"Oh, teach me how I should forget to think":

The Pedagogical Problems of Pleasure and

Rigor in Social Media and Shakespeare

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Abstract

This paper investigates the anxiety exhibited by some academics over the use of new media in teaching Shakespeare. New media, some critics claim, impoverish academic studies, undermining communication skills and cognition by introducing the pollution of the market and the ideas of a populace deluded by pleasure-seeking into the realm of education. I question the bias that rejects the pleasure of new media, paying particular attention to laments about the decline of academic authority into "edutainment" and "infotainment," and I argue that the importance of new media lies, in part, in its ability to facilitate new modes of communication, to accommodate new constructions of identity and to contest older less objective views of language, knowledge, and selves.

Social media offers considerable benefits for the teacher of Shakespeare.[1] My own investigation into the possibilities of social media for Shakespeare pedagogy culminated in an upper-division, hybrid Shakespeare class that was delivered through Interactional Television. Interactional Television works by broadcasting the instructor and students, who are situated in classes on multiple campuses, synchronously into each other's classrooms onto large television screens. There is always one class in which there are both an instructor and students, while the other rooms participate through video.

I incorporated the social media platforms Twitter and YouTube to offset some of the communication obstacles that this mode of instruction created.[2] The students in this class were facing the difficulty of open access to instruction and to each other in the online component of the class, as well as to a televised environment in the face-to-face component of the course. These factors often impeded student communication. In addition to accommodating the students more effectively, this project provided an opportunity to test some of the theories I had encountered

in researching the pedagogical affordances and constraints of new media. Social media intrigued me as a potential site of liberation, play, and collaboration, especially through constructions of social and personal identities through language. What I found confirmed much of my research. The students were enriched by their use of Twitter and YouTube. They gained scholarly independence, a greater appreciation for the power of language in a variety of mediums, and a sense of their place in an intellectual community. They also realized the significance of sociocultural constructions of identity in literature.

My initial forays into this Web 2.0 pedagogy suggested Shakespeare and social media would be a complementary match. "New literacies" scholar James Paul Gee, a strong advocate of technology in education, offers a rational research based approach to the benefits of Web 2.0 pedagogy, as well as a clear overview of the sociocultural structuring of identity through language and its practical application for students. He claims that there is a growing interest in "how people . . . are building identities (often several different identities) through networking with others, . . . virtual communication . . . and shared experiences" (Gee 2000, 40-41). His work uncovers deep connections between "literacy, society, and power" (Gee, 2000 26). According to Gee, "networks and their concomitant practices allow people to form multiple, changing and fluid [identities] with others" (Gee 2000, 42). Gee's work has informed my approach to Shakespeare. What I value most in teaching Shakespeare is examining dramatic characters and the dynamics of both representation and interpretation. Such dynamics reveal identity to be socially constructed, yet also potentially autonomous, and forgeable through effective language use. The approach to language, identity, and power in new literacies makes visible "the discursive, representational and semiotic processes through which identities are created, sustained and contested" (Gee 2000, 29). Since I had previously focused on theories of the carnivalesque in Shakespeare, the notion of contestation suited both my theoretical approach to Shakespeare's work and my pedagogical interest. Web 2.0 pedagogy intrigues me especially since it has been touted with encouraging students to "look for gaps in knowledge" and "imagine alternative interpretations" (Giglio and Venecek 2009, 13).

New Media: Liability or Liberation?

Considering Christy Desmet's salutary reminder that scholars "take into consideration" the opinion of both "admirers and detractors" (2009, 66) of social media, however, I had also become aware of, and concerned with, the dangers that critics claim this medium might pose to rigorous learning and literacy. Critics cautioned that enthusiasm for the use of technology might be at best "cultural intoxication" (McDonald 2009, 29), at worse "ignorance meets egoism meets bad

taste meets mob rule" (Keen 2007, 1). Moreover, many of these scholars perceived an opposition between approaching the text socioculturally — what Russ McDonald refers to as the practice of criticism as "social work" (2009, 30) — and the ability to teach students deeper understandings of language through Shakespeare. Indeed, McDonald, writing from the perspective of Shakespeare studies, claims that "a robust anti-formalism" grew out of this socially oriented criticism, one that encouraged a "disapproval of attention to style or pattern . . ." (2009, 30). He further complains of students who know nothing about "parts of speech," "semantic content," or "syntax" (McDonald 2009, 30).

This was particularly disturbing to me, as I was also teaching linguistics and literature that semester, and most of my students would take both classes. I had not considered the incompatible philosophical differences behind these approaches to language and literature. In fact, I was excited by the potential of approaches from linguistics, especially syntax, semantics, and discourse analysis, not only to enrich the students' understanding of Shakespeare's use of language, but also to help students realize of the importance of language to reading, writing, and identity building more generally. Yet I was surprised to discover in rhetoric and composition courses a shift away from ideas about "correct" writing and toward student self-determination. This shift can be traced back to an important document promulgated by the committee on CCCC Language in 1974, the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" (Butler 2008, 108). Gee, indeed, describes new literacy studies as "sociocultural work" (Gee 2012, 2). Moreover, others in the field of composition studies complain that

> now when we have national searches for the next generation of compositionists, we are faced with applicants . . . influenced by critical theory, by Marxist theory, by our supposed liberatory duty to help students resist and subvert the dominant discourse, and by postmodernity, by Habermas, and by Derrida. (Wallace et al 2000, 92)

Many academics seem to regard a student-centered approach to composition and language as a democratic practices that undermines more formal understandings of language and critical thought. Such academics suggest an opposition between the deleterious theory behind this change in composition studies and the cure offered by linguistics (Wallace et al 2000, 93). Even Stanley Fish has echoed the complaint that composition is without "any theory to be taken seriously", arguing alongside other disgruntled literary scholars that "composition is not doing its pedagogical job: 'students can't write clean English sentences'" (quoted in Butler 2008, 121).

Social media has become associated with this pedagogical problem, as academics continue to see the increased use of the Internet and of various nontraditional methods in literary scholarship as

a threat to the foundation of the university and higher learning. For example, Sharon O'Dair, again writing from the perspective of Shakespeare studies, worries that these practices may constitute "professional suicide", and jeopardize the sanctity of the university, claiming that "democratization seems to be . . . a way to undermine further our commitments . . . to expertise . . . the craft of writing and close reading and . . . our relationship to the market, which . . . has been arm's length, largely non-instrumental or not-for-profit" (O'Dair 2011, 28, 91). Behind this critique of new methods, there may also be a view of the market and the populace as forces of corruption. The assumption would be that in a culture driven by pleasure rather than rigor, where everyone is "under the spell of the latest Apple gadget" (O'Dair 2011, 93), students cannot learn the craft of writing or the critical abilities involved in close reading.

Other scholars, however, have suggested that new media liberates education, increases critical thought and enhances understandings of communication. In fact, they attribute to new media the potential for enabling an epistemological revolution and promoting new levels of literacy. As Richard Lanham argues,

> we may expect a deal of commentary greeting the electronic modification of print literacy as the death of the Western self. Surely the opposite is taking place. The characteristically unstable Western self, by turns central and social, sincere and hypocritical, philosophical and rhetorical, is just what electronic literacy has been busy revitalizing (Lanham 1993, 25).

More recently, Joan Walsh, editor of salon.com, praises Paul Levinson regarding his book *New New Media* for his revelations concerning this "glorious new era of media democracy" (Levinson 2009, back cover). Similarly, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, in Multimodal Discourse: The Modes of Contemporary Communication, are lauded for their efforts to "outline a new theory of communication for an age of interactive multimedia" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, back cover).

The suggestion here of a new type of language and of language acquisition can be taken further. Based on linguistic research that reveals the language practices of culturally marginalized groups' to be complex and coherent, Gee argues for a more democratic approach to language instruction. In addition, he exposes the elitism that would exclude such language, arguing that those who maintain these notions belong to a particular discourse community: "Discourse demand[s] . . . performances which act as though its ways of being, thinking, acting, talking, writing, reading, and valuing are 'right' . . . the way . . . 'intelligent' . . . people behave" (Gee 2012, 215). Based on fear about "correct" language use, such exclusionary practices remain unexamined. Gee claims that no discourse has the "last word on truth" (2012, 215). Linguistics grammarians and psycholinguists substantiate Gee's argument against the unexamined acceptance of prescriptive rules (such as the

rule to not split an infinitive), demonstrating such rules are frequently not based on the logical relationships that structure well-formed sentences in English, and, moreover, psycholinguists argue that ungrammatical writing does not suggest a lack of critical thought.[3]

In addition to biases about grammatical language use, critical reaction to the integration of elements from nonstandard American English culture, such as popular culture, has a long history, especially with regard to media and the teaching of Shakespeare. These ideological differences have continued to vacillate, perhaps tellingly, between (on the one hand) fears about the market, the appetite, the irrational, and (on the other) utopic visions of these pedagogical practices that claim media to be democratic, multicultural, "postpatriarchal," or "postgendered" (Burt 1998, 8). These fears regarding new media echo the early critique that accompanied the replacement of required literature with media considered "popular." As Richard Burt first illuminated in *Unspeakable ShaXXXespeares: Queer Theory and American Kiddie Culture*, conservative critics claim that

> [c]oncern about the "dumbing down" of America is widespread and well- justified. This country cannot expect a generation raised on gangster films and sex studies to maintain leadership in the world, or even its unity as a nation. Shakespeare has shaped our language and our culture. His work provides a common frame of reference that helps us into a single community (Burt 1998, 8).

Even more than most areas of study, film studies (popular or otherwise) requires multidisciplinary understandings in literature, linguistics, sociology, psychoanalysis, and even technology; this hardly seems like a substitution in English departments that would suggest a "dumbing down" of American culture.

Requiring Shakespeare as the solution to academic dissolution is, as Burt claims, misinformed. The problem these days is not with whether or not to teach Shakespeare. The problem is which Shakespeare to teach. New media has already transformed Shakespeare:

> The conservative's fear about dropping a Shakespeare requirement seems misplaced, however, since it depends on an opposition between popular culture and Shakespeare (understood as high culture) that clearly no longer holds. It's not so much that Shakespeare is "out" in universities as that he has "popped" in, as it were (Burt 1998, 2).

Although Burt is merely clarifying the nature of the real problem, thinking of present representations of Shakespeare as high culture, he also identifies deeply ingrained associations of popular culture and media with the devolution of critical thinking and communication skills.

Yet, even from the beginning, media scholars have suggested media's involvement in non-rational practices, while simultaneously revealing the role of new media as a promoter of critical thought. After all, Marshall McLuhan's statement that "electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatever" (McLuhan 1994, 80) suggests that media would not involve communication as we know it. Moreover, his assertion that he "read only the right-hand page of serious books," while claiming, "if it [were] a frivolous relaxing book, [he] read every word . . ." (Bessai 1999), seems to confirm critics' fears regarding media's effect on reading and writing practices. Much of what he claimed, however, regarding the spectator's involvement in the processes of phenomena has expanded into to the processes of communication itself in new media.

This development suggests that the impact of media is ultimately to inspire analytical thinking and to create greater understandings regarding the potentials of language use. This media-inspired, spectator interest in processes is evident in McLuhan's discussion of the instant replay and the audience's involvement in sports. McLuhan claims that a famous American football player had told him that since the introduction of the instant replay

> We have now to play the game in such a way that the audience can watch the actual process that we are performing. They are not any longer interested in just the effect of the play; they want to see the nature of the play. So they have had to open up the play on the field to enable the audience to participate more fully in the process of football play. (1977)

As is evidenced above, new media offers tools that enable a greater desire and potential for analysis and collective participation. Moreover, McLuhan also asserted that "learning itself [would] become the principal kind of production and consumption" and that "electric automation unites production, consumption, and learning in an inextricable process" (1994, 350). When the masses are feared or fetishized as irrational and where pleasure and learning are dissociated, this potential expansion of the learning environment is obscured, something perhaps McLuhan mocks when he claims to read "every word" of poorly written works.

Shakespeare and Popular Entertainment

Among Shakespeare critics, the ideological underpinnings of the bias against the expansive learning environment are further revealed in the mistaken view of Shakespeare as exemplifying linguistic rules that reflect a closed and stable meaning. Shakespeare's wordplay runs counter to the desire "to make language perspicuous" (Mahood 1957, 10). Moreover, his use of the polysemous pun (a word based on the same phonological content but open to multiple interpretations) seems

to anticipate postmodern sensibilities regarding language and truth. It echoes, to some extent, Derrida's notion of the "fundamental" instability of language (Herrick 1997, 258). In the early modern period itself, John Eachard's suggested reform of education, which recommended purging "Punning, Quibling and that which they call Joquing, and such other delicaces of Wit" (Eachard 1670, 31) from academic exercise, would have had the striking effect of purging Shakespeare's own education. Notions of "clarity" and "truth" that inform the tendency to want to make writing transparent run counter to the language and complexity of Shakespeare's texts.

Shakespeare's writing practices are better described as taking part in Bakhtin's conception of the grammatical jocose, rather than in the rhetorical practices of the "clear English sentence" that, as Fish would have it, students lack. The disconnect between Shakespeare scholars and Shakespeare's style is evident as far back as Johnson who, as Mahood suggests, is now blamed for pointing out the flaws in Shakespeare's wordplay rather than appreciating them, even when they are strictly speaking "not working." Johnson admonishes Shakespeare's "improbable pun on bear the animal . . ." (quoted in Mahood 1957, 10) in the lines from *Richard III*: "You meane to beare me, not to beare with me" (3.1.128). Here the animal, the bear, does not make much sense in terms of meaning. It is an excuse to play with language for the sake of playing with it. As Stallybrass and White point out, in the grammatical jocose, adherence to "order is transgressed to reveal erotic and obscene or merely materially satisfying counter-meaning" in Shakespeare's work (1986, 11). As they further assert, "punning is one of the forms taken by grammatical jocose . . . the pun violates and so unveils the structure of prevailing and (pre-vailing) convention . . . Shakespeare's most indulged literary practice points to a plural, unfixed, comic view of the world" (1986, 11). Moreover, as Michael Bristol has long argued, "the enterprise of drama . . . bring[s] authoritative discourse into close, proximate relationship with the experience of everyday productive life so that it can be viewed experimentally and irreverently" (1985, 178). Shakespeare's use of language and his dramatic practice is far more democratic than it is elitist.

Rather like Shakespeare, promoters of new literacy challenge a blind adherence to traditional modes of communication. They argue that those who reject the epistemological frame involved in new media succumb to "nostalgia" for a social stability that has become "an obstacle to necessary action" (Kress 2010, 7). These traditional modes do not reflect the realities of contemporary experience. Kress, for example, uses the term "grammar" rather than "close reading" or "the craft of writing," but the referent is the same: it figures writing as a disciplined, orderly phenomenon that ultimately discovers and conveys "the truth," a construct that reflects a wishful thinking around "past social practices of particular groups" (2010, 7). Critics such as Kress claim that communication is far more ambiguous than traditionalists tend to acknowledge. In fact, uncertainty

and instability in contemporary experience has only increased, and the truths of this experience, distrust of narratives and so on, require tools of communication with different affordances and constraints: "Representational and communicational practices are constantly altered, modified, as is all of culture, in line with and as an effect of social changes" (Kress 2010, 7). It may seem surprising but today's linguistics and media scholars are closer to thinking like Derrida — and I would add, like Shakespeare — than many might imagine. Here Kress acknowledges the instability of language, and Gee's focus on the sociocultural nature of language suggests Derrida's notion of alterity.

Recent shifts in pedagogical practices reveal that teaching Shakespeare with new media is particularly relevant to the times, not only in terms of new literacy but also in terms of what O'Dair refers to as the "democratization" of learning in current Shakespeare studies. Proponents tout social media as encouraging a more democratic, critical perspective and allowing for a more liberated examination of various discourses of those in power by the marginalized. They credit Shakespeare's plays with facilitating these very experiences in the classroom. Gee's sentiments regarding new literacy are echoed in the way in which Ramona Wray, for example, values the experience in her classroom, a classroom in which students are able to arrive

> not only at a fresh sense of their agency but also at a consciousness about their own position in a society that has historically traded upon fixed roles and that has often elected to judge on the basis of predetermined affiliations" (Wray 2009, 157).

Like Gee, Wray suggests that these student-directed discoveries regarding marginalized identity might be transformative. Quoting Judith Fetterly, she interestingly suggests that making "the system of power" open up to discussion regarding the construction of gendered identity eventually results in changes in the way gender is conceived (2009, 157). Moreover, a Shakespeare classroom, and in particular one that incorporates media and interpretive "play," can contribute to this "balance of power" shifting (2009, 157). Like Gee, Wray values education not for its sanctioning of "correct" ways of thinking or writing but rather for the material consequences that begin in the classroom: "gender aware pedagogy might have an effect, even a transformative function, one that invests in local policies and practices in order to fashion more constructive modes of understanding and ultimately political engagement" (Wray 2009, 157).

Social media's fostering of a collaborative, amateur culture can be similarly empowering. The use of YouTube in teaching Shakespeare is especially productive for establishing an active classroom and a sense of open discussion. As Desmet has illuminated,

> Coupled with the invitation to self-display is a concomitant imperative to share videos with friends, colleagues, and family . . . this imperative provides the best reason yet to use YouTube in the Shakespeare classroom. Participating in a virtual network of Shakespeare artists, both as producers and critics, gives students a real stake in the shaping of Shakespeare for our time (Desmet, 2009, 69).

With this in mind, closer analysis of the interrelations between Shakespeare, social media, and new literacy seems particularly beneficial for new ways of conceiving not only the self but also how that self is created through language socially.

New Media and Pedagogy

Technology is inevitably going to be a factor in the way students learn and its medium may ultimately shape the type of independent thinking and creativity students perform. As Kathleen Blake Yancy states, "it's not a question of whether you'll use technology to help students learn. It's a question of what kinds of technology you will include and when" (Yancey 2003, 105). Mark A. Gammon and Joanne White argue that "educators must be prepared to provide students with the tools to embrace . . . demands across all media" (2011, 330). They call on "educators and students to work collaboratively in addressing the critical competencies necessary for accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media content" (Gammon and White 2011, 331). Louise Marshall and Will Slocombe also discuss the inevitability of technology's inclusion in the lives of future scholars, pointing out that "the move away from independent scholarly activity towards networks of communities of scholars engaged in technology-enhanced research needs to be reflected in the pedagogy of our subject" (2010, 101). Giving students an awareness and experience with these virtual communities is a pressing need.

More fundamentally, N. Katherine Hayles, in addressing the apparent disadvantages of technology for future scholars, emphasizes how online environments are changing the way we think. She reveals an opposition between "hyper attention," which "excels at negotiating rapidly changing environments in which multiple foci compete for attention," and "deep attention" which involves "focusing for long periods on a noninteractive object such as a Victorian novel or complicated math problem" (Hayles 2007, 188). For Hayles, however, this epistemological shift does not signal the destruction of our "economy, culture [or] our values" as it does for critics of technology such as Keen. Rather, she claims that the "expectations of educators" trained in "deep attention" can become "saturated with assumptions about [the] inherent superiority" of older modes of cognition and attempt to constrain young people "to the procrustean beds outfitted for them

by their elders" (Hayles 2007, 188). She argues that this situation should instead give way to "a constructive synthesis" (Hayles 2007, 188). In fact, she reports that a task force created by the Federation of American Scientists found that learning with technology "teach[es] skills critical to productive employment in an information-rich society" (Hayles 2007, 195). Hayles introduces the notion that stimulation is important to this generations' ability to learn and points to the power of pleasure in motivating learning. What is particularly pleasurable and motivating to students — "feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness" (Hayles 2007, 195) — is also what educators, including Shakespeare instructors, seem to value.

Critics are increasingly seeing social media as the vehicle for new social truths and, simultaneously, as "ushering in a new era of communication" (Kress 2003, 22). Social media is also associated with challenging some of our notions of "what reading is; what the functions of writing are; [and] what the relation of language to thinking, to imagination, to creativity might be" (Kress 2003, 22). In fact, new media seems to offer both tools for close reading and those needed to be "fully involved in the contemporary struggle to define the self " (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 240). In the wake of the postmodern deconstruction of the subