespeare*

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<sup>88</sup> 'It may or may not be apocryphal' said Leonard, 'that the Queen [the late Queen Elizabeth II] refers to herself as a Windsor Local' (Leonard, 2021).

*and Remembrance* when the veterans chose which Shakespeare they wanted to perform as well as writing their own Shakespeare-inspired pieces, but Leonard observed that ‘it was still thrilling. Professional productions can’t have the same rawness of connection between those on stage and audience, and with a one-off like *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, all the energy goes into one performance’ (Leonard, 2021). Leonard said that Shakespeare’s Globe wanted to give an opportunity to amateur actors at the start of their careers, and that they ‘would not be glorified set dressing’ (Leonard, 2021).

*The Merry Wives of Windsor* did afford another opportunity, via SAA, for an ensemble of veterans to be part of a production at a prestigious venue like Shakespeare’s Globe. Faber was particularly pleased that SAA was once again working with the theatre and so soon after *Shakespeare and Remembrance*, seeing it as establishing solid foundations for future joint ventures (Faber, 2021). For its part, Shakespeare’s Globe saw the exercise as fulfilling its desire for extending community involvement in its activities. However, and although veteran VET-GLOBE/1 enjoyed their participation, Leonard’s comment above about ‘set dressing’ resonates with how they saw their role in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as being little more than that (VET-GLOBE/1, 2021). Such peripheral involvement, as VET-GLOBE/1 perceived it to be, carries a danger that veterans could feel they are only on the fringe of theatre activity. It requires careful balancing to ensure that veterans derive as full a therapeutic and acting experience benefit from their involvement as possible, and do not see themselves as marginalised or just ‘making up the numbers’ (VET-GLOBE/1, 2021).

### **Shakespeare’s Globe and *The Winter’s Tale***

Any plans that SAA and Shakespeare’s Globe may have had for further joint ventures were put on hold during the lockdowns and restrictions necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was not until 2023 that a second and similar collaboration between the SAA veterans and Shakespeare’s Globe took place, when they worked together on *The Winter’s Tale*. The first half of the play was staged in the indoor Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, and for the second part both actors and audience moved to the outdoor venue of Shakespeare’s Globe. It was for the second half that SAA veterans were cast as the chorus of Bohemians in the play. The cast rotated from a team of over twenty veterans, of whom twelve

performed in each show. Some veterans, such as Phil Milio and Julie Geisler, also had minor speaking parts as servants. Milio and his partner Geisler had attended the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth* workshops, about which I write in Chapter Four. Acting and learning Shakespeare is for Milio, a challenge and 'it helps to exercise my brain' (Milio, 2023). On a wider level, Milio talked anecdotally about veterans he knows who:

May or may not have PTS [post-traumatic stress, or PTSD] for whom Shakespeare helps them to identify ways to describe their emotions and feelings. They say they find studying Shakespeare therapeutic, they are not in a therapy session, but find it helpful to study Shakespeare and the art of acting.

(Milio, 2023)

Milio personally gravitated towards SAA because of the access it provided to acting, and especially Shakespeare which he especially loves and identifies with.

For both Milio and Geisler, it was the first time they had acted on stage in the UK, as both are Americans based in New York. Milio is a veteran and Geisler is a civilian. Both have experience acting Shakespeare in the US, having taken part in a production of *As You Like It* for Military Resilience Foundation (MRF) in New York in 2022. MRF is a partner organisation in the New York-based Public Theatre's Public Works Community Ensemble. Both Milio and Geisler therefore had links with community theatre and Shakespeare before their work with SAA and Shakespeare's Globe in 2023.

The couple became involved with SAA's international hub during the Covid-19 lockdowns. 'SAA was providing acting and other classes via Zoom to reach beyond the UK at a time when such classes were very much needed' (Milio, 2023). However, to act in person at Shakespeare's Globe – the couple spent over a month in London to do so - was revelatory, as it tapped both into the couple's love of Shakespeare and Milio's military connections. 'When we walked into the Globe on our first day, we both started to cry as we talked about the overwhelming joy to be in that space' Milio told me. 'I said to Julie, "over fifty years ago, I was in a war. That's what qualifies us to be here today"' (2023). Geisler called it 'mind-blowing' to act at Shakespeare's Globe, as 'such gravitas, history and significance was truly incredible' (Geisler, 2023). Milio's observations about the theatrical experience echo what many other veterans have told me. He found immense

value in working with fellow veterans, appreciating the 'distinctly exceptional relationship' that SAA members have that seemed to him to be innate. 'Military personnel are trained to have each other's back, it becomes instinctual' (2023). Milio also spoke about the pride of having served his country, and how this related to his theatrical work. '[Fellow soldiers] are prepared to give their lives for their mates, so I felt safe and trust in their presence. Trust is so important in theatre as it is in combat' (2023). That trust enabled Milio to take what he called the risk of stretching his talent. He also found it easy to work with the rotating group of SAA actors, because as in the military, 'troops come and go, and we rely on each other to learn the ropes as tours end and another soldier's tour begins' (2023). SAA thus offers a military-type experience in civilian life.

Working with theatre professionals was a positive experience for Milio and Geisler. Voice coach Tess Dignan was particularly praised for what Geisler called insightful and transformative coaching (Geisler, 2023). Milio and Geisler also told me about how, when they dropped a line in their speaking parts, the professional actors were supportive and reassuring. This assisted in building and reinforcing confidence. Both also enjoyed, and learned from, the international diversity of the veterans from the UK, the US and one each from Canada and Israel who took part. Geisler, as a civilian partner of a veteran, said she learned how many of the experiences and perspectives of military personnel cut across geography, and that she personally 'grew in my awareness and sensitivity to issues we all face' (2023). This shared experience, which although it owed more to the theatrical process than to the content of the Shakespeare play performed, reinforced how applied work can be conducive to understanding and overcoming challenges faced by veterans and their partners in a civilian world, even when the veteran left the military many decades ago. This is entirely in keeping with the ethos of SAA, without whom Milio acknowledges that he and Geisler would probably never have had the chance to act on stage at Shakespeare's Globe (2023).

Other veterans who took part found the experience to be beneficial. Canadian veteran Andrea Greening called it 'transformational' (Greening, 2023). Jen Aviv, formerly of the Israeli army, said that her involvement with *The Winter's Tale* happened at a time when her acting career was 'at a dead end' but that this opportunity provided by SAA led to her performing at the Cambridge Shakespeare Festival in 2023. The boost to her confidence was significant, and

she said that 'I now truly know I'm capable of carrying a full professional production. It is important that we are seen as artists, performers, actors and not solely as a charity case' (Aviv, 2023). Colin Paterson, a Chelsea Pensioner and padre for the Scots Guards Association for London and Bucks, Berks and Oxfordshire, had a small speaking part and said that his experience at Shakespeare's Globe was 'definitely one of my lifetime achievements to treasure' (Paterson, 2023).

Like Paterson, Milio and Geisler also had an enhanced experience to that of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* veterans because they had speaking parts. In assigning to the veterans small speaking roles on stage, there has clearly been a positive shift, if only minor, in Shakespeare's Globe's confidence in working with veterans in *The Winter's Tale* when compared to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Overall, the adaptability of Shakespeare is at the core of the success achieved by SAA's collaboration with the 'big stage' of Shakespeare's Globe. The fusion of professional and amateur, from sight-reading rehearsals in a veterans' community centre to acting on a world-renowned stage, represents a quantum leap for both the veterans and the concept of applied Shakespeare. I have noted in elsewhere in my thesis that veterans who are involved with Shakespeare as a form of therapy often neither know nor care about putting a label on what they do. Speaking about his theatrical involvement with veterans, Leonard agrees. 'I'm not even sure what applied theatre is, we just want people to claim ownership of Shakespeare. He has durability, and because he is about universal human truths, anyone can graft their experiences onto Shakespeare and re-shape his work' (Leonard, 2021). This latter is exactly what the veterans do when they bring their military experience and ethos to their on-stage work.

I have chosen to focus largely on Milio and Geisler in my analysis of *The Winter's Tale* partly because of their enhanced roles in the production and additionally because they are an example of SAA's ability, as part of its international hub, to include veterans who do not live in the UK in its projects. Milio and Geisler's experiences at Shakespeare's Globe were positive for them, but they did also highlight the wider issue of 'professionals' and 'amateurs' in theatre, which can be a potential cause of discontent for some veterans (as seen above with VET-GLOBE/1). It also must be acknowledged that Milio and Geisler

were able to afford both time and the resources to enable them to fulfil the chance to act at Shakespeare's Globe.

As with all the other SAA veterans, both Milio and Geisler were officially classed as volunteer community cast members rather than employees of Shakespeare's Globe. This meant that as Americans, they only required a tourist visa to be in the UK as their participation in the production was not officially classed as work. Neither are Equity members, and nor did they need to be.<sup>89</sup> Milio and Geisler paid for their own flights, accommodation and related costs such as their visas. In common with the other SAA veterans, they received a small *per diem* from SAA to help with the costs of meals and local transportation and were not paid a fee for appearing on stage. This is in contrast to Faber's early determination to establish a more professional side to SAA. When working with CVP in 2015, Faber had insisted that *Twelfth Night* should be staged in London's West End. This, she said, meant that the cast could use this performing credit on their CVs to be accepted by Spotlight, an agency that connects performers with roles in theatre, television and film. Faber had also ensured that cast members were paid enough – she quoted that it needed to be a contract over £500 – to enable them to qualify for Equity membership (2021). The veterans who took part in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Winter's Tale*, as I have mentioned above, were not paid. VET-GLOBE/1 did see that as typifying the veterans' role as little more than set dressing, although they were keen to stress that pecuniary remuneration was not their motive to work with SAA and Shakespeare's Globe. They were, however, particularly disillusioned at what they saw as 'using veterans to get funding from the veterans' community' (2021).

Veterans performing on stage inevitably poses a problem of their well-being for SAA. Faber's previous production expertise had particularly identified the need for understudies, of which there were none in any CVP productions. Veterans with PTSD or re-adjustment issues can be mentally fragile, and Faber believed that having no understudies put immense and unwarranted pressure on the veterans (2021). Additionally, and to assist in attracting financial sponsorship for future productions, Faber considered it necessary to ensure that 'the show would go on' if any of the cast were unable to perform. Consequently *Richard III*,

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<sup>89</sup> Equity is the performing arts and entertainment trade union. There is no requirement to join Equity in order to perform professionally.

CVP's last production, included three understudies in its cast, and a professional director, Imogen Beech, rather than McLoughlin (who is credited in the play's programme as CVP's founding artistic director).

McLoughlin had cast veterans only in CVP productions because her view was that the troupe was formed to use Shakespeare therapeutically only for that demographic (McLoughlin, 2021). True to CVP's founding ethos, the cast of *Twelfth Night* – the first on which Faber and McLoughlin worked together - comprised only veterans, (many of whom had trod the boards for CVP previously), including Shaun Johnson (Malvolio), Peter Biggs (Sir Andrew Aguecheek), Cassidy Little (Sebastian) and Androcles Scicluna (Feste). Bringing theatrical professionals into the mix was another of early Faber's initiatives. The sustainability of an all-veterans' acting company as established by CVP had, from the beginning of SAA, seemed limited to Faber. In 2012, Faber had been asked to produce *The Two Worlds of Charlie F*, a play written by Owen Sheer based on veterans' experiences in the Afghanistan war. During the subsequent Canadian tour, Faber initiated a 'buddy system', whereby professional actors took on a mentor role for the actor-veterans. Faber recollects that 'an immense camaraderie grew up between the professional actors and the veterans because they had a lot in common' (Faber, 2021). This commonality included working together in small units, and said Faber, the buddying system allowed veterans to learn acting skills and techniques in a relaxed and informal manner (2021).

Having seen the success of the buddying system in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F*, Faber wanted to use professional actors alongside the veterans at SAA, partly to increase the range and scope of the company and partly because she hoped that civilians would be acting role models for the veterans. In particular, Faber believed it could, and did, assist with integrating veterans into wider society, which is part of SAA's remit to help the transition to a civilian world. This aim, while laudable and true to SAA's ethos, does require a delicate balance, as it could be counter-productive to the veterans' confidence and well-being if they felt they were being replaced by professional actors. It could also be potentially damaging if veterans gained the impression that their behaviour, including stories they shared with each other about combat, was being held up to scrutiny against civilians and found wanting.

Some veterans who had worked with McLoughlin at CVP disagree with using professional actors in SAA productions. VET-GLOBE/1 cited the instances of productions whose cast were not exclusively veterans, which in their opinion, was contrary to what the ethos of an organisation like SAA should be (2021). The casting for *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at Shakespeare's Globe, as mentioned above, particularly prompted questions from other veterans about how they actually work with the theatre, a concern perhaps exemplified by James's 'upstairs, downstairs' remark I have quoted above. Teddy Kiendl, who ran SAA workshops in 2022 and 2023, wanted his planned production of *Macbeth* to be cast entirely or mainly with veterans, but was disquieted that a proposal to stage it at Shakespeare's Globe would result in a largely civilian cast (Kiendl, 2022). Kiendl has specific views on how theatre marginalises veterans, about which I write more in Chapter Four, and was therefore particularly keen that productions should cast only veterans, or if that were not possible, to keep the use of professional actors to an absolute minimum.

In contrast with the experiences of Milio and Geisler mentioned above, it was also the opinion of VET-GLOBE/1 that some difficulties arise when working with professional actors. This, they said, happens when professionals 'were there to progress their own careers, which is different to the veterans' and that 'some actors caused drama, and that meant we weren't in a healthy space' (VET-GLOBE/1, 2021).<sup>90</sup> This latter comment in many ways encapsulates a viewpoint common to some veterans I have interviewed. While not being gratuitously selfish, it shows how they perceive a difference between progressing their careers and the 'drama' that their actions may cause in rehearsals and performances, to the same motivations and behaviour in professional actors. The reason for this stance is two-fold. Firstly, some veterans view Shakespeare and applied theatre primarily as therapy, with an additional benefit of providing post-service career training and prospects. Secondly, the veterans often have a proprietorial attitude towards military orientated organisations like CVP and SAA. Correspondingly, veterans may not always welcome 'outsiders' into their 'band of brothers' space, and especially when the possibility of civilian involvement is not made clear to them when they joined. VET-GLOBE/1's comment thus highlights

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<sup>90</sup> I am not citing below the exact date of the interview, because the veteran is concerned that this can be cross-matched to other, 'on-the-record', information and views they have shared with me.



possible negative repercussions for when Shakespeare (or any other form of theatre) is used for therapeutic reasons and may prevent some veterans from engaging fully in SAA's activities, or even from joining it initially.

Faber has a different stance, reiterating that the interaction between veterans and professional actors can assist the former in transitioning back to civilian life. Extreme behaviour caused or exacerbated by PTSD or general re-adjustment issues can be helped by what Faber called 'mimicking other people's behaviour when they are working closely together' (Faber, 2021). SAA's well-being officer Nick Shatford also found that the mix of professional actors and veterans made working on productions more harmonious, and that each group learned from the other (Shatford, 2023). The policy of working with professional actors follows from Faber's view above that the CVP model of using only veterans was not sustainable in the long-term. Shatford particularly thought that, although it happened rarely, CVP's lack of understudies caused problems when veterans had what he described as 'off-days coping with their [psychological] issues' (2023). These two diametrically opposing viewpoints of Faber and Shatford and some veterans highlight a fundamental problem about inclusivity in a group, and particularly one with therapeutic aims: should that group remain closed only to those who fit its subject criteria, such as veterans, or should it integrate other people into it for the intended mutual benefit of both? Encouraging, or indeed requiring, the veterans to work alongside professional actors, does allow those who wish to pursue a career in the performing arts to experience at first-hand the practices of those already doing so. Conversely, it is not necessarily therapeutic to those who are at the beginning of their journey to conquer their PTSD to risk feeling inexperienced and inadequate. Nor is it conducive to recovery to feel they are being marginalised or used as what has been described in a clearly pejorative way as 'set dressing'. However, the binary of 'either/or' in this situation is neat in theory, but does not necessarily work in practice, and is a complication which may dilute the therapeutic benefits intended by the applied Shakespeare offered by SAA et al.

VET-GLOBE/1 has recently stepped back from SAA and told me they did so because 'it [SAA] is losing its tether to what it originally was' (2021). Faber commented that some members inevitably part company because they gain a new confidence and independence and wish to branch out into other pursuits and

activities. An example of this is that two SAA veterans have since drawn on their military skills to be involved in professional Shakespeare productions in a non-acting capacity. Tip Cullen and Tom Leigh have both worked as military advisors in the arts industry. Cullen advised on details such as correct weapon-handling and marching for the RSC's 2019 production of the Thomas Otway Restoration play, *Venice Preserved*. Leigh offered similar skills and advice to the National Theatre's stage and film version of *Henry V* in 2022. 'When they step away from SAA, it can be a sign they are moving on' (Faber, 2021). This can take the form of independent theatrical projects, or, as Faber said, 'the acting they do with us can also be a springboard into another art form' (Faber, 2021). Dean Helliwell now does stand-up comedy for which he writes his own material, as well as acting, and commented that 'I'm doing this independently. SAA has given me healing, but that's part of a different story and then you move on' (Helliwell, 2023).

Conversely, some veterans gravitate to SAA after having pursued independent projects, attracted by a military ethos in a civilian world. Lee Wilkinson served in the Royal Anglian Regiment, Third Battalion, between 1971 and 1979, and joined SAA in 2018. When he left military service, he describes himself not as having PTSD but as struggling with the transition to civilian life; he commented that 'I don't think you ever completely become a civilian' (Wilkinson, 2021). Post-service life appeared to be a 'dead end'. Wilkinson had a post-service failed marriage and a family background, which like so many service personnel, included a troubled childhood.

Wilkinson was already a trained actor when he joined SAA, with experience of writing about, adapting and performing Shakespeare. He trained at the National Conservatory of Dramatic Art (NCDA) in Washington DC and RADA in the UK, specialising in Shakespeare at both. Part of SAA's appeal to Wilkinson was that it enabled him to continue to explore the possibilities that Shakespeare offers to veterans and in an environment where he works alongside them. In 2020, SAA provided Wilkinson with access to a media course for British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS). As part of the course, he was required to produce a short documentary, titled *Finding Will*, which was based on a play Wilkinson had written in 1999. The seventeen-minute-long piece was filmed at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in July 2021, and featured interviews with Faber and Shaun Johnson about the value of Shakespeare to veterans' mental well-

being. In it, Wilkinson reiterates many of the findings of my other research: principally, the unique mental conditioning a recruit receives and how this inculcation impacts on his or her post-service re-adjustment; and the value of dealing with trauma or disturbing experiences through the eyes of a Shakespearean character than directly. 'Dealing with your own PTSD is a stressful, emotional weight' said Wilkinson in the film. 'Dealing with that secondary to yourself through a Shakespearean character is far easier' (Wilkinson, 2021).

The documentary is not a paean to SAA, but there is a palpable sense of gratitude for what the organisation has offered Wilkinson. He has also been involved in marketing roles for SAA-sponsored productions, including *Army Girl*, *Spitfire: The Musical* and *Maddie*. SAA and Shakespeare have therefore been, for Wilkinson, valuable stepping-stones to other, more diverse theatrical projects. Although Wilkinson mentions the arts in general as being a valuable re-adjustment tool, it is the theatre – and particularly applied theatre and applied Shakespeare - that continues to inspire him most. In his blog, Wilkinson asks the question that is important for my focus on applied theatre and specifically on applied Shakespeare:

What's the role of theatre? To entertain? To inform? To inspire? [...] theatre, at least for me, has another role, possibly even responsibility and that is to keep the past alive and to represent our lives in full. [...] So is the role of theatre, to represent the human condition? Shakespeare is so successful and continues to be reinvented by every new generation of actors due to that fact, it speaks to the human condition. 'As 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure' (*Hamlet*, 3.2.20-22).

(Wilkinson, 2021)

Wilkinson's hope is that Shakespeare is made more accessible to veterans, and that through Shakespeare's words they can find it easier to say not just that they need help but that the creative arts are a great way to find it (Wilkinson, 2021). Shakespeare's words and characters may well provide, as they have done for Wilkinson, the distant-yet-familiar resource with which veterans can better articulate those needs.

## Shakespeare's Soldiers

Aside from stage productions, SAA has used applied Shakespeare as a dual purpose well-being tool for veterans and a transformative gateway for young people. Shakespeare's Soldiers was an outreach programme designed to pair troubled veterans with troubled children. The project was initiated in 2015 by Faber, and followed on from Bravo 22, a veterans' group which went into schools to talk about military life and in particular, injuries they had sustained. The intention of Shakespeare's Soldiers was initially to introduce inner city children from London to a literary and theatrical world they either may not have encountered before, or one about which there was a perception they would have no interest in. The first school chosen was in Bethnal Green, in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, which was then ranked as the sixth most deprived local authority in England.<sup>91</sup> Passages from Shakespeare were chosen that did not relate to war and combat, and so 'would not trigger the veterans' (Faber, 2022). They were selected by McLoughlin, with whom Faber was then working.

Veteran Shaun Johnson, about whom I write in Chapter One, took part in the Shakespeare's Soldiers project. He recounts that the first question the veterans were asked was whether they had killed anybody (Johnson, 2021a). From that unpromising beginning, which could have triggered psychological distress in the veterans, the children watched the veterans perform sections of *Twelfth Night*, including Malvolio's speeches and the cruel letter he received ostensibly from Olivia. After the performance, the children were encouraged to talk about what they had seen and how it could relate to their life experiences. A second Shakespeare's Soldiers project used the character and speeches of Banquo to talk about *Macbeth* to another east London school, in Hackney. Faber then expanded the project to a private school whose pupils were predominantly 'army brats' (children whose parent or parents serve in the armed forces). According to Faber, these children were troubled in a different way. They were worried about their parents being maimed or killed in action and used the

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<sup>91</sup> LSOAs are small geographical areas used for statistical purposes and in Tower Hamlets, they typically cover a population of between 1,000-3,000. According to 2015 statistics, 'deprivation is widespread in Tower Hamlets: three quarters of the borough's LSOAs are in the most deprived 30 per cent of LSOAs in England on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015; more than half (58% per cent) are in the most deprived 20 per cent of LSOAs nationally; one quarter (24 per cent) of Tower Hamlets LSOAs are highly deprived and are in the ten per cent most deprived in England' ([www.towerhamlets.gov.uk](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk)).

veterans vicariously to ask such questions as ‘how did you lose your leg?’ and more importantly, to process the answers they were then given (Faber, 2022).

A female veteran who participated in the project said that the experience of working with Shakespeare’s Soldiers boosted her confidence and ‘allowed me to feel good about myself again’ (VET-FEM/1, 2022).<sup>92</sup> VET-FEM/1 had been medically discharged from the armed forces with physical symptoms which she said could have been a response to shock and stress. She explained how her role in Shakespeare’s Soldiers included taking the lead in workshops by running through the synopsis of the plays used, and then to ‘walk and talk’ through the plot and characters with the children. ‘The children were not overly engaged in the beginning, but that quickly changed’ (2022). For VET-FEM/1 the process was empowering both for herself and the children. ‘In the schools in deprived areas, the kids had a lack of confidence. That resonated with me because I also lacked self-worth’ (2022).

VET-FEM/1 spoke of feeling powerless in the military, and that SAA provided her with a safe, collaborative space to use her transferable skills and to explore the creative side of herself. ‘You bring something to the organisation [SAA] and it brings something to you. Some charities offer only a snapshot of working with the arts - one week-stuff. With SAA you can stay as long as you wish to’ (2022). Shakespeare, it would seem, was largely incidental to the value gained by FEM-VET/1. The process of applied theatre, and working with children, who like her, lacked self-belief, principally formed the therapeutic element of the Shakespeare Soldiers exercise.

Faber would like to resurrect the Shakespeare’s Soldiers programme but lacks funding. It is wrong to take one outreach programme and make extravagant claims that Shakespeare is capable of conquering all in socially deprived areas, or of alleviating the natural anxiety felt by children whose parents have dangerous occupations. What can be extrapolated from it is that the veterans figuratively spoke the children’s language, and in so doing it opened the very different world of Shakespeare’s language – and work - to them for transformative purposes.

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<sup>92</sup> VET-FEM/1 agreed that I could include her gender but not her name. She agreed I could write about her experience of participating in Shakespeare’s Soldiers but did not want the schools in which she worked mentioned, nor the Shakespeare plays that were used in the sessions.

## Conclusion

In the US, there have been academic studies carried out over several years by Alisha Ali and Stephan Wolfert about how DE-CRUIT helps veterans to process their trauma through Shakespeare (since 2016 and on-going). My qualitative research attempts to address the gap in similar studies in the UK. The responses I have been given to interviews with veterans and key personnel within SAA have been most often provided by those who have engaged successfully with what SAA has to offer - a safe, supportive environment where the unique experiences and capabilities of veterans are understood, and a replication of the military 'band of brothers' family. SAA's successes, including VET-FEM/1 do, however, mean that veterans sometimes want to move on, a testimony to how some veterans acquire post-trauma growth and self-confidence from working with their military family again. This latter applies to many of the veterans I have interviewed, including Shaun Johnson, Dean Helliwell and Neil Davies.

As with all families, however, some members leave because of disagreements. Those for whom the arts or the SAA model do not work as a therapeutic (or practical) tool tend to drift away without necessarily leaving feedback as to why (Faber, 2021). However, even veterans who have criticisms of SAA, such as GLOBE-VET/1, may be measured as a partial success for SAA, because they have often gained theatrical knowledge and experience, as well as self-confidence, from their involvement with the organisation. It is perhaps significant that some who have voiced criticisms to me wish those comments to be included only when attributed to their pseudonyms. This is because they are essentially loyal to the SAA ethos and what the organisation has afforded them in terms of help and opportunities.

SAA is a unique veterans' organisation in the UK. Its objective is to nurture veterans sufficiently so that they can gain self-belief, confidence and acting skills to perform plays on a public stage. SAA recognises the importance of building such confidence, using the way in which the camaraderie of military service can be replicated by veterans working together, and how skills gained in the armed forces have invaluable similarities with theatrical work. Where SAA differs markedly from its predecessor CVP, is that it goes beyond the first stages of healing and recovery, by offering on-going training and support for veterans who wish to make a post-military, professional career in the theatre or the arts in

general. SAA has also developed a more robust model from the ad hoc approach of CVP which meant it had no permanent base, nor a formal way in which the veterans could be together other than at play rehearsals and performances. SAA has developed from amateur roots to be transformative for veterans by offering to them a mixture of military understanding and camaraderie allied to the theatrical and artistic skills afforded by the professional nature of its programmes and personnel. Although as an organisation it is not exclusively Shakespeare-oriented, I offer this case study of SAA as an example of a veterans' group that can be both therapeutic initially and beyond, and a stepping-stone to sustained post-trauma growth and arts-based career opportunities to veterans with PTSD or post-military readjustment issues.

