

## University of Southern Queensland

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### Who killed Desdemona?

#### Abstract:

Despite widely documented innovations integrating theatrical approaches into secondary school in-classroom engagement with the works of Shakespeare, evidence remains that students and teachers struggle with applying those techniques to the pedagogy of interpretation. *Who Killed Desdemona?* introduces a clown-based approach to an interpretation of Shakespeare's play, Othello, within a school familiar setting. The screenplay is undergirded by the theories of John Dewey and Jerome Bruner in scaffolding collaborative processes of situated and authentic learning, and integrates the social and peer-learning paradigms of Lev Vygotsky and Etienne Wenger. The screenplay introduces clown-based play and interactivity with both text and live/video attendant audience in negotiating a process of performance-in-rehearsal, where the clowns critically and irreverently unpack and interpret Shakespeare's text through intermittent discourse and enactment.

#### Biographical Note:

Scott Alderdice has worked as a lecturer in Theatre at the University of Southern Queensland for twenty years. In 2004 he co-founded the long running USQ Shakespeare in the Park Festival, for which he has directed 7 mainstage productions and wrote and directed three clown-based adaptations of Shakespeare's works. In 2009 Scott began developing Working with Shakespeare, an online video-based learning portal aimed at assisting teachers in integrating theatrical practice and collaborative approaches to in-class learning experiences in the study of Shakespeare. As a part of that project he has written more than seventy 'video-essays' which scaffold student-driven theatrical investigation and interrogation of Shakespeare's works.

#### Keywords:

Creative writing – Othello – Clown – Scaffolding – Interpretation

## **Who Killed Desdemona?**

1. INT. A LECTURE HALL OR CLASSROOM - DAY

The room is full of students, books and devices ready for note-taking. There is a growing air of expectancy.

From outside come the faint and garbled sounds of hushed voices in urgent argument. The voices grow nearer - giving one a clear sense of an intermittently approaching discordance among several people.

Suddenly, it sounds as if a race has been initiated. There are racing feet - yelling voices no longer concerned with being overheard; the door crashes open and CLOWN FOUR (an unkempt and wildly attractive buccaneer type) bursts in closely followed by the other three in tangled pursuit.

CLOWN FOUR begins to address the audience even as he slides to a halt before them. All the CLOWNS are of a similar age to the assembled student audience. CLOWN ONE is a bristling intelligent and opinionated young woman; CLOWN TWO a self-conscious nerdy looking young man; and CLOWN THREE a diminutive female who makes up for her stature with streetwise bravura and disdain.

The other three CLOWNS spread themselves around the front of the class in various stages of frustrated despair and embarrassment. The CLOWNS regularly refer directly to camera, acknowledging it's presence as though the proposed lecture was being recorded or simulcast.

CLOWN FOUR

OK. OK. This is the story. No. I got this. This is in excellent hands.

CLOWN ONE

It's the mind we're worried about.

CLOWN FOUR energetically enacts much of what he says, leaping onto desks, venturing out among the assembled students - irreverently transgressing the boundaries between performance space and audience.

CLOWN FOUR

Iago. OK? Has a problem with his main man, Othello - I dunno, Iago has been gravitationally wronged! And so, as like a revenge thing - Iago lets drop this tiny little fib to the big dude and Othello totally loses it - has a complete freak-out and up and does his missus in. Othello - Desdemona - sad end. And everybody puts the finger on - Iago. Am I right? Is that not the story?! Ka Chiiing!! Go to the top of the class and collect a big fat star.

CLOWN THREE

Collect a big fat head.

CLOWN FOUR

Buuuuut, what nobody is saying - what nobody is talking about, is THAT - the whole 'Iago is to blame' thing is the big 'who dropped that smoking big pooh-de-pooh in the middle of the floor' fib!

In itself!

Yes it is!

CLOWN THREE

Have you been Od'ing on dickhead pills?

CLOWN FOUR

OK. OK - this is my hypotenuse.

CLOWN TWO

It's called an hypothesis.

