Reimagining Shakespeare Education

Teaching and Learning through Collaboration

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CHAPTER 14

Collaborative Rhizomatic Learning and Global Shakespeares

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'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together'.

All's Well That Ends Well (Shakespeare, 4.3.74–5)

Film, theatre and television are inherently communal and collaborative art forms (Miell and Littleton, 2004: 1). Therefore, cooperative learning effectively reproduces the communal character of the subject for close reading, while problematising the uneven terrain of collaboration in the performing arts. The 'interdependent and collective nature of collaboration' (Newell and Bain, 2018: 62) encourages participants' agency, sense of responsibility for their roles, and shared accountability. By creating knowledge collaboratively, students and educators lay claim to the ethics and ownership of that knowledge, an act that is particularly urgent and meaningful in the age of COVID-19 when students, more than ever, longed to be connected to others during quarantine.

Collaborative learning involves the creation and circulation of freeform responses that foster a better understanding of dramatic texts. In this form of non-linear thinking, the texts become parts of a non-hierarchical network of ideas rather than a singular point of origin for dramaturgical meanings. This chapter demonstrates how collaborative learning helps students and researchers untangle the web of 'mingled yarn' of Shakespearean performances in digital culture. The philosophical principles and pedagogical strategies originated from my practices in the classroom as well as my partnership with a number of collaborative digital humanities projects. One unique feature of my approach to teaching is its exploration of textual and performative variants in the plays and their performances through digital tools. While this chapter discusses pedagogies for the fouryear university classroom, many of the collaborative learning strategies are applicable to other levels of education.

Drawing on strategic presentism (Dimock, 2018) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of the rhizomatic, nomadic nature of postmodern

knowledge (1987: 53), my pedagogy emphasises enquiry-based learning that – supported by digital tools – discovers deep connections among seemingly distinct interpretations, though it has faced some challenges due to students' uneven preparation and their diverse reading and viewing habits. Despite the internal diversity among its participants, the collaborative enterprise has created productive synergies among its collaborators and encouraged 'radical listening': a strategy to listen for the roots, rather than the plot, of stories. The proactive communication strategy of radical listening creates 'an egality between teller and listener that gives voice to the tale' (Charon, 2006: 66, 77). In the context of teaching drama, students progressed from looking for the what in 'plot' to the why in characters' motivation and behaviours.

My pedagogy treats Shakespeare's plays as fundamentally performative narratives that sustain both past and contemporary conventions. The methodology of strategic presentism, a term coined by Lynn Fendler (2008: 677), acknowledges the present position of the interpreters of the humanities and empowers them to make a difference by methodically using our contemporary issues to motivate historical studies. By thinking critically 'about the past in the present' (Coombs and Coriale, 2016: 88) – such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement – students analyse performances and dramatic texts with an eye toward changing the present. The collaboration has also revealed Shakespeare to be a cluster of texts for critical analysis rather than simply a 'white' canon with culturally predetermined meanings.

A key lesson that we have learned is that, while not every thread we pursued thrived, the educational benefits lie not in exhausting all possible interpretations but rather in sustaining multiple pathways to knowledge. The two parts of this chapter – text-based and video-based pedagogies – examine each of the collaborations' goals, significance, challenges, pedagogical impact and lessons for future innovations.

Rhizomatic Learning

Non-linear, networked learning strategies mine rhizomatic, horizontal, synchronic connections among textual and performative variants of Shakespeare. These strategies draw attention to the growing body of productions, films and digital videos with variegated meanings. Deleuze and Guattari use the botanical metaphor of 'rhizome' to describe epistemological multiplicities, as opposed to an 'arborescent' model of knowledge, which is hierarchic like a tree (2004: 7, 16, 25). As Douglas Lanier writes, 'to think rhizomatically about the Shakespearean text is to foreground its

fundamentally adaptational nature' (2014: 29). My rhizomatic pedagogy replaces the linear, arborescent, grand narrative with the 'rhizome' which has no centre and grows in all directions. Rhizomatic learning is pedagogically inclusive of multiple patterns of critical thinking and discrete but connected writing habits. It promotes diversity not just by accommodating differing learning needs but also by valuing divergent paths to knowledge that are rooted in cultural differences.