## Chapter Three: The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans

‘Speak what we feel and not what we ought to say’

*King Lear*

5.3.323 (1997: 2553)

This case study examines the work of DE-CRUIT, which is, to my knowledge, the first structured programme in the US to use Shakespeare combined with veterans’ own personal monologues and mimesis as a resource for veterans with PTSD or re-adjustment issues. DE-CRUIT’s approach draws on the principle of communalising trauma through the use of applied Shakespeare in dedicated workshops and has a more therapy-based approach than Soldiers’ Arts Academy (SAA) in Britain. DE-CRUIT takes its name from the observation of its founder, US army veteran Stephan Wolfert, that soldiers are recruited when they join the military, but are not ‘de-cruited’ when they leave it. By this, Wolfert means that men and women, highly trained in warfare and how to kill, are not in his experience and opinion, given any practical, emotional or psychological help to enable them to reintegrate into civilian society. They are, says Wolfert, wired for war, but not unwired from it, and nor are they re-wired for society and what comes after their service (*Cry Havoc!* 2015; 2021). Wolfert’s experience is not confined to the US military. Speaking on the Jeremy Vine Show on BBC Radio Two, British veteran Paul Minter said he was left to deal with his own well-being and trauma when he left the army, and that the armed forces are ‘very good at getting you conditioned to go to war, but not a lot at calming you down, or un-conditioning you afterwards’ (Minter, 2023).

What, in the military sense, constitutes wiring or conditioning? The two are interchangeable nouns and Wolfert defines wiring as follows:

It means the military rewires the central nervous system and creates automatic, mind–body responses to war stimuli. For example, outside the military, if you hear bullets flying over your head, you may instinctively duck and take cover, but that instinct is rewired in soldiers, so that we respond to it with violence instead. It’s all automatic — just like saluting without thinking. In basic training, they drill these automatic responses into us, but when we get out, we don’t have eight weeks of basic *untraining*. We don’t learn how to leave those responses behind.



It is significant that although Wolfert left the military in 1993, he still refers to soldiers – and himself – as ‘we’, indicative of the power and endurance of that initial wiring.

Wolfert’s personal circumstances and story are essential to comprehending why and how DE-CRUIT was established and the work it has done with veterans since. Wolfert joined the US army in 1986 on a twenty-year commission as an infantry officer with medical training. He had sustained a serious spinal injury in high school, which he feared would preclude him from joining the armed forces, and he made several attempts to enlist before finally being accepted when he was deemed to have made a full recovery. Wolfert experienced an abusive childhood and joined the military to escape his domestic circumstances and memories. In this, Wolfert is not alone. John Blosnich (2014) writes that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among US military personnel may have prompted many to make the decision to enlist. Concomitantly, people with a history and background of trauma are thus exposed to the possibility of sustaining other types associated with their service, such as combat PTSD and military sexual trauma. In several studies conducted by Alisha Ali and Stephan Wolfert, a significant finding was that a high proportion of veterans undertaking the DE-CRUIT programme identified their primary trauma as being non-military, and that these primary traumas ‘largely reflected factors that were *pivotal* [authors’ italics] in the participants’ decision to join the military’ (2018: 9).

Wolfert served in the US Army from 1986 to 1993, completing less than half of his commission. He poses the rhetorical question: ‘having worked so hard to get into the army, why did I then run away?’ (*Cry Havoc!* 2015). During a live-fire training exercise in 1991, Wolfert’s comrade, with whom he had served in the first Gulf War of 1990-91, was hit in the face by ammunition that pierced the armoured personnel carrier they were both in at the time. Wolfert, despite his medical training, could not save his friend. He explained, graphically, in his one-man show about PTSD and Shakespeare, *Cry Havoc!* that ‘I would not have been able to find his mouth to do CPR’, describing the wounded soldier’s head as resembling ‘an over-inflated water balloon covered in flesh and held together by

my hands' (*Cry Havoc!* 2015). Wolfert was severely traumatised both by the incident and having to return his friend's possessions to his family. Wolfert went absent without leave (AWOL) from the army, and by chance one evening he sought refuge in a Montana theatre that was showing a performance of *Richard III*. The identification with Shakespeare's Richard was immediate and an anagnorisis for Wolfert, who had no background nor prior interest in Shakespeare. 'I was transfixed' says Wolfert. 'There I sat in the audience, yet there I stood on stage' (2015). The high school injury enabled him to relate to Richard's disability because Wolfert's condition had also caused walking and postural difficulties, albeit temporary. 'Like me, he [Richard] was deformed, and like me, despite our deformities, joining the military and succeeding. And like me, finding that military service is now probably over. And like me, wondering what now?' (2015). Instead of Richard's statement 'I am I' (5.5.137: 590), Wolfert's question 'Who am I now?' found the answer in Shakespeare because the play encompassed 'hearing this poetry, having this rhythm in my body, seeing a veteran on stage' (2015).

Wolfert suffered from PTSD after the incident which caused him to go AWOL and was medically discharged from the military two years after it had happened. He then trained as an actor, graduating with a Master of Arts degree in fine arts from Trinity Rep Conservatory, Providence, Rhode Island in 2000. He was the only veteran in his class, and he responded differently to external stimuli such as loud noises; for example, a helicopter going over ahead triggered in him a violent response. Such responses characterised much of his behaviour. Wolfert described to me an incident when, long after he had left the military, he was catering for a children's Disney-themed party:

A little girl threw a cake at me, and my first impulse was to crush her skull. I went towards her, I didn't hit her, but I was horrified. I have choked people in my sleep and woken up not knowing if it were real.

(Wolfert, 2021)

Wolfert began to ask himself 'what the hell was wrong with me?' rather than, as he later learned to do, 'what the hell happened to me?' At that point he did not fully realise that he was suffering from PTSD (2015). He was, however, aware that his growing knowledge of Shakespeare taught him that there were parallels between his experiences as a soldier and those he found in

Shakespeare's characters. He said that 'I read though Shakespeare's works and I'm finding a veteran in every play, even the comedies, and they share the experiences of my brothers and sisters' (2015). In this context, Wolfert is not referring literally to his brothers and sisters, but to his military colleagues. My interviews with veterans who have worked on *Henry V* support the notion that the reference in the play by the king to his 'band of brothers' is also now seen to encompass female veterans and serving personnel. For greater clarity on inclusivity in DE-CRUIT sessions, Wolfert does, however, refer to participants as his brothers and sisters in arms and to any civilian observers and participants as brothers and sisters in healing.

Wolfert set up DE-CRUIT on an informal basis in 2003, in association with the Veterans' Centre for the Performing Arts (VCPA) in Los Angeles, as a different approach to the heavy reliance on pharmacological treatment for PTSD and the number of veterans for whom this treatment did not work (Veterans Affairs Committee, 2014; Ali and Wolfert, 2016: 58). The prevalent military ethos of 'manning up' and not showing weakness means that it is not acceptable to many veterans to admit to mental illness and therefore to seek treatment based on that premise (Ali and Wolfert, 2018: 345). DE-CRUIT's raison d'être was therefore, to be a theatre-based programme to help support combat veterans with PTSD and those who struggle to transition to civilian life. DE-CRUIT's approach differs from most dramatherapy or applied theatre for veterans in that it uses only Shakespeare, in combination with monologues personally written by the participating veterans, in its workshop sessions. 'Participants' writes Wolfert, 'have the opportunity to explore and perform Shakespeare's texts while acquiring classical actor training for life' (DE-CRUIT, 2015). Since 2014, DE-CRUIT has worked with academics at New York University, principally Alisha Ali, an associate professor in applied psychology who specialises in trauma, and educational psychologist Bruce Homer of City University of New York. This academic research on the DE-CRUIT programme is conducted through the Advocacy and Community-based Trauma Studies laboratory (which has the apposite acronym of ACTS), headed by Ali. This formal collaboration with academia is unique among veterans' organisations that purely use or have used Shakespeare, both in the US and the UK.

Ali and Homer do not have input into the Shakespeare material used in DE-CRUIT sessions but have access to workshops and DE-CRUIT's feedback on them. The psychologists also present in their published papers individual case studies of veterans who have participated in the DE-CRUIT programme. For DE-CRUIT, its partnership with the universities allows the organisation to incorporate in its literature and delivery the latest findings from psychotherapeutic research, including cognitive processing therapy (CPT) and narrative therapy (Ali and Wolfert, 2016: 60). CPT considers that PTSD sufferers experience negative emotions about the traumatic event, and then block these emotions as a protective mechanism (Resick, Monson and Chard, 2016). This prevents the processing of the traumatic experience, leading to 'stuck points' from which the sufferer struggles to emerge. Stuck points are defined as conflicting or strong negative beliefs that cause unpleasant emotions and/or problematic behaviour (DE-CRUIT, 2015). One phase of CPT treatment involves writing a detailed account of the sufferer's worst traumatic experience (Resick, Monson and Chard, 2008). CPT is recommended as a treatment for PTSD by the US Department of Veteran Affairs. Narrative therapy, developed in 1980 by Michael White and David Epston, views people's problems as external to themselves, thus there is no blame attached to the sufferer, who is also viewed as being the expert in their own trauma and life. Narrative therapy advocates the use of reflective writing to assist with processing trauma (White and Epston, 1990; Explore Your Mind, 2019; Ackerman, 2021).

### **Mimesis in DE-CRUIT's work**

The DE-CRUIT model is informed by Keith Oatley's work on the therapeutic value of mimesis as a form of simulation. Mimesis is the imitation and depiction of reality through the arts and particularly literature. Oatley attributes the term to Aristotle and says it has 'almost universally been taken to mean imitation or representation' (1999: 114). Ali and Wolfert work on Oatley's premise that mimesis is a psychological process of simulation (2019: 7). DE-CRUIT interprets mimesis as an approach that might allow them to 'use theatre to promote positive psychological change in therapy clients' (Ali and Wolfert, 2016: 60). DE-CRUIT works on the basis that, although written four hundred years ago, Shakespeare's plays can relate directly to experiences veterans have today. His characters

include soldiers, veterans and their families (such as Harry Hotspur, King Henry V, Iago, Coriolanus and Kate Percy), who experienced trauma, and this direct acknowledgment that similar trauma existed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a key stage in how the veterans will view the relevance and potential efficacy of applied Shakespeare when working on their own traumas (Ali and Wolfert, 2019: 7-8).

Oatley posits that Shakespeare's plays are simulations of how people interact with their own predicaments and that they then use those simulations to work through their own emotions and experiences (32). Oatley contends that this process makes clearer the deep structure of selfhood and social interaction (33). 'What is distinctive about Shakespeare' writes Oatley, 'is that he brought the idea of simulation to such perfection that it has never been bettered' (32). Oatley's model of simulation requires the audience member or reader to imagine themselves in the role of a fictional character, and then to reflect upon how they would think, feel or act if they were in that character's situation (Ali and Wolfert, 2019: 7). Ali and Wolfert describe DE-CRUIT's process of mimetic induction as immersing the veterans in the world of Shakespeare's verse as a simulation of their own world, and of the ways they can cope with the civilian world after leaving the military (8). Shakespeare's characters are not real.<sup>93</sup> Yet when I watch or read a play, I can share, relate to and empathise with, their life experiences compared to mine. They become the embodiment of my love, fear, grief, joy and all the thousand shocks that flesh is heir to. I thus undergo Oatley's model of simulation. As a theatrical exercise, Shakespeare is 'real' enough to facilitate an authentic expression of veterans' needs and experiences. A Shakespearean role provides a mask of character behind which the actor can hide; there is no risk of personal exposure in acting out the trauma experienced by characters like Hotspur, Hamlet or Macbeth.

DE-CRUIT's approach to using mimesis as a technique involves a group dynamic that replicates the combat unit veterans are familiar and comfortable with. The choice of Shakespeare as a medium through which the DE-CRUIT veterans find a safe place to explore and share their trauma owes something to

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<sup>93</sup> That is perhaps an obvious statement, but as a Master of Arts student, I had this fact gently pointed out to me by a professor who was alarmed at my propensity to consider Hamlet, Lear, Desdemona et al, as people who somehow could leap off the stage or page and share their problems and mine with me over a glass or two of wine.

Wolfert's seemingly laconic answer to the question why Shakespeare is 'why not? It worked for me' (in Howes, 2019). However, although Wolfert's experience is important, the rationale is more specific than his personal enlightenment in a Montana theatre. Wolfert explains:

Simply, Shakespeare demands the most of us and offers the most to us, as actors and humans. To perform Shakespeare demands the absolute depths of us physically, vocally, psychologically and emotionally. In return, while performing Shakespeare, we are given language that accesses and expresses the very depths of our physical, vocal, psychological and emotional being.

(DE-CRUIT, 2015)

As I point out in my literature review section on applied theatre and applied Shakespeare, there is an aesthetic, temporal and historical distance between the DE-CRUIT veterans and the Shakespearean material they use and particularly in the language, which, while recognisably English, is linguistically removed from their everyday speech. This dual sense of familiarity and detachment initially aids trauma management by keeping the veterans a step removed from their own experiences when they are verbalising and sharing them. Ali and Wolfert show that, as veterans progress through the sessions, the mimetic and heuristic process enables them to use less literal language with which to write their own monologues (2019: 10). As they become more familiar with Shakespearean imagery, they begin to use more subtle and imaginative language to express their own thoughts. 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say' (*King Lear*, 5.3.323: 2553), is a quotation that Wolfert uses frequently in workshop sessions (see below). Wolfert's view is that there was a rigid social structure in Elizabethan and Jacobean society (as many, including Teddy Kiendl, whom I quote on the subject in Chapter Four, would agree still exists), and that that is analogous with the military hierarchy; this serves vicariously to reinforce the veterans' identification with military characters and plotlines (7). Wolfert describes Kate Percy's speech to her husband Hotspur in *I Henry IV*, (2.4.31-58: 1176-7) as 'the best description of post-traumatic stress disorder in the English language, and it was written four hundred years ago' (2017). The experiences that Shakespeare depicts for his military characters and their families therefore appear to have a recognisable and fundamental parallel with those of twenty-first century veterans.

DE-CRUIT is not unique in recognising that, for veterans, perceived timelessness can be key. Greek tragedy has also been used by some theatre practitioners to heal psychological trauma, such as combat PTSD.<sup>94</sup> Wolfert believes however, that both in comparison and efficacy, Shakespeare is more suitable than Greek tragedy for several reasons. Firstly, he says that Shakespeare's England had more in common with the US than did ancient Greece, partly because there was no compulsory military service in the former and that armies were drawn from lower social strata in both Elizabethan England and the modern US (Ali and Wolfert, 2018: 262). Secondly, Wolfert cites the Great Chain of Being, the belief prevalent in the early modern period that a social order was created for mankind by God, as corresponding to the 'rigid, rank-based structure of the military world' (Ali and Wolfert, 2019: 7).<sup>95</sup> Thirdly, Ali and Wolfert posit that Shakespeare is more understandable to the DE-CRUIT veterans because they study Shakespeare's plays in his own, original words as opposed to being translated from another language, such as would be necessary from ancient Greek, for example (Ali and Wolfert, 2018: 262).<sup>96</sup> Fourthly, Ali and Wolfert believe there is an immediacy to Shakespeare's characters which is not delivered or interpreted via the Chorus in Greek tragedy (Ali and Wolfert, 2018: 262).

Unlike the approach taken by Doerries, DE-CRUIT works on the principle that veterans participate in workshops rather than just listening to a lecture. Although DE-CRUIT sessions do not lead to the participants staging a public production, Wolfert commented that 'Shakespeare in performance dissolves the barrier between actor and audience' (2021). Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, veterans typically attended eight weekly sessions held in various towns and cities

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<sup>94</sup> Bryan Doerries, artistic director of the US-based Theatre of War Productions, tours US military bases with his adaptation of Sophocles' play *Ajax*. He tells veterans that 'PTSD is from BC' (Before Christ) and that if it can happen to a valiant warrior like Ajax, it can happen to them. Doerries ends his readings by reiterating that 'if you're feeling these things, you're not alone. Not only are you not alone in this room, you're also not alone across time' (2015: online). The 2009 play *Nobody's Home*, co-written by Ailin Conant and Will Pinchin, is a modern re-telling of Homer's *The Odyssey*, and focuses on one soldier's struggle with PTSD after serving three tours of Afghanistan (2010, online). Jonathan Shay, a psychologist who works with Vietnam veterans, finds a comparison with Odysseus in relation to American soldiers coming home from deployment with psychological injuries (2002: 246).

<sup>95</sup> The Great Chain of Being includes the concept of the Divine Right of Kings. This latter was a doctrine that espoused the belief that a monarch was divinely appointed by God and was therefore not accountable to any earthly authority. God was therefore considered to be at the top of the Great Chain of Being. It is easy to see how Wolfert makes a comparison between this type of social hierarchy with that present in the military.

<sup>96</sup> In Chapter Four: "Improvise, Adapt and Overcome": producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes', I examine how Ukrainian veterans learned English as a prerequisite to performing their version of *Twelfth Night*, and the differences this made to their interpretation of Shakespeare.

across the US. In 2018, DE-CRUIT partnered with Amphibian Stage to deliver face to face sessions in Fort Worth, Texas, after Amphibian hosted a performance of *Cry Havoc!* Amphibian Stage is a theatre company whose mission statement states that it 'passionately uses theatre to foster empathy, motivate thoughtful conversation and connect each of us to our own creative imaginations' (2021). Amphibian's role with DE-CRUIT was to organise workshops, choosing dates and planning and implementing marketing. It also recruited participants and coordinated the data collection for New York University. Project coordinator Ayesha Ganguly describes this outreach programme as applied theatre and art therapy, which corresponds to Wolfert's own description of DE-CRUIT's work. Wolfert said that 'it is theatre. Psychodrama is the worst brand name ever' (DE-CRUIT session, 7 October 2021). Ganguly sees Amphibian's continuing role as one of facilitating partnerships with relevant local organisations so that the DE-CRUIT programme can become even more widely available to veterans across the US (2021). Amphibian collaborated with DE-CRUIT during the pandemic by facilitating an online version of the programme. During Covid-19 restrictions, DE-CRUIT workshops were shortened to six sessions and held online via a Zoom link, which enabled veterans to participate together but from different locations. Sessions are now taking place again on a face-to-face basis.

Briefly, the DE-CRUIT programme has the following *modus operandi*, which is explained in DE-CRUIT's literature provided to veterans for both face-to-face and online sessions (DE-CRUIT, 2015) and which I will describe below as part of my observations on the online workshops. Participating groups consist of three to twelve veterans of both sexes. Ages vary, as do their branches of service and areas of deployment. Serving personnel may also undertake the programme, and some do so as a prelude to leaving military service. In face-to-face groups, veterans sit in a circle; online sessions encourage a reaching out of hands towards the screens of the other participants. Each session begins with a 'check-in' to enable participants to ground themselves and be in the moment as is required for acting. Veterans are encouraged to begin the process of self-expression in the first person; being able to say, 'I feel' and to use words which express feelings and emotions is a vital skill for performing Shakespeare, according to Wolfert (DE-CRUIT, 2015; 2021). Sessions end with the 'reinforcement', whereby veterans are asked to describe a feeling or discovery



they have taken from the session. This allows both closure of the session and for the veterans to leave their character behind after rehearsal, a skill that can also be used to leave behind upsetting moments or emotions experienced in everyday life. Both the check-in and the reinforcement techniques have been adapted from those used by Shakespeare & Company, a Massachusetts-based organisation that produces and performs Shakespeare plays and other works and offers an educational programme and professional actor training.

When check-in has been completed, Wolfert begins the first in-person session by showing his one-man, autobiographical production, *Cry Havoc*, (online groups are provided with a link to the production to watch either before or after the session). In *Cry Havoc!*, Wolfert intersperses Shakespearean monologues and dialogues with his memories and experience of service, much of it trauma related.<sup>97</sup> The first two workshop sessions work on common symptoms of PTSD, such as nightmares, flashbacks and hypervigilance (Ali and Wolfert, 2016: 62). Participants then move on to read and closely analyse Shakespeare's representations of war-related trauma in selected monologues, soliloquies and characters, in addition to writing their own monologues which describe their personal experiences of trauma. This dual combination takes as its ethos Oatley's work on the benefits of simulated narration together with his citing of Shakespeare's plays as having the effect of acting as simulations of human actions so that 'the deep structure of selfhood' could emerge (2011: 32). The writing of a personal monologue also corresponds to the therapeutic element inherent in both cognitive processing therapy and narrative therapy.

Ali uses DE-CRUIT veterans' written monologues as sources of research data. For example, an analysis of these monologues has revealed experiences and traumas common to veterans who have served in different conflicts and who are of different generations (Ali and Wolfert, 2018: 345). This enables an ability to tailor future DE-CRUIT programmes and validates the use of the arts as an

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<sup>97</sup> In order of appearance in *Cry Havoc!*, the Shakespearean passages are: 'Now is the winter of our discontent' from *Richard III* (1.1.30: 516); 'So fair and foul a day I have not seen' from *Macbeth* (1.3.36: 2567); 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more' from *Henry V* (1.3.5-7 & 34: 1476-7); 'Till he unseamed him from the navel to the chops' from *Macbeth* (1.2.22: 2565); 'The gates of mercy shall be all shut up' from *Henry V* (3.3.87-92: 1480); 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers' from *Henry V* (4.3.60-2: 1500); 'Thou art the ruins of the noblest man' and 'Cry "havoc" and let slip the dogs of war' from *Julius Caesar*, (3.1.259-60 & 276-8: 1563); 'He proved best man in the field' from *Coriolanus* (2.2.94-118: 2819-20); 'Hail Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds', 'O sacred receptacle of my joys' and 'In peace and honour rest you here, my sons' from *Titus Andronicus* (1.1.70, 1.1.92 & 1.1.150: 382-3); 'Honour pricks me on' from *I Henry IV* (5.1.129-138: 1213-4).

efficacious treatment approach for veterans and other traumatised groups. It also means that data may be presented to a wider research community and Governmental organisations responsible for the welfare of veterans (Ali and Wolfert, 2019: 10). There is, to date, no other comparative academic research which has studied this method of combining veterans' own narratives with those of Shakespeare.

The final weeks of the programme consist of participants being taught breathing techniques which will enable them to speak both Shakespeare's verse and their own monologues, when they share them with the rest of the group. These techniques use skills that Wolfert learned in drama school when training to be an actor and are based principally on the rhythm of iambic pentameter. Breathing is also crucial to the DE-CRUIT 'unwiring' process. It is explained, or perhaps reiterated describes it better in the context of veterans, that the military uses breath control to enable a soldier to steady the shot he or she is about to take. The British Army also teaches the importance of breath control before soldiers fire a gun. In a 2023 BBC documentary series, *Soldier*, an infantry recruit, Private Owen South, emphasised the importance of relaxation before firing the General Purpose Machine Gun (GPMG), saying that for maximum accuracy, the body must be relaxed, so 'let your body loose and then your breathing, slow it and control it [...] then choose a moment in your breathing cycle [to fire]' (*Soldier*, 2023). DE-CRUIT uses an approach to breathing that is designed to 'untrain' this type of military wiring. The DE-CRUIT process focuses on a technique called square or box breathing, whereby the participant breaths in deeply for five heartbeats, holds the breath for five heartbeats, exhales for five heartbeats and remains empty for five heartbeats. The process is then repeated for three to five cycles. The participant is encouraged to 'be in the moment' while carrying out box breathing and to relax the body rather than stand in a typical military posture. When the veteran reads a Shakespearean monologue, they are encouraged to use the DE-CRUIT technique and breathe in before each new line of verse. For this reason, Wolfert encourages any veteran who chooses Hamlet's speech on his disillusionment with life (2.2.287-298) to deliver the words as verse rather than prose, to facilitate this method of breathing.

The choice of Shakespearean passages is based on an algorithm developed over many years by Wolfert (Ali and Wolfert, 2016, 2018; Wolfert,

2021). Each one has been chosen to match the veteran's personal experience of combat and trauma. Guilt over killing equates to Richard's nightmare soliloquy in *Richard III* (5.5.131-160: 590-1); disillusionment with the military is represented by Falstaff's speech on honour in *I Henry IV* (5.1.127-139: 1213-4); and military camaraderie as expressed in *Henry V* (4.3.18-67: 1499-1500). DE-CRUIT uses twenty-two Shakespearean passages and the number chosen reflects 'the twenty-two American veterans per day who end their pain through suicide' (Wolfert, 2021). Veterans write about an incident that most affected them, and by referring to a list of thoughts and feelings given to them, they select which they most experience when they recall the traumatic incident. They then choose from the twenty-two passages the one with which they most identify. Some passages have been edited by Wolfert – the Kate Percy speech from *I Henry IV* has, for example, been shortened - and most are written in iambic pentameter, which Wolfert calls akin to the rhythm of the human heartbeat.