CLOWN FOUR

To you. Maybe.

Check this gob-stopping analytication:

Speaking to one of the female students in the 'audience'.

You can take notes. Cutie. You want me to put my number in your phone? See that? That was your missed opportunity.

OK. Shakespeare writes this story - Deedee from the town of Venice gets herself an unhealthy crushon for this ole dude, Othello, and does a bunk - not in the biblical sense - but out the window and down the street with Daddypants -

who cannot believe his luckiness!- who straight away is off to the IGA for a sambwich-bag full of Viagra - for him - an' a bottle of red cordial for her, an' off they jump on this sailing ship to the island of Cyperus to bust up some badasses from Turkeyland an' to get some conjaguling done!! - BUT - every good story has one of them - a butt - just like -

CLOWN ONE

Don't say it!

CLOWN FOUR

So! According to Shakespeare, Othello's honest honest bro-man, Iago, whispers - Hey, Othellooooo, this is me whispering - hey? Pretty impressive, yes? I can do it with the other hand. Totally ambibivalent. Just a little reality check here Othellooooo - what is the glamour-girl doin' with you? When she could be doin' a whole bunch of hotter guys, more like her own age an' hottiness. And maybe - just maybe - she is. An' BAM! when that thought goes into ole mate's brainbox, things start lookin' a whole lot more suss than they previously did, and Deedee doesn't help herself with her total immaturity! and then - EEEEEAAARRRGGH! Crash! Burn! - Othello goes all 'why-crack-one-egg-when-you-can-smash a-dozen!', and does poor Deedee in! Sad story. The end.

CLOWN ONE

You are a complete tosser.

CLOWN FOUR

What? It is a totally legit interpretation? Baz Lurhman an' me - twins.

CLOWN THREE

How can you possibly suggest Desdemona has any responsibility for her death?

CLOWN FOUR

OK. Fair question. An' point number one: "*Who hath done this deed?*" That is Emilia speakingeth - to Deedee - when she miraculously wakes up after the big guy strangles her, just before she dies properly - and what does Deedee say?

CLOWN THREE

"Nobody. I myself."

CLOWN FOUR

Now are you sayin' to me, that Deedee is a liar?

CLOWN ONE

No. I am saying to you, that she is exactly the same as thousands of other battered women - she has suffered such abuse to her self-esteem that the first person she blames for her husband's violence is herself.

CLOWN FOUR

That is a Twenty-first Century interpretiveness of a four hundred year old story.

CLOWN ONE

You live in the Twenty-first Century buddy!

CLOWN FOUR

Yeh?! Well ... so do you! Lady!

OK. That could have been a better put down.

I was being gentle.

CLOWN ONE

Anyone can see Desdemona is a victim of domestic violence.

CLOWN TWO

She's got a point.

CLOWN FOUR

Yes she does. And it's her head. Cause did I say, that Othello, is not a troubled soul?

CLOWN ONE

Troubled?!

CLOWN FOUR

No! I did not! - but who troubled him?

OTHERS

Iago!

CLOWN FOUR

Ah! See, now that's what Shakespeare WANTS you to think.

CLOWNS

Because it's true!

CLOWN FOUR

Oh my dear sad friends; let us examine, shall we, the facts.

CLOWN ONE

Someone needs to examine your head.

CLOWN FOUR

Agreed! If they want to see what a massive geniastical brain looks like from inside the cockpit.

CLOWN THREE

And the captain of your cockpit would be a cockwit.

CLOWN FOUR

Out of respect for the pathetic, we are gonna skip the whole bit about her jumpin' out the window back in Venice right? Because, hey, what little lady worth botherin' about has not done that once or twice?

CLOWN THREE

Are we speaking from experience?

CLOWN FOUR

I have a hover-board. I do not do windows.

CLOWN ONE

I'd push you off a bridge.

CLOWN FOUR

So they arrive their boats in Cyprus -

HE takes on the voice and persona of a Captain's plane arrival announcement.

