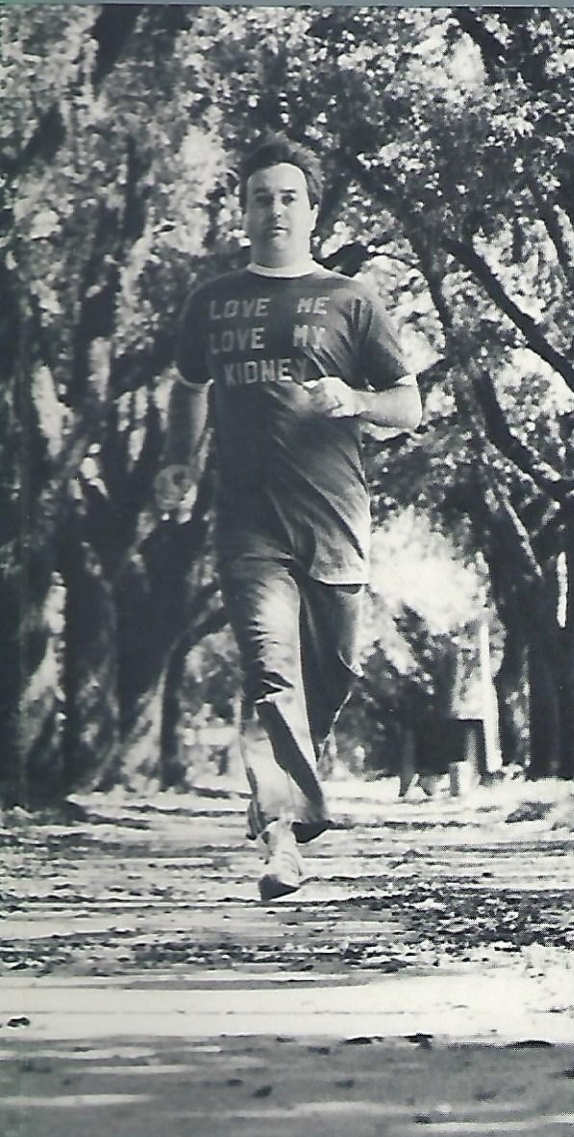
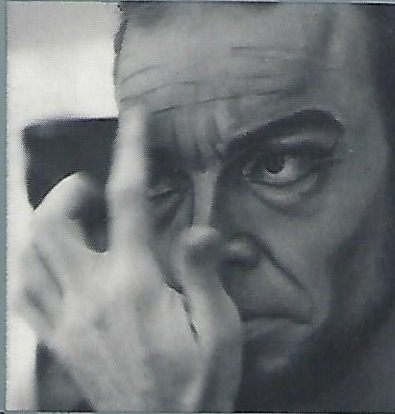


Dimensions 79

A report on
Exxon's 1979
contributions
in the
public interest
and the
Exxon Education
Foundation Report



Special educational materials introduce the televised Shakespeare plays to millions of high school students.

PUBLIC BROADCASTING PROGRAMMING

Shakespeare for schools

Famed actor Sir John Gielgud likens it to a medieval tapestry, a sequence of great pictorial scenes. To director David Giles, it resembles the film *The Godfather*: a story of a family jockeying for power on a large scale. Oddly enough, both are referring to the same work—Shakespeare's *Richard II*—one of 37 of the Bard's plays presented on public television over a six-year period that began in 1979. The series is funded through WNET/Thirteen by Exxon and two other firms. The initial season included new productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Measure for Measure*, *As You Like It*, *Henry VIII* and *Richard II*.

The comments of Gielgud and Giles are found on phonograph records included in the package of educational materials prepared especially for this series and distributed free to U.S. high schools.

Developed by TelEd, a California-based company, the materials were designed to help high school students and teachers gain a better understanding of Shakespeare's plays. An educational advisory committee, chaired by Shakespeare scholar Maynard Mack of Yale, was actively involved in the preparation of the study kits, a task made more challenging by the fact that the commit-

tee had to begin work on the package before viewing the completed productions. Members of the advisory committee included representatives of the National Council of Teachers of English, the American Association of School Librarians, the National Parents Teachers Association, the Secondary Theatre Association and other organizations.

The committee's current chairman, John Andrews of the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., and editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, describes the committee's goals.

"First of all," says Andrews, "there was a unique opportunity of having the entire canon of Shakespeare's plays made available in a permanent form. In preparing materials that would illuminate the plays, we had to consider how viewing them on television would differ from seeing them in the theater or on film, or reading them. We wanted people to be conscious of the special qualities of the television medium."

