

**2018 SAA Seminar: Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance 1**  
**Leader: Jessica Winston, Idaho State University, winsjess@isu.edu**  
**Respondent: James C. Bulman, Allegheny College**

**Elizabeth Charlebois, St. Mary's College of Maryland**

**Performance Cruxes and Consequences:  
Teaching Shakespeare on Stage**

In this paper I will discuss how I teach Shakespeare in performance as an English professor at a public liberal arts college. With my undergraduate English students, I focus on the relationship between text and performance. After providing examples of “textual cruxes” in Shakespearean editorial practice and textual criticism, I teach students to identify what I term “performance cruxes,” very specific places in the script that seem to especially invite or even necessitate performance to determine meaning. In a series of pre-performance exercises, I ask students to fully imagine staging these cruxes in a variety of concrete ways that would have different interpretive implications. After attending a live performance as a class, students assess the interpretive implications of how the director, actors, and artistic team have presented these performance cruxes in the production. In this paper I will share some of the pedagogical and interpretive strategies I have developed, as well as the pleasures and perils I have experienced teaching Shakespeare through live performance.

**Sarah Enloe, American Shakespeare Center**

**What Shakespeare's Actors Know**

Context matters. For Shakespeare, context means: Actors, stage, and play. Beginning with the techniques actors and producers of Shakespeare use when approaching a play gives students insights into not just single plays, but the canon and literature beyond early modern drama that reveal choices. Choices playwrights made, choices actors make, and choices audiences (and students) receive and interpret. By breaking down the working with the text in a manner similar to the way actors work in the rehearsal room, students make choices about characters and delivery before seeing the production and arrive able to turn a critical eye to the play at hand. Taking such knowledge a step further, students may then “direct” the actors using their knowledge and see the impact tiny changes can make on the entire play. In this paper, I will examine rehearsal room techniques that work in the classroom and explore ways to give students the tools of close reading for performance, and how that close reading leads to an informed approach to seeing plays in production and provides concrete conversation points for post-show discussion.

**Andrew James Hartley, University of North Carolina, Charlotte**

**Theatricality and the Resistance of Thesis**

Central to the way literature students think about responding to text is the notion of a univocal thesis, an argument which will unify the student's thoughts on said text while—at least tacitly—banishing contrary readings as unconvincing or wrong-headed. In this essay I would like to explore the specific case of teaching Shakespeare in a way which utilizes responses to live productions of texts which have already been scrutinized in class to argue instead for an inherent

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plurality of approach, interpretation and construction of meaning. This process turns competing readings into choices whose validity is dependent not on an ontological notion of what the play as text *is* but what the play as production might become. I will draw on campus productions and on visits from the Actors from the London Stage.

**Miranda Johnson-Haddad, A Noise Within**

**Is There a Shakespeare Professor in the House?**  
**Reflections on How Scholars, Performers and Audiences May Serve Each Other**

Because of my close affiliations with two professional theaters, I have frequently been able to teach a given Shakespeare play with regard to a specific production that my students would be seeing. Moreover, the “students” who would witness that production have not been limited to undergraduates; they have often included adult theatergoers with varying degrees of familiarity with Shakespeare and his plays, as well as other teachers who would themselves be taking their students to that production. During the last eight years, I have taught many teachers through the Education Department of a professional theater in Pasadena, CA. These instructors in turn teach Shakespeare to an enormous variety of students at community colleges, high schools, and even elementary schools, where their classes include native and non-native English speakers; AP English students and ESL students; and students from affluent and from under-served communities. In this paper I will explore the question of how we teach live theater performances of Shakespeare’s plays by focusing on three questions: 1) how do we adapt our teaching to a particular audience (for example, non-native English-speaking high school students who may be attending a live theater production for the first time, as compared to older, native English-speaking adults with substantial theatrical knowledge and experience; 2) what pedagogical venues are available to us as academics beyond classroom teaching (for example, enrichment teaching, or writing study guides or program notes for a production, professional or otherwise); and 3) how can we forge stronger community connections between our teaching institutions and local performance venues, to better serve a wide variety of audiences?

**Kate McPherson, Utah Valley University and Utah Shakespeare Festival**

**Improv Teaching:**  
**Utah Shakespeare Festival Post-Play Discussions in a ‘Yes, and’ Mode**

Now in its 57th year, the Utah Shakespeare Festival boasts a Tony Award, an Emmy Award, an eight-play season that runs from late June to mid-October, and devoted patrons, many of whom have been attending for decades. Nearly 120,000 people attended the Festival in 2016, with approximately 60 percent of patrons from Utah; 24 percent from Nevada; 6 percent from Arizona; 6 percent from California; and 4 percent from other areas (USF, “About Us”). In 2017, I was invited to begin leading what the Utah Shakespeare Festival (USF) calls Play Seminars. These sessions are held the morning after the performances at 9 AM and 10 AM in an outdoor seminar grove and are attended by between 20-100 patrons daily. The seminars are free, open to anyone, and designed to be part of the wrap-around experience that USF fosters, including free daily play orientations, a free daily music, dance, and comedy “Greenshow,” a free rotating