"Ladies and gentlemen we will soon be arriving in Cyprus, famous mythical Island of Love, the Ibeza of the Renaissance, the weather in Cyprus

this morning is very very stormy, all the seagulls are flying backwards, and in fact the whole Turkish army has up and got themselves drowned."

Now, who is the first person at the Cyprus check-in?

CLOWN TWO

Cassio.

CLOWN FOUR

OK - you be Cassio.

HE launches into a rehearsal-come-enactment of Act 2 Scene 1, the arrival at Cyprus.

"Come, let's to the seaside, ho!" I'm Montano, one of the Cyprussy guys.

And then up the beach walks Cassio.

No no no - dude, you have just been on a storm-tossed ship, and there is the wind blowing and the rain - come on!

CLOWN TWO

What?

CLOWN FOUR

There's a storm - you don't have to throw up water and slime and ... sewerage, but you got to put some imagination to work.

CLOWN TWO

I'll try again.

CLOWN FOUR

Yes you will.

"Come, let's to the seaside, ho!"

That's Montano. Shakespeare.

And then up the beach comes Cassio.

CLOWN TWO (as CASSIO)

"Thanks, you the valiant of this warlike isle,  
That so approve the Moor! O, let the heavens  
Give him defence against the elements,  
For I have lost us him on a dangerous sea."

CLOWN FOUR

'I have lost us him' - have you been drinking?

CLOWN TWO

No.

CLOWN FOUR

No other substance abuse or personal behaviour problems you need to discuss?

CLOWN TWO

Uh, not here. Thank you.

CLOWN FOUR

Ok. It's a Shakespeare thing. Back to Montano.

CLOWN TWO

"I have lost -

BOTH

- us him on a dangerous sea - "

CLOWN FOUR

Yeh. It doesn't make anymore sense the second time.

"Is he well shipp'd?"

See, we're yellin' here because of the wind.

CLOWN TWO (as CASSIO)

"His bark is stoutly timber'd, his pilot  
Of very expert and approved allowance;  
Therefore my hopes, not surfeited to death,  
Stand in bold cure."

CLOWN FOUR

Just answer the question! All these words!

And then next minute everyone is calling out 'a  
sail. A sail!'

CLOWNS ONE/THREE:

'A sail. A sail.'

CLOWN FOUR:

This is just so excellent! Now we are like a  
band or something. And you are my BV girls!



CLOWN ONE

I feel dirty.

CLOWN THREE

I need a substance problem.

CLOWN FOUR

"A sail. A sail!" So everyone goes runnin' off down the beach an' then I say -

"But, good lieutenant, is your general wived?" 'cause I don' know - I must've got wind. You get it? 'Got wind'? Ge -? There's a stor - blowin'... - doesn' matter.

Casspo - ... "is your general wived?"

CLOWN TWO (as CASSIO)

"Most fortunately: he hath achieved a maid  
That paragon's description and wild fame;  
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,  
And in the essential vesture of creation  
Does tire the ingener."

CLOWN FOUR

So even though Montano does not know what an ingener is -

CLOWN ONE

It's an inventor.

CLOWN FOUR

Yes, thank you. I said Montano didn't know. I was in character.

So from that wordosaurus you can pretty much tell Cassio has got a serious wet spot for Dessie.

CLOWN TWO (as CASSIO)

"She that I spake of, our great captain's captain,  
Left in the conduct of the bold Iago, -"

CLOWN FOUR

The bold Iago!

CLOWN TWO (as CASSIO)

"Whose footing here anticipates our thoughts  
A se'nnight's speed. Great Jove, Othello guard,

And swell his sail with thine own powerful  
breath,  
That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,  
Make love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms,  
/Give renew'd fire to -"

CLOWN FOUR

Woah! Woah! Back it up. Casstipher - !  
'...love's quick pants ....'?

CLOWN TWO

'...in Desdemona's arms' Yes....?

CLOWN FOUR

That's not like a, 'Quick, daks down - Slap  
that! - then up again with the daks!?

CLOWN TWO

I don't think so. No.