The organising principle of the internet is a contemporary example of rhizomatic structure. There is no beginning and end, and there is no one single, fixed path through the contents with a singular meaning. Putting learning in a rhizomatic context and utilising digital tools encourages 'introspection about [our own] position in ... cultural and sociopolitical contexts that can challenge authoritative ... meaning-making processes' (Bell and Borsuk, 2020: 6). Students learn through collaboratively charted paths rather than curated exhibitions provided by the instructor. As a result, they would be able to use Shakespeare as a training ground to understand other complex texts in the future.

My pedagogical model connects what may otherwise seem to be isolated instances of artistic expression. In contrast to goal-oriented pedagogies, collaborative learning allows participants to take into account the ambiguities and evolving circumstances that affect interpretations of the texts. A singular, modern edition of Shakespeare's plays is no longer the only object of study. Instead, it is one of multiple nodes that are available for search and re-assembly. Teaching Shakespeare through translated versions and performative possibilities draws attention to dramatic ambiguities and choices that directors must make (Schupak, 2018: 165). In dramaturgical terms, it helps students discover 'how the same speech can be used to perform ... radically divergent speech acts' (Rocklin, 2005, xviii). Students no longer encounter Shakespeare as a curated, editorialised, pre-processed narrative but as a network of interpretive possibilities. Instead of taking a secondary role by responding to assignment prompts, students examine the evidence as a group, annotate the text and video clips, and ask and share questions that will, at a later stage, converge into thesis statements.

For instance, the political meanings and affective labour behind Hamlet's lines 'A little more than kin, a little less than kind' (Shakespeare, 2005: 1.2.68) during Claudius' announcement of his marriage to Gertrude depend upon performative contexts. If played as an aside in response to Claudius' greeting him as a 'son', Hamlet's comments could deepen a division within the court. If addressed to Claudius, these lines could publicly challenge Claudius' authority by disrupting the king's orchestrated

familial harmony. The king has to decide whether to respond in kind or ignore the insult, as his courtiers are watching. If addressed to his mother, Gertrude, Hamlet could be opposing her re-marriage after his father dies, gesturing towards a moral high road. If addressed to the spectators, the prince could be insinuating that his uncle's marriage with his mother has overstepped the boundary of brotherly kinship.

Text-based Collaboration

Using open-access tools, such as Perusall.com, that incentivise and support collective and collaborative annotation of texts, I create a social space where students learn from each other. Perusall opens up any webpage or PDF text for annotation. Perusall and similar computer-mediated scholarly communication platforms have been shown to enhance the quality of collaboration and promote effective learning interactions between students (Miller et al., 2018; Cadiz, Gupta, and Grudin, 2000). Annotations are gathered under thematic clusters as distinct 'conversations', as Perusall calls them, for analysis. For each assigned text, the class would read, annotate and comment on a shared document, engaging in close reading and a critical framework of literary interpretation. The interactive nature makes reading a more engaging, communal experience, because readers become members of a community.

The annotation tool, paired with a dynamic digital play text, provides pedagogical advantages over reading a print text as an isolated activity. A typical, codex-book modern print edition would fixate ambiguous textual variants by making editorial choices and by glossing particular words in the text. We worked with the modernised version of the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (ISE) *King Lear*. The ISE's dynamic digital text shows textual variants when readers hover the mouse over a word.

While textual variations and ambiguities can seem irrelevant to students, they are central to our understanding of a play. For example, in the division-of-the-kingdom scene (1.1), Regan tells Lear that she 'profess[es] [herself] an enemy to all other joys/Which the most precious square of sense professes'. The floating pop-up window glosses the second instance of 'profess' as 'to affirm or to claim, insincerely'. It also reveals that the Quarto uses the stronger verb 'possess'. As students mulled over the variants, they saw that while the difference may be subtle, the choice of word alters Regan's tone. In the same scene, Cordelia says in her aside that 'then poor Cordelia/And yet not so, since I am sure my love's/More ponderous ['richer' in the Quarto] than my tongue'. In student annotations and discussion in this

thread, they concluded that the adjective 'richer' would align Cordelia, in terms of the speech act (utterances that perform an action and intent), with the language of transaction initiated by Lear, Goneril and Regan. The adjective ponderous would add a sense of severity to Cordelia's thought process. Kent's advice to Lear in the scene also shifts in tone from diplomatic in the Folio to dire in the Quarto: 'reverse thy state' versus 'reverse thy doom'. Taking on the role of editors, students provided rationales for their choice and shared their overall interpretations of the narrative.

