

IN MEMORIAM

JAMES NORRIS LOEHLIN

For nearly twenty-five years James Loehlin was a much-loved and respected teacher, colleague, scholar, and friend in the University of Texas at Austin's English Department and Director of Shakespeare at Winedale, one of the Department's signature programs for undergraduates. Born November 4, 1964, James died of pancreatic cancer September 14, 2023.

James came to UT Austin as an Associate Professor of English in 1999, or rather, he returned to UT then—since, as a native of Rollingwood, the son of long-serving Psychology Professor John Loehlin, and a Plan II undergraduate, it was where he began. Hired specifically to serve as the Director of Shakespeare at Winedale, an immersive Shakespeare performance program situated in UT Austin's Winedale Historical Center and in which he had participated as a student, he performed superbly not only in that role but also as teacher, scholar, mentor, community leader, fund-raiser, and outreach diplomat, among others.

James began acting in high school, playing Claudius in Westlake High School's production of *Hamlet* for the University Interscholastic League one-act play competition. He participated in Shakespeare at Winedale (1983, 1984) as a UT undergraduate in the Plan II Liberal Arts Honors Program and graduated with highest honors in 1986. He attended St. Anne's College, Oxford as a Marshall Scholar, acting in and directing several plays both in Oxford and at the Edinburgh Fringe, pursued a PhD in Drama and Humanities at Stanford University, graduating in 1993, and then taught in Dartmouth's Drama Department for five years, serving as Director of their London Foreign Study Program.

Bearing witness to his profound knowledge of theater history in the Renaissance and modern periods, James's scholarship fed into his performance practice with students. He published books on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, as well as Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*; he also authored *The Cambridge Introduction to Chekhov* and co-edited, with his UT Austin colleague David Kornhaber, *Tom Stoppard in Context*. At London's Globe and Orange Tree Theatres, as well as at Winedale, James directed, acted in, or supervised productions of thirty-five Shakespeare plays, plus all four of Chekhov's major plays and works by Marlowe and Stoppard.

James was a charismatic classroom instructor of Shakespeare, modern drama, and world literature, always manifesting a professional but delicate combination of tact, grace, and firmness of purpose and receiving the highest possible student evaluations while often teaching an overload. He won five major teaching prizes, including the College of Liberal Arts' Harry Ransom Award (2004), the student-nominated Chad Oliver Plan II Award, and the President's Associates Teaching Award (both 2006). He was inducted into UT Austin's Academy of Distinguished Teachers (2008), won the Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award (2011), and was awarded the prestigious, student-nominated Silver Spurs Centennial Teaching Fellowship (2022). Yet his most significant achievements were as Director of Shakespeare at Winedale, which took students away from their desks and on to the non-air-conditioned Theater Barn stage in Round Top every summer for nine weeks of grueling pre-dawn to midnight overheated sessions that culminated in multiple productions of three Shakespeare plays each season.

Here's how James described his intense, though non-prescriptive vision of Winedale productions:

The students scrutinize the language for sound and sense, staging clues, and interpretive options, combining scholarly study with practical experiment. They try out multiple

possibilities for every scene.... One of the basic philosophies of the Winedale method ... is that there are no rehearsals: each engagement with the text is a performance, as valid as any other, and demanding the same level of commitment. Accordingly, our work on the plays is...directed toward defining and exploring problems, both of text and performance.... The autonomy of the students in the ensemble process can lead to inconsistency—some experiments work, some don't—but it allows meaning to be discovered, or created, in real time.