CLOWN FOUR

NO! That is like - huhu huhhu huhu huhu huhu  
huhu huhuhuhuhuhuhuhuhuhu.....!

CLOWN FOUR launches into a progressively wild and outrageous  
improvised orgasm routine. He tumbles out among the assembled  
students, climbs over them, falls across them, swings off any  
ceiling fixtures he can reach tunnels under chairs and desks...  
The other CLOWNS desperately try to keep furniture and other  
students out of his pathway of transgression until he  
eventually collapses in a howling sexual climax.

CLOWN ONE

Alright! We get the picture.

CLOWN THREE

It's how I get the picture out of my head!

CLOWN FOUR

Almost gave myself a coma.

CLOWN THREE

You have a serious problem with being human,  
don't you?

CLOWN FOUR

Cassio is doing like an 'entry thing' right?

CLOWN ONE

An entry thing?!!!!

CLOWN FOUR

Woh! Who has got the dirty mind now? OK - I just checked, and it's me. An 'entry' thing - my moraligious friends - is a lead-in. An introductational device used by professionals like Shakeyspeare and me. Ergo and as by example, Ladies and billyjacks, give it up for the hottest honey in Venice, the huhuhuhu glitter girl of now hooked up with the Gen-eral who came to save your island!

CLOWN ONE

That is a very misogynistic interpretation.

CLOWN FOUR

Hey! It is Mister-ogynistic to you.

Here I take the time of remindance, what is the weather?

CLOWN THREE

It's raining?

CLOWN TWO

And it's windy.

CLOWN FOUR

It is as they say in the classics ; 'Pi -

OTHERS

Hey! Woh! Watch out!:

CLOWN FOUR

Pitiful weather!' And Cassio is talking up Desdemona huge!

Go dude.

CLOWN TWO

"That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,  
Make love's ....."

CLOWN FOUR

No. Go! I like that bit.

CLOWN TWO

"...love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms,  
Give renew'd fire to our extincted spirits  
And bring all Cyprus comfort!"

Note: A slash / indicates the point at which the next speaker begins their next line of dialogue. A double slash // indicates where to begin the following line of dialogue.

"O, behold,  
The riches of the ship is come on shore!  
//Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your -"

CLOWN FOUR

And come in Desdemona! Go Desdemona!  
Stop. Stop! Stoooooop!  
I can not believe this is happening.

CLOWN THREE

What? I was coming up the beach.

CLOWN FOUR

That was you coming up the beach?

CLOWN THREE

Desdemona. Yes. What you want me to mime sand?

CLOWN FOUR

Six weeks on the boat?

CLOWN THREE

If you say so.

CLOWN FOUR

Hey, sixteenth century galleon, which is a  
four-masted ship - boat -

CLOWN ONE

A boat? Did it float?

CLOWN FOUR

All the way from Venice to Cyprus- from the  
window to the wall - Yes. Six weeks - tops.  
Some of us do our research. Wikipedia is  
'word'.

So Dessie gets off the galleon - and she is  
runnin' up the beach.

CLOWN THREE

Yes. You don't want her to be seasick?

CLOWN FOUR

Seasick is not cool. Seasick is not a part of the huhu picture. What you want Cassio to be sayin' 'here comes the glitter girl!' an' up you turn with a little bit of belly chunk on your cheek?

CLOWN THREE

I feel like throwing up now.

CLOWN FOUR

Hold it. Swallow. Works for me. So runnin' up the beach. Woh! Woh! Back! Beep beep.

Who you runnin' to?

CLOWN THREE

Othello. That's what she hopes.

CLOWN FOUR

Correct. Othello - so your hair is out, 'cause the big man thinks that is alluring. Alluring. That's onomatopeta. It means what it sounds.

CLOWN ONE

Like dumb. And dope.

CLOWN THREE

And deadshit.

CLOWN FOUR

Alluring. Now the wind is blowin'. The rain is rainin - not too heavy - no like mud an' ...floatin' drowned Turks - an' with your permission, I have a little bit of music I can improvise ...?