Choice and therefore 'ownership' of the passages as part of the mimesis process is rooted in the DE-CRUIT model. Veterans are not required to source their own material from Shakespeare, although they would not be discouraged from doing so if they wished. The intention of the algorithm is to offer guidance, which is neither surprising nor authoritarian, given that many of the participants have never encountered Shakespeare before, or have done so only briefly. Wolfert eschews what he calls the 'casting' approach, whereby the monologues are assigned without choice. This reflects Wolfert's belief that only the veteran can fully know what he or she has experienced and so is the person best able to identify the Shakespearean piece they most closely identify with (this follows the classic narrative therapy approach). The list is as follows:

<p><i>Sonnet 35:</i> 'No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done' (1934-5)</p>	<p><u>Shame or guilt</u></p>
<p><i>I Henry IV: 2.4.31-58 (1176-7)</i> 'O, my good lord, why are you thus alone'</p>	<p><u>Insomnia</u> <i>Wolfert lists only insomnia for the purposes of the DE-CRUIT session, but Kate Percy's speech also</i></p>

	<i>encompasses, from the point of view of both the veteran sufferer and his or her spouse, issues such as depression, irritability, hypervigilance, sexual dysfunction, difficulty concentrating and many other symptoms of combat PTSD.</i>
<i>Hamlet: 2.2. 287-298 (1697)</i> 'I have of late - wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth'	<u>Depression and disillusionment with life</u>
<i>Julius Caesar: 3.1 257-278 (1563)</i> 'O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth'	<u>Rage from the loss of someone close</u>
<i>Richard II: 5.5.1-41 (1008-9)</i> 'I have been studying how I may compare'	<u>Feeling imprisoned or isolated</u>
<i>Coriolanus: 1.1.156-173 (2796-7)</i> 'He that will give good words to thee will flatter'	<u>Rage</u>
<i>Coriolanus: 3.3.124-139 (2841)</i> 'You common cry of curs! Whose breath I hate'	<u>Rage</u>
<i>Macbeth: 5.5.16-27 (2613)</i> 'She should have died hereafter'	<u>Grief from the loss of a comrade or someone close</u> <i>Wolfert indicates that the pronouns may be changed to reflect personal experience.</i>
<i>Hamlet: 3.3.36-53 &amp; 64-72 (1718)</i> 'O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven'	<u>Paralysed by guilt and/or guilt from killing</u>
<i>Macbeth: 5.1.30-34,36-38,42-43,52-54 &amp; 56-58 (2609)</i>	<u>Intrusive thoughts</u>

<p>'Out, damned spot! Out I say'</p>	
<p><i>Richard III</i> 5.5.132-160 (590-1)  'Have mercy, Jesu! – Soft! I did but dream'</p>	<p><u>Nightmares. Guilt from killing or harming</u>  <i>Wolfert indicates that in the last line – 'To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard', the veteran may, if they wish, replace his or her own name to personalise the soliloquy.</i></p>
<p><i>Richard II:</i> 5.5.41-66 (1009)  'Music do I hear?'</p>	<p><u>Feeling that I wasted my life</u></p>
<p><i>I Henry IV:</i> 5.1.129-139 (1213-4)  'Yea, honour pricks me on'  (1934-5)</p>	<p><u>Disillusionment with military service or honour</u></p>
<p><i>Richard II:</i> 3.2.4-26 (981-2)  'I weep for joy/To stand upon my kingdom once again'</p>	<p><u>Mixed emotions of 'home'</u></p>
<p><i>Hamlet:</i> 4.4.9.22-9.56 (Q2) (1729)  'How all occasions do inform against me'</p>	<p><u>Paralysis from fear</u>  <i>This passage is often cited as being indicative of Hamlet's growing disgust at his weakness and vacillation. My interpretation of Wolfert's usage is that he shows here in his symptom classification how a veteran may read it differently, in that PTSD can cause paralysis through fear, hence rendering the sufferer incapable of acting.</i></p>
<p><i>Henry V:</i> 3.3.80-120 (1480-1)  'To our best mercy give yourselves'</p>	<p><u>Need for vengeance</u></p>
<p><i>As You Like It:</i> 2.7.138-165 (1622-3)  'All the world's a stage'</p>	<p><u>Disillusionment with life or difficulty with ageing</u>  <i>Wolfert edits this piece to place the section referring to a soldier in bold.</i></p>

<p><i>Henry V</i>: 3.1.1-34 (1476-7)</p> <p>'Once more unto the breach, dear friends once more'</p>	<p><u>Missing the rush of combat and military life</u></p>
<p><i>Henry V</i>: 4.3.21-65 (1499-1500)</p> <p>'If we are mark'd to die, we are enough'</p>	<p><u>Missing military camaraderie</u></p>
<p><i>Titus Andronicus</i>: 1.1.70,81-84,89-95,150-156 (381-2,383)</p> <p>'Hail, Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!'</p>	<p><u>Survivor's guilt/carrying the memory</u></p> <p><i>Wolfert edits this piece to include the words daughters and sisters, to follow sons and brothers, respectively.</i></p>
<p><i>Macbeth</i>: 5.5.9-15 (2613)</p> <p>'I have almost forgot the taste of fears'</p> <p><i>Richard III</i>: 1.4.66-67 &amp; 68.1-4 (Folio: 534)*</p> <p>'I have done those things/Which now bear evidence against my soul'</p>	<p><u>Emotional numbness</u></p> <p><i>*Wolfert includes these lines from Clarence as indicating emotional numbness and suggests that the words 'wife and poor children' may be replaced by the veteran with the names of people he or she personally loves and protects. My interpretation is however, that Clarence's lines are more apposite for the feelings of guilt or shame.</i></p>
<p><i>Hamlet</i>: 3.1.58-72&amp; 79-87 (1705)</p> <p>'To be, or not to be, that is the question'</p>	<p><u>Suicidal thoughts</u></p>

Figure 2: List of Shakespearean passages supplied to the veterans at DE-CRUIT workshops

(DE-CRUIT, 2015).

The quintessence of the DE-CRUIT mimetic sessions is what Shay describes as communalising trauma (1994: 4). This is the sharing of the traumatic experience/s with others, to be able to relate what happened in a supportive environment and with the assurance that the traumatised person has not been left to cope alone. Vets & Friends, a US community-based support programme, promotes veteran healing and reintegration using a communalisation of trauma approach, and this can potentially offer resolutions to trauma and moral injury by

creating a safe environment for the restoration of trust and acceptance by community (Balmer, Sippola and Beehler, 2021: 2777). Conant says that myths and stories, including theatre, transmit human experiences so that trauma can be communalised as an essential step to recovery (2021). Shay points out that trauma, however caused, is likely to have longer lasting and more serious consequences for the sufferer if they are not permitted to communalise it (1994: 39). Judith Herman writes that the recovery process is based upon empowerment of the survivor and restoration of relationships and may be conceptualised in three stages: establishing safety, retelling the story of the traumatic event and reconnecting with others (1998: 3). Shay summarises what he refers to as the three stages of communalisation: firstly, that the trauma victim must be allowed to voice his or her experience; secondly, that listeners should believe and remember what has been shared with them; and thirdly, that those listeners should be permitted to repeat to others what they have learned (2002: 243). Shay says it is impossible to overstate the importance of the arts in providing a platform for the voice of the trauma victim to be heard and understood and that when the three stages are achieved, it is then, he argues, that the circle of communalisation is complete (2002: 244). It is, therefore, intentional that DE-CRUIT's in-person sessions require participants to sit in a circle as a physical representation of this bonding mechanism.

### **DE-CRUIT Shakespeare sessions**

I attended a three-week programme of six online workshops in September and October 2021. These sessions were delivered via Zoom, because of Covid-19 restrictions. I had contacted Wolfert and Ganguly prior to the sessions beginning to obtain approval and permission to observe the proceedings, which was freely given, as was individual permission from the participants. Although it is usually an inviolable rule of DE-CRUIT sessions that everything shared in them remains confidential and kept within the members of that group, I was granted permission to use material I obtained in the sessions in my thesis according to the ethics process set out in my methodology section. Wolfert is especially keen to promote healing through Shakespeare across international veteran communities. I was told beforehand that the veterans would want me to participate, albeit in a limited way, rather than just to observe the workshops; they would feel uncomfortable

and as if they were being 'spied upon' if I only did the latter. During the sessions, I did, however, only participate when invited to do so. This approach differed from that of the UK veterans' sessions I attended, where it was initially preferred that I should observe, and take notes only, until the participants grew to know me (and trust me) better over a short period of time. At the beginning of DE-CRUIT's session one, I introduced myself and assured the veterans they would be always pseudonymised in my writing. I asked (as I did before every subsequent session) if any of them objected to my presence. None did; some of the veterans said they were pleased and positive about anything that would raise awareness about combat PTSD and what they have experienced.

Each session lasted for an hour and a half and was led by Wolfert. Sessions began at 18.30-20.00, Central Standard Time (12.30-02.00, British Summer Time). Seven veterans attended: three females and four males. Participants had already been supplied, via email, with handout sheets appertaining to the first five scheduled sessions; the sixth one was a recap session, at which guests, who would act as supporters for the veterans, were also invited to attend and watch the veterans deliver their monologues. The handout sheets cover topics such as what is PTSD; the effect of trauma on the brain's limbic system; why Shakespeare can help with symptom management; breathing techniques used in both the military and in the theatre; and the twenty-two Shakespearean monologues which, as I explain above, have been chosen to reflect a specific symptom of PTSD or readjustment from the military to a civilian life. Wolfert always refers to monologues or passages, rather than soliloquies; I shall therefore do the same. I describe the sessions below from my notes taken at the time.

The sessions largely followed the *modus operandi* I have described above. Session One began with Wolfert telling the veterans that it was to be a 'shame-free, apology-free zone'. Participants were asked to check-in by grounding their bodies; this they did by putting their feet on the floor, either from a standing or sitting position, and touching their faces or any other parts of their bodies that were tense or painful. The aim was to facilitate self-awareness and to reinforce that it is not shameful or unusual to feel physical manifestations of psychological trauma. Wolfert believes that trauma, howsoever caused, produces long-lasting effects on the brain and body of the traumatised person. He draws extensively on



the work on Bessel van der Kolk in this approach. Van der Kolk writes that abuse and violence activate a hyperactive alarm system which keeps the body in a fight/flight or freeze mode, and that trauma interferes with the circuitry of the brain which involve focusing and being able to stay in emotional control. Van der Kolk advocates a range of therapeutic intervention, including applied theatre, to facilitate healing (2014, online).

## **Session One**

These 'check-ins' happened at the start of every session and were part of what Wolfert called 'treating your body and yourself with kindness and compassion'. Wolfert then asked them to create a virtual circle of 'buddy' awareness; he likened this to the military circle of awareness under fire and said that the veterans need to re-wire and re-direct that process in a non-combative setting. When this process was completed, the veterans were asked to introduce themselves and briefly give a summary of their military service and deployments. All participants in these sessions except Wolfert (and later, his wife Dawn Stern, who assisted in session six) are pseudonymised. In accordance with my promise to the veterans, mentioned above, regarding this pseudonymisation, I do not in this thesis assign gender to any individual participant and nor do I disclose their ethnicity, because this may inadvertently allow identification. Wolfert identifies himself on DE-CRUIT literature as he/him. The veterans were not asked which pronouns they personally preferred when engaging with each other in the workshops, and nobody appeared to find this a problem. I, however, use the pronoun 'they', to replace 'he' and 'she', so that gender cannot be identified in my thesis.

There was much emphasis on reassurance and stepping away from military experiences and 'wiring'. Wolfert said that 'theatre is our template. We can make a mistake, we can fail – and nobody dies'. Participants were asked to write for five minutes, about 'the landscape of my childhood'. They were told to stop promptly, to reinforce that it is not a problem, as it would be in the military, to leave something unfinished. It was stressed that although the veterans will share their own monologues with those of Shakespeare in later sessions, there was no requirement for them to write poetry unless they wanted to. Wolfert asked if anything had happened to the veterans' physical bodies as they wrote. One veteran, DC7, said it released tightness in their chest. Another, DC2, reported

feeling initially nervous, but then became relaxed and nostalgic. DC5 and DC6 enjoyed the process of writing; for the former it became stressful because of the countdown to the five-minute cut-off, and the latter enjoyed writing out of their comfort zone. The veterans were asked to write a short, timed piece at home before the next session, which is about why and when they joined the armed forces. Wolfert said this was less about writing and more about the physiological process that evolves from it. The session ended with a re-grounding of the body exercise, and each participant (including myself) was encouraged to say, 'My name is, and I reinforce [whatever each participant has taken from the session]'. There has been little mention of Shakespeare, only Wolfert saying the lines from *King Lear*: 'Speak what we feel and not what we ought to say' (5.3.323: 2553), and none about the experiences which led to the veterans having PTSD or re-adjustment issues.

## **Session Two**

Session two began with the physical grounding. Wolfert talked about the symptoms of PTSD, and of what constitutes a 'stuck point'. He gave the example that a veteran may have held a belief prior to the traumatic incident that they were able to protect themselves in any situation. Trauma they subsequently sustained may cause them to re-evaluate that belief, and to assume that they were harmed during their military service because they were personally to blame. A stuck point can then lead to the veteran being unable to move on from the trauma because they cannot move on from their negative, self-damaging thoughts. CPT recognises the danger of stuck points in preventing recovery from trauma, and of the necessity and value of resolving this issue (Resick, Monson and Chard, 2008: 98-106; Jazeb, 2019, online; Renee, 2021, online).

I learned in session two that some of the veterans had previously attended DE-CRUIT sessions, either once or twice before. It was not easy to assess why they continued to participate in this programme: whether the sessions had not been efficacious for them, but they wished to try again; whether those participants had enjoyed the sessions so much that they wanted more; or whether six sessions are too few to be confer a lasting benefit. Wolfert did not, and does not subsequently, ask these questions; there was a tacit agreement that that would be an admission of failure on the part of both the veterans and the programme.

My impression was that six sessions may be too few; although Wolfert did not rush anyone to tell their story and to participate in the readings, the veterans only began to open up confidently halfway through the programme. The familiarity they had with each other, as constituent parts of a military 'band of brothers' did in part help this process of sharing their stories, when perhaps, for example, a more disparate group of civilians experiencing mental health issues might struggle.

Wolfert did most of the talking to start with. He posed questions such as 'why do we say we're fine when we're not?' and admitted that personally, it was a struggle every day for him not to drink alcohol (alcohol abuse was one of his coping mechanisms in the early days of his PTSD). He told the veterans that even though the experience that led to his PTSD is over, he is still feeling it because 'PTSD is not a memory, it's a physiological experience'. The veterans shared the writing they did about their childhood in the first session, variously describing the colours of their landscape as grey and green. Wolfert used encouraging, positive words, such as 'beautiful' and 'moving', to praise what the veterans were sharing. Wolfert and some other veterans admitted to having had a bad childhood, but DC2 said theirs was good and the writing about it unlocked the feeling that 'so many of the mysteries of who I am are yet to be discovered'.

There was not time in this session to cover everything in the handout, and Wolfert did not rush the veterans into keeping rigidly to the set agenda. There was no reading, for example, of the 'homework' set about why they joined the military. Wolfert told the veterans that they will be studying Shakespeare for the first time in session three and ended with the reinforcement as before.

### **Session Three**

Session three started with the reading of Kate Percy's speech from Act II, Scene IV of *I Henry IV*. Wolfert told me in a later interview that he always starts work on Shakespeare with this passage because it perfectly describes what so many veterans are battling. Kate's speech offers the veterans all-important distancing from their emotions because, said Wolfert, 'it's a spouse asking a veteran questions about what's going on, [so] it gives the veterans distance and therefore perhaps compassion for themselves, or if not for themselves, at least for their partner who would be asking these questions' (2021). It may have been, for a substantial number of those veterans, the first time they confronted in public what

they feel and potentially why they feel it. Kate therefore provides a vital opportunity to talk about PTSD from a distance, opening up to the veterans a crucial one-step-removed stepping-stone to being able to talk about their own issues before the DE-CRUIT sessions progress to the veterans' first-hand experience of trauma. Wolfert said that feedback from previous workshops indicates how astounded the participants were at how accurately Shakespeare, through the vehicle of Kate Percy, describes their symptoms and feelings:

Kate is a great place to start before we get into the veterans that Shakespeare wrote about such as Richard III and Macbeth, and where our veterans get to speak those characters' words in the first person, [they are characters] which perfectly describe what it was like [to serve in the military].

(Wolfert, 2021)

This use of Kate's input represented a logical and natural development in the applied Shakespeare therapeutic sequence, and I was eager to observe how it might be played out among the group of veterans I was observing.

Wolfert divided Kate's speech into line sections, colour-coded on the downloaded handouts, and each veteran was allocated a set of lines. They were reminded to breathe in at the beginning of each new line, and to breathe out at the end. 'Dare to fuck up' said Wolfert. 'This was written four hundred years ago, and you may not understand all of it. That doesn't matter'. I was also asked to read five lines. I deemed this to be an honour. I have been informally told by British veterans that it is not easy to be accepted into what is their very esoteric world because I have not personally served in the military, and to be asked to participate indicated that the DE-CRUIT veterans were comfortable with my presence. Later in this session, I was asked to share my experiences as a civilian if they in any way related to what Kate Percy says.

Wolfert asked the veterans how they felt when reading the speech. DC7 said they felt emotional listening to me reading it in the accent of Shakespeare, the authenticity of which the other veterans concurred. I was born and raised in London and my accent is now a mixture of south of England and Cornwall (where I now live) rather than sixteenth-century Warwickshire, but this was not important, and I doubt I could have pinpointed the hometown or state in the USA from where each veteran originated or now lives. It was interesting that for my contribution,

they focused on my delivery, in an English accent, and not on Kate Percy's words. It appeared however, that listening to me reading aloud brought at least some of them closer to Shakespeare; I share his nationality and the veterans bridge not just time, but geographical distance in this way. I felt I had, in a small way, helped the veterans to process Shakespeare. DC4 said it was good to have a non-military way to find a breathing rhythm, which they found soothing, and that they felt an unburdening in this. DC4 said they like Shakespeare a lot and read their lines again, this time sounding less stilted and as if they were asking a question of someone; the meaning of the lines was becoming more apparent, and they were empathising with what the partner of a traumatised veteran also suffers. DC2 picked up on what they called the 'naturalness' of DC4's delivery, observing that they understood the meaning better when it was read aloud by somebody else, and that they could imagine their partner saying the words to them; the whole speech is an emotional release. DC2 contributed a poetic thought of their own, saying 'the frozen pond began to crack when I read William Shakespeare'. Shakespeare's poetry has been the catalyst for the imagery and writing of some of the veterans, and catharsis was achieved by combining the two.

DC5 mentioned the way in which they were required to breathe to speak the lines, observing that it made delivery more natural, which in turn made it easier to concentrate on meaning. Wolfert reiterated that the military teaches breath control for engaging targets. He commented that the military thus uses the same tools as theatre and Shakespeare, but 'the military dehumanises people. Shakespeare rehumanises them'. Wolfert told the veterans that Shakespeare gives us a language that we already speak, in the rhythm of the human heartbeat. A note of caution should be sounded here. Iambic pentameter is a useful tool for veterans to engage with Shakespeare, and particularly those who were unfamiliar with his work prior to participating in DE-CRUIT sessions, but it should not be all-encompassing. I have noticed that many who use Shakespeare therapeutically place great emphasis on the 'human heartbeat' metre of iambic pentameter (as do Ali and Wolfert in all their academic papers), taking it as a blanket term as if that were the only way Shakespeare wrote and the only way in which we speak. The point to note here is that what works for the veterans therapeutically is more important than for example, the way a professional actor may be taught to deliver Shakespearean verse for performance on stage.

When the veterans finished, Wolfert analysed Kate Percy's speech in the same way as Jonathan Shay does (1994: 165), taking each line of speech and comparing it to the corresponding PTSD symptom (the veterans have this in their printouts). Wolfert personalised Shakespeare's words:

Hotspur deploys the next day, just as we all did – we've all been in that position. We know how it feels. This is historic – we are not alone. Kate Percy gives us distance, she represents someone else, someone removed from us, who is talking about our experiences so perfectly, Shakespeare gives language to the unspeakable.

(Wolfert, 2021)

Although the veterans were not acting *per se*, Wolfert told them that Shakespeare's characters are asking the audience for help and that there is no shame in anyone doing that. There is no 'fourth wall' approach about Wolfert's methods. He asked them then to begin to work out loud rather than just to read lines, as if what they were engaged in was for the stage and not the classroom. Veterans were asked to scan each line for the rhythm of iambic pentameter, and then to speak each line aloud followed by what they think it meant in their own words. 'Be bold' advised Wolfert. 'While Shakespeare is writing about everyday human experiences, his characters and texts are not casual – how often does one get to say "thick-eyed musing and cursed melancholy"?' Wolfert told the veterans therefore, not to speak casually, but to give each line, breath, energy and enunciation; by so doing he said that 'you'll have more fun and frankly it will make more sense to the listener'. In face-to-face sessions, the participants would be encouraged to stand to speak their lines and to move about. This is a major limitation of online work; while it can potentially reach out to more veterans across a wider geographical area, it curtails the physical experience of acting and of doing this all together in one dramatic space.

#### **Session Four**

In sessions four and five, Wolfert introduced the veterans to excerpts from *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V*, *Coriolanus*, *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*. They were given this short, stichomythic exchange between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to study first:

LADY MACBETH	Did you not speak?
MACBETH	When?
LADY MACBETH	Now.
MACBETH	As I descended.
LADY MACBETH	Ay.
MACBETH	Hark!

2.2.16-21 (2578)

Wolfert asked the veterans to explore how the vowels represent emotion, while the consonants are action. The idea was to work on this simple passage before tackling more complex verse. They then worked on short sections from the other plays above and were asked to transfer what they learned from this work to the reading of their own personal monologues. Wolfert said this is actor training as well as having a therapeutic value. This exercise, therefore, is not about character analysis, although Macbeth lends himself well to being studied by veterans to identify points of comparison.<sup>98</sup>

The veterans had also received the text of twenty-two Shakespearean monologues (see table above) and a document listing common PTSD symptoms. Each veteran chose a monologue which most corresponded to their predominant symptom or experience, and which they have been encouraged to read aloud at home. In session four, they did not share the monologue they had selected. Instead, Wolfert asked them to think about which lines they found easy to master the breathing techniques for, which lines tripped them up, and how their bodies responded to their reading. DC1 said the experience was positive because 'I'm living in my monologue; you can't help but feel it'. Wolfert sounded a note of caution, stating that Shakespeare may unleash or elicit feelings that the veterans were not aware of. DC5 concurred that that happened and said that working through the monologue was a release of some of those feelings, which DC5 called 'a catharsis'. No other veterans felt comfortable to share their monologues at this stage. All were requested to work on them over the weekend before the next session.

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<sup>98</sup> See Chapter Four: 'Improvise, Adapt and Overcome': producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes, for an analysis of how veterans working with Soldiers' Arts Academy in Britain relate to *Macbeth*.

## Session Five

Session five brought together the Shakespeare monologues with the personal ones that the veterans have written. For the first time, the veterans shared their experiences of the most traumatic incident that had happened to them during their military careers. They read aloud their personal monologue (they had the option to read it silently to themselves if they preferred, although none did) to re-experience that moment of trauma in their lives. Wolfert told them to use the box-breathing technique if they felt physically stressed, which two of them did. All then used the Shakespeare monologue to talk about their personal experience and feelings. This is at the heart of what DE-CRUIT does; the aim is to allow the vocalisation of traumatic experiences in a language distant from yet familiar to their own. DC1's personal monologue included the lines 'I have doubt. I was a happy-go-lucky person. How do I find the person who when life gave me scraps, I made quilts?' DC1's Shakespearean monologue is from *Richard II*: 'I have been studying how I may compare/This prison where I live unto the world' (5.5.1-41: 1008-9)). The thirty-five lines chosen from this monologue stopped short of Richard's most pensive utterance: 'I wasted time, and now doth time waste me' (5.5.49: 1009) and Richard is not a character who displays symptoms of PTSD, but DC1 called it a reflective piece that encouraged them to think about how their military service has affected their current life.

DC2 said 'I don't know how to let people into my fortress, how to lower the drawbridge'. DC2 was the veteran for whom Shakespeare had most awakened poetic self-expression. DC2 was suspicious of people when growing up, having had a 'feral childhood'. Their selection of monologue was from *Hamlet*: 'I have of late – but wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth' (2.2.287-298: 1697). Wolfert told DC2 they were no longer carrying their incumbrance alone and that the rest of the group was sharing it with them, a comment that perfectly encapsulates the use of applied Shakespeare to communalise trauma. It made DC2 feel tired and weary as they identified with the burden that Hamlet carries. Hamlet does not however, suffer from PTSD or re-adjustment issues. Bereavement is at the heart of his loss of mirth, but so too are myriad emotions engendered by Claudius: anger, a need for revenge, the paralysis of vacillation which can lead to feelings



of shame, inadequacy and self-doubt.<sup>99</sup> DC2 did not know the play and chose this monologue from a limited selection of twenty-two because, as a discrete speech, it most mirrored their own feelings and emotions. This highlights another fundamental difference in DE-CRUIT's approach to that of its British counterparts, Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA) and its forerunner, Combat Veteran Players (CVP); the monologue is not read in context with the whole play because the intention is not to stage a public performance. Outside of the sessions, only friends and families, who were invited to the last session as 'supporters', will hear them.

Wolfert's selection of monologues from *Hamlet*, a tragedy whose protagonist is not a soldier, inevitably includes: 'To be or not to be' (3.1.58-87: 1705), as a speech indicative of the contemplation of suicide which many traumatised soldiers do. However, other soliloquies may show how veterans view the content in a different way to a civilian actor or audience. The Second Quarto soliloquy is usually interpreted as portraying Hamlet's growing disgust at his weakness and vacillation, and that the actions of Fortinbras the soldier – and the consequences of those actions – are the catalyst for Hamlet finally to act against Claudius. The inclusion of this monologue in Wolfert's chosen twenty-two is to show that PTSD can cause paralysis through fear, hence rendering the sufferer incapable of acting. This is a pivotal point in the play, and that for directors to cut these lines, often to shorten the production, takes away much of *Hamlet's* military meaning where it is important to view the domestic, 'revenge' tragedy in the light of the wider threat to the safety of Denmark.

Both DC3 and DC4 chose Sonnet 35: 'No more be griev'd at that which thou hast done' (1934-5), to represent their strongest emotion, which in both cases was shame. DC3 said that as they read it, they felt their 'tension lifting a little. DC4 admitted to feeling nervous about reading aloud and felt 'the blood rushing to my extremities' when they did so. DC6, who read the same monologue from *Hamlet* as DC2, said they felt connected to their chest and breathing. DC5 chose Antony's words from *Julius Caesar* to represent rage at the loss of someone close: 'O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth' (3.1.257-278: 1563), and reported feeling tingly, hot and over-stimulated, but that a 'lump in my chest

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<sup>99</sup> Such is the dilemma and frustration of a researcher who becomes 'embedded' in her research group, that it was at this point of the session that I most wanted to intervene (although I refrained from doing so). I wanted to discuss the play in depth and to establish why a soldier could identify with a non-military scholar in such a profound way. I was not, however, invited to participate in the workshop at that enhanced level.

has gone'. Wolfert encouraged DC5 to engage in the box-breathing technique at this point. When the veterans re-read the monologues in session six, DC5 then spoke the piece from *Julius Caesar* with much more anger and aggression. That appeared to represent a mixture of understanding the words better and then applying them more closely to their own experience of trauma, and of wanting to speak the lines as if they were acting them instead of just reading. Not every participant experienced physical changes. DC7 said they felt nothing from reading two passages from *Coriolanus* which represent rage: 'He that will give good words to thee will flatter' (1.1.156-173: 2796-7) and 'You common cry of curs! Whose breath I hate' (3.3.124-139: 2841). However, in session six, DC7 also said that the words resonated more this time as they became more confident in reading aloud.