Writing and circulating rationales for editorial and interpretive choices led to increased awareness of one's own decision-making process, known as 'meta-cognition' (Varghese, 2019) in students' learning process. With collaborative close reading, students claim the language, in recognition of the speech act, rather than just the character in the sense of whether a character is 'relatable'. King Lear has also opened up new avenues for linking contemporary cultural life and early modern conceptions of aging. In one course, students connected, on Perusall and during class, what they perceived to be Lear's most eccentric moments (the division-of-the-kingdom scene and the first scene at Goneril's castle) to the generational gap crystallised by the catchphrase 'OK boomer', which went viral after being used as a pejorative retort in 2019 by Chlöe Swarbrick, a member of the New Zealand Parliament in response to heckling from another member. The fictional situations have room for both intellectual and emotional responses to the play. The peer-to-peer collaboration excavates layered meanings of key words in a play text that tend to be glossed over by students if they read the text by themselves. As a cognitive and affective learning strategy, reading in solidarity is more effective than reading in solitude (Neil, 2020).

In a similar vein, students were asked to combine textual annotations with a cluster of relevant images they selected from the Folger Library's LUNA, an open-access digital image collection. In Othello's final speech (5.2) before his suicide, he alludes, in the 1623 First Folio, to the 'base Iudean', a person of Jewish faith or Judas Iscariot in the Bible, and, in the 1622 First Quarto, to a 'base Indian', Indians of the New World, who 'threw a pearle away/Richer then all his Tribe'. With dynamic 'toggle view', a reader of the digital edition could see simultaneously all the variants in a crux that is now open for comparative analysis. The Biblical allusion would signal Othello's failed conversion to Christianity, Iago's betrayal, as well as Othello's lost soul. The reference to the New World would support interpretations of Othello's internalised status as a 'savage'. Historical engravings and paintings of Othello in the final scene reflect varying assumptions about the word choice and the weight of the freighted words.

In other instances, textual variants take the form of speech assignment rather than word choice. For example, the 'Abhorrèd slave' speech directed toward Caliban in *The Tempest* (1.2) is assigned to Miranda in the First Folio and most modern editions, but to Prospero in Lewis Theobald's, John Dryden's and other pre-twentieth-century editions. In turn, in modern performances these lines are sometimes reassigned depending on how the director wishes to characterise Miranda and Prospero. It makes Miranda less innocent and more complicit in colonial crimes against the natives if she joins Prospero in calling Caliban a slave. There is another side of the coin. It can be empowering for Miranda to speak thus. Melissa E. Sanchez observes that, when the lines are spoken by Miranda, she is intruding 'into the political debate' between two men, Prospero and Caliban, and establishing herself 'as an independent agent' (2009: 65). Studies have shown that the reasons for reassignments of these particular lines are rarely stylistic but instead ideological (Clayton, 2016: 436).

Global adaptations activate dormant aspects of Shakespeare's plays. A play such as *Henry V* and its global afterlife provide rich material to be mined in, for example, a post-Brexit world. The enquiry-driven collaboration turns speakers of other languages into an asset, particularly international students who are not native speakers of English. All too often they are seen as a liability, but their linguistic and cultural repertoire should be tapped to build a sustainable intellectual community. Take *The Tempest* for example. What exactly do Prospero and Miranda teach Caliban? The word 'language' is ambiguous in Act 1, scene 2 (Caliban: 'You taught me language ...'). It is often taken to mean his master's language (a symbol of oppression). But it can also mean rhetoric and political speech writing, a new tool for him to change the world order. One way to excavate the different layers of meanings within the play and in performances is to compare different stage and film versions from different parts of the world, as will be discussed in the next section. Students translated a passage into a language of their choice and shared their rationale with the class. For the purpose of sharing, they translated back into English what they wrote in another language. Sharing their linguistic skills, students also looked up historical translations of the plays. Caliban's word, 'language', is translated variously in different languages. For example, Christoph Martin Wieland translates the word in German as 'redden', or 'speech'. In Japanese, it is rendered as 'human language', as opposed to languages of the animal or computer language.