CLOWN THREE

Music. For me?

CLOWN FOUR

Air Guitar Rock God!

CLOWN ONE

What are you doing?

CLOWN FOUR

You are Emilia - servants don't talk.

OK, Casstatrophossie! One more time.

CLOWN TWO

"...love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms,  
Give renew'd fire to our extincted spirits  
And bring all Cyprus comfort!"

CLOWN FOUR

And then in comes Desdemona!

He plays his air guitar Guns 'n Roses porn-track.

Slow motion! Slow motion!

CLOWN THREE

Hey! You can take your slow motion and shove it  
up your - !

CLOWN FOUR

OK. I'll do it. You play the guitar.

HE takes up position as Desdemona. CLOWN THREE takes the air  
guitar.

Casterpho! Please!

CLOWN TWO

"O, behold,  
The riches of the ship is come on shore!  
Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your knees.  
Hail to thee, lady! and the grace of heaven,  
Before, behind thee, and on every hand,  
Enwheel thee round!"

CLOWN FOUR

That is an entrance! That is smokin'!

CLOWN THREE

I think you can give Desdemona back now.

CLOWN FOUR

Oh, after I have done all the action.

CLOWN THREE

Yeh, I might need to have her washed.

CLOWN ONE

That is not how it happened.

CLOWN FOUR

Works just fine for me.

CLOWN ONE

That is obscene.

CLOWN FOUR

Come on man, it's Pamela Anderson.

It's Miley! Miley!

CLOWN ONE

You are making her into ... Cheap trash!

CLOWN FOUR

Hey! We are working on a budget - but what part of that was cheap?! On close reading of Shakespeare's play, you have got to admit - this is a wet tee-shirt scene!!!

CLOWN THREE

It is a wet what?!

CLOWN FOUR

Tee-shirt! Come on man! Put it together - she is runnin' up the beach. There is the wind, there is the rain - what chick - sorry - female - does not know she's got a wet tee-shirt thing goin' on.

CLOWN TWO

I am beginning to see his point.

CLOWN FOUR

There, see? Cassio's got a point. The whole audience has got a -

CLOWN ONE

This is Shakespeare!

CLOWN FOUR

Yeh man! Shakespeare was into porn!

CLOWN ONE

I am not listening to any more of this.

CLOWN FOUR

What? You takin' your balls and goin' home?

CLOWN ONE

Come on.

CLOWN THREE

No. I want to stay.

CLOWN FOUR

See, I told ya. Desdemona is not so innocent.

CLOWN THREE

I am not saying anything.

CLOWN FOUR

Yeh - but she does then, pretty soon.

CLOWN ONE

You are just sexualizing Desdemona. It's just tacky. It doesn't prove anything.

CLOWN FOUR

Get thee to a nunnery. That's Hamlet. I am multi-playable!

CLOWN ONE

I am Emilia. I stick around to protect Desdemona.

CLOWN FOUR

Well you didn't do a very good job at that then.

CLOWN ONE

You are trying to say Desdemona is a tramp -

CLOWN FOUR

No I am not sayin' she is trashy. Not 100%. But Shakespeare wants the audience to think of Desdemona as the huhu girl - as not like this Disney Princess - cause obviously, Disney had not been invented yet. Mickey Mouse was not born.



CLOWN ONE

We are dealing with an intellectual powerhouse.

CLOWN FOUR

Thank you. I will go on.

**Please Note: For the purposes of this presentation Page 20 to 66 have been omitted.**

2. INT. A LECTURE HALL OR CLASSROOM – DAY, CONTINUOUS

CLOWN FOUR (AS IAGO)

"I pray you, be content; 'tis but his humour:  
The business of the state does him offence,  
And he does chide with you."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"If 'twere no other—"

CLOWN FOUR (AS IAGO)

"'Tis but so, I warrant."

HE makes the farting sound of trumpets

"Hark, how these instruments summon to supper!  
The messengers of Venice stay the meat;  
Go in, and weep not; all things shall be well."