"We also felt that students should be made aware that Shakespeare is, as Ben Jonson described him, not for an age but for all time. Yet, as universal as he is, he is also of an age and his plays are rooted in a specific historical period very different

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Star-crossed lovers *Romeo and Juliet* (left) are portrayed as teenagers of Shakespeare's day. Film crews (below) pay meticulous attention to historic detail so viewers can transcend their own times and see plays much like those seen by the Bard's original audiences.

they would reach the widest possible audience. It has been estimated that over eight million students and their families saw the series. No doubt their enjoyment was enhanced by the background materials.

A sampling of some of the 20,000 response cards included in the kits and returned to TelEd by teachers and librarians indicates their usefulness. The chairman of an English department in a Brooklyn, New York, parochial school notes enthusiastically that the materials stimulated student interest in the plays. A high school teacher in Newton, New Jersey, writes that the package

added "tremendously" to student understanding of the plays. A review of the kit published in *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter* points out that unlike other commercially developed Shakespeare study materials, this kit "does not relate to high school students and teachers as though they were once removed from the Neanderthal Age."

The massive educational outreach effort accompanying *The Shakespeare Plays* has other dimensions, which the three underwriters of the play series also are funding. For example, public television station WNET in the New York area distributed 225,000 guides to the plays to viewers who wrote in for them. A touring exhibition made up of items from the Folger Shakespeare Library will be shown in museums across the country through the summer of 1981.

To accompany the second season of *The Shakespeare Plays*—which will include *Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *The Tempest* and an encore presentation of *Richard II*—a new set of study materials has been distributed. TelEd received 2,500 response cards even before the plays were telecast.

Shakespeare's famous description of the student in the "Ages of Man" speech—"the whining school-boy, with his satchel/And shining morning face, creeping like snail/Unwillingly to school"—is precisely opposite the picture presented by the millions of young viewers learning to savor the genius of the world's greatest dramatist.

HIGHLIGHTS

The MacNeill/Lehrer Report: Funded in part by Exxon, this program offers its two million nightly public television viewers 30 minutes of in-depth analysis of a single news event. The award-winning series received the University of Missouri School of Journalism's Medal of Honor for Distinguished Service to Journalism.

Three Cheever Stories: Three short stories from John Cheever's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection were adapted for Exxon's *Great Performances* series. Ed Herrmann, Sigourney Weaver, Michael Murphy, Kathryn Walker, Eileen Heckart and Laurence Luckinbill starred. The stories are variations on the same theme: the desperation and loneliness haunting many of today's affluent suburbanites.

Dance in America: Works by two of The New York City Ballet's most celebrated personalities were featured in *Two Duets: With Choreography by Jerome Robbins and Peter Martins*, an hour-long *Great Performances* production partially funded by Exxon. Mikhail Baryshnikov and Natalia Makarova performed Robbins' romantic *pas de deux*, *Other Dances*. In contrast, Heather Watts and Royal Danish Ballet star Ib Andersen danced Martins' lively contemporary ballet, *Calcium Light Night*.

Live from Lincoln Center: History was made in the concert hall as public television viewers witnessed live broadcasts of some of the world's most celebrated performers, including:

Luciano Pavarotti, Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic, with arias from Verdi's *La Traviata*, Puccini's *Tosca*, and other works.

Dame Joan Sutherland and Marilyn Horne, with Richard Bonyngge conducting the New York Philharmonic; and

Kurt Weill's 1947 operatic adaptation of Elmer Rice's play, *Street Scene*, performed by The New York City Opera.

Ormandy at Eighty: This *Great Performances* program featured Maestro Eugene Ormandy in his adopted home, Philadelphia's Academy of Music, for a special birthday concert of works by Ormandy's mentor and friend, Sergei Rachmaninoff.

from our own. In experiencing these plays, it's important that students exercise their historical imaginations by transcending their own times and viewing the plays, as much as possible, through the eyes of Shakespeare's original audience."

Andrews points out that *Romeo and Juliet* are teenagers, to be sure, with a great appeal to today's young people, but that the world around them was far removed from ours. "Understanding what separates us from Shakespeare's day is essential in appreciating his works," he says.

Perhaps the most notable pieces of the educational package are phonograph records containing excerpts from the plays, as well as interpretive commentary by cast members and others connected with the production. For example, Richard Pasco, who plays Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, raises questions about the morality of political assassinations toward marriage, women, kingship and the nature of heroism. Another deals with the language of the plays, always a problem for students (How many people know that such phrases as "elbow room" and "catching a cold" were coined by Shakespeare?).

One particularly useful item is a matrix indicating how certain themes, plot devices and theatrical conventions keep recurring in Shakespeare's plays. Disguises, for example, are used in five of the six dramas shown in the first season, and all but one involve the overthrow of a ruler or some other disorder in the body politic.

The distribution of 27,000 Shakespeare study kits to public and parochial schools represented the largest free educational effort ever undertaken in connection with a U.S. television series. The materials could be freely duplicated, thus assuring that

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