Although it is not strictly true to say that any piece of Shakespearean verse would have sufficed, the identification with each veteran's strongest PTSD symptom felt in general secondary to the importance Wolfert placed on how that monologue is delivered; it was the soothing nature of the breathing that was all-important in teaching how to re-wire the same military-applied breathing technique used to fire (often in anger) a weapon. Prior to attending the sessions, I expected the meaning to be the primary focus. Similarly, it became apparent to me how important the sharing of their experiences was, and in the language that, as Ali and Wolfert point out so often in their research papers, is both familiar and at a distance from everyday speech. I could then relate these academic findings to the reality of the veterans I was observing and working with in these sessions. I was also aware of my own dilemma, in wanting to talk about character analysis and context, but I felt that ethically, this would be 'o'er stepping the bounds' (*Romeo and Juliet*, 4.2.27: 924). At this point, I wondered how much Shakespeare the veterans would take away from these sessions; several said the sessions ignited or reawakened an interest in Shakespeare.

## **Session Six**

Session six included supportive partners or friends joining the veterans. Monologues, both personal and Shakespearean, were read again. This was very much a reinforcement session of the preceding five; Wolfert said that theatre is the original medicine and a wonderful template for communalising trauma. Dawn

Stern, a professional actress and Wolfert's wife, was present, to support him and to reiterate Wolfert's words that 'theatre actors show up to perform to the audience, but the power dynamic is reversed here: we are here for the veterans' (2021). Family and friends acting as supporters represented the only audience the veterans had or will have in their DE-CRUIT programme, and it is hoped by Wolfert that the supporters too, will gain insight and understanding into how DE-CRUIT helps the healing process. As the embodiment of 'Kate Percy', who suffers too, the intention was that some of the invited guests might find an amelioration of their emotions by hearing, perhaps for the first time, their loved ones describe how they feel. The goal was to increase the likelihood of families and friends having empathy for the veteran who is suffering at firsthand from combat trauma. There was a sense, not of 'graduation' from the sessions, but of the significance of sharing – or communalisation – of trauma in the presence of others who had similar experiences, and who therefore understood what the veterans thought and felt. Wolfert ended the session with lines from *Richard III*: 'I do mistake my person all this while' (1.2.239-246: 525), to emphasise that, in contrast to Richard's previous negative opinion of his physical qualities, he is now more positive and content. The wheel had come full circle, as Wolfert began his own journey with Shakespeare as a way of helping his combat PTSD, with watching *Richard III*.

### **Follow-up session**

There was no informal evaluation of the series of workshops at the end of session six. DE-CRUIT did, however, hold an online follow-up to these and other workshops, on 4 April 2022. I was again present. The format was different, in that it was a virtual public event via Zoom, titled Shakespeare and Veterans, rather than closed workshops at which only the veterans (and, for the final session, their supporters) were invited. Audience members included personnel from organisations for military women, and veterans who are now professional actors. The event's remit was to showcase veterans who had completed the DE-CRUIT programme presenting their own original written work inspired by Shakespeare

and interspersed with some of his verses. Some of the veterans had attended other workshops to the ones I describe above.<sup>100</sup>

Shakespeare and Veterans was co-hosted by Wolfert and Alisha Ali of New York University, with whom, as I have pointed out above, he collaborates. This time I was present only as an observer. Ali advised the participants to think of the event as a final session of the DE-CRUIT programme, although as mentioned above, veterans can contact Wolfert at any time for further help if the need arises. Fifty-four people attended. The participants were encouraged to talk about their feelings in as much detail as they wish, and it was stressed that everyone listening would be non-judgmental. The format was that participants should tell their stories using prose narrative, Shakespearean verse and their own monologues. Only four veterans chose to do this.

No veteran had elaborated on details of their experiences during the original workshops I attended. During the follow-up session, all four veterans who shared their monologues were exceptionally candid about the traumas they sustained and the concomitant impact on their lives. Two were graphic. Some of the distressing experiences involved military sexual trauma (MST). DE-CRUIT has always paid attention to the issue of MST, and this has been enhanced by the prevalence of the broader #MeToo movement.<sup>101</sup> Research carried out by Ali and Wolfert suggests that women veterans with a history of MST have a nine-times higher risk of being diagnosed with PTSD and are also at higher risk of depression and suicide (2022a: 32; Klingensmith and Tsai, 2014: abstract). One veteran, DC-A, chose to share details of their MST, and described the process of reporting the assault and the investigations that followed, as 'like being in a firefight for months' and that 'one [physical] rape was followed by a year of rape of the spirit'. The DE-CRUIT veterans, including DC-A, did not request that I should withhold details of MST and other traumas, but for two reasons I have chosen not to share more of what was said at this follow-up session. Firstly, as a researcher I am mindful that sensitivity is paramount, and some of the details

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<sup>100</sup> Although this was a public event where names were freely given, I have chosen not to publish them to protect the pseudonyms I have given to those veterans who participated in the workshops of autumn 2021. I use numbers to refer to the veterans who participated in the workshops, i.e. DC1, DC2 etc (see above). To ensure there can be no inadvertent cross-matching or identification of those who took part in the follow-up session, I use letters instead here, i.e. DC-A, DC-B, and so on.

<sup>101</sup> #MeToo is a social movement founded by Tarana Burke in 2006. Its remit is to empower the victims of sexual abuse and harassment to speak out about their experiences.

given were exceptionally intimate and harrowing. Secondly, there may be a small risk that pseudonyms could be compromised if I give more detail.

The session began, like the workshops, with the checking-in routine of 'my name is, right now I feel'. DC-A was 'wired', an interesting choice of word given that Wolfert uses it to in the context of military training to refer to being 'wired for war'. DC-B said they need 'to get it [telling their story] done now'. DC-C said they felt 'excited and nervous' and DC-D felt 'on edge'. As in the workshops, Wolfert was patient, allowing the veterans to speak in their own time, but also ready to interject with encouraging words if the need arose.

DC-A used Shakespearean verse that had not been supplied by DE-CRUIT, quoting from *Richard II*: 'How long shall I be patient? Ah, how long/ Shall tender duty make me suffer wrong?' (2.1.164-5: 970); *Measure for Measure*: 'O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch/Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?' (3.1.138-9: 2056), and *Othello*: 'You told a lie, an odious, damnèd lie' (5.2.187: 2168) and 'I ha' lost my reputation, I h'a lost the immortal part of myself' (2.3.246-7: 2127). DC-A chose to intersperse Shakespearean lines with those from their own monologue, including an evocation of a recognised symbol of soldiers' deaths in war: 'When the red poppies wilt from overuse and the yellow ribbons fray'. It was clear from their description of the MST they had undergone that the Shakespearean lines chosen were especially apt. Poetry and especially Shakespeare, said DC-A, helped them to make sense of what had happened and how to move on from it. The mental trauma sustained was compared by DC-A to 'war wounds, a kind of shrapnel in the mind'. DC-A's engagement with Shakespeare beyond material supplied by DE-CRUIT - the process of researching, reading and identifying with verse they have chosen themselves - suggested DC-A was taking ownership of Shakespeare in a more proactive way than any of the other veterans at this follow-up session.

DC-B spoke of using art as their cocoon. There was a barely suppressed anger in the delivery when they quoted the bitter speech of Coriolanus: 'You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate' (*Coriolanus*: 3.3.124-138: 2841). DC-B then read from a personal monologue which contains words and phrases such as 'violated', 'traumatised', 'anger', 'pain', 'sadness', 'despondency' and 'strangers will judge me'. DC-B was 'angry and tight' after sharing their work and feelings. As I mention above, some veterans have attended several DE-CRUIT

programmes, and I wondered if DC-B had already, or will do so in the future. Catharsis did not appear as yet to have been attained.

DC-C also used *Coriolanus* which reminded them of a particular military assault they had taken part in and the briefing that had preceded it: 'He that will give good words to thee will flatter' (1.1.156). Coriolanus is the Shakespearean character who most epitomises the soldier who struggles to adapt to civilian life and that struggle was also apparent in DC-C.<sup>102</sup> They used the word 'now' five times in their monologue, to express their concern about what they do now with their life after having left the military. Although Coriolanus's words to the citizens are bitterly cynical: 'What would you have, you curs/That like not peace nor war? The one affrights you/the other makes you proud' (1.1.157-9), DC-C said they reflect with gratitude on being able to serve their people and with their brothers in arms. The workshops and follow-up session afforded DC-C the opportunity of 'bringing me some peace because I'm able to let some of the poison out'. DC-C did not describe their specific trauma. Wolfert interjected after the monologues to say that DC-C could use Shakespeare to construct a vision of their future self, and that this applied to everyone else in attendance.

DC-D chose *Macbeth* as the play with which they most identified. They selected the 'Double double, toil and trouble' recitation of the Weird Sisters (4.1.10-36: 2596-7), using, as the Sisters do, trochaic tetrameter to deliver their personal monologue. This, DC-D said, fits with the rhythm that best expressed their own experiences. Their personal monologue described distrust and needing to overcome fear, which they said Macbeth's words: 'I have almost forgotten the taste of fears' (5.5.9: 2613) also helped them to do. There were clearly still unresolved personal issues for DC-D, but participating in this session represented an intensely emotional experience, which culminated in crying and a feeling of being 'lighter and more at ease'.

Comments and questions were then invited from the audience. The former mostly consisted of reinforcing how courageous the veterans were to share such intensely emotional stories. There were few questions. Mary Jo McConnell, a US veteran and life coach who assists Wolfert to deliver the DE-CRUIT programme face-to-face, said she was struck by the reflections that followed the monologues,

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<sup>102</sup> See the section of my literature review which analyses Shakespearean characters who exhibit symptoms of PTSD or a struggle to transition to civilian life after leaving the military.

and how these were enhanced and heightened by speaking Shakespearean verse. Wolfert reinforced how the sharing of stories allows us to have compassion and empathy for ourselves and each other. The session ended with the familiar mantra of 'my name is, and I reinforce [however they feel after the session]'. It was made clear prior to the beginning of the series of workshops, and during all of them, that veterans could contact Wolfert if and whenever they needed any further help or support. As I mentioned above, veterans may also enrol for more sessions if they wish. There is no sense that veterans are left on their own when participation in a workshop series concludes.

## Conclusion

DE-CRUIT uses a more therapy-based approach to its workshops than its British counterparts because, for DE-CRUIT, the sessions are not a means to an end in respect of putting on a Shakespearean production in public. Any public performances that DE-CRUIT does stage consist either of Wolfert alone, such as in *Cry Havoc!* or the three, two-hander productions that Wolfert acted in with his wife, Dawn Stern, in summer 2022.<sup>103</sup> These performances help both to fund-raise, and to spread the message of DE-CRUIT's work across the US. DE-CRUIT's workshops are solely therapeutic in nature, by using the words of Shakespeare and the techniques required to speak and act the lines of a play, to heal. This is what Shay means by communalisation of trauma. Wolfert's aim is to assist veterans to reconnect with life outside the military and says that 'the use of theatre and the performance of Shakespeare's verse provides a safe, collaborative environment in which to explore the deepest facets of our humanity' (2021). Wolfert's choice of Shakespearean excerpts have been carefully tailored to reflect both military and non-military content or emphasis, and while this model will clearly not work for every veteran, it is certainly helpful to many of those whom I observed over a six-week period. It is, however, a source of frustration to me that I was not permitted to do follow-up interview with any of the participants a year or two after their sessions.

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<sup>103</sup> *The Head of Richard* used only Shakespeare's text from *Richard III* to re-tell Richard's story from the perspective of a military veteran and focused on his emotional deformity caused by chronic abuse and humiliation. *Make Thick My Blood* portrayed Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as trauma survivors. *She-Wolf* told the story of Margaret of Anjou from the perspective of her being a warrior, prisoner of war and much-maligned queen of England (DE-CRUIT, 2023a).

At those DE-CRUIT's workshops that I participated in (and with the caveat that this observation may not apply to other sessions with a different group of veterans), it did appear that the content of the Shakespeare verse used by each veteran was somewhat less important than the soothing nature of the breathing used to deliver it. I also noted at the time that only two veterans, DC5 and DC7, chose plays that are overtly military in nature, *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. I felt then, and still do, that a fuller exploration of those plays would benefit DC-5 and DC-7, and I hope they (and the others) would be inspired to read the whole chosen play to put into context the small excerpts they used. In the follow-up event, it was true that for some participants, this had happened and that they had engaged more with the meaning of Shakespeare's words and the characters he portrays. DC-C, for example, had mentioned how Coriolanus, even with his many advantages of a family and 'a good job to go to', struggled with re-integrating into civilian life, and there was a consensus among those who had read the play or excerpts from it, that Shakespeare's portrayal was accurate and thought-provoking. Since making these notes, I have interviewed many other veterans, and now realise that while some do benefit from studying plays like *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*, others find it less triggering and thus more therapeutic to concentrate on less overtly militaristic plays and characters.

Wolfert now wishes to make DE-CRUIT a transferable model, whereby veterans are taught the programme and how to disseminate it among the wider veteran community (DE-CRUIT, 2023b). This is part of a wider post-pandemic restructuring of how DE-CRUIT operates, and also reflects the growing need for such applied Shakespeare services that is beyond Wolfert's capacity to provide. Veterans helping other veterans by using the qualities unique to Shakespeare that Wolfert and Ali have identified and studied, is providing a proven and efficacious model of applied Shakespeare that could be replicated in the UK (or indeed, any country in the world). As Wolfert says, 'all it requires is a commitment from the veterans and the community members in [their] area' (DE-CRUIT, 2023b). The DE-CRUIT model, adapted to use relevant Shakespearean content could, I argue, also be applied to other traumatised or marginalised groups, and this is an area of applied Shakespeare that my research has identified as this far being much needed but currently non-existent.



## **Chapter Four: ‘Improvise, Adapt and Overcome’: producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes**

**‘We few, we happy few, we band of brothers’**

*Henry V*

**4.3.60 (1997: 1500)**

A key element of my research is to establish how the concept of nationhood pertains to veterans who use applied Shakespeare therapeutically, including those veterans who do not share Shakespeare’s nationality. This chapter, therefore, examines how the shared brotherhood of the military – the ‘brothers in arms’ ethos – can encompass international collaboration between veterans working on Shakespeare as therapy for combat traumas. A pre-existing conflict in Ukraine, which in 2022 escalated into a full-scale and still on-going war, has brought into focus an examination of how Shakespeare may be used to cope with the traumas inflicted during wartime as well as its aftermath. It also demonstrates how war necessarily impacts on the practicalities of the theatrical process, but equally, what function theatre can serve during times of conflict. My case study firstly analyses how Ukrainian veterans used applied Shakespeare in 2019 as a rehabilitation and well-being tool following their deployment to combat zones in the Donbas and Crimea regions of Ukraine beginning in 2014. I also analyse how a collaborative venture between UK, US and Ukrainian veterans was impacted when the Ukrainians were redeployed to war zones.

Secondly, this chapter shows how theatre and Shakespeare helped an American veteran in his difficult transition to civilian life after being a combatant in the Vietnam War, and how he believes Shakespeare produced with a military standpoint may help other veterans’ rehabilitation, including those who are not British, and for them to feel that their perspective has a natural place in the theatre industry. These two examples share the common denominator of UK-based Soldiers’ Arts Academy (SAA), which through its international hub enabled the veterans that I cite to work together on Shakespeare. In this chapter, I present evidence that Shakespeare can provide a means of helping soldiers of different nationalities – including those for whom English is not their first language - who have been affected by conflict to communalise their trauma as a way of overcoming it.

My case study takes as its starting point a 2019 production of *Twelfth Night* by Ukrainian veterans in the Shakespearean theatre group, Project W. The backdrop to Project W was, and remains, the Ukrainian war with Russia.<sup>104</sup> Project W was established to offer theatre as therapy for Ukrainian veterans who had fought in their homeland conflicts of 2014 onwards. Project W encompasses veterans who learned English specifically to act in *Twelfth Night*, which they performed publicly in Ukraine, and with particular significance because it was written by England's 'National Poet' who is held in high esteem by many Ukrainians (Torkut, 2023c). Project W's intention was to bring *Twelfth Night* to the UK as a joint venture with SAA. As part of another similar project, the Ukrainian veterans also briefly participated alongside British and American veterans in workshops aimed at staging *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the UK and Ukraine in 2022/3.

However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 required the recall and deployment of the Ukrainian veterans to frontline combat, and any theatrical collaborations those veterans were involved with have been indefinitely postponed. Therefore, I have borrowed the motto used by the British Army, and the Royal Marines in particular, of 'Improvise. Adapt. Overcome', because this case study has by necessity been changed and re-defined by the context of war. I was still able to examine Shakespearean theatrical work undertaken between British and American veterans but had reluctantly to exclude much (but not all) material appertaining to the Ukrainian veterans.<sup>105</sup> The importance of

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<sup>104</sup> It is necessary briefly to contextualise the current military and territorial situation regarding the Ukrainian veterans. Historically, much or all of what is now Ukraine was part of the Tsarist-ruled Russian Empire, and later the USSR, with only brief periods of independence. Following the break-up of the USSR, Ukraine became an independent sovereign state in 1991, and began to forge closer political and economic ties with the UK, the US and Europe. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, in eastern Ukraine. Annexation is a unilateral act whereby a state proclaims its sovereignty over territory outside its domain, justified by Russia by irredentism, a doctrine espoused by those who seek to claim territory they believe was historically theirs. Later in 2014, pro-Russian separatists proclaimed independence in Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk provinces. Although the Minsk Agreement to end the conflict was signed in 2015, low-level hostilities continued. In February 2022, Russian president Vladimir Putin authorised the build-up of a large military presence on the Ukrainian border, officially recognised independence in Donetsk and Luhansk, and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February. At the time of writing, the Ukrainian-Russian war is still on-going.

<sup>105</sup> Prior to beginning my PhD, I attended as a private guest of SAA and Project W, an online film showing of the latter's *Twelfth Night*, which also included discussions about the play among the Ukrainian veterans and SAA personnel. I obtained verbal permission from the organisers and participants to observe and take notes, and I subsequently wanted to include this material in my research for my PhD. Prior to the outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, I was in the process of obtaining translations into Ukrainian of participant information sheets and consent forms which were required to secure written permission from the veterans to include their *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in my thesis. As well as curtailing the veterans' participation in workshops, the war also prevented me from securing the requisite retrospective and current permissions. As I describe below, I have been able to interview some Ukrainians and obtain

Shakespeare to those fighting a war, and how, comes into focus as part of this chapter's examination of the camaraderie between soldiers and veterans of different nationalities. This bond, for example, informed the decision of SAA's veterans to postpone *A Midsummer Night's Dream* until their Ukrainian counterparts could again participate in it, and how they chose instead to concentrate on a production of *Macbeth* which they dedicated to those Ukrainian soldiers.

### **Soldiers' Arts Academy links to Ukraine**

In Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career', I describe how SAA facilitates training and access to a post-service arts-based career for veterans. I mention above SAA's international hub, whose mission statement is 'to foster an international arts hub where serving and veteran military personnel and their families can work together in all areas of the arts to reach their artistic potential' (SAA, 2023). SAA's involvement with Ukrainian veterans in particular also owes much to the social capital that operates within the military. Robin Seaward had thirty years' service in the British Army, before becoming a consultant in the international development and security sector. Seaward was employed by the UK Government's Stabilisation Unit in Ukraine as a special defence advisor when he met at the British Embassy a Ukrainian national.<sup>106</sup> This person, who later became my contact (UKR-CONTACT/1) knew that Seaward had experience both of working with veterans and links with SAA, hence how the latter became involved in Project W. Seaward's contacts meant it was possible to secure for Project W the backing of the UK Embassy and the British Council in Ukraine. Seaward also acted alongside the Ukrainian veterans in *Twelfth Night* because 'they were short of a Sir Toby Belch' (Seaward, 2023).

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their written permission. Otherwise, I use only material that was already in the public domain when referencing Project W and its production of *Twelfth Night*.

<sup>106</sup> The Stabilisation Unit is a UK cross-governmental unit which provides expertise to build stability, prevent conflict and meet security challenges internationally. It recruits, trains and deploys qualified and experienced civilian experts to support UK government activities in fragile and conflict-affected states, and to multilateral missions on behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth & Development Office (Gov.uk, 2023).

## **Project W and *Twelfth Night***

Since beginning my research into Shakespeare and combat PTSD, I have worked with veterans in the UK and the US for whom English is their first language. It became apparent when I encountered Project W that Shakespeare's appeal for veterans crossed not only some geographical divides, but also language barriers. Project W was the first venture of the Veterano Theatre, an English-speaking company founded in Ukraine in 2018 with a remit of using theatre as therapy for war veterans.<sup>107</sup> It can be compared with Combat Veteran Players (CVP) in the UK; Veterano Theatre co-founder Father Serhiy Dmytriyev comments that 'for veterans, theatre is a kind of artistic rehabilitation as well as an opportunity to reveal their creative potential' (in Kostiuk, 2019). Nataliya Torkut, Shakespearean professor and founding head of the Ukraine Shakespeare Centre, called the Veterano Theatre 'a real experience of art therapy for participants and the audience, especially those soldiers who had just returned from the front' (Torkut, 2023c). This comment from Torkut especially resonated both with my research question about the praxis of applied Shakespeare as therapy for veterans, and this chapter's assessment of how important Shakespeare is received by veterans like the Ukrainians who do not share his nationality. Project W, according to Bohdana Kostiuk, also provided 'the opportunity to communicate with like-minded people' (Kostiuk, 2019). As part of that communication, and to participate in Project W, the Ukrainian veterans first learned English. War veteran and Veterano Theatre's other co-founder, Ihor Kasyan, wanted Project W to showcase what he called the talent and dedication of veterans, and comments that 'learning English and performing in a play are difficulties which veterans can – and did – overcome through work and perseverance' (in Kostiuk, 2019). Learning English, rather than performing the play in Ukrainian, had a two-fold appeal. Firstly, it enabled the learning of a new linguistic skill which the veterans could use in their post-military life, either in the theatre or elsewhere. Secondly, for many the opportunity to speak Shakespeare words in the language in which they had been written represented a bond with a writer who, as I describe below, is for many Ukrainians an icon of resistance to what they perceive as historical and current colonial oppression by Russia.

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<sup>107</sup> There are similarities between aims and objectives of the Veterano Theatre and Combat Veteran Players (CVP) in the UK (see Chapter One: 'Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare', for an analysis of the work of CVP).

The first production from Project W, which takes its title from Shakespeare's first name, was *Twelfth Night*. This play, says Kasyan, was 'not a random choice, the British playwright wrote about important social and political issues' (in Kostiuk, 2019). It has not been possible to contact Kasyan, who subsequently attended the SAA workshops, because of the war situation. However, I have been able to communicate via email with UKR-CONTACT/1, who worked closely with Kasyan, and they shared their knowledge about his involvement on the project. UKR-CONTACT/1 said that Kasyan had attended a film festival organised by the British Council in Kyiv at which *Twelfth Night* was shown, and he fell in love with it. 'It became his dream to stage this play with a group of veterans, and in English, to show the joy of life as shared by veterans – people who have been through horrendous moments but who have not lost their light within' (UKR-CONTACT/1, 2023). *Twelfth Night* is a comedy and not an ostensibly military play. Distancing from those 'horrendous moments' was a crucial element in the Ukrainian veterans using Shakespeare for healing. Seaward remarked that:

Veterans can put on plays about the military, but they are somehow not as readily appealing. Some plays are just for former military personnel to act in, which is important for the actors' release into being somebody else, but it is better [for therapeutical purposes] to be totally anonymous. Shakespeare gives you that, he takes you away from the raw reality of being a veteran.

(Seaward, 2023)

UKR-CONTACT/1, who taught the Ukrainian veterans English, said that Ukrainians in general are well-read people who love English literature and in particular Shakespeare 'because he's about history, the fight for justice and love' (2023). This observation extends to veterans too, as they 'are an embodiment of the whole society, so their respect and love of Shakespeare are a reflection of our wider society' (2023). It is important for their well-being and re-adjustment that when veterans return to civilian society, they feel accepted rather than ostracised for what they have done during their time in service. There was a palpable sense, when talking to UKR-CONTACT/1 and listening to some of the Ukrainians who played in *Twelfth Night*, that theatre as a 'normal' activity offered that prospect of inclusivity and acceptance.

*Twelfth Night* brought together theatre practitioners Oleksiy Hnatkovsky as the play's director, and the director of the Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theatre, Rostyslav Derzhypilsky, as artistic director. Military participants were all soldiers who had been involved in the fighting in Donbas from 2014 onwards, and included Volodymyr Boyprav, of the 81<sup>st</sup> Airborne Brigade; aerial observer, Yevhen Yarylo; Serhiy Vikarchuk-Yevpatoriysky, of the 56<sup>th</sup> Separate Motorised Infantry Brigade; and volunteer and founder of the Veterans Service Portal, Larysa Mykytyou (in Kostiuk, 2019).<sup>108</sup> Other participants were Ukrainian civilians who volunteered to help with the war effort. These volunteers included women who had driven to the frontline with clothing and medicines for the soldiers, and who then brought back wounded fighters for more specialised medical treatment away from the combat zones (Seaward, 2023). Although these women were not veterans, they too had sustained trauma relating to their experiences of conflict. Project W's *Twelfth Night*, therefore, demonstrates not only how but for whom Shakespeare can be produced when war intervenes. UKR-CONTACT/1 estimated that there were twenty performances of *Twelfth Night*, some in Kyiv and others across western and eastern Ukraine, including in the town of Kramatorsk which has since sustained heavy Russian bombing. UKR-CONTACT/1 said they would like the veterans to perform *Twelfth Night* again in Kramatorsk as a morale-booster to the civilian population when the war is over. There were also plans to take the play on an international tour, including to the UK. The latter was curtailed firstly by restrictions on travel because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and secondly by the invasion of Ukraine by Russian armed forces in February 2022.

### **Project W working with SAA**

Project W's first collaboration with SAA happened prior to that full-scale invasion of 2022. In the interim between 2014 and 2022, however, international audiences were seen as crucial to put across the message of what the earlier fighting had inflicted on the people of Ukraine. UKR-CONTACT/1 also said that working together with the UK and US veterans was a powerful tool for increasing the confidence and boosting the spirit of the Ukrainian veterans (2023). They feel they are not alone because they can reach out to men and women, who like themselves, understand what being a combatant involves. Online video-

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<sup>108</sup> I have included names here, as these are in the public domain in press cuttings and online webpages.

conferencing platforms like Zoom afforded the only viable opportunity to disseminate information about the 2019 production, and to share it with the veterans' British and American counterparts. Project W teamed up with SAA on 3 June 2020, to present a joint version of the Ukrainians' *Twelfth Night*, with all actors performing from their homes.<sup>109</sup> At this time, Ukraine was neither wholly at war, nor entirely at peace. Sporadic fighting was continuing in the Donbas region, and soldiers were being killed. The *Twelfth Night* veterans had fought in that region of Ukraine and were now coping with news of casualties from the frontline. The joint venture with SAA at such a difficult time for the Ukrainian participants psychologically, served as a genuine and valuable therapeutic exercise because they were acting with other veterans who understood what they were feeling and had experienced (UKR-CONTACT/1, 2023).