CLOWN THREE

See, Iago doesn't say anything either.

CLOWN FOUR

Yes he did. He just lied.

I never said Iago did not do what he did. I'm  
just saying that it would have been easy to  
make his little schemes come undone if  
everybody else had told the truth.

If the audience, which was in the know the  
whole time – no fourth wall – had said  
something.

CLOWN TWO

What lies did Othello tell?

CLOWN FOUR

Did he once say to Dessie, 'You have been cheating with Cassio?'

CLOWN TWO

Yes.

CLOWN FOUR

When?

CLOWN TWO

Just then.

CLOWN FOUR

No. Called her whore. Did not mention a name.

CLOWN TWO

Well, in the final scene.

CLOWN THREE

Yes, but then in the final scene it's too late. He's gone all psycho by then.

CLOWN ONE

And it's Othello who somehow conveniently forgets it was him who threw the handkerchief away in the first place.

CLOWN FOUR

Yes, both Othello and Desdemona get a sad case of hanky-nesia.

But, what about Emilia?

CLOWN ONE

What about Emilia?

CLOWN FOUR

How come Emilia, in the final scene with Desdemona, does not tell her where Othello's jealousy cometh from?

CLOWN ONE

Well, it's Iago.

CLOWN FOUR

No! Iago is just stirring the pot - Iago did not pour in the ingredients.

CLOWN ONE

Then, the handkerchief.

CLOWN FOUR

No! The handkerchief is just a happy little coincidence which Emilia actually begins - Exhibit A the previous scene.

CLOWN THREE

Then what is it?

CLOWN FOUR

"Three great ones of the city,  
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,  
Off-capp'd to him..."

CLOWN TWO

Yes. Three Venetian lords tried to convince Othello to make Iago his lieutenant. Before the play begins. So what?

CLOWN FOUR

"But he...horribly stuffed with epithets of war,  
non-suits my mediators..." and gave the gig to Cassio.

CLOWN TWO

Which is Othello's right.

And after what happened you can see he made the right decision.

CLOWN FOUR

After what happened? What happened? When?

"... it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets  
He has done my office..."

CLOWN ONE

Oh, this is mentioned once by Iago -

CLOWN FOUR

Twice!

"I do suspect the lusty Moor  
Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof  
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my  
inwards;  
And nothing can or shall content my soul  
Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife,"

CLOWN ONE

So Iago is insanely jealous. He thought Emilia  
slept with Cassio too. Little man syndrome.

CLOWN FOUR

But why would Othello so just jump to the  
belief that his wife could be unfaithful,  
unless he had seen such cheatingness with his  
own little peepers.

"This is a subtle whore,  
A closet lock and key of villanous secrets  
And yet she'll kneel and pray; I have seen her  
do't."

CLOWN THREE

Oh, is this what you've been leading up to?  
Emilia has slept with Othello.

CLOWN FOUR

And maybe even with Cassio.

Three great ones of the city spoke up for Iago  
to convince Othello to make Iago his  
lieutenant. What if Emilia had tried a little ...  
bribery of her own.

CLOWN ONE

That is absolutely ... not worth responding to.

CLOWN FOUR

No. Yeh. You're right. Let's just do the last  
scene.

CLOWN ONE

No. We're don't have to do the last scene.  
We're out of time.

CLOWN FOUR

Scaredy scaredy.

CLOWN ONE

I am not scared!

CLOWN THREE

Let's just do it. I'm doing it. The last scene.  
So Desdemona is sent to her room to wait for  
Othello....

CLOWN FOUR

That is a lead in.

CLOWN ONE

I know.

(as EMILIA)

"How goes it now? he looks gentler than he  
did."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"He says he will return incontinent:  
He hath commanded me to go to bed,  
And bade me to dismiss you."

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"Dismiss me!"

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"It was his bidding: therefore, good Emilia,  
Give me my nightly wearing, and adieu:  
We must not now displease him."

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"I would you had never seen him!"

