Researchers in the Canine Cognition Lab at Sacred Heart University (SHU) have been working with service dogs to study their behavior and how they can help individuals with mental health issues. The dogs are trained to perform specific tasks such as getting medication, calming someone having a panic attack, and interacting with students. Once the dogs are able to sit still under environmental stimuli, they will even attend class a desk without being disruptive to their environment. They believe that studying the dogs’ behavior will give them insight into human behavior. Yeater will try to determine if the dogs were taught specific abilities or if they have innate abilities. Moreover, Yeater and her team are studying the effects of animals on the self-report feelings of stress and self-efficacy of students. Measuring cortisol and asking students to self-report feelings of stress before and after the interaction by biological and psychological indicators of stress before and after spending time with the dogs.

Beyond the behavioral requirements of an emotional support animal, these service dogs are trained to perform three distinct functions: service dog training happens in the biology department, partnered with Barbara Pierce, professor of psychology, and chair of the psychology department, and Deirdre Melzer, associate professor of psychology—serves as the research assistant. Engage undergraduate students in the lab space with dogs. When you see what is happening with the dogs at the Canine Cognition Lab where undergraduates are all dedicated to graduate-level study. Brown, Duke and Columbia (even have a handful of other schools (such as Yale, Smith), December 2020 cover feature, and only ilustrious. “The New Science of Canine Cognition” was the first in the country to engage undergraduate students. The research field.

Sacred Heart plays host to Keith Hamilton Cobb and the Untitled Othello Project, a multidisciplinary approach to unpacking a script that for centuries has stood at the intersection of art, race and culture—for better or for worse.
ART MAKES NO SENSE WHATSOEVER. It is utterly inefficient to make—a single work may take as little as hours or as long as a lifetime to complete—with no guarantee of success. Then, at its best, art’s impact transcends any quantifiable measure—a touch of brush to canvas may teach as much about the emotions of love and loss as it does about the science of color and light; a shift in key may reduce an audience to tears or send a nation to war; the truth of a moment in a book, film or play may reveal more about ourselves than we’d otherwise be willing to admit.

And, to this last, sometimes the opposite is true. Sometimes it is a moment’s un-believability—and our willingness to accept it anyway—that is most telling.

Keith Hamilton Cobb has issues with Othello. “I don’t think it’s a great play,” he says of Shakespeare’s classic, which (it should be noted) ranks among the most frequently produced plays in the country year after year. “It’s plot driven [meaning the characters do unbelievable things solely because the action of the play requires it]. The characters are stereotypical tropes. I don’t like the character of Othello. He’s badly written, boorish and blunt … but I care for him.”

That dichotomy—a feeling intellectual’s frustration with ingrained and endorsed stereotype versus an empathic actor’s mission to find the true human in every character—is at the heart of Cobb’s Untitled Othello Project, which took up residency on campus at Sacred Heart for two weeks at the start of this past December. Stereotype and caricature are, of course, the antithesis of what the play requires it to value profitability over authenticity? Furthermore, what does it say about a culture that not only accepts these stereotypes for so long, but elevates them unquestioningly as the work of genius?

Finding the Othello that could be there—indeed, the one some might say should be there—is no small task, but deep dive into the text of the play. Weighing historical intention against modern sensibilities, cultural shorthand as it existed then and now, and the understanding that a modern audience will never fully divorce itself from its modernity, the team sought to unpack the play’s intentions and determine if a better narrative exists inside the one we’ve accepted on merit for so long. “Stellar” is the word Cobb uses without hesitation to describe his two weeks on Sacred Heart’s campus. The group pored over the script with an attention to detail never afforded in traditional theatrical rehearsal. Over the course of 60 hours, discussion never progressed past Act 2, Scene 1. For perspective, it’s typically only 80 to 90 hours that most regional and small New York theaters get to attempt a fully fledged production of a play such as this.

“May there be a story in there where Othello’s journey toward enriching— which he does—can be made legitimate,” he says. “But you’re not going to find it if you’ve only got three weeks to recycle what everyone already knows.” So when Cobb and company take on Othello, it’s not just this play and its author they are putting under the microscope. They’re holding a mirror up to an industry. How can the art of theatre truly be an art when its business model requires it to value profitability over authenticity? Furthermore, what does it say about a culture that not only accepts these stereotypes for so long, but elevates them unquestioningly as the work of genius?

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