The original production had to be modified to accommodate the demands of an online event. The actors spoke their lines and sang songs from their version of *Twelfth Night*, but there was no scenery, and the actors did not wear costumes. Some parts were taken by, or shared with, UK veterans, as some Ukrainian veterans were unable to be present. Altogether, there were thirteen participants. As I note above, although I had been accepted by the University of Exeter, I had not then begun my PhD, but because of my previous connections with SAA and interest in the subject, I was invited to be a private guest at the event. My analysis of the performance is from notes I took at the time, but mainly from being subsequently able to watch a filmed performance that had taken place in Kyiv in 2019. This filmed performance is archived by SAA and available upon request for research purposes. I was given access by SAA to this version, which had been uploaded as a PowerPoint presentation, and granted specific permission to use it in my thesis. The film of the Kyiv performance began with each Ukrainian veteran giving a personal story about their involvement in the war in the east of Ukraine in 2014, focusing on the branch of the military they served in and their experiences of combat. These personal stories included why they were taking part in the production, and what acting in *Twelfth Night* meant to them. These were some of the reasons:

We chose *Twelfth Night* because it's a comedy and about love. We want to share this as an example to all veterans.

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<sup>109</sup> The session began at 20.00 Eastern European Standard Time (EET)/18.00 British Summer Time (BST), until 22.00 EET/20.00 BST.

(UKR-VET/1, 2020)

I used a gun, now my weapon is words.

(UKR-VET/2, 2020)<sup>110</sup>

There are good people around me, in the theatre I meet a new family.

(UKR-VET/2, 2020)

We play a lot of dramatic parts in our lives, and theatre gives me a shoulder to lean on, a hug and an embrace. When we come out on stage it is a little victory.

(UKR-VET/3, 2020)

For me, Shakespeare is God.

(UKR-VET/4, 2020)

We want to share the true information about the war to all peoples.

(UKR-VET/4, 2020)

Our goal is closer participation [with other veterans and other people] with this project.

(UKR-VET/4, 2020)

It is striking that these reasons are mostly not about the actual participation in war and fighting. They are first and foremost about veterans who see themselves as people not defined solely by conflict and combat. Listening to these stories helped to contextualise the veterans' use of theatre, and particularly Shakespeare, as therapy.<sup>111</sup> The stories functioned as an important and cathartic starting point for their acting.<sup>112</sup> Although, as I have mentioned above, Torkut pointed out the potential therapeutic value to the audience, Seaward commented that the actors are 'not doing it [telling their stories] for the audience's benefit, they are doing it for themselves' (2023). It is, Seaward observed, 'a very emotional experience to be able to share their stories in this way' and said that 'it surprises many people how veterans can express themselves so eloquently' (2023). During the Kyiv performance, there were tears and hugs on stage between the veterans. This represented the communalising of trauma, not just between themselves as a quasi-military unit, but in front of an audience. Seaward contextualised his involvement in *Twelfth Night*, saying that the impact from the

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<sup>110</sup> The type of gun was specified by the participant, but I do not include details for security reasons, and any concomitant risk of identification.

<sup>111</sup> It is important to note that the Ukrainian veterans did not share such reasons again during the online performance.

<sup>112</sup> Later in this chapter, I will recount the views of American Special Forces veteran, Teddy Kiendl, who has the opposite view that catharsis can never be truly achieved for soldiers who have engaged in combat.



four conflicts he had been involved in had changed his life, and that ‘we all want to share the impact for good that theatre can have on us all’ (2023). Veterans I have interviewed frequently reiterate that theatre is a safe space where they are not alone with their post-service traumas. Seaward summarised this by saying ‘they are with kindred spirits with similar problems. They don’t have to bottle things up or brave it out for fear of being seen to be weak’ (2023). Shakespeare thus gives the veterans, regardless of nationality, an important outlet for their emotions.

The Kyiv performance continued with a rendition of ‘Auld Lang Syne’. This song was chosen, according to UKR-CONTACT/1, because it is traditionally sung over the festive period of Twelfth Night, and because ‘Scottish people are very close to Ukrainians by the spirit of fight’ UKR-CONTACT/1, 2023). The song featured intermittently throughout the play. A Scottish theme was reinforced by some of the cast wearing kilts. Costumes ranged from kilts to Renaissance-style clothing; the wider message behind such an eclectic mix is that the participants transition from their military personas to civilian life by donning costumes for *Twelfth Night*. Masks symbolised the covert military necessity of keeping facial features and identities concealed. There were other military-inspired details. A metal detector is used, ostensibly to search for Olivia’s ring that Malvolio tossed away, a benign counterpoint to the action of sweeping for anti-personnel mines. A performer played bagpipes as Malvolio fondly watched Olivia sleeping, symbolising both her repose and the greater peace of the ending of war. Actors mimicked the swooping of seabirds and rode inflatable seaside dolphins. This imagery conjured up Viola’s shipwreck but also denoted a freedom that the participants craved from war and which acting in *Twelfth Night* briefly gave them. It all represented an absorption of a wartime perspective in their work, a mingling of the military and the ordinary which for the performers is therapeutic and cathartic.

The toy dolphins in particular presented an innocent, slapstick, almost childlike humour. Comedy was a way for the participants to cope with their traumas. Their use of humour was apparent throughout, notably from a character dressed in Elizabethan costume who announced himself self-importantly ‘I am Shakespeare’, and whose entrance drew delighted applause from the audience. He then rolled on the floor, and when asked what he was doing by the cast, replied

'I am turning in my grave', obviously at what he perceived to be a heretical version of his original play. This also provoked much amusement. As with *Twelfth Night*, however, this production's joyful comedy was never far from a darker reality. To a backdrop of black and white photographs of soldiers and scenes of combat, the song 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone' was played in English and with surtitles, to highlight loss and death engendered by war, but as a reminder too of the new life and hope that theatre can provide (lyrics by Peter Seeger, 1955).

The production used Bollywood-style music to accompany the marriages between Sebastian and Olivia, and Orsino and Viola. Bollywood is the portmanteau name for the Mumbai-based Hindi film industry which has come to be synonymous, in India and beyond, with jolly song and dance musical productions. The Bollywood music style was appropriated and chosen, said UKR-CONTACT/1, because it is internationally associated with, and renowned, as an expression of joy and celebration. *Twelfth Night* ended with a definite anti-war message. Feste concluded the proceedings by running to the front of the stage and directly addressing the audience, 'Make love, not war'. This line, in essence, epitomises the attitude I have encountered among the Ukrainian veterans to whom I have spoken. The soldiers and veterans said they fight not for the bloodshed of war, but for peace. UKR-CONTACT/1 commented that *Twelfth Night* is about overcoming evil and 'about the victory of beauty and love over dark forces. About joy. This is very close to veterans' hearts. Soldiers have been killed, including some we have worked with on *Twelfth Night*. We must perform now and in the future in their memory' (2023). Those future performances will be invaluable, I argue, both for the veterans to process their wartime experiences in a way such as I have described in my chapter on applied Shakespeare, and to help them re-integrate into a civilian society that itself will have suffered intensely traumatic events. This, and as a template for future theatre as therapy, is the overwhelming significance and value of Project W's *Twelfth Night*, which can be taken forward with the company's desire to expand its Shakespeare range for Ukrainian veterans.

### **Shakespeare in Ukraine**

The reason why Shakespeare was chosen as the first project of the Veterano Theatre has roots in the long-standing significance of Shakespeare in Ukraine.

There is a strong historical and current connection in times of peace and conflict. The Ukraine Shakespeare Centre (USC) was founded by Nataliya Torkut in 2008 to promote Shakespeare studies throughout the country and has forged ties with international universities and scholars. This includes the University of Birmingham (also twinned with Ivan Franko National University in Lviv) and The Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon. In 2022, the Institute's director, Michael Dobson, was made an honorary member of USC in recognition of his work in developing Shakespeare studies in Ukrainian universities. 'Ukraine' says Dobson, 'is a country with such a passionate commitment to culture that even when citizens have only three hours of electricity a day, I have known a hundred and twenty at a time spend two of those hours talking online about Shakespeare' (Dobson, 2022).

I interviewed Torkut in a Zoom call in July 2023, a session that was punctuated by Torkut having to answer war-related emails and a phone call, and during which she could hear shelling outside. In Chapter One, I note that Shakespeare's Globe has embarked on a process of decolonising Shakespeare in order to address the concept that his work has been used as a tool to uphold colonial and racial oppression. Torkut reiterated to me that from the standpoint of many Ukrainians, Shakespeare has often been viewed in terms of a liberator from the colonial repressions that Ukraine has undergone for centuries. Torkut said that 'Shakespeare is a manifestation of our historical resistance to Tsarist Russia, to Stalin and the USSR and now to Putin' (Torkut, 2023c).<sup>113</sup>

Torkut expanded on that comment by citing how Ukrainian translations of Shakespeare were first banned in the 1860s under Tsarist rule, when the Ukrainian language was also proscribed and 'our culture suppressed. Contemporary amateur performances of *Hamlet* were seen as resistance. We were a colony of the Russian Empire and of the USSR too' (2023c). Torkut gave the examples of Les Kurbas, Ukraine's modernist director who was the first to bring Shakespeare to the Ukrainian professional stage, and who was shot in 1937 during the Soviet era, and poet and dissident Dmytro Palamarchuk who completed his Ukrainian translation of the Sonnets in one of Stalin's labour camps. Despite opposition from the Kremlin, a Ukrainian translation of

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<sup>113</sup> Vladimir Putin has been the President of Russia since 2012. He authorised both the 2014 incursions into, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Shakespeare's Complete Works was begun in 1984 and published in 1986. The team of translators included Ukrainian poets Dmytro Pavlychko and Ivan Drach, theatre director Les Taniuk and academic Viktor Koptilov (Komeliuk, 2019: 130). It is a translation of which Torkut is immensely proud and that Bohdan Komeliuk calls 'a remarkable feat' which is 'widely regarded as a cornerstone of the Ukrainian Shakespeareana' (2019: 125). Project W's English language production of *Twelfth Night* might appear to be counter-intuitive to the pride Ukrainians have in speaking their own language (and being permitted to), but it can be explained not only in terms of an important linguistic skill for the veterans. Torkut said that 'Ukrainians believe themselves to be not part of Russia, but part of Europe. Some of us have long believed that Shakespeare is our father who will help us to join European nations (2023c). The sense of nationhood as espoused by Torkut thus incorporates Ukraine both as a sovereign country and as a natural member of a desirable European family of nations. Speaking English therefore, and performing Shakespeare in its original language, represents part of that wider identity and a move towards Ukrainian freedom and sovereignty rather than its historical colonisation.

In Ukraine therefore, Shakespeare has become to many people an icon, not just of literature, but of freedom of thought, speech and expression. Shakespeare's own nationality is important, not for what it is, but for what it is not. Seaward remarked that a significant asset and appeal of Shakespeare is that his work is not 'a Russian vehicle. Chekhov, for example, is seen as a statement of allegiance to Russia. Shakespeare is stepping back from Russian literature, it's seen as freedom' (Seaward, 2023). For Ukrainian veterans, this view of Shakespeare can explain why his work has great value during, and in the aftermath of, fighting not just a war, but one with Russia as the opponent.

I was in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 2023, when Torkut and her colleague Maya Harbuzyuk, Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Ivan Franko National University, were made Senior Honorary Research Fellows at The Shakespeare Institute. Both walked with a Ukrainian flag in the Shakespeare Birthday procession through Stratford-upon-Avon on 22 April, and Torkut gave the toast 'To the Immortal Memory of William Shakespeare'. Torkut remarked in her Birthday Toast speech that 'Ukraine is fighting not only for its own future and independence. We are fighting for the free civilization which Shakespeare has helped shape'

(2023a). Torkut, whose son is fighting on the frontline, continues to deliver lectures in Ukraine (and co-ordinates humanitarian aid and supplies to combatants wherever possible). The Shakespearean theatre in Ivano Frankivsk is now an underground air-raid shelter, but plays are being performed when possible; Torkut told me that performances of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* there are morale boosters to the civilian population (2023b). Shakespeare in Ukraine is, therefore, still being produced when war has intervened.

One of the most meaningful Shakespearean comparisons to the situation for Torkut, however, is *Henry V*. During her trip to Stratford, Torkut likened the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky to Shakespeare's Henry V and his Agincourt speech. Torkut evoked a powerful image when she said 'He [Zelensky] is appealing to the nation, to those on the frontline – he's like a Shakespearean character. His evolution from Prince Hal to King Henry V, we have seen it with our own eyes' (in Murray, 2023). As a rallying cry in a time of desperation, *Henry V* has been drawn on before in modern times of war. Two notable cinematographic (and thus more readily available to mass audiences than stage plays) examples from the twentieth century, are Laurence Olivier's film, made in 1944 during the Second World War, and Kenneth Branagh's 1989 version which post-dated the Falklands Campaign by seven years. Olivier's film, partly funded by the UK Government and dedicated to British commando and airborne troops, served a role beyond entertainment. Chris Fitter refers to the 'overtly (and dazzlingly successful) propagandist character of Olivier's film, which was structured to boost patriotic morale in the months prior to the D-Day offensive' (1991: 259). Carla Dente writes that a distinguished precedent to Olivier's morale-boosting film is to be found in a pamphlet by G. Wilson Knight, titled *This Sceptred Isle: Shakespeare's Message for England at War*, and published in 1940. Dente interprets Wilson Knight's text as saying that 'Shakespeare's words contain a promise of better times to come' (2013: 99).

Torkut, in 2023, put the perspective of a nation currently at war, and the hope of better times to come, when she said that 'William Shakespeare, and culture in general, can help us survive this war' (in Murray, 2023), and that 'it [Shakespeare] is something full of beauty when it is also something that gives us the hope that we will win and we can return to peaceful life, studies, to staging Shakespeare's plays' (Torkut, 2023b). UKR-CONTACT/1, who has been closely

associated with those who have fought in the war, told me they too believe Shakespeare offers post-war hope by supplying a healing template for all those who have suffered from conflict. Shakespeare is a coping mechanism in the present, as well as one potentially for the future. The lasting legacy of Project W could therefore be its resurrection as therapy for veterans when the current conflict ends, and as UKR-CONTACT/1 said, a template for veterans of any nationality whose lives have been impacted by the effects of war.

### **Project W and *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

Re-winding to pre-February 2022, staging Shakespeare's plays with an international cohort of veterans was the rationale for the next collaborative venture between Project W and SAA, which was to have been a co-production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. UKR-CONTACT/1 told me that the choice was appropriate for the veterans, because like *Twelfth Night*, the play is 'joyful and full of magic and positive emotions' (2023). The international aspect offered a chance, they said, 'to bring forward better understanding of veterans of different wars, speaking different languages, but telling about their fight for peace, for their land and values. We wanted to multiply the message of love not war in many countries' (2023).

The director was Teddy Kiendl, an American veteran who served in the US Army with the 82nd Airborne Division before joining special forces and serving with the 5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam.<sup>114</sup> When he left the military in the 1970s, Kiendl took acting classes, and then became a theatre practitioner in the UK, notably as an actor, director and writer with Theatre Mobile, in Burnley, Lancashire (1975-1977); as artistic director of Live Theatre Co in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1977-1984 and 1992-1997); and resident director and then artistic director of the Albany Empire, London (1984-1986 and 1987-1991). Although he principally worked with new writing, Kiendl has also directed Shakespeare, including *Romeo and Juliet* at the Albany Empire (1988) and a British Council 'Land Rover Tour' of *Macbeth* through Ghana, Sierra Leone, Malawi and Namibia for the English Shakespeare Company (1992). He has freelanced extensively as

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<sup>114</sup> The war in Vietnam began in 1954. Operation Rolling Thunder was the first deployment of America troops to Vietnam in 1965. A ceasefire agreement was reached in 1973, when American troops were then withdrawn by March of that year.

a director since the late 1990s to the present day, including with SAA. 'Theatre and military have a lot of similarities - [they are] a group of people who do a lot of simple things joined together' (Kiendl, 2023).

Kiendl's pathway into the arts happened when he returned to Vietnam in the early 1970s to make documentaries about the war for French TV company ORTF (Kiendl holds joint American-French citizenship). Kiendl said he was by then 'overdosed on war' and was reluctant to return to the US because of what he calls prejudice against Vietnam veterans, and especially those who had served in special forces. He came to London to study theatre and says that acting classes were a major reason why he did not suffer as much from the aftermath of war as he feared he would, having had what he described laconically as 'a rough time out there' (2023). It is significant, in terms of the distancing afforded by theatre, that Kiendl spoke in the second person narrative when he commented that 'theatre fills your head with other things than visions of what you've gone through' (2023). Although it may appear counter-intuitive to that observation, Kiendl is convinced that Shakespeare in particular gave him an easier transition from war to civilian life because of his implicit belief that Shakespeare understood soldiers and what they experience in war. Although this understanding is not unique to Shakespeare, veterans who think the same way as Kiendl (Wolfert of DE-CRUIT, for example), find comfort in that four hundred years ago, soldiers endured the same experiences and feelings about war as do 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century combatants.

However, from the perspective of inclusivity, Kiendl did not find life in the theatre easy, and still does not. He said that in several theatres he had to conceal his military background from colleagues, many of whom would have ostracised him because of their hostility towards his former profession (2022). There is, said Kiendl, nothing new in such antipathy, and he quoted the lines from Rudyard Kipling's poem, 'Tommy', where soldiers are not welcome in the audience:

I went into a theatre as sober as could be,  
They gave a drunk civilian room, but 'and't none for me;  
They sent me to the gallery or round the music-'alls,  
But when it comes to fightin', Lord!  
They'll shove me in the stalls!

(1890, 9-12)

Although he came from what he called a privileged background, Kiendl joined the US army as a private, mainly because he wanted to go into special forces.<sup>115</sup> Joining as the lowliest rank brought him into direct contact with fellow soldiers who were from poorer and underprivileged families. This experience informed both his military and theatrical careers:

As a theatre person my interest was in marginalised people, such as I had met in the military, and giving them a voice on stage. I also had a lot of sympathy for certain left-wing causes, but being a veteran I would have been automatically labelled as right-wing and so not likely to fit in with the theatre industry. Theatre still marginalises veterans to this day.

(Kiendl, 2023)

However, it is not as simple as a clash between the political ideologies of left and right. Kiendl attributes prejudice against the military as being primarily a middle-class trait, saying that he could freely admit to his background when working in Newcastle, which had a more working class set of actors and practitioners (2023). Kiendl sees the principal inequality issue in British society as being one of class discrimination, and that Shakespeare can be an effective tool to counter that. Kiendl's opinion is that:

One of the defining signs of class in Britain is still a person's accent, well, posh accents didn't exist in Shakespeare's day. They were regional. Shakespeare wasn't posh and neither were the groundlings who flocked to the Globe. Coming at it from my perspective as [a] military [person] working on *Macbeth*, posh doesn't connect with a tribal warrior society.

(Kiendl, 2022)

Apposite to Kiendl's views on class is the work of Northern Broadsides, a theatrical company founded in 1992 by actor Barrie Rutter. It has since staged twenty-seven Shakespeare productions. Its remit is to perform in northern English accents and was one of the first companies to do this to play Shakespeare's kings and queens as well as porters, jesters and fools, because 'the classics don't belong to any one region or voice – they're part of our common culture' (Northern Broadsides, online, 2023).

Kiendl believes prejudice towards the military may also be rooted in what he refers to as a 'terrible truth' (2023). Judith Herman, writing about trauma, states

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<sup>115</sup> It is generally a requirement of both UK and US special forces that the candidate should have worked their way up the ranks from private or its equivalent.



that 'Soldiers in every war, even those who have been regarded as heroes, complain bitterly that no one wants to know the real truth about war' (1992: 8). That real, and uncomfortable, truth, says Kiendl, is that:

Veterans know that the secret of civilisation is violence - the violence that is needed to protect peoples and countries, and when the violence is over, people don't want to know. PTSD is the result of the horrible secret veterans go through – this horrible knowledge explains why we aren't welcome in theatre generally. We know the dirty secret and society doesn't want to acknowledge that. Theatre is just a part of that society.

(Kiendl, 2023)

It contextualises Kiendl's comment by understanding that the reception afforded to many US veterans on their homecoming from Vietnam was hostile. Bob Feist, who served in Vietnam between 1968 and 1969, comments that 'we were not honoured, but were treated as the face of an unpopular war' (2012, online). Bob Greene compiled a book of two hundred and thirty-four letters solicited from Vietnam veterans, and although he debunks some of the myths surrounding whether many soldiers were spat upon when returning home, he writes that for many 'they were made to feel small and unwanted in so many other ways that it felt like being spat upon' (1989: 12). Jonathan Shay writes of veterans who found themselves 'outcast and humiliated' when they had assumed they would have been 'welcomed, supported and understood' (1994: 7). Shay quotes an unnamed veteran who said that he was asked to tell a gathering of family members what being in the war had been like. 'I started to tell them, and I told them. And do you know, within five minutes the room was empty. [...] After that I didn't tell anybody I had been in Vietnam' (xxii).

These testimonies are part of what Kiendl called 'the terrible truth' and 'the dirty secret', and why he is now so passionate about using Shakespeare as a literary vehicle to de-marginalise veterans. Kiendl believes that being accepted back into civilian society is crucial to help veterans with their psychological issues. Like Torkut and UKR-CONTACT/1, he also sees Shakespeare as a way to show the wider world that war is omnipresent:

The Ukrainian war is rooted in their history, such as the Holodomor – they are now facing genocide.<sup>116</sup> The reality for Ukraine is that men are being

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<sup>116</sup> The Holodomor was a genocidal famine in Ukraine induced by Stalin between the years of 1932-3. Sometimes referred to as the Terror Famine, it killed millions of Ukrainians, many of whom were peasants,

killed and women raped and killed. The West has lost sight of these things, a truth it doesn't want to acknowledge. Shakespeare does. It's what Shakespeare means in times of war and its aftermath which is why he is so important to the Ukrainians now. Part of the reason Shakespeare works as therapy is because he deals with war and violence, he deals with 'the terrible truth' by showing the world what war truly means to those who experience it.

(Kiendl, 2023)

As Kiendl sees it, Shakespeare performed with a military perspective can be a powerful way of demonstrating to a civilian audience the reality of the 'terrible truth' for soldiers who experience it, both at the time of conflict and many years afterwards.

### ***A Midsummer Night's Dream* workshops**

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was chosen to be the joint venture between SAA and Ukrainian veterans, said Kiendl, because the Ukrainian performers had wanted only to perform comedies and that the physical elements of the play would take emphasis away from Shakespeare's trickier textual passages for those who spoke English as a second language. However, and apropos to his views on theatre and soldiers, Kiendl passionately wanted SAA's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be produced to reflect the military ethos and experiences of the participants. He commented that 'working with veterans for the first time caused me to look at the play from a more military perspective' (2023). It is significant that, given what Kiendl said about theatre marginalising veterans for many years, he felt that this was also the first time for him personally to produce two plays – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (and later, *Macbeth*) – with the remit of inclusivity for veterans. Kiendl's proposal, therefore, was to draw out the darker elements of the play by encompassing war and the aftermath of conflict. This post-war world, as in any conflict, included prisoners of war, of whom Kiendl believes Hippolyta is one.<sup>117</sup>

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* workshops began on 3 January 2022, with Kiendl as director and a production planned for performances in Ukraine and

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and was believed to have been Stalin's response to what he considered to be the threat of Ukraine's strengthening cultural autonomy.

<sup>117</sup> Hippolyta is part of the spoils of war for the victor, Theseus, whom she will marry, having little choice in the matter, because she is the female leader of a conquered people.

Shakespeare's Globe in summer 2023. The workshops, a practical example of international collaboration, were initially attended by British, American and Ukrainian veterans, in addition to Ukrainians who had volunteered as civilian assistants in war zones, and some Ukrainian theatre personnel. Workshops ran for a total of twenty sessions, the first six of which were attended by seven to eight Ukrainian veterans. Attendance numbers initially averaged up to twenty veterans, with numbers dwindling after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and when it became apparent that a production was not to be forthcoming. Most of the veterans had acted in Shakespearean productions previously, but there were varying levels of comprehension and enthusiasm for the project; British veteran Ian Jones said he was there purely as 'it was something to do' (which in itself represents the value of SAA's workshops in reaching out to veterans) and he was not entirely sure he understood Shakespeare, or ever would do so.

In the first two weeks, the veterans started by working on any Shakespearean monologues they were comfortable and familiar with. For the Ukrainians, this mainly consisted of passages from *Twelfth Night*, although one was drawn to the power and pathos of the speech by Constance in *King John*: 'I am not mad; I would to God I were/For then 'tis like I should forget myself' (3.4.48-49). It was easy to see the connection and analogy of Constance's words to war, loss and grief experienced since 2014 by the Ukrainian participants. Kiendl then commenced working with all the veterans on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It became apparent after several sessions that one or two veterans contributed more than the others by asking questions about the text and wanting to take on bigger acting challenges. There were other challenges to be met, such as the limitations of working online; Kiendl said that not being able to gauge body language made it difficult for him as the director. The Ukrainians also needed translations of some technical theatrical and poetic language. Kiendl adopted a 'breakout room' method, whereby the British and Americans worked together in one 'room', the Ukrainians in another, and all came together later in the session. It seemed to work well, and there was much enthusiasm for the play as the veterans progressed with their understanding of it.

These workshops differed markedly from the DE-CRUIT sessions I analyse in Chapter Three. Whereas DE-CRUIT sessions concentrate on the incorporation of emotional expression exercises, Kiendl's workshops were

primarily intended to prepare the veterans for a stage production. Acting, and particularly in their second language, did constitute a boost to morale and confidence for the Ukrainian participants, and the therapeutic aspect of Shakespeare was very important to them. This latter did, however, appear to be secondary for the British and Americans who participated; their motivation was more rooted in SAA's role as a gateway to being cast in professional productions. I noted another difference in Kiendl's approach to that of Stephan Wolfert in the DE-CRUIT workshops where veterans are always highly praised and never criticised, even mildly.<sup>118</sup> Kiendl centred his methods around acting techniques and textual understanding so that the veterans would be competent to act on stage.