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"So would not I my love doth so approve him,  
That even his stubbornness, his cheques, his  
frowns--  
Prithee, unpin me,--have grace and favour in  
them."

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"I have laid those sheets you bade me on the  
bed."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"All's one. Good faith, how foolish are our minds!

If I do die before thee prithee, shroud me  
In one of those same sheets."

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"Come, come you talk."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

O, these men, these men!

Dost thou in conscience think,--tell me,  
Emilia,--

That there be women do abuse their husbands  
In such gross kind?"

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"There be some such, no question."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the  
world?"

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"Why, would not you?"

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"No, by this heavenly light!"

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"Nor I neither by this heavenly light;  
I might do't as well i' the dark."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the  
world?"

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"The world's a huge thing: it is a great price.  
For a small vice."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"In troth, I think thou wouldst not."

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"In troth, I think I should; and undo't when I had done.

Marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty exhibition; but for the whole world,--why, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for't."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong For the whole world."

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"Why the wrong is but a wrong i' the world: and having the world for your labour, tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"I do not think there is any such woman."

CLOWN ONE (as EMILIA)

"Yes, a dozen; and as many to the vantage as would store the world they played for. But I do think it is their husbands' faults If wives do fall: say that they slack their duties,

And pour our treasures into foreign laps,  
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,  
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,

Or scant our former having in despite;  
Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,  
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know  
Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell

And have their palates both for sweet and sour,  
As husbands have. What is it that they do  
When they change us for others? Is it sport?  
I think it is: and doth affection breed it?  
I think it doth: is't frailty that thus errs?  
It is so too: and have not we affections,  
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?

Then let them use us well: else let them know,  
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so."

CLOWN THREE (as DESDEMONA)

"Good night, good night: heaven me such uses  
send,  
Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend!"

CLOWN TWO

And then Othello comes in and murders her.  
Desdemona.

CLOWN FOUR

Could have been avoided. Sad ending.

CLOWN ONE

It doesn't prove anything. You snuck that  
evidence in.

CLOWN FOUR

If the evidence is there....

CLOWN ONE

Is there any scholar, anywhere on the planet  
who has written about this?

CLOWN FOUR

Nup. I thunk it up all by myself. Right out of  
my own brainbox.

CLOWN TWO

It's worth thinking about though. Isn't it.

CLOWN THREE

*Who hath done this deed?*

*Nobody. I myself.*

Desdemona was lying.

END



## Research Statement

### *Research Background*

Despite widely documented innovations integrating theatrical approaches into secondary school in-classroom engagement with the works of Shakespeare, evidence remains that students and teachers struggle with applying those techniques to the pedagogy of interpretation. *Who Killed Desdemona?* introduces a clown-based approach to an interpretation of Shakespeare's play, *Othello*, within a school familiar setting. The screenplay is undergirded by the theories of John Dewey and Jerome Bruner in scaffolding collaborative processes of situated and authentic learning, and integrates the social and peer-learning paradigms of Lev Vygotsky and Etienne Wenger.

### *Research Contribution*

This work makes use of clown-based play and interactivity with both text and live/video attendant audience in negotiating a process of performance-in-rehearsal, where the clowns critically and irreverently unpack and interpret Shakespeare's text through intermittent discourse and enactment. Beyond presenting a bold contentious interpretation of *Othello*, the screenplay scaffolds a dynamic in-class collaborative and performative approach to engaged learning which demonstrably challenges notions of correctness in point-of-view or language. The direct address style of interactivity incorporates processes of reiteration and contextualisation to obviate audience and viewer cognitive overload, and instead enable an active and agile processes of personalised comprehension and analysis.

### *Research Significance*

A screenplay that scaffolds interactive performative interpretation as a part of engaged learning, the work was performed and video recorded with an audience of secondary school teachers, students and tertiary students at the USQ Arts Theatre on 30 and 31 March 2014. The work then received a recorded reading at the USQ Scriptwriting as Research Symposium on 27 June 2017. This screenplay is a part of a larger body of video-based learning resources available through the acclaimed Working with Shakespeare website.