Each summer he spent every waking minute with about sixteen undergraduates, most with no previous theater experience, guiding them through their own rendition of these classic texts while letting them find their own voices. James's pedagogy was premised on collaboration rather than competition, democracy rather than hierarchy. He participated in all the rituals (the early morning volleyball and Frisbee games, the clean-ups, the singing, the "circle") that created and sustained group coherence and collaboration. He treated his students as his beloved children: with sympathy, infinite patience, shrewd guidance—and with intellectual rigor and discipline. He expected miracles from them, and, within their capabilities, they created miracles while undergoing life-transformation. The experience of total immersion in the language and stagecraft of the world's greatest dramatist made the least talented among them competent Shakespeareans who came to comprehend, as James puts it, "art from the inside": speaking the lines with understanding and "knowing" Shakespeare as students who read the text in a conventional class cannot. Consequently, in 2014 the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust of Stratford-Upon-Avon recognized Shakespeare at Winedale as one of only fourteen North American Shakespeare Festivals included in their Shakespeare on the Road project, the sole academic, non-professional program so honored.

James's deep investments in students and production, as in his scholarship, were inseparable. In addition to cultivating donors and fund raising, overseeing theater renovations to conform to the fire code, selecting the plays, interviewing applicants and determining and casting


participants, organizing the summer events, and arranging touring performances, he energetically oversaw the Program's demanding daily requirements: working on three Shakespeare plays for nine weeks, from dawn to midnight, in the Texas heat. His multi-tasking was captured by a student who wrote: "I can think of no one else who could simultaneously fix an essential Port-a-cool fan, give directorial notes on scenes, and be on the phone to the Royal Shakespeare Company in England."

Alumni, many of whom had signed up for multiple summers under James's gentle but demanding tutelage, formed Winedale's core audience, often traveling long distances to attend their successors' performances. One student describes being inducted into "an enormous, loving community of scholars, performers, and readers who return to Winedale again and again to reconnect with old friends and see what Dr. Loehlin and his new group of students have come up with." Another represented generations of Winedalers when he wrote: "The students of the summer program come to understand the depth of James's thoughtfulness and erudition, but also to see his great capacities for empathy and kindness. His combination of intellect, compassion, and approachability make James a person whom students work hard to please, in many cases harder than they have ever worked for anything else." Winedalers formed amazingly durable bonds with each other, with James, and with Shakespeare. They quote his lines at every turn, they become ardent playgoers, they donate to support future Winedalers, and they never forget that magical time when they learned that they could effectively convey Shakespeare's beautiful but difficult language to diverse audiences. The confidence and self-discipline James instilled in the shyest and least promising of students was profoundly maturing: they learned that hard work, a ritualized and rigorous schedule, and a loving mentor, can elicit talents they never knew they had. And James's influence extended beyond their Winedale time: many of his students went on to work in Camp


Shakespeare and Shakespeare Outreach, programs for elementary schoolchildren that the English Department offers in schools all over the state. In so doing they spread the Winedale experience ever more broadly; in a time of retrenchment for the Humanities they persist in changing the world, child by child.

Formal reunions subsequently brought middle-aged executives, schoolteachers, and software engineers back to the Barn to relearn their lines; annual New Year's Eve parties assembled any alums who could make it to Austin. So committed was James to his students that he continued teaching them even after being diagnosed with cancer early in the summer of 2022. Throughout his final days, dozens of current and former students visited to tell him how much he meant to them, and he reciprocated by conducting ad hoc seminars on Ovid right up to the end.

For many of James's colleagues, like his students, it was a great pleasure and a privilege, and profoundly transformative, to know and interact with him, and the world is a far poorer place without him. He is greatly missed in the English Department, the College of Liberal Arts, the College of Fine Arts, the wider community that includes Austin, Round Top, Dallas, and Houston, generations of students, numerous donors, and, most especially, those who knew him best: Laurel René Goff Loehlin, his loving wife of twenty-seven years; his sister, Jennifer Ann Loehlin, and her partner Michael T. Mashl; his sister- and brother-in-law, Holly Goff Marcks and Jeffrey Earl Marcks; and his nephew, William Arren Broussard, Jr.



Jay O. Hartzell, President
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This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Alan W. Friedman (Chair), Elizabeth Cullingford, and David Kornhaber.