Act I, scene 3 of Othello offers another instance that is ripe for multilingual interpretations, which is the focus of a digital project that I

participated in as a collaborator. Directed by Tom Cheeseman, Version Variation Visualisation: Multilingual Crowd-Sourcing of Shakespeare's *Othello* (https://sites.google.com/site/delightedbeautyws/) examines how two key lines are translated in different languages. Focusing on the last words spoken by the Duke of Venice to Brabantio in the court scene, the project has collated 200 translations in thirty languages of the following lines:

If virtue no delighted beauty lack, Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

(Shakespeare, 2005: 1.3.289-90)

Translations of these lines into different languages deal with the meanings of fair and black rather differently. Mikhail Lozinskij's Russian translation says 'Since honour is a source of light of virtue,/Then your son-in-law is light, and by no means black'. Christopher Martin Wieland and Ángel Luis Pujante used 'white' in German and Spanish (respectively) to translate fair, while Victor Hugo chose 'shining'. The software has since been adopted by Vladmir Makarov, Nicolay Zakharov and Boris Gaidin at Moscow University of the Humanities to compare multiple Russian translations of Shakespeare (shakespearecorpus.ru/). The translators' choices of word reflect how social markers – gender, class, immigration status – create and amplify one's desires and needs. While not directing the discussion toward their individual experiences of racialised discourses, students, including those who are 'blessed with surplus visibility of race' (Karamcheti 1993: 13), were able to discuss racial prejudices – a typically more sensitive topic in class – through these eye-opening translations of an impersonal, fictional scene.

All of these textual variants and translational differences draw attention to the instability of the play texts as well as their variegated terrains that are open for interpretation. Grounded in the notion of variants and translations as parallel texts, the pedagogy encourages students to (re-)claim the language rather than aiming for interpretations that are disingenuous, gratuitous, or merely 'politically correct'.

Video-based Pedagogy

Working in tandem with collaborative textual analysis is video-centric collaboration. By turning a large number of performance versions into common objects of study, my digital video project makes links between adaptations that were previously regarded as distinct. Digital videos help us make necessary links between different modes of performative and literary representation. Our current, active, communal user-centric culture, which

prioritises user participation (Fazel and Geddes, 2017: 3), is supplanting the more passive and siloed reader-centric experience that dominated the previous centuries, which in turn replaced the oral culture of Shakespeare's age. Performance-oriented understanding of Shakespeare can enhance the collaborative reading of textual variants in multilingual contexts.

For a number of reasons, the digital video has a special place in collaborative pedagogy and the current phase of global Shakespeare studies (Öğütcü, 2020; Thurman, 2020). First, the rise of global Shakespeares is inseparable from the prevalence of digital video on commercial and open-access platforms, because these platforms provide inter-connected forms of communication for site-specific epistemologies — knowledge that is produced in and reflects cultural specificities of particular locations.

Secondly, digital videos support instant access to any sequence in a performance, as well as the means to re-order and annotate sequences, and to bring them into meaningful conjunction with other videos, texts and image collections (Joubin, 2011: 43). As such, digital video lends itself to collaboration via affordable and sharable tools. In a pedagogical context, digital videos of Shakespeare performance — dynamically co-constituted through the repertoire of common knowledge, with users' hands as scribes and editors — can destabilise and expand the repertoire.

Thirdly, digital video has recently redefined many of the terms and parameters of the study of Shakespeare. While in the 1990s students typically encountered global Shakespeare for the first time through film or theatre, in our times the initial encounters occur predominantly on digital platforms in the form of video clips, memes or quotes. It has become more common for non-professional readers and audiences to encounter global Shakespeares in fragmented forms. The outbreak of the global pandemic of COVID-19 in early 2020 closed live theatre events and cinemas worldwide, but at-home audiences consumed a large number of digital videos when global travel and national borders were shut down.