Kiendl's approach did not use a level of distancing from the experiences of being a soldier; in a crucial way, it was the opposite. Kiendl frequently used military analogies to put his points across, such as explaining that the technical skills used to master text and performance can be compared to reading a map. When breaking down the Shakespearean text into portions, or units, to make it easier for the veterans to understand (an approach based on Stanislavskian techniques which I describe below), Kiendl referred to an objective for the actor as being 'the strategic aim, whereas an action is the tactic deployed to achieve the end'. Kiendl also evoked a familiarity of language between war and theatre, by reminding the veterans that battlefields are referred to as theatres of war. It appeared to me, from my observations of these and other workshops, that having their own esoteric language (about which I write in my literature review section on applied Shakespeare) made it easier for the veterans to process why Shakespeare's words and phrases sometimes have different meanings or nuances to everyday modern English and correspondingly, this assisted several veterans in a quicker assimilation of Shakespearean language.

It should be noted there are similarities between the military and theatre, beyond language, that veterans can relate to. Paul Fussell, for example, writes of the theatricality inherent in the hazards of conflict, and how this theatricality can be valuable for soldiers who are fighting in war because 'seeing warfare as theatre provides a psychic escape for the participant; with a sufficient sense of theatre, he can perform his duties without implicating his real self, and without

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<sup>118</sup> See Chapter Three: 'The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans'.

impairing his innermost conviction that the world is still a rational place' (1975: 192). Fussell quotes from the war diaries of artillery officer, Major P. H. Pilditch, who on the eve of the Battle of Loos in 1915, wrote that 'a queer feeling these last few days intensified last night. A sort of feeling of unreality, as if I were acting on a stage' (Fussell, 1975: 192).<sup>119</sup> When the actors on a theatrical stage are veterans, and particularly when they are acting for therapeutical reasons, this communion between themselves can be likened to the communalisation of trauma about which Jonathan Shay writes about being able safely to share one's story to understanding listeners (1994: 4).<sup>120</sup>

Kiendl's evocation of such familiar examples did appear to put the veterans at ease; the impression was that Shakespeare cannot be truly hard if they can relate performing his work to skills they already possess. Although this approach carries potential triggering risks, there was a strong sense of camaraderie of veterans being brought together by the demands of Shakespeare. I also noted an empathy between Kiendl and the veterans, perhaps because he is the latter himself, and as an extension of this, they subconsciously appeared to trust him as they would do a military commander giving orders or instructions in the field. Although neither Kiendl nor any of the other veterans discussed in detail their deployments, all were aware that as soldiers, they shared common combat experiences and military values. This commonality is relevant when discussing Kiendl's approach to acting and how it drew on a technique which uses the concept of affective or emotional memory as advocated by the Soviet Russian theatre practitioner, Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938).

### **Kiendl and Konstantin Stanislavski**

Kiendl as a theatre director is strongly influenced by Stanislavski and has used Stanislavski's methods throughout his career. The essence of Stanislavski's ethos is that the actor should live a role rather than merely perform it and his techniques, or system, for acting, are described in *An Actor Prepares* (1936) and a sequence of notebooks, written in the 1920s and 1930s. Jean Benedetti calls Stanislavski's system 'a working method for working actors' (1982: ix). The

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<sup>119</sup> The primary source, *The War Diary of an Artillery Officer, 1914-1919*, by Major P.H. Pilditch, is held in the private papers collections of the Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>120</sup> I explain Shay's concept of communalisation of trauma in more detail in my literature review section on combat PTSD.

principles of acting as used by Kiendl are adapted from this system, and Stanislavski's own later revisions to it. Two particular elements of Stanislavski's system were apposite to the SAA veterans working with Kiendl. Firstly, Stanislavski advocated that actors performed better if they had personally experienced the actions they want to portray on stage (Stanislavski, 1936: 49). Stanislavski's 'Magic (or Creative) If' would thus enable them to consider with authenticity what they would have done were they in their character's situation. Secondly, and in relation to Shakespeare produced with a military perspective, the veterans would draw on those experiences and memories of service and combat to inform their performance. This latter is a concept that Stanislavski termed emotional memory, and which, according to Benedetti, serves to bring 'human depth by his [the actor's] own personal involvement' to a role (90).

However, as Perviz Sawoski writes, emotional memory requires that an actor recreate an event from the past in order to regenerate the 'feelings' experienced at that time (2018: 20). There are inevitable dangers inherent in the practice of emotional memory; Benedetti points out in relation to Stanislavski's own experience that 'all too often, however, the evocation of past experiences produced negative results – tension, exhaustion, sometimes hysteria. At other times the mind seized up, refusing to yield up its secrets' (90). For the veterans in my research specifically, a reliance on the emotional memory approach obviously has implications for triggering potentially distressing flashbacks or other symptoms of PTSD when veterans perform war-related passages and plays (Shakespeare or any other). Michel St Denis writes that he had seen in young actors the introspection required to use Stanislavski's method pushed to the point of psychoanalysis, remarking that 'I felt that then we had left the theatre to enter therapy' (1964: 81). Bernard Askew writes that, according to Stanislavski, everything an actor does on stage as a character 'must serve a purpose for that character (2017: 142). For the actor-veterans, everything (or at least, most) of what they do on stage must serve a therapeutic purpose for themselves if that is primarily why they are using Shakespeare. The Ukrainian veterans, who mainly do perform for therapeutic reasons, may have felt it was not conducive to their psychological well-being to relive the traumas of their combat experiences.

Stanislavski was aware of the problems associated with requiring his actors to practice emotional memory, and his later work (1934-8) saw a shift

towards what he called the method of physical actions, whereby emotions could be triggered by a series of physical actions on stage. (Sawoski, 5). Stanislavski's method of physical actions was drawn upon by Kiendl to break down the Shakespearean text into manageable, and comprehensible portions called units and objectives. Thus, a unit is a portion of a scene that contains one objective, and units change each time there is a shift in the scene. Therefore, said Kiendl, if an 'objective' is what a character is attempting to achieve, an 'action' is the means chosen (either consciously or unconsciously) of achieving that end. Kiendl told the veterans that this method works because it enables a deeper understanding of the script and thus the part the actor is required to play. 'I have often' said Kiendl in an early session, 'watched Shakespeare performances that were just about an actor giving a speech and not knowing what the hell they're actually talking about'. This approach appeared to work for the veterans reading and understanding Shakespeare. One commented that the unpicking of texts into units in particular, worked for them in exactly the way Kiendl described because it did mean the difference between saying their lines and understanding them (VET-INT/4).<sup>121</sup>

However, the usefulness of Stanislavski for acting Shakespeare is questioned by some theatre practitioners. Peter Holland argues that the two are fundamentally incompatible because of Stanislavskian assumptions about realist character (2005: 43); certainly, Stanislavski's insistence on the fourth wall concept would seem to be in conflict with the delivery of Shakespearean asides to the audience, for example. Actor Simon Callow rejects the approach used by Kiendl of breaking down the text into units, saying that Shakespearean metaphor cannot be 'coerced into the "activity-towards-an-action-straitjacket"' (1984: 82). St Denis writes that the actors who play characters such as Lear and his Fool, Viola and Feste, Othello and Iago, cannot possibly 'live their parts' which require long practice with the text (83) and points to Stanislavski's own reservations about applying his methods to Shakespeare (82). Stanislavski lamented that unlike with Chekhov, he could not fully express his perceptions of Shakespeare, acknowledging that 'we have created a technique and methods for artistic impression of Chekhov, but we do not possess a technique for the saying of the artistic truths in Shakespeare' (1924: 350). Kiendl's view is that, unlike St Denis's

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<sup>121</sup> VET-INT/4 did not want to be named.

observation, a veteran can play the parts of major characters with whom he or she possesses a military affinity which can be drawn upon to facilitate the interpretation.

Overall, Kiendl's adaptation of Stanislavski's methods did seem to work for the veterans. They were buoyed by the prospect of acting together on stage, and especially in a production intended to be taken to Ukraine. Kiendl planned to go to Kyiv for a week in March 2022, during which visit he intended to hold workshops for the Ukrainian veterans, ask Ukrainian folk quartet DakhaBrakha to perform in the production and meet with representatives from the Ukrainian Veterans' Ministry.<sup>122</sup> Kiendl intended also to source funding, try to secure venues and generally boost the collaboration between British, America and Ukrainian veterans. However, Kiendl did not go to Ukraine, because of Russia's invasion on 24 February. In purely practical terms of producing Shakespeare at a time of war, week nine of the workshops therefore included no Ukrainian participants; the veterans had been called back to active service and deployed to the fighting. In perhaps more nebulous, but equally important, emotional terms of producing Shakespeare in war time, however, it must be noted that although Kiendl had limited email contact with the Ukrainian civilians in the group who had been evacuated to safer countries, neither he nor we did not know the fate of the combatants.

The remaining participants discussed what then should happen with the production, which they did not want to abandon. Many veterans during the course of my research have told me that they are accustomed to carrying on after the loss of their comrades. It is how they survive the trauma of war and its consequences. One veteran suggested concentrating only on Shakespearean monologues connected with war to show solidarity with the Ukrainian fighters, but the consensus was to continue with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which participants were familiar with and enjoying. This showed, they said, that the Ukrainian participants were not forgotten, and that their albeit brief participation had a purpose apropos a future production. The plan, therefore, was to put on indefinite hold any public performances, but that these would happen again with the Ukrainian veterans when hostilities cease. There was no question that the

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<sup>122</sup> The name DakhaBrakha in translation from Ukrainian means 'give and take'.



Ukrainians would be abandoned by their new international comrades. There was an unspoken assumption of 'when' they return, rather than 'if'.

As the weeks went on however, it became apparent that the war would be a long-drawn-out affair, and that the Ukrainian veterans would not be returning to the SAA sessions for many months, possibly years. Although it was still agreed that they should be involved as soon as is practicable, and assuming they survived combat, the prospect of not staging a production within the original timescale anticipated caused numbers of attendees to dwindle, until there were only a handful remaining each week. Those who left did not attend necessarily (or primarily) for therapeutic reasons, and they wished to pursue other acting or artistic projects. Meanwhile, Kiendl encouraged the veterans who remained to select Shakespearean passages they are especially interested in, to work through in the same way as they were analysing and acting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was serendipitous that in this way they arrived at a play they enjoyed, and which also has distinct military overtones – *Macbeth*.

### ***Macbeth***

Such was the enthusiasm for this play, and in discussion with SAA, Kiendl decided that the sessions should then focus on producing *Macbeth*, which would have the subtitle of *A Soldier's Tale*. Willy Maley calls *Macbeth* 'the soldiers' play' (2011: 248) and argues that it is 'about war's aftermath – guilt, hallucinations, insomnia at that stage where the theatre of war becomes a drama of trauma' (244). Kiendl was keen that, as with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this production should draw on the military experiences and perspectives of the veterans taking part (including himself as director). There was an obvious caveat of being careful not to trigger any psychological issues in the process because *Macbeth* is not a light-hearted comedy, and Kiendl was mindful that he should consult with the appropriate SAA personnel such as Amanda Faber and well-being officer, Nick Shatford, on this aspect.

Three participants remained and, albeit in a limited way, so too did the international connection: US-based American veteran Phil Milio and his civilian partner Julie Geisler and Jones. Jones said, not entirely tongue in cheek and echoing comments he made at the start of the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* workshops that 'I am here because I hate Shakespeare. It's not even in English,

it might as well be in another language, but I'm here to be persuaded' (Jones, 2022). The atmosphere became more intimate, and we could and did share stories and details about ourselves. We learned, for example, that Jones performs stand-up comedy routines, mainly in clubs and pubs in the north west of England. Kiendl suggested that for the next session, Jones should read the Porter's speech from *Macbeth* (2.3.1-20 & 26-33: 2580-1) which said Kiendl, is one the finest examples of the stand-up comedy genre ever written. The participants wished to concentrate on *Macbeth* with a military emphasis, and all agreed, in the spirit of international collaboration between veterans, that it should be dedicated to the Ukrainian veterans. Workshops therefore continued in much the same vein as those with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with close analysis of text and an emphasis on understanding what Shakespeare wrote before attempting to perform it.

A British veteran, who had been a military psychiatric nurse (VET-INT/5) later joined us for the *Macbeth* sessions, having seen the workshops advertised on the SAA website.<sup>123</sup> They had acted in Shakespeare before, and although VET-INT/5 was keen to pursue a professional acting career and was motivated to attend the workshops as a stepping-stone to this ambition, they were also keenly aware of the therapeutic value of Shakespeare:

Shakespeare helps [in mental health] because you relate to the characters, you share their histories and yours. This all helps to process your angst if, for example, you feel guilty about what you've done in service. That's partly why I've jumped on board with doing *Macbeth* because that play helps you to put your problems into perspective. We have to be careful though, with reliving traumas every night on stage, for some that doesn't work.

(VET-INT/5, 2022)

This is the distancing of which I write about in my chapter on applied Shakespeare. With their professional mental health background, VET-INT/ 5 also believed that carefully chosen passages from Shakespeare could be a template for use in therapy sessions with veterans.

The participation of a former military psychiatric nurse did bring another dynamic to the group. I describe above the Stanislavskian system that Kiendl

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<sup>123</sup> I pseudonymise this veteran because of the sensitive nature of their previous work in the military.

drew his directing approach from. A key example of its use in *Macbeth* was the aspect of emotional memory. For instance, when Jones was allocated the Sergeant's (or Captain's) speech (1.2.8-23, 25-33 & 35-42: 2565-6), Kiendl advised him to draw on his own personal experiences to imagine he is asking a soldier what another soldier would feel at that point. Kiendl suggested that the lines which describe Macbeth unseaming his enemy 'from the navel to the chops' (1.2.22: 2565) could relate to Macbeth going berserk as a result of the intensity of the battle he has just fought in. VET-INT/5 shared some general examples of how soldiers may be affected by such combat.<sup>124</sup> We discussed how at the start of the play, Macbeth has not slept for a long time, and some of the participants related how their own experience of this translated into their corresponding actions; none of the veterans, however, were triggered or appeared to feel uncomfortable with the direction of the discussion. We also discussed perspectives it was acknowledged by Kiendl that some people may feel uncomfortable with, such as the suggestion that Macbeth's letter to his wife (1.5.1-12: 2571-2) is more sexually charged when she reads it because she pictures him bloodied from the battlefield. This corresponds to the 'uncomfortable truths' about which Kiendl speaks (see above).

Apropos to working with this much smaller group, my use of the word 'we' rather than 'they' is deliberate. Until then, I had been, as agreed at the outset, only a note-taking observer. As I note above, I was asked more frequently for example, about text, characters and plot, iambic pentameter and whether the play – one of the shortest in the Shakespearean canon – may have missing scenes. I was increasingly required to participate; I was no longer just their 'audience'. I had become embedded in the group and accepted as part of them. That was significant, because it demonstrated not only a level of trust towards a civilian, but that the veterans were becoming increasingly confident and comfortable about working together with Shakespeare. Three weeks into the *Macbeth* sessions, I was asked by Kiendl, with the consent of the others, to be a dramaturg for the production.<sup>125</sup> Thus, I found that research spilled over into involvement in a way I had not anticipated.

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<sup>124</sup> I was asked not to include these examples in my thesis.

<sup>125</sup> I sought additional ethics clearance for this role in December 2022, but was advised by the University of Exeter that I was covered by my original ethics approval. See Appendix B.

## The role of dramaturg

In my role as dramaturg, Kiendl and I worked both with, and away from, the other veterans. Kiendl wanted 'our' *Macbeth* to concentrate on the military aspect of the play and to be about what comes after the 'hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost and won' (*Macbeth*, 1.1.3-4: 2564). Kiendl was especially interested in exploring why a hitherto honourable soldier who has fought bravely and loyally for his king, 'turns bad'. Macbeth is a soldier and a valiant one. Killing the king he has fought like Bellona's bridegroom (1.2.54: 2565) on the battlefield to protect has obvious mental repercussions for him; he cannot sleep, has nightmares, experiences emotional withdrawal from his wife and displays nihilistic tendencies at the end of the play. These disturbances may be, and probably are, manifestations of guilt, but equally they could be interpreted as symptoms of PTSD. However, Kiendl did not want what he called 'a one-dimensional PTSD production'. VET-INT/5's experience of being a military psychiatric nurse was invaluable at arriving at this decision. VET-INT/5 said that only a fifth of their cases had involved PTSD and commented that 'Macbeth acts in civilian life the way he's previously acted in battles and wars. He's essentially leaving the forces with adjustment disorder [AD], but AD is rarely PTSD' (VET-INT/5, 2022). Arising from these discussions, our initial thoughts were that a production of *Macbeth* could give the credence and emphasis on Macbeth's prior experiences as a soldier, fighting in what would have been very bloody and brutal wars, and certainly using daggers at close quarters. We agreed that the start of our production should show Macbeth and Banquo bloodied and obviously fresh from the battlefield, to emphasise this. Both are presented as seasoned soldiers, and the Norwegian wars would not have been their first. Both have therefore been exposed to traumatic events and practices, which may have a lasting effect on them psychologically. This was important because the veterans in our group could directly relate to Macbeth and Banquo's state of mind as Shakespeare presents them in the play.

## The *Macbeth* workshops

Working more closely with the veterans, I realised how some of my own thinking as a researcher into combat PTSD was being influenced and changed. During one session, VET-INT/5 asked Kiendl if he personally thought that acting in Shakespeare, and specifically *Macbeth*, is cathartic. Kiendl replied that ‘nothing is cathartic because you’ve seen what you’ve seen, done what you’ve done. Nothing will get rid of that but experiencing that reality again vicariously through characters [means that] you see you’re part of an historical continuum’ (2022). This challenged my assumptions about catharsis and how valuable Shakespeare can be. I was no longer taking for granted, if I ever did, that Shakespeare can be a panacea for all evils caused by combat; the DE-CRUIT workshops I attended a year earlier had an almost evangelical zeal about the value they place on Shakespeare as therapy. From the mention of catharsis came a discussion about Shakespeare’s use of iambic pentameter (one of the veterans said they had read that the metre can have calming qualities), and Kiendl partly qualified his observation about catharsis by saying that ‘it [iambic pentameter] is the heartbeat, the basic sound we hear in the womb which is imprinted in all of us. Shakespeare’s use of this metre is an authentic connection with all other human beings – which is as close to catharsis as you can get’. Although he did not consider it to be catharsis *per se*, Kiendl told me in a later interview that he also benefited therapeutically from working with veterans in these workshops, because he too was being challenged about what may or may not be efficacious when it comes to dealing with his own traumas (Kiendl, 2023).

The *Macbeth* workshops ran for twenty-two weeks. During that time, Kiendl was not able to secure funding or a venue in which to stage the production in 2023. Kiendl wanted to continue with the proposal, originally for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, to play at Shakespeare’s Globe, but for 2023, the theatre decided that it would work with veterans in its production of *The Winter’s Tale* (see Chapter Two: ‘Soldiers’ Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career’) and on no other production with them. There was additional frustration at an opportunity lost because Shakespeare’s Globe was due to stage *Macbeth* between July and October 2023, and it would have been thought-provoking to have had the veterans’ version in juxtaposition. A tentative alternative was to approach the theatre for a 2024 production, but in the meantime there were

problems. No imminent production meant that there were insufficient veterans then to stage one, and even if there were, SAA did not have the funds – Faber estimated a cost of £32,000 a week for the required four weeks of rehearsals (Faber, 2023).

There was much disappointment because the veterans believed by then that there would be a full production in which they would participate. For Kiendl, it was particularly frustrating because he said he wanted ‘desperately to do the plays [*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Macbeth*] with the Ukrainians’, and that the whole process of re-thinking them from the perspective of soldiers and veterans had been a revelation (Kiendl, 2023). I observed that Jones especially grew in confidence from the sessions. In the beginning he had struggled with understanding the language and asked a lot of questions about its meaning. By the end of the workshops, Jones said he felt able and willing to take part in a full production and was enjoying the play and working with other veterans. We had a brainstorming session on how we might have gone ahead, possibly with a radio version which would have been considerably cheaper and easier to organise, but the decision was made once again to suspend workshops until there was a reasonable prospect of staging a production. I observed in my notes that there was a dual danger that losing access to weekly workshops and being disappointed again about putting on a production would have a detrimental effect on the veterans’ well-being, and that the value of what had been achieved so far may be negated.

## **Conclusion**

The value of the workshops I describe above is not easy to assess other than for the veterans who attended them, partly because the numbers of participants by the end were too few to extrapolate a general conclusion from. Partly too, there was no performance to watch to gauge the veterans’ acting and post-trauma growth progress afforded by their immersion in the Stanislavskian methods used by Kiendl. Bearing in mind too, what Kiendl said above regarding the Ukrainians only wishing to act in comedies, it would have been interesting to see what impact his military emphasis may have had on the well-being of those Ukrainian veterans. The war-related content in their *Twelfth Night*, such as the photos of soldiers and combat that formed a backdrop to the stage, would tend to imply

however, that they were not entirely averse to the inclusion of potentially triggering material.

I can, however, extrapolate what I did observe to form the following conclusions. From a positive standpoint, the camaraderie provided by the workshops is important in itself, and from the lessons learned in those sessions the veterans also felt able to act on stage; there is a validation in the therapeutic process when it enables them to have the confidence to pursue their performance goal. Two workshop participants, Phil Milio and Julie Geisler, were subsequently involved in a production at Shakespeare's Globe, *The Winter's Tale*, which Milio described as giving him 'overwhelming joy' and that working on this production with other SAA cast members has 'created bonds that will last forever' (Milio, 2023).<sup>126</sup> There was some frustration and discontent on the part of the veterans that they could not put what they learned to practical use by staging a full production at Shakespeare's Globe, even though they appeared to understand why. SAA, mainly through financial constraints, can only facilitate these workshops if a production is imminent. It highlights again the difference between SAA, which is performance-oriented, and DE-CRUIT in the US, which uses Shakespeare purely as a therapeutic tool and is funded accordingly. From the perspective of this chapter as an examination of international collaboration between veterans, the contrast between the approach of these organisations is not, I believe, connected to nationality, merely a different focus to applied Shakespeare.

In the midst of an on-going war, which has provided the backdrop for this chapter, Ukrainian veterans have reached out to the international community to show what is happening in their country, and some are choosing Shakespeare to do it. UKR-CONTACT/1 says that this communication goes beyond just veterans to sections of the civilian population too:

The message Ukraine wants to get across to the world is of love not war, how bravely Ukraine is fighting for freedom and her land, protecting justice and for belief in victory and of light against darkness. Veterans have to speak with one powerful voice, in English or in many languages, strengthening the power of good, the power of love. Shakespeare is all about that, he just didn't know Ukrainians at the time. That is the message that theatre and Shakespeare can help us to put across.

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<sup>126</sup> See Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career', for a fuller analysis of veteran participation in *The Winter's Tale*.

I have demonstrated in a previous chapter: 'Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare', how nationhood and Shakespeare's nationality are not consciously important to those veterans who engaged in applied Shakespeare for therapeutic reasons. Insofar as the remit of this chapter is concerned, nationhood had a significant impact of the praxis of applied Shakespeare because some of the participants about whom I write were subsequently deployed to the battlefield to defend their homeland of Ukraine. From its inception, the Ukrainians' Project W demonstrates how Shakespeare can bring together veterans of different nationalities, and how therapeutically efficacious this can be even when English is not the first language of those who engage in this form of applied Shakespeare. Project W includes veterans and some civilians who have helped in the war effort; both groups will have suffered trauma because of their experience of conflict. Working together as they have done on Shakespearean projects could serve as a model to help those traumatised groups in the future, and particularly to assist with the reintegration of veterans into civilian society. Many Ukrainian veterans I have spoken to frequently use words such as beauty and hope in connection with Shakespeare: beauty in a time of overwhelming ugliness and death. There is the beauty of his words, and the hope that his plays may once again be staged in Ukraine when war is over. Whether Shakespeare is capable, on a longer-term basis, of healing the wounds of war between enemies, such as Ukraine and Russia, is not a question I felt I could ask of the Ukrainian participants with whom I have worked while conflict is ongoing and emotions on their part were understandably heightened and raw. However, the Ukrainian veterans certainly have a powerful anti-war message. Perhaps a starting point might be Le Beau's words in *As You Like It* which Torkut quoted in Stratford in 2023: 'Hereafter in a better world than this, I shall desire more love and knowledge of you' (1.2.251-2: 1609).

Hereafter, a better world for veterans of all nationalities would be more understanding of their potential as theatrical people, typified by those whom I have studied for my research (and opportunities for that potential to be fulfilled). This understanding is necessary to inform how future treatment and/or therapeutic models are based, with the over-arching imperative that, as



psychologist Eric Meyer writes 'therapies for depression and PTSD should be adjusted to account for military culture' (2015: 29). This case study demonstrates how the ethos of the joint SAA/Project W workshops would appear to fulfil that cultural requirement, and how Shakespeare can have a therapeutic role to play for traumatised veterans of nationalities other than British. It also contributes to the area of Shakespeare studies which analyses the ideological uses to which Shakespeare can be put during times of on-going conflict.

## **Conclusion**

### **'Tis the curse of service'**

#### ***Othello***

##### **1.1.34 (1997: 2101)**

'Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war' are words spoken by a soldier's wife Kate Percy, in *I Henry IV* (2.4.50: 1177), and they both begin my thesis and have served throughout as the catalyst and inspiration for my research. My thesis therefore focuses on how applied Shakespeare may be used therapeutically for military veterans suffering from combat post-traumatic stress disorder, or who struggle to adjust to civilian life when leaving the armed forces. As I have shown, these conditions contribute towards myriad psychological and social symptoms that range from milder problems such as coping with everyday tasks like shopping, to alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence and homelessness and, at worst, suicide. Although there is now more awareness of PTSD and adjustment disorders, they still represent a mental health issue that is too often misunderstood or ignored by governments, the military hierarchy, society in general and even veterans themselves who are too ashamed to admit to having problems. My research aims both to fill a gap in existing knowledge about combat PTSD and readjustment issues, and to offer possibilities for an applied Shakespeare option for rehabilitation, recovery and post-trauma growth.

Focusing on British, American and Ukrainian veterans who participated in various Shakespeare-themed projects, productions and workshops as my primary source, my research encompasses theatrical work they have undertaken with veterans' organisations in the UK and the US (including the work done with the Ukrainians as part of an international collaboration of 'brothers in arms') and assesses the value and efficacy of such work. It identifies which Shakespeare plays, passages and characters have had particular significance when used therapeutically by the veterans in my research group, and how this can be so. My research therefore represents an original contribution to knowledge about the use of applied Shakespeare to address mental health issues in a specific and discrete section of society. It thus contributes to existing knowledge about applied Shakespeare as a branch of applied theatre, it contributes to existing knowledge

about military mental health, and on a wider level, suggests that applied Shakespeare can be adapted and tailored to the needs of other traumatised groups for whom conventional therapy or medication is not the sole, or necessarily efficacious solution. My research also recognises an often-overlooked truism that soldiers can be victims of war and suffer from its consequences, and that applied Shakespeare can help to heal the hidden wounds that often are, in Iago's words, 'the curse of service' (*Othello*, 1.1.34: 2101). As Jonathan Shay so eloquently points out, 'there is no contradiction between hating war and honouring the soldier' (1994: xxiii).