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series of prop, costume, and actor seminars, plus inexpensive backstage tours. At many Shakespeare festivals, such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, patrons pay a small admission fee for access to lectures and discussions led by experts. Sponsored by donors and the Utah Humanities Council, these hour-long discussions at USF allow patrons of all ages to inquire about the plays, learn about their history and context, explore the director's, designers' and actors' choices, and respond as audience members. They are advertised as led by "theatre scholars (with play directors and actors joining in at times). . . allowing audience members to engage in a lively give-and-take where everyone learns" (USF, "Events").

What all this adds up to is a Play Seminar audience that is impossible to predict. All I could know is which play (or two) patrons would show up to discuss and in response, I developed a strategy for success I came to call Improv Teaching. I have never studied acting techniques and have only studied pedagogy tangentially, but I organically discovered an approach to teaching that worked. Based on the principles of Improv Comedy, the chief commandment of which is to encourage positivity and continued action, I had to show up six mornings a week in a 'yes, and' mood. The seminars intend to get playgoers to "share [their] views about Festival plays, their interpretation, and subtle nuances (or to hear the views of others)" (USF, "Events"). I struggled initially to move from my professorial, discussion-leading mode with an agenda of textual or performance cruxes and historical background I wanted to transmit to becoming a facilitator with expertise and inside information that could lead to a more nuanced reading of the performance. This open, present, and willing to fail approach (necessitated by both the seminar format and a season that encompassed plays as diverse as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Shakespeare in Love*, and *Guys and Dolls*) has changed the way I think about teaching in the university classroom.

**Allison Machlis Meyer, Seattle University**

**Bringing Down the Bard's House:  
Pedagogy, Representation, and the All-Female Cast**

This paper will analyze student experiences of studying the first tetralogy through viewing and writing about the Seattle Shakespeare Company's 2017 *Bring Down the House*, a successful two-part adaptation of *Henry VI* Parts 1, 2, and 3 directed by Rosa Joshi and the upstart crow collective, a Seattle theater company dedicated to producing classical works with all-female casts for contemporary audiences. By reflecting upon my students' responses to the adaptation's all-female cast, as well as the analytical work they produced for my "Shakespeare: Context and Theory" course, I hope to articulate and better theorize the pedagogical value of students' experiences of representation in live theater performances of Shakespeare. This paper will also be forward-looking, aiming to strengthen and develop effective teaching strategies and assignments with the Seattle Shakespeare Company and upstart crow's next collaborative all-female play, 2018's *Richard III*, in mind.

**Niamh J. O'Leary, Xavier University**

**Bridging the Gap from the Performance-Based Classroom  
to Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance**

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In 2015, I was fortunate to receive a grant that supported a semester-long collaboration with the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company [CSC] in my undergraduate Shakespeare course. The collaboration was based on CSC's fall production of *As You Like It*. Over the course of the term, actors and designers from CSC visited my class at three different points. They led the students through exercises, gave them assignments, explained their design for the production, and fielded questions in a post-production Q & A. As a class, we all attended the final dress rehearsal of the production. I had great ambitions, but the reality came up short in several ways. This paper is an effort to process my successes and failures with that collaboration as I plan and implement future similar projects on skimpier funding (but surer pedagogical footing). In particular, I will consider ways to introduce small pieces of performance studies theory to undergraduate literature students; how to prepare students to see a live theatre production and how best to process the experience after; and how to help students conceptualize live performance in relation to filmed productions and cinematic ones.

**Paul Prescott, University of Warwick**

**Performances, Anthropology, and the Antipodes:  
Teaching Shakespeare through the Portal**

For the last two years, I have co-taught an undergraduate module, 'Local and Global Shakespeares', with colleagues from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Although separated by ten time zones, students in Warwick and Melbourne nevertheless convene in real time (8am/6pm) via the 'International Portal' (a sophisticated version of Skype). My paper will discuss the ways in which we have tried to integrate live Shakespearean performance into this heavily mediated and geographically distanced pedagogic encounter.

**Shiladitya Sen, Montclair State University**

**Teaching Writing via Shakespearean Performance**

In teaching drama to undergraduates for nearly two decades, I have often used live stage performances as a key tool for teaching the text. While doing so, I discovered an unexpected benefit to utilizing such performances: they provide an excellent lens via which to discuss and teach the nature and process of effective, college-level writing. This is particularly true with performances that hew close to the nature of early modern staging. Elements that were true for Shakespearean performances at the original Globe and Blackfriars (a relatively bare stage, the absence of the fourth wall, ensemble casting, the use of conventions such as soliloquies and asides, etc.) function as excellent metaphors for issues that students need to consider in their writing. Attending live performances allows students to comprehend such issues in a manner and degree that simply reading plays cannot, and brings them in direct contact with the transactional, fluid, and metatheatrical nature of early modern performance. Experiencing live performance in conjunction with other mediums, such as cinematic versions of the same play, leads to increased awareness of issues such as perspective, adaptation to one's medium/form, the relationship between performers and their present (and assumed) audience, the way words shift meaning with

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a changed context or different frame; these and other elements can be directly related to the process of writing for the college classroom. Such aspects of Shakespearean performance also analogize in instructive ways to classroom practice and the interactions between students and instructors, facilitating greater self-reflexivity on the part of both student writers and their teachers.

This paper draws upon my experiences using stage performances—especially those by the Shenandoah Shakespeare company (now the American Shakespeare Center) of Virginia and the Lantern Theater company of Philadelphia—to teach writing in the undergraduate classroom. It will explore the benefits and challenges of incorporating live performances of early modern drama in the teaching of writing, the framing strategies and scaffolding that are required, and the discussions and assignments that arose from this approach.

**Michael Shurgot, South Puget Sound Community College**

**‘Do the Parts Fit? Why or Why Not?’  
Teaching the Performance at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival**

My paper will summarize teaching methods I have been using for twenty years for a class I call “Shakespeare in Ashland” at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The class focuses on live performances and fosters participants’ individual responses to production decisions by directors, set, lighting, and costume designers, and actors.

**Garry Walton, Meredith College**

**Framing the Performance**

My own education in Shakespearean drama was transformed in graduate school by a year spent in the UK attending performances and by a semester projecting 16 mm films of Shakespeare’s plays for students in a large lecture hall. Ever since, my Shakespeare classes have been built around performances – both in the classroom and in theatres throughout North Carolina, Virginia and DC, and including DVDs and rebroadcasts of live performances from the Globe, the RSC, and the National.

But this essay seeks to move beyond reflection and anecdote to outline the beginning of a theory of performance pedagogy. Clearly audiences can appreciate, understand and learn from performances of plays they have not studied, but it has always seemed to me that my own and my students’ enjoyment and understanding are heightened when we have prepared for the performance we are attending. It may follow that the more we know about the text, the venue, the company, and the director’s conception before the performance, the better prepared we are for it. So the instructor’s challenge may be how to gather and share appropriate information before a performance, as well as how to offer occasions for thoughtful processing afterward.

Unless they are acquainted with such features as cross-gender or race-blind casting, universal lighting, direct address to the audience, modern dress – much less such major choices as

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promenade staging or radically reduced casts or massive textual cuts – some students can be so startled as to have difficulty appreciating the production at hand. On the other hand, preparing students to listen for particular speeches, to look for key relationships, or to note specific acting/directing choices can enrich their experience immeasurably.

Perhaps my final question should be the first: what goals and purposes are served by attending the performance? To gain insight into the text, to hear the language spoken clearly and with understanding, to see a familiar work of art re-envisioned in a new way, to witness a master actor at work in an historic performance, to marvel in the power of an ensemble, to make a record of a performance for those who cannot attend, to compare productions, to seek a definitive performance of a work – each purpose will lead to different preparation and different follow-up activities.

**Jayme M. Yeo, Belmont University**

**Regional Identity on Shakespeare's Stage:  
A Pedagogical Experiment**

Regional productions of Shakespeare's work often integrate their local contexts through visual, aural, or cultural appropriations: an iconic building recreated in the set, original music written by local artists, or a regional colloquialism dropped into a line. These local embodiments read Shakespeare's work through regional identity and constitute the most accessible form of "non-mediated" live theatre for the majority of Shakespeare classrooms worldwide. But how do we teach students to identify and understand these appropriations?

This paper explores one answer to that question by overviewing a pedagogical project that took place at my home institution, Belmont University, during the 2016-17 academic year. Funded by a micro-grant from the Folger Institute, this project enabled our students to collect artefacts from the Nashville Shakespeare Festival's Summer 2016 production of *The Comedy of Errors* and curate them in an online archive. In the Fall of 2016, students in a Shakespeare class taught by my colleague, Dr. Marcia McDonald, attended the play and collected photos, interviews, and video footage. In the Spring of 2017, students in a class on digital literacy taught by Dr. Joel Overall built the website archive. In both classes, students engaged in multiple forms of visual, aural, and digital close reading through curating video footage, interviews, photos, musical scores, set models, costume sketches, and other elements of the production.

In this paper, I will overview assignments in both classes and highlight how these projects activated habits of learning that, as Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi argue, are valued by twenty-first century students (4). Specifically, students worked in small, independent groups as they explored the production's engagement with regional identity. They then translated their findings in multimodal projects that included traditional essays, website design, and edited videos. Ultimately, these activities provided a platform for an intimate engagement with the performance, one that gave students an opportunity to examine closely the major elements of Shakespeare in performance.

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