In pedagogical contexts, the malleability of digital video puts play texts and performances to work in an interactive environment. Online performance video archives can encourage user curation and interaction with other forms of cultural records. In practice, this redistributes the power of collecting, re-arranging and archiving cultural records away from a centralised authority to the hands of users. Despite the challenge of maintaining net neutrality and equal access, generally speaking, in a de-centralised model of networked culture, the users have more direct engagement with narratives and multi-modal representations of events.

While there is much academic discussion of mediated representations of Shakespeare in the mediascape such as YouTube (see O'Neill, 2014) and while there is an increasing number of apps with supplementary video content, peer-reviewed open-access video-centric teaching platforms have remained marginal to pedagogical and critical inquiries. Videos on such platforms as YouTube and Vimeo are not vetted or consistent enough for teaching and research. They are also ephemeral, disappearing when the contributor retracts them or when the rights holder asks for them to be removed.

Aiming to provide vetted, crowd-sourced performance videos that are open-access with permalinks, Peter. S. Donaldson and I co-founded the MIT Global Shakespeares (https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/), an openaccess digital performance video archive providing free online access to performances from many parts of the world as well as peer-reviewed essays and vetted metadata provided by scholars and educators in the field. Deeply collaborative in nature with nine regional editors and four affiliated projects, the MIT platform publishes vetted video, metadata and peer-reviewed analyses of performances. With a 'decentralised editorial design' (Henderson, 2018: 72), it is both a curated and crowd-sourced archive. Donaldson details the 'variorum' aspect of the project in Chapter 13 in this volume. Here I would like to focus on our new single-play learning modules and user interface that we launched in 2018 (https://shakespeareproject.mit.edu/). Our interface supports the creation of clips and streamlining of aggregated searches. It can suggest videos of potential interest based on the user's history. By creating clips that are meaningful to them, students curate their public 'self – their tastes, passions and signature arguments. They exchange notes on their affective relationship to a play or film.

Among the self-contained online learning modules for students and for educators to gain competency and to deploy in class are *Othello, Much Ado About Nothing, Hamlet, The Tempest, The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*. They are accessible and free of charge. Users can request access. Designed for classroom use, the modules share a focus on global adaptations. The *Global King Lear in Performance* module (Figure 14.1), for example, features thirteen full films and numerous video clips that have been pre-arranged in clusters of pivotal scenes (such as the blinding of Gloucester). The feature of clustered, curated clips from a large number of performances is pedagogically useful. While it is only feasible to teach indepth by assigning one or two films of *Lear* in a given class, students can expand their horizon by close reading competing performative interpretations of a few pivotal scenes. There are also modules focusing on single productions, such as the solo Beijing opera performance entitled *Lear Is Here*

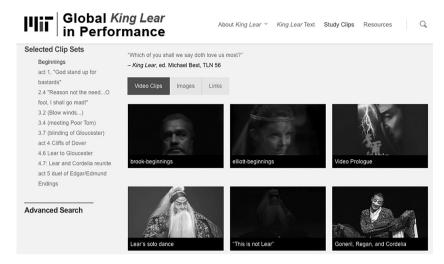


Figure 14.1 Screenshot of the MIT Global Shakespeares webpage, restricted to students who are given access via courses

(https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/modules/). It offers detailed lesson plans, exercises and explication specifically around one adaptation. The full performance video has been divided up into video chapters to facilitate learning. All of the modules have permalinks and offer vetted, curated content on platforms that invite direct user engagement.

As I discussed in the previous section on text-based pedagogy, teaching *Lear* entails teaching each culture's and generation's reaction to the challenging ethical burden within and beyond the play's actions. Does Cordelia's hanging enhance the tragic pathos surrounding her journey, or does it help to highlight the senseless male suffering? The biggest payoff of teaching *Lear* through video analysis is a rhizomatic, productive engagement with performative variants. Viewing a clip of Cordelia's silent protest from Peter Brook's existentialist 1971 film of *King Lear* and a clip of Lear's reaction from Grigori Kozintsev's *Korol Lir* (1971) enables an inherently comparative approach to scene analysis. Viewing performances in this 'distracted' fashion helps to resist the tyranny of the few canonised adaptations and their privileged interpretations. Consuming performances through arbitrary as well as curated pathways sheds new light on performances that do not tend to be discussed side-by-side.

Juxtaposing the clips of the division-of-the-kingdom scene, for example, allows us to re-examine the critical tendency to explain Lear's problems

away as part of a perceived ethical burden. The scene in Brook's film version is dominated by close-ups of Lear and other characters, framing Paul Scofield's Lear as a solemn statue. In contrast to Laurence Olivier's Lear in the made-for-television film (dir. Michael Elliott, 1983), who laughs off Cordelia's initial response, Scofield's Lear speaks methodically and remains stern throughout the scene, which ends with him calmly banishing Cordelia. Cordelia's aside is cut, thereby diminishing the weight of a potentially revelatory moment as well as Cordelia's self-discovery. Placed side-by-side with Akira Kurosawa's *Ran* and other versions that contain elements of merriment, this scene in Brook's film sets a much more sinister and nihilistic tone for the entire narrative. External, sartorial signs of regality are largely absent in Scofield's Lear. In contrast to Elliott's film, this scene in Brook's film does not treat the division of the kingdom ceremonially.

Some assignments ask students to curate their own video clip collections and articulate their rationale. Students use the tools on MIT's platform to make short virtual clips, which they then integrate into their analysis and commentary. Similar to the aforementioned textual exercises, they state their reason for making particular clips and for their particular collection of clips. By making clips, tagging them with thematic or dramaturgical descriptors and sharing their annotations, students engage in a collaborative form of close reading the textual and performative variants. At the same time, insights from their curatorial experience enable a bird's-eye view of multiple performances, leading to a productive form of distant reading (Moretti, 2013).

Thus organised, digital videos – those that have been vetted and lodged in MIT Global Shakespeares – are common objects for close study in a media-rich environment, enabling multi-centred conversations about Shakespeare that are not always routed through traditional British-US centres of Shakespeare production. As stable, accessible, citable video texts, performance videos are now available for citation in scholarship.

Conclusion

Combining text- and video-based pedagogies, my collaborative educational projects reflect the fact that global Shakespeares thrive in hybrid cultural and digital spaces, moving through and beyond print editions and such traditional and emerging metropolitan centres as London and New York. Building a community with shared purposes, the projects create multiple non-hierarchical entry points for ideas to flow through disparate cultural spaces and through genres of stage and screen. They encourage

students' ethical responsibility to each other as they grow from a recipient of knowledge transfer to co-creators of knowledge. At the core of my projects is the co-existence of multiple, sometimes conflicting, versions of the same narrative in multiple pathways to knowledge. Students are able to pause an encounter with a play to gather more visual and textual information collaboratively. They resume the encounter when they are ready, placing the contrasting versions side-by-side or meshing them in a narrative that they now own.

By foregrounding the linkage between early modern English drama and contemporary ideologies in global contexts, we address 'the ways the past is at work in the exigencies of the present [including] the long arc of ongoing processes of dispossession under capitalism' (Coombs and Coriale, 2016: 87–8). In this framework, the past is not an object of obfuscated, irrelevant knowledge that is sealed off from our present moment of globalisation, but rather one of many complex texts to enable us to re-think the present. Since strategic presentism decentres the power structures that have historically excluded 'many first-generation students, students of colour, and differently abled students' (Spratt and Draxler, 2019: 4), more students – especially underprivileged ones – are empowered to claim ownership of Shakespeare.

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REIMAGINING SHAKESPEARE EDUCATION

Shakespeare education is being reimagined around the world. This book delves into the important role of collaborative projects in this extraordinary transformation. Over twenty innovative Shakespeare partnerships from the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East, Europe and South America are critically explored by their leaders and participants. Structured into thematic sections covering engagement with schools, universities, the public, the digital and performance, this book offers vivid insights into what it means to teach, learn and experience Shakespeare in collaboration with others. Diversity, equality, identity, incarceration, disability, community and culture are key factors in these initiatives, which together reveal how complex and humane Shakespeare education can be. Whether you are interested in practice or theory, this collection showcases an abundance of rich, inspiring and informative perspectives on Shakespeare education in our contemporary world.

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