There is an identifiable lack of any similar research to mine in the UK. When I began my research, one of my principal secondary sources for fieldwork came from Alisha Ali, a professor of applied psychology at New York University, and Stephan Wolfert, who set up the DE-CRUIT group for traumatised veterans like himself in the US. They have together published a plethora of papers about the specific use of Shakespeare in arts-related therapeutic work with veterans in the US. Similar academic research work had not, prior to my PhD, been undertaken in relation to veterans in the UK and other countries. The intention of this thesis is therefore, to fill a gap in academic research in the field as it appertains not only to American veterans, but also those in the UK and Ukraine, the latter of whom have worked in collaboration with their 'brothers in arms' of different nationalities.

The key aim that drove my research was, therefore, to expand on Ali and Wolfert's work to establish how applied Shakespeare can be efficacious, and how and why it helps the well-being of some veterans who suffer from mental health and lifestyle issues. A limitation of Ali and Wolfert's research is that it concentrates only on observing workshops organised by Wolfert's DE-CRUIT organisation, which used Shakespearean text and personal monologues written by veterans, to help them to process their traumas and lifestyle problems that arose from their service. My research goes further. It examines both DE-CRUIT's workshop-based approach and that of British veterans' arts-based organisations which have facilitated the staging of full Shakespeare plays in public venues. This latter approach has served both to help the veterans to cope with psychological problems, and also to equip them with the skills and experience necessary for

them to pursue a professional or semi-professional career in theatre as part of their post-trauma growth process.

My argument, resulting from what I have learned, is that applied Shakespeare can have a therapeutic role to play in assisting with recovery from PTSD and the transitioning to civilian life. This is validated by my findings that while theatre and acting in general can replicate the 'band of brothers' familiarity of a military unit, there are experiences unique to engaging with Shakespeare that assist the therapeutic process. These are threefold. Firstly, I have found that a key benefit of using Shakespeare is that today's veterans find much in Shakespeare's military characters, and the portrayal of war and its aftermath which includes combat-related trauma, that they can personally relate to. This allows them to process their own, often distressing experiences, at a distant because those traumas could have happened to someone else. Secondly, this distancing segues into my finding that Shakespeare's language is both familiar but sufficiently removed from everyday speech for veterans to use it as a tool to evaluate and accept their own experiences as part of recovery and/or readjustment. Thirdly, I have found that some applied Shakespeare practitioners, including Wolfert, assert that the breathing techniques used to deliver the rhythm of Shakespeare's verse have demonstrable value as a calming method for veterans experiencing stress. I use the word 'practitioners' deliberately. The work that my subject group of veterans engage in is not dramatherapy carried out by healthcare clinicians who have additional experience in drama. It is offered and delivered by theatre practitioners, many of whom are veterans themselves, which offers the empathy and understanding that military personnel often feel cannot be experienced by civilians who did not personally serve in the armed forces and especially in combat.

My literature review contextualises my research into theatrical practices as therapy by examining what combat PTSD and readjustment issues are; what constitutes applied theatre, applied Shakespeare, and why the latter offers a unique element of therapeutic value; and by identifying which specific texts demonstrate an awareness on Shakespeare's part of psychological conditions experienced by veterans. I should point out that regarding Shakespearean text, I believe the material I have included is by no means exhaustive; there are other passages and characters that offer therapeutic qualities, but the limitations of the

length of my PhD meant that I chose to concentrate on the Shakespeare which has most been used in practice by the veterans.

Regarding such practice, it is my four case studies that form the praxis element of my thesis. My research brings together best practice from veterans' organisations that use Shakespeare because each case study focuses on a different aspect of work done with Shakespeare and veterans. Chapter One: 'Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare', examines the beginnings of applied Shakespeare in the UK to address and ameliorate veterans' psychological issues. Combat Veteran Players (CVP) was set up initially for veterans to read Shakespeare in workshops that concentrated on inducing calmness by using the breathing techniques associated with delivering verse, and particularly iambic pentameter. I found that the camaraderie and confidence engendered by veterans working together enabled CVP to stage four full Shakespeare plays at mainstream venues in Stratford-upon-Avon, London's West End and Shakespeare's Globe. These performances provided a springboard for some veterans to progress on to a professional acting career in both Shakespeare and other theatrical work. This case study also focuses on an individual veteran, Shaun Johnson, whose Shakespearean journey began with CVP. An important finding of my interviews with the veteran was that professional theatre, in this case the ethos of Shakespeare's Globe, clashed with how he perceived Shakespeare should be performed at the theatre. This encapsulates the difference between Shakespeare as a performing art and Shakespeare when used, successfully and as my PhD focuses on, as a therapy and well-being tool in an on-going battle against PTSD.

Chapter Two: 'Soldiers' Arts Academy: Shakespeare as therapy and a career', examines CVP's successor, Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA), and its dual role in bringing together veterans for therapeutic reasons and to provide them with a gateway into the performing arts by the provision of workshops, opportunities to take part in professional performances, and by enabling the veterans to qualify for Spotlight and Equity membership by dint of their work with SAA. Key differences from CVP were that SAA diversified away solely from Shakespeare and did not cast only veterans in its productions. Both of these differences had implications for the use of applied Shakespeare as therapy, with some SAA members relishing the professional opportunities this diversification

afforded, while others felt that SAA had moved too far away from what should have been its core remit of staging productions only with veterans as actors.

Chapter Three: 'The DE-CRUIT Shakespeare therapy programme for US veterans', examines the practices of DE-CRUIT, a US-based veterans' organisation that solely uses Shakespeare as a mimetic tool as therapy for traumatised veterans. DE-CRUIT's *modus operandi* is of workshop sessions that explore trauma through what Shakespeare's characters and words also display, and because it does not stage public productions, I conclude that DE-CRUIT is much more of a purely therapeutic organisation than SAA. DE-CRUIT concentrates on enabling veterans to work through their mental health problems by selecting the piece of Shakespearean verse that most resembles their feelings and experiences in conjunction with writing their own personal monologues. In common with CVP's early work, I found that DE-CRUIT places great emphasis on the calming qualities of iambic pentameter, and that its workshops attempt actively to 're-wire' veterans away from their former military training that taught them how to go into combat and ultimately how to kill. While I found that there is a necessity for the differing approaches of SAA and DE-CRUIT, the latter is more focused on enabling a smoother reintegration into society in general than of pursuing a career in the performing arts.

Chapter Four: "'Improvise, Adapt and Overcome": producing international Shakespeare when war intervenes', focuses on veterans from the UK, the US and Ukraine who used Shakespeare as a therapeutic tool, and I found that Shakespeare has an international resonance beyond his status as England's national poet. In some instances, those veterans worked together as an international manifestation of the military 'brothers in arms' ethos. My case study is informed by the context of the on-going war in Ukraine against Russia. For the Ukrainian veterans, it was important that they learned English to stage what to them was a cathartic production of *Twelfth Night*. I learned that the new language ability they acquired both constituted a valuable life skill and, perhaps more importantly to them, a tangible way of demonstrating that they had a place in the international community rather than being a 'colony' of Russia which their history had largely involved. One of my unexpected findings from this case study was that veterans may feel they are marginalised by a theatre industry that is

unsympathetic to a military ethos. This may have repercussions for veterans seeking theatre as therapy, or of deriving benefit from it if they do.

Another unanticipated outcome from my research is that there is little or no conscious connection between Shakespeare's nationality and that of the British veterans. Nationhood is not as important as to why they relate to Shakespeare's work as I had previously assumed it would be. My findings in respect of my subject group contradict the arguments about Shakespeare and cultural capital which centre around his nationality and concomitant elevation to the status of national icon. Instead, the veterans I interviewed speak of the power of his language and characterisation, the apparent understanding Shakespeare had of how soldiers think and feel and of how therapeutic it is to feel connected with Shakespeare's military writing while simultaneously being able to be one step removed from the traumas it expresses. In discussions about the work they have done on *Henry V*, the play most closely associated with British, or specifically English, patriotism and its military consequences, none have flagged up Henry's nationality as a point of interest for them. Rather, in this and other plays, the veterans have connected with the experiences of Henry both as a military commander, and more particularly as the combat soldier: the 'band of brothers' that represents the universality of war and military service. Veteran Shaun Johnson has been vociferously opposed to what he calls the re-writing of Shakespeare's texts, not because in his view it 'insults' Shakespeare's nationality but that it does belittle his artistry (Johnson, 2022a, 2022b).<sup>127</sup>

Among non-British veterans and civilian participants with whom I have worked, I must note a striking difference between the Ukrainians and the Americans. The Ukrainian veterans, and academics, view Shakespeare's nationality as significant both in that he and his work represent an important cultural defiance against what they view as centuries of colonisation by Russia (including the USSR), and apropos to that colonisation, their own concomitant desire to be considered as Europeans rather than Russians. In contrast, the reasons the American veterans give for why they engage with Shakespeare echo their British counterparts and are similarly unconnected to Shakespeare's nationality. American veteran Phil Milio, who works with SAA, commented that

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<sup>127</sup> See Chapter One: 'Shaun Johnson: a veteran's journey with PTSD, Combat Veteran Players and Shakespeare', for a fuller discussion of Johnson's views on Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is helpful for all veterans as his stories encompass issues, such as going to war and returning from war, that any veteran of any nationality can relate to. 'Shakespeare is a tool of communication that spans all sorts of cultures' said Milio (2022). The view of his American civilian wife Julie Geisler was that Shakespeare's text, although old, is still relevant today, and that that is what is overwhelmingly important rather than from where Shakespeare originated (2022). These comments by Milio and Geisler typify those made by other American veterans whom I have interviewed and observed. The only exception to their views on nationality that are espoused in these comments happened when, as an observer of the DE-CRUIT workshop sessions I describe in Chapter Three, I was asked to participate by reading some of Kate Percy's words from *Henry IV*. The American veterans in the workshop concurred that they had derived a benefit of connection from hearing those words spoken by me in, as they said, the English accent of Shakespeare. Kate's speech is the Shakespearean text that Wolfert uses as his introduction to DE-CRUIT sessions, and I am persuaded by my observations of those sessions that this passage could become the template with which veterans may begin work on Shakespeare as therapy.

However, applied Shakespeare for traumatised veterans is perhaps not an obvious therapy, given the early encounters of those veterans with whom I worked. Without exception, they hated Shakespeare at school, did not understand it and thus felt it to be irrelevant to their lives afterwards. The comment made by one veteran, Neil Davies, that Shakespeare was 'not for the likes of me' encapsulated how all felt about their working-class, educational exposure to the 'high culture' of Shakespeare (Davies, 2021). Veterans sometimes, perhaps often, originate from underprivileged societal groups, and may have joined the armed forces for socio-economic reasons. Although the UK armed forces does not, historically or now, keep data on the socio-economic background of recruits, Charlotte Cooper and David Gee's research found that army recruitment is targeted at the UK's poorest towns and cities, particularly neighbourhoods where annual family income is around £10,000 and that there is a long-standing correlation between higher enlistment rates and periods of high unemployment (Cooper and Gee, 2019)). However, those veterans whom I have included in my thesis believe that, irrespective of their own backgrounds and



unsatisfactory first encounters in a classroom with Shakespeare, their post-education experiences of his work reinforce the RSC's view that Shakespeare can be for everybody (RSC, 2023, online). Their working class origins and initial negative encounters in school have not continued to define Shakespeare as high culture that is unachievable to them. Correspondingly, they do not perceive anything intrinsically elitist or 'special' about his work that places him in a rarefied strata accessible only to academics and the theatre-going middle-classes; they have proved to their own satisfaction that this is not the case. The veterans' involvement shows them not only that they can access Shakespeare, but they can also enjoy and derive benefit from it.

There are certainly contradictions inherent in the veterans' 'Shakespeare for all' beliefs and an elitism which some critics believe is inherent in the cultural capital that surrounds Shakespeare. It is important to stress that the veterans have not appropriated Shakespeare's work for elitist or even anti-elitist reasons. For those who came to Shakespeare for therapy, their particular 'Why Shakespeare?' rationale, it appears that any corresponding acquisition of cultural capital associated with Shakespeare is to them incidental and certainly not as important as the therapeutic benefits Shakespeare has endowed them with. Veterans thus acquire the cultural capital of Shakespeare because they open their minds to literature that has the potential to transform them.

Just as I opened my own mind and thus my pre-conceptions about veterans, theatre and Shakespeare underwent change during my PhD, so too did the ethnographic process undertaken for my thesis teach me that research necessarily evolves; that theory does not always have the expected or desired answers to how the practice unfolds; that what seems a straightforward methodological path at the beginning often needs to be adapted before the end. Adaptation has happened for my research for various reasons. For some veterans, an informal approach was the key to yielding not just valuable qualitative data, but in putting at ease people who were vulnerable because of their psychological issues and also potentially wary of me as a civilian who has never served in the military. I had assumed in the beginning that I would be only an observer of the veterans' workshops, rehearsals and performances. However, as their trust of me grew, I was invited to participate to a lesser or greater degree in their Shakespeare sessions; this was as simple as reading some lines, to

becoming a dramaturg for what was intended to be a public production of *Macbeth* at Shakespeare's Globe. Praxis is about relationships, reflexivity and understanding how and why objectivity and subjectivity, which I had assumed would guide both the agendas of researcher and researched, becomes intersubjectivity in practice. As a researcher, I also have moral and ethical obligations to the subjects of my research, some of whom could be classed as vulnerable adults. I found, and I would advocate this approach to other researchers in this and related fields, that it was not conducive to the well-being of some veterans to refer outright to PTSD (even though, and I will stress this again, all who participated in my research were made fully aware that PTSD formed a fundamental part of it). Some were very candid about having PTSD and/or adjustment issues, and that that was why they had gravitated to Shakespeare as a therapy, but many others did not want to acknowledge their condition to me, at least not initially. My research would have yielded less had I insisted on rigidly following my initially planned methodology of formal questionnaires and structured interviews.

There are, regrettably but inevitably, limitations to the scope of my research. The duration of a three-year PhD does not allow for following up on the post-trauma growth and progress (or otherwise) of the veterans who have engaged with the work I describe. This is why it was important to include veterans who historically had used Shakespeare, so that I could examine and assess how efficacious this engagement was for them over a period of time and on an on-going basis. There was a sense too, of unfinished business and frustration in that the SAA veterans' work on *Macbeth* never came to fruition on a public stage as was the original intention, and which would have represented a major achievement for the veterans who participated. The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, which necessitated global lockdowns, prevented face-to-face interviews and performances, although on the positive side, conducting such research via online video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom, meant I had easier access to veterans in different countries and time zones.

Undoubtedly, the most significant limitation I encountered was the war in Ukraine. This obviously encompassed the important ethical and humanitarian aspects of conducting research when a war was in progress and people – both military and civilian – were being killed daily. This consideration was to me

profound. On a practical level, it curtailed Shakespearean projects that the Ukrainian veterans were engaged in, and my ability to interview them. Conversely however, and because the conflict had been on-going since 2014, it provided a rare opportunity to research how valuable Shakespeare is at a time of war and even in a country where English is not the first language. This reinforced my belief that applied Shakespeare is currently underused and undervalued as having a significant role to play as a rehabilitation and well-being tool for traumatised individuals and groups.

This observation was crystallised during a presentation I gave at The Shakespeare Institute in June 2022. I was asked by a member of the audience if I thought there were uses for my research beyond its application to veterans. I believe that there are. As a template for other traumatised people, Shakespeare can be tailored to their specific needs, experiences and traumas in the same way as it has been for the veterans. This may be, as with the veterans, in workshops or on the public stage. It may be also adapted for use as one-to-one therapy; veterans derived benefit from working together in units that partly replicate their military experience, but this group approach may not be suitable for everyone. As with the veterans, it is axiomatic that the application as Shakespeare as therapy requires careful choices as to the most appropriate material to use. There is, I contend, also a key benefit in the delivery of this material by theatre practitioners, rather than dramatherapists who may bring an unwelcome element of clinical practice to people who do not want to acknowledge openly that they have psychological problems. Applied theatre, and in this case, applied Shakespeare, offers, I suggest, a gentler approach to what is a delicate issue.

I have also been asked: why did I choose to research Shakespeare and veterans? It is true that by so doing, I have identified a significant gap in existing academic work which my thesis begins to fill. In choosing the work of an early modern writer to address twenty-first century problems, I had to begin my PhD by believing there was merit in the supposition that Shakespeare understood veterans and that that is why his work is relevant to them and helps as a therapeutic tool. Of course, I could equally make the case that Shakespeare understood mothers, fathers, kings, queens, artisans, saints and sinners – and not just veterans. The point is that many of the veterans with whom I have worked think Shakespeare *understood them* and their unique set of circumstances and

experiences. That is crucial in enabling them to derive benefit from Shakespeare when applied therapeutically.

Veterans have told me that Shakespeare encapsulates the difference between philosophising on *jus in bello* safely behind a desk, and what happens in actuality to combatants in the field. I argue that my research also may assist in understanding how soldiers often feel *jus post bellum* and why this matters to their mental health if those emotions are not acknowledged and addressed. Jeff Williams, founder of the outreach group Veterans United Against Suicide, described to me how some British military personnel with whom he now has contact believed their presence in Afghanistan (2001-2021) played a key role in facilitating women's rights which had been crushed under Taliban rule (and have been again since the final American withdrawal in 2021), and that far from perpetrating oppression, the soldiers who took part in that war argue that their deployment prevented it. Williams cites the cases of the Afghan interpreters and other personnel who helped UK and US troops, and who were left behind after the full evacuation of Western military personnel in November 2021. 'It was horrific to leave them behind, we didn't see those Afghans as being any different to our own soldiers' (Williams, 2022a). Williams called the withdrawal a shambles, saying that 'soldiers felt like a failure because they didn't win a war and it has opened up a lot of wounds, wounds that can cause moral injury, in a lot of people' (Williams, 2022a). Those wounds must then be treated before the veterans may re-adjust to their new, non-military world and lifestyle.

Beyond my PhD and its focus on directly helping veterans, Shakespeare performed with a military perspective could have a wider and deeper remit to inform a civilian audience, and Governments, about the struggles that many veterans face, and to foster an understanding of, and sympathy with, those difficulties so that a meaningful strategy for care and rehabilitation can be put into place - a strategy that can and should include Shakespeare. That is the path that leads, I argue, to the use of applied Shakespeare at its best and most efficacious. Neil Davies, an ex-paratrooper who used Shakespeare as therapy for combat PTSD when other treatments and therapies had failed, perfectly summed up the value of Shakespeare to him and other veterans when he told me 'you can't get better than the Bard as a cover for confessions' and, after performing on stage in

*Shakespeare and Remembrance*, said 'I felt cleansed, at peace with myself' (Davies, 2021).

Veterans with whom I have been privileged to work say that Governments are willing to send them out to foreign fields to protect their own people and countries, or to peace-keep in war torn territories whose present and future is quarrelled over by politicians from the safety of their offices. As soldiers, doing their duty for which they enlisted, those veterans were willing to go. Some soldiers never return to become veterans. They come home instead in body bags, and crowds line the streets to pay their respects to the passing, flag-draped coffins. Plenty of people also proudly cheer that flag when worn by physically injured veterans at the Invictus Games. Too many in those crowds, however, do not see, or do not choose to acknowledge, the mental scars that are the legacy of service for many veterans. For the majority of service personnel today - the lucky ones - transitioning to civilian life when leaving the military is not marred by PTSD. However, it is evident from extrapolating the experiences of veterans in my research that very few will have no psychological scars or behavioural problems resulting from their service. The 'scars' that they bear will impact on their civilian lives to a lesser or greater extent. The veteran sleeping rough, maybe near the theatre from which an audience has just watched *I Henry IV* and listened to Kate Percy's impassioned words, may have PTSD because of his military service and cannot cope with the pressures of civilian life. He may drink himself to death that night, attempting to keep at bay the combat-related scorpions of his mind. A veteran's definition of what constitutes being killed is not necessarily confined to actual bodily death, for example. In reference to no conflict in particular, veteran Ian Jones said in an online Shakespeare session I was observing that 'people die out there without being killed' (Jones, 2022).

Veterans I have interviewed feel it is disingenuous to omit soldiers from the category of the victims of war, and the unmerited and unwanted consequences of that exclusion may be to deny veterans not merely access to therapeutic practices – either conventional or arts-based – but also to imply that they are unworthy of being in receipt of them. Additionally, some veterans I have spoken to hold the viewpoint that libertarian values, in applied theatre or elsewhere, should not presume because soldiers are trained to kill, they do not

have a conscience about what they do, or that they seek to glorify war and their part in it.

I therefore offer my research as a demonstration that Shakespeare can and does work as a therapeutic tool for veterans who have PTSD or readjustment issues caused by their time in service.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Change of name for researcher, Jane Francesca Wright**

I began my PhD in my married name of Wright, and all the following documents accordingly carry that name. At the start of my third year, and with the written consent of the University of Exeter, I used my maiden name of Green. This is because I wish to dedicate my doctorate to my late parents, Alan Green and Henrietta Nicholls.

## Appendix B



### COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

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## College of Humanities Ethics Proposal

### Title of Project

Applying Shakespeare Therapeutically to Military Veterans Who Have Combat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Or To Help With Transitioning to Civilian Life

### Name of Applicant

Jane Francesca Wright MA

### Email Address

jw1123@exeter.ac.uk

### Role/Position/Title of Applicant

PhD student (1<sup>st</sup> Year)

### Department

English

**Applicant Declaration:** I confirm that I have read the University of Exeter's [Code of Good Practice in the Conduct of Research](#) and [Research Ethics Framework](#).



### Name of Supervisors

Professor Pascale Aebischer & Dr Evelyn O'Malley

**Names of other Researchers/Collaborators** (if applicable) **N/A**

## **Estimated Start Date**

January 2021

## **Duration of Project**

3-4 Years

## **Lay Summary of Project**

My project is about applying Shakespeare therapeutically to military veterans who have combat post-traumatic stress disorder and/or those who struggle to transition to civilian life. My research will focus on whether, and to what extent, Shakespeare has a role to play in combat PTSD management and that transitioning process. Concomitantly, it will question whether Shakespeare's works can resonate empathically with military veterans, and if so, why. Participants in my research will be asked to share their experiences of having PTSD and/or transitioning, and of using Shakespeare therapeutically to alleviate their conditions. The importance of the project is that there has been little academic research and study of the therapeutic use of Shakespeare for UK veterans. It is important too, to research the delivery methods and therapeutic efficacy of Shakespeare for veterans during the lockdowns and concomitant social/geographical distancing conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Research Methods**

I will, at all times and in all circumstances, follow the University of Exeter's online research guidance when collecting survey or interview data. I will regularly refer to this guidance to ensure that I continue to adhere to it throughout the duration of my research.

Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA) and DE-CRUIT will, on my behalf, initially identify and approach veterans with whom they work and who may also be interested in my research. I will supply SAA and DE-CRUIT with Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms. Only when I am in receipt of the signed Consent Forms will I approach the veteran directly. Obviously, SAA and DE-CRUIT will know which veterans are taking part in my research but any other information I share with them (i.e. about individual responses) will be pseudonymised (and later fully anonymised in accordance with the data storage

of my project). The only exception to this is that I will identify the individual concerned to the SAA/DE-CRUIT well-being officer/s if, in my opinion, he or she has told me something which represents a threat to their safety, or to that or other people.

Data will be collected via personal interviews with participants via email, telephone and Zoom and similar online platforms; questionnaires via email; and my observation via Zoom and similar platforms, of workshops, rehearsals and performances engaged in by the participants. Participants will be asked about their experience of having combat PTSD; any medical treatment (both conventional and alternative) they have undergone or are undergoing for their condition; and any arts-based therapies they have undergone or are undergoing. It is important for the purposes of my research to ask about their experiences of PTSD. Firstly, this is because it will aid my understanding as a researcher of their condition and the impact it has on their lives. Secondly, the type and range of PTSD symptoms they experience and the way in which these impact on their lives may prove to have a relevance on the specific Shakespeare plays, passages, characters and performances that help them most during their applied Shakespeare therapy; I wish to research this hypothesis.

Veterans will then be asked specifically about their experiences of Shakespeare as drama therapy i.e. how they initially were referred, or self-referred to organisations which use Shakespeare as drama therapy; what they have been or are participating in, such as workshops, rehearsals, private and public performances; the type of audience they performed to if relevant (this could be a 'closed' audience comprising only other members of their group, semi-public which would allow a selected audience of, for example family and friends; or fully public on a recognised public stage or arena); the benefits (or otherwise) they feel they have obtained or are obtaining from drama therapy using Shakespeare.

I also intend to be present in an observational capacity via online platforms at workshops, rehearsals and performances. Ethics approval has already been granted for the observation of Shakespeare workshops run by SAA and which are due to begin soon.

My research may also include related work done by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and other professional acting companies.

## **Researcher Statement and Experience**

I shall be working with military veterans who have mental health issues related to trauma they have sustained during their service, either in training or deployment. I am mindful that the nature of combat PTSD is such that sufferers often develop a lack of trust, therefore all participants must be fully confident that I will treat them with respect at all times and that this extends to the security of the way I collect, store, disseminate and use data.

I have previous and recent experience of working with veterans who have combat PTSD. I have a Master of Arts degree in Shakespeare and Theatre, awarded in 2019 by The Shakespeare Institute, (University of Birmingham), Stratford-upon-Avon. My dissertation subject was Shakespeare and combat PTSD; for this I researched and interviewed several veterans who work with SAA (SAA was the gateway organisation), in addition to watching public performances given by them. I also interviewed via email veterans who participated in a similar Applied Shakespeare programme in the USA run by an organisation called Feast of Crispian (FoC); this was the gateway organisation. I researched DE-CRUIT, a veterans' organisation in the USA which specifically uses Shakespeare as drama therapy. I obtained ethical approval for my research from the Shakespeare Institute Ethics Committee, after discussion with my dissertation supervisor, Professor John Jowett.

## **Location**

Data collection will take place in the UK and with UK veterans as participants. However, due to the collaborative nature of veterans' organisations (some collaborations occurred pre-Covid 19, and others have developed because of geographical and/or social distancing) a proportion of data collection may appertain to the US. For example, SAA is due to participate in a collaborative venture with DE-CRUIT (date to be confirmed by both parties). This will involve solely UK veterans but will be jointly run by a UK national and an American national as group leaders (please note that I have already obtained ethics approval for this piece of research). The same American national is planning to come to the UK (Covid-19 restrictions permitting) in summer 2021, to lecture and



run workshops solely for UK veterans; this will be in collaboration with SAA. I wish to observe these lectures and workshops as part of my research. I should like to obtain ethics approval at this stage to observe the lectures and workshops if they take place online due to Covid-19 restrictions. I shall submit a further ethics approval application to observe the lectures and workshops should they take place in person.

There may be a collaborative project between SAA and veterans in the Ukraine (this has still to be confirmed and if so, whether it will take place online and/or in person in the UK after Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted). Apropos to this, and should the Ukrainian project take place, I will access the group organiser via SAA; he is a UK national, and I will seek his guidance as to the legal requirements of the Ukraine, including any translations of relevant consent forms and information sheets. Before I initiate any research from outside the UK or that which involves non-UK nationals, I will ensure I conform fully to the ethical and/or legal requirements of the relevant countries. I will, where appropriate, undertake to translate the information sheet, consent form and any other relevant literature wherever English is not the participant/s' first language. I will submit those forms (and any other relevant translated material) for ethics approval. I should like at this stage to obtain ethics approval to observe the project if it takes place online and to contact participants online. I shall submit a further ethics approval application if the project takes place in person.

Many projects involving veterans have been postponed or curtailed due to Covid-19. It is therefore impossible at this stage to give dates as to when such projects will be happening. I shall do so as soon as dates are finalised. At this stage, I should like to request ethical approval to observe any online projects as and when they take place in the UK.

### **Definition of Participants and Recruitment**

Participants will be vulnerable adults to the extent that they have sought therapy, and possibly medical treatment, for the mental health issue of combat PTSD. The participants that I will research are all engaged in, or have done in the past, arts-based therapy via organisations that specialise in such therapy: principally SAA. I will not approach veterans directly. SAA will be a third party 'gateway' to the

participants in that SAA will initially identify and approach veterans on my behalf. I shall be working closely with its CEO and well-being officer/s at all stages of my research. All participation will be voluntary, participants may withdraw at any time without penalty and there will be no financial inducements either to participate initially or to remain a participant.

Participants will be military veterans, so will all be over the age of 18. Their ages will typically be 40-55, but some may be younger or older. I do not anticipate that any will have learning difficulties, nor at this stage do I anticipate that any will be in custody. I anticipate that most will be male, but I should like to include if possible and appropriate, female veterans. I intend to carry out case studies of three to four veterans who have used Shakespeare as drama therapy in the past, and three to four who will be using it during the period of my research. All participants will be veterans and not serving military personnel. The nature of PTSD means that participants may be at risk of psychological distress caused or exacerbated by taking part in my research. I shall liaise closely with the appropriate Wellbeing Officer/s at all stages of my research to avoid it, identify it should it happen, and how it should be dealt with should it arise.

Combat PTSD can be a profoundly debilitating psychological condition. To date, the application of arts-based therapy and specifically Shakespeare, is an under-researched field of study. From my previous experience of working with veterans who have PTSD, I learned that they often feel they suffer from a forgotten and shameful condition. During my Master of Arts research, some indicated to me that it can be cathartic to share their experiences. I hope that my PhD research may benefit participants by giving them that opportunity and voice; may help the wider veteran community (the 'band of brothers' camaraderie that means so much to them is particularly significant in this context); and will demonstrate my intention to bring more awareness of the condition to the general community, such as academics and the civilian population. I shall not however, at any stage of my research and engagement with veterans promise any or all of them that taking part in my research will be of personal benefit to them. I shall make it clear to everyone who takes part in my research that doing so may cause he or she psychological distress.

## **Anonymity, Pseudonymity and Withdrawal from my research**

My case study veterans fall into two categories: those who have historically participated in Shakespeare as therapy (Category A) and those who will be doing so during my PhD (Category B). I propose to approach the issues of anonymity, pseudonymity and withdrawal from my research as follows:

The Category A veterans who have participated in public performances, podcasts, radio broadcasts, television programmes, online workshops and other media will be named if they wish to be and only with their written consent. This is because those performances are a matter of public record (their names have appeared in theatre programmes and other ephemera, advertising and so on), as are any media appearances. I will liaise with those Category A veterans for approval of any material I include in my thesis; this will ensure that they are aware of, and approve the use of, any information they share with me or that I source from elsewhere, potentially sensitive or otherwise. They may then indicate any information which they may not wish to be published in my thesis and I will not use it. However, they will be pseudonymised if they wish, and their details will also be redacted from any materials I may use for illustrative purposes in my thesis. I do not anticipate that consent to be named will be withheld. None are serving military personnel.

Category B veterans are different in that their therapy is ongoing and for that reason they may not wish to be named in my thesis; also, they may not participate in any public performances by which their names appear as a matter of public record. Their details will be pseudonymised by me for the duration of my research to ensure accuracy; their details will be anonymised to store in perpetuity.

Personnel from SAA (such as board members and well-being officer/s) will be named, with their informed and written consent, if it is appropriate to include them in my thesis, as will the personnel who lead any workshops and rehearsals, who direct and/or produce any performances. None are serving military personnel.

I undertake not to use any information about third parties which any veteran shares with me during any stage of my research.

My records will include all participants' names, ages, branch of the Armed Forces in which they served and other personal details (such as contact telephone numbers and email addresses). I will not include service details in my thesis, but it will be useful for me as a researcher to be aware of their military background. From my past research for my Master of Arts dissertation, it became apparent that veterans who served in, for example, the Falklands Conflict, may have had different PTSD experiences from a veteran of Iraq (this is partly due to the nature of the warfare, and also may reflect the age of the veteran to whom I may refer). Category B veterans will be pseudonymised for the duration of my PhD; this is to ensure authenticity and accuracy when writing up case studies. Data of all veterans will be anonymised to store in perpetuity after final submission of my thesis and award of my PhD.

When SAA has identified veterans who may wish to work with me, I shall supply Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms. I shall always liaise closely with SAA regarding contact I have with veterans. This is a requirement also from SAA so that participating veterans can be monitored for any adverse effects on their mental health. When interviews take place in person, SAA CEO Amanda Faber has suggested that a well-being officer should be present (outside the interview room so as not to interfere with or influence the interview in any way) for my personal safety and that of the veteran should the interview prove to be distressing. I shall apply for separate ethics approval to carry out face to face interviews when Covid-19 restrictions permit such contact. Mrs Faber will keep records of which veterans are participating. She has agreed in writing that she will a) store any shared information on her private computer; b) that she will not use it in any way and will share it with nobody except the SAA well-being officer/s if the need arises; and c) she will destroy the information when I request it.

Veteran participation in my research will happen in two ways. Firstly, there will be the veterans who agree to take part in full case studies as detailed above (Category A and Category B). Secondly, there will be other veterans who participate in workshops, rehearsals and performances who agree to my observation and note-taking, but who are not participating in full case studies. Therefore, there needs to be two distinct time frames for withdrawal should the participant wish to do so.

A veteran who participates in a full case study will have the right to withdraw from my research at any stage up until the final submission of my thesis

if he or she subsequently changes their mind about being included. Should this happen, I will not use what they have told me in my thesis but will include an explanatory section to indicate withdrawal of the participant/s; those participants will not in any way be identifiable. I will need to show that research has been carried out by me and why it has not been included in my final submission. In itself, it may represent a valuable research finding which will be evaluated.

Veterans who participate in workshops, rehearsals and performances will be also supplied with Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms. They will be supplied in advance of the commencement of workshops, rehearsals or performances; I propose to supply those a fortnight beforehand and will liaise with the gateway organisations to ascertain if this is an appropriate length of time. Participants will be made fully aware that I am observing the workshops, rehearsals or performances and of who has access to my research data.

I need to ensure that the whole study of the workshops, rehearsals or performances will not be stopped if one participant does not want their personal involvement to be included; should they indicate this is the case I will not make notes on anything that relates to that individual. A participant who has previously consented will have the right to request that I remove my observations from the study if he or she subsequently changes their mind about being included: I propose a three-month period in which they can do so, without prejudice and without having to give a reason for it. Should this happen, I will remove any notes which relate to their participation.

Until this three-month period has elapsed, data collected about the veterans will be pseudonymised; this is to ensure that I remove the correct observations should a participant wish to withdraw consent. After three months, I will anonymise all data relating to a participant who has withdrawn consent. As mentioned above, only anonymised data will be kept in perpetuity.

I will only take manual notes. I will not make any audio or video recordings. I will ask the workshop, rehearsal or performance director/producer to remind all participants before the workshops, rehearsals or performances begin that I am observing. I will include on the participant information sheet and consent form the option that any participant may, at any stage of the workshop, rehearsal or performance indicate to the group leader, director or producer that he or she wishes me to stop observing. The group leader, director or producer will then convey that request to me by the most appropriate means.

## **Informed Consent**

As mentioned above, I shall liaise with SAA, which will initially identify and approach veterans who may be willing to take part in my research. Participant information sheets and consent forms will be supplied to SAA and to the prospective participants. I shall answer any further questions they may have relating to their participation. I do not anticipate working with anyone who is unable to give informed consent. Participants will be made fully aware of who has access to my research data (see below). I will require a signed Consent Form before I proceed with any or all research involving that participant.

## **Data Protection and Storage**

All data obtained by me will be kept confidential. All data obtained by me will be stored securely in password-protected files on my own personal password-protected computer. This is kept in my own home and is accessed only by me. Hard copy (manual) notes taken by me will be uploaded to my computer and those notes will then be destroyed by shredding. Access to data will not be granted to anyone other than myself, agreed third parties in the gateway organisation, my Supervisors and other appropriate University personnel. I will use SharePoint to upload data to the Cloud. I confirm that all participants will be informed of their right to withdraw data up until the point of publication. I confirm that data will not be used in any future publications once the participant has decided to withdraw. Anonymised data will be retained securely for an indefinite period.

I confirm that the research study is compliant with the [General Data Protection Regulation 2018](#) and that necessary arrangements have been made with regard to the storage and processing of participants' personal information and generally to ensure confidentiality of such data supplied and generated in the course of the research. For more information on GDPR for researchers please click [here](#).



## **Funding Sources**

I have no funding sources other than a doctoral loan from Student Finance England (SFE) and my own savings. I receive no funding from any charity, organisation, company or Government body apart from SFE.

## Appendix C



COLLEGE

OF

HUMANITIES

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e w [www.exeter.ac.uk/humanities](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/humanities) [humanities-ethics@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:humanities-ethics@exeter.ac.uk)

### **CERTIFICATE: RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE FAVOURABLE ETHICAL OPINION**

Academic Discipline: Drama

Title of Project: **Applying Shakespeare As Drama Therapy to Military Veterans Who Have  
Combat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Reference: 2021-018

Researcher (PI): **Jane Francesca Wright**

Co-Investigator(s):

Supervisor(s): Pascale Aebischer, Evelyn O'Malley

Contact Details: [jw1123@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:jw1123@exeter.ac.uk)

Date: 02/04/2021

Conditions:

The project will run from 02/04/2021 to 02/04/2025



Reviewers of the College of Humanities Ethics Committee gave a favourable ethical opinion of the above research project.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Katie Beswick'.A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Jana Funke'.

**Dr Katie Beswick**

**Dr Jana Funke**

Co-Chairs of the Humanities Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix D



### Participant Information Sheet

#### **Veterans who are taking part in Shakespeare workshops/performances with Soldiers' Arts Academy**

**Title of Project: PhD - Applying Shakespeare Therapeutically To Military Veterans Who Have Combat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Or To Help With Transitioning To Civilian Life**

**Researcher name:** Jane Francesca Wright MA

#### **Invitation and summary of my project**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. My PhD research project will examine the role of Shakespeare used therapeutically to help veterans who have combat PTSD and/or to assist other veterans with the transition from military to civilian life. It will look at how and why Shakespeare is used and what results are obtained from it. I will principally be working with Soldiers' Arts Academy (SAA). I should like to invite you now to take part in my research and this information sheet will explain the nature of the project, how you can be involved if you would like to be and issues such as confidentiality and what will happen to my research when it is finished.

Please take time to consider the information carefully and please discuss it with your family, friends or anyone else whom you think would be appropriate. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions or concerns. Should you choose to take part, I will ask you to sign a Consent Form, a copy of

which you will keep for yourself together with a copy of this Participants' Information Sheet.

Once again, thank you for your interest – it is much appreciated.

### **Purpose of the PhD research**

The purpose of the PhD research is to examine when, how and why Shakespeare is used therapeutically to help veterans of Her Majesty's Armed Forces who have PTSD resulting from their service, or who are transitioning from military to civilian life. My research will include talking to veterans who have in the past, or who are currently taking part in activities using Shakespeare. I am carrying out this research because I have a deep respect for Her Majesty's Armed Forces. I have not personally served in the military.

### **Why have I been approached?**

You have been approached to take part in my research because you are taking part in activities organised by SAA and especially if you also have expressed an interest in Shakespeare.

### **What would taking part involve?**

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, I do not anticipate being able to meet you in person for the foreseeable future. It may be that you would prefer not to meet up at any time: it is entirely your choice as to how we communicate.

I have liaised fully with SAA about contacting you and what questions I ask you. Initially, I will send you an introductory questionnaire. This can be by post as a hard copy or via email (whichever you prefer). You may answer as many or as few questions as you choose. There are no 'right' and 'wrong' answers and your experiences and feelings are valuable whatever you choose to tell me. You may wish to write your answers down to email or post to me, or you may prefer that we speak on the telephone to go through them instead.

I undertake not to discriminate on the grounds of age, sex, gender, disability, race, class, creed, religion or for any other reason. I will not be judgemental about anything you choose to tell me.

I will ask you for some basic information such as your name, age range and the branch of the Armed Forces in which you served (i.e. Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force or Royal Marines). You are free not to share your service information with me if you so choose; this information is for my records only to help my understanding as a researcher and will not be used in my thesis. You will not be referred to by name in my thesis; you will be pseudonymised throughout unless you choose to be named. I will not use any information about third parties such as family, friends and military colleagues that you share with me.

I will ask you about your transition to civilian life since leaving the military, such as how it has affected you, how easy or hard it has been and so on. I will ask you about your involvement with SAA: how you found SAA; why you decided to take part in activities; how and in what ways this has been a positive, negative or neutral experience for you.

I will then ask you questions specifically about Shakespeare. I will ask whether you knew anything about Shakespeare before taking part in SAA activities (this may only have been at school). I will ask you questions about your involvement with and workshops or performances (either run by SAA or another organisation); this will include any Shakespeare plays, passages and characters that you study or play. I will ask you how working with Shakespeare makes you feel.

I will ask you if you have performed Shakespeare anywhere – this could be in workshops, in front of an invited audience of friends and family or on a public stage. I will ask you how performing makes you feel.

I will want to continue to chat to you about your involvement with Shakespeare if you agree. This will include talking (probably on the telephone) and/or short questionnaires sent to you when you take part in workshops, rehearsals or performances. It will also include observing you in those workshops, rehearsals and performances. The frequency of questionnaires and contact will be determined by mutual agreement.

I will attend workshops, rehearsals and performances as an observer, and I will always indicate that I am watching. You will always be made fully aware that I am observing you and of who has access to my research data. If at any time during my observations you are uncomfortable with this you may indicate it to the group leader, and I will not make notes on anything that relates to you. You will also have the right to request that I remove my observations from the study if you subsequently change your mind about being included: I propose a three-month period in which you can do so, without prejudice and without you having to give a reason for it. Should this happen, I will remove any notes which relate to you.

You will be given pseudonyms throughout if that is your wish. You will be described in my writing in terms such as Veteran A, Veteran B and so on. You may however wish to be named (perhaps if you take part in a public performance or broadcast) and I will do so only with your written consent.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

I intend my research to help veterans who may have PTSD, or other veterans who are transitioning from military to civilian life. Your involvement will be part of that and of bringing more awareness of veterans' issues to a wider community (such as academics and the civilian population in general). I will not judge, criticise, condemn or be in any other way negative about what you choose to tell me.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There is a risk that taking part in this project may cause you psychological distress because you may re-live past experiences and traumas. Some of my questions may trigger unwanted memories, flashbacks or other symptoms. I would strongly encourage you to speak to a healthcare professional, and/or the well-being officer at SAA should this happen, or if you are in any way concerned about your physical and mental health.

### **What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may ask me to delete any reference to you up to three months after the event. I may still refer to you (as Veteran A, Veteran B etc) when describing any workshops, rehearsals or performances you may have taken part in. You will not be identified or identifiable.

### **How will my information be kept confidential?**

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing [dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk) or at [www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection)

Your data will be stored and processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). I will store all your data in password-protected files on my password-protected computer, to which only myself has access.

I anticipate keeping the data, anonymised or otherwise, for an indefinite period. This is because I may wish in the future to publish articles or to give papers at conferences, which will draw on the research I have done for my PhD. I would also like to keep the data for any future research I may undertake, and this may include sharing anonymised data with other researchers.

I will process your data with sensitivity at all times. I will not share your data with anybody other than my University supervisors and other appropriate University personnel, and board members and the well-being officer/s at SAA. I reserve the right to break confidentiality and anonymity if, in the opinion of myself, my University supervisors and/or the SAA well-being officer/s, anything you have told me represents a danger to yourself and/or any other person or persons.

You may authorise me to keep your contact details if you wish to be informed about the outcomes of the project or about future related research.

Those details will not be shared with any other parties and will be kept in strict accordance with GDPR.

### **Will I receive any payment for taking part?**

There will be no payment for taking part. I will reimburse you for postage and any related costs if you choose to send your questionnaire/s back to me by post.

### **What will happen to the results of this study?**

The research will be used in my PhD thesis for the University of Exeter. As the 'gateway' organisation between researcher and participants, SAA will also have full access to it. I will also disseminate the information by publishing in appropriate academic journals and books, and at conferences and with other veterans' groups. With SAA's written permission, I will upload the outcomes of the project onto the SAA website so that participants will have access to it.

### **Who is organising and funding this study?**

I am organising and carrying out this research for my University of Exeter PhD thesis. There will be no other researchers working on it. I receive no funding from any companies, charities, organisations or Governmental bodies apart from a Doctoral Loan from Student Finance England.

### **Who has reviewed this study?**

This project has been reviewed by the Department of Humanities Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter (Reference Number).

### **Further information and contact details**

Researcher on this project:

Jane Francesca Wright

[jw1123@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:jw1123@exeter.ac.uk)

07398 230134

If you require further clarification or are not happy with any aspect of this study, you may contact:

Project Supervisor:

Professor Pascale Aebischer, Office 319, Queen's Building, University of Exeter, Streatham Campus, Northcote House, Exeter, EX4 4QJ.

[P.V.Aebischer@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:P.V.Aebischer@exeter.ac.uk)

01392 264335

Dr Jana Funke, Chair of the College of Humanities Ethics Committee, University of Exeter, Department of English & Film, Queen's Building, The Queen's Drive, EXETER EX4 4QH

[j.funke@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:j.funke@exeter.ac.uk) 01392 725612

Gail Seymour, Research Ethics and Governance Manager

[g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk), 01392 726621

Thank you for your interest in this project and I hope you will agree to take part in it.

N.B. This participant information was modified to be applicable to veterans taking part in the US.



## Appendix E



Participant Identification Number:

### Consent Form 1

Title of Project: PhD: **Applying Shakespeare Therapeutically To Military Veterans Who Have Combat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Or To Help With Transitioning To Civilian Life**

Name of Researcher: Jane Francesca Wright MA

I have previously participated in Shakespeare activities with SAA and/or other organisations and:

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated (...) for the above PhD project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
  
2. I would like to take part in a full case study, which includes online questionnaires, online interviews and being observed by the researcher if I take part in any future workshops, rehearsals and performances.
  
3. I give written permission to be named in the researcher's thesis and understand that this will make me identifiable. I may withdraw that consent at any time and will then be anonymous and not identifiable. (Please circle as appropriate)

YES/NO

4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time up until the researcher's submission of her thesis (September 2023) without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

5. I understand that all data collected during the study will form part of the research undertaken by Jane Francesca Wright. I understand that relevant sections of the anonymised data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from the University of Exeter: including project supervisors, Professor Pascale Aebischer and Dr Evelyn O'Malley; and by [individuals to be named] from Soldiers' Arts Academy where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.



Please tick and initial as appropriate. You may indicate that you do not agree either by putting a cross or leaving blank:

I understand that taking part involves making questionnaire responses;

I understand that taking part involves the researcher making interview transcripts;

I understand that taking part involves speaking to the researcher on the telephone;

I understand that taking part involves speaking to the researcher via email;

I understand that taking part involves speaking to the researcher via online platforms such as Zoom;

I understand that taking part involves the researcher accessing photographs of workshops, rehearsals and performances;

I understand that taking part involves the researcher accessing audio recordings of workshops, rehearsals and performances;

I understand that taking part involves the researcher accessing video recordings of workshops, rehearsals and performances.

This data will be used for the purposes of:

Inclusion in the PhD thesis named on this Consent Form

Inclusion in anonymised records held by the named researcher for an indefinite period

Sharing with other researchers for use in future research projects

Reports published in an academic publication, on a project website and/or a media publication,

and public engagement activities such as conferences and seminars

I agree that my contact details can be kept securely and used by researchers

and supervisors from the research team, Department of Humanities, University of Exeter, to contact me about future research projects

I agree to take part in the above project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

taking consent

When completed: 1 copy of this form will be kept by me, as the participant, and 1 copy will be kept by the researcher for the project file.

## Appendix F



Participant Identification Number:

### CONSENT FORM 2

Title of Project: PhD: **Applying Shakespeare Therapeutically To Military Veterans Who Have Combat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Or To Help With Transitioning To Civilian Life**

Name of Researcher: Jane Francesca Wright MA

Participant Identification Number:

I am currently or am planning to participate in Shakespeare activities with SAA and/or other organisations and:

6. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated (.....) for the above PhD project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. Please select EITHER option 1 OR option 2. Then proceed to question 6.

#### OPTION 1: FULL CASE STUDY (Q2 and Q3)

7. I would like to take part in a full case study, which includes questionnaires, interviews and being observed by the researcher during any workshops, rehearsals and performances I take part in. OR

8. I understand that my participation is voluntary. If I choose to volunteer for a full case study I am free to withdraw from that study at any time up until the researcher's submission of her thesis (September 2023) without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

#### OPTION 2: OBSERVATION ONLY (Q4 and Q5)

9. I would like to take part ONLY in being observed by the researcher during workshops, rehearsals and performances.

10. If I choose to be observed only, I understand that if I am uncomfortable with the researcher observing any workshop, rehearsal or performance I participate in, I may ask her to stop making notes on me without me having to give any reason and without my legal rights being affected. I understand I have up to three months from the date of the observation/s to tell the researcher if I subsequently change my mind about being included in the study.

11. I consent to be named in the researcher's thesis & I may withdraw this consent at any time without giving a reason. If do not want to be named, I will remain anonymous and will not be identifiable. (Please circle as appropriate).

YES/NO

12. I understand that all data collected during the study will form part of the research undertaken by Jane Francesca Wright. I understand that relevant sections of the anonymised data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from the University of Exeter: including project supervisors, Professor Pascale Aebischer and Dr Evelyn O'Malley; and by [individuals to be named] from Soldiers' Arts Academy where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.

Please tick and initial as appropriate. You may indicate that you do not agree either by putting a cross or leaving blank:

I understand that taking part involves speaking to the researcher on the telephone;

I understand that taking part involves speaking to the researcher via email);

I understand that taking part involves speaking to the researcher via online platforms such as Zoom;

I understand that taking part involves the researcher accessing photographs of workshops, rehearsals and performances;

I understand that taking part involves the researcher accessing audio recordings of workshops, rehearsals and performances;

I understand that taking part involves the researcher accessing video recordings of workshops, rehearsals performances.

This data will be used for the purposes of:  
Inclusion in the PhD thesis named on this Consent Form

Inclusion in anonymised records held by the named researcher for an indefinite period

Sharing with other researchers for use in future research projects

Reports published in an academic publication, on a project website and/or a media publication,  
and public engagement activities such as conferences and seminars

I agree that my contact details can be kept securely and used by researchers

and supervisors from the research team, Department of Humanities, University of Exeter, to contact me about future research projects

I agree to take part in the above project.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

taking consent

When completed: 1 copy of this form will be kept by me, as the participant, and 1 copy will be kept by the researcher for the project file.

## Appendix G

### List of Illustrations

**Figure 1:** Kate Percy's speech from *I Henry IV*, in Shakespeare's *First Folio*.

**Figure 2:** List of Shakespearean passages supplied to veterans at DE-CRUIT workshops.



## **Appendix H**

### **Personal interviews conducted**

Tip Cullen (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 7 June.

Neil Davies (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 24 January.

Amanda Faber (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 22 November.

Amanda Faber (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 11 March.

Amanda Faber (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 31 March.

Julie Geisler (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 14 November.

Julie Geisler (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 1 August.

Dean Helliwell (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 17 December.

Dean Helliwell (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 11 June.

Matilda James (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 23 July.

Shaun Johnson (2018) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 12 June.

Shaun Johnson (2021a) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 6 March.

Shaun Johnson (2021b) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 19 June.

Shaun Johnson (2022a) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 26 May.

Shaun Johnson (2022b) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 17 August.

Shaun Johnson (2022c) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 12 November.

Shaun Johnson (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 12 May.

Ian Jones (2022) Conversation with Jane Francesca Green, 20 June.

Teddy Kiendl (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 14 November.

Teddy Kiendl(2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 13 January.

Ceri Lawrence. (2018) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Wright, 21 May.

Jaclyn McLoughlin (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 5 December.

Phil Milio (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 14 November.

Phil Milio (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 2 August.

Robin Seaward (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 25 April.

Nancy Smith-Watson (2018) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Wright, 25 May.

Nataliya Torkut (2023c) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 15 July.

UKR-CONTACT/1 (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 17 April.

VET-FEM/1 (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 24 May.

VET-GEN/1 (2021) Informal conversation with Jane Francesca Green, various dates.

VET-INT/3 (2022) SAA *Macbeth* workshop, 13 June.

VET-INT/4 (2022) SAA *Macbeth* workshop, 13 June.

VET-INT/5 (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 13 October.

VET-NOML/A, B & C (2021) *No Other Man's Land*. Zoom online, 5 February.

VET-PTSD/1 (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 22 January.

VET-PTSD/2 (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 24 January.

VET-SAA/1 (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green (no date given for anonymity purposes).

Ian Wainwright (2022) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 12 July.

Lee Wilkinson (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 11 June.

Jeff Williams (2022a) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 21 January.

Jeff Williams (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 3 March.

Stephan Wolfert (2021) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 17 October.

Stephan Wolfert (2023) Interviewed by Jane Francesca Green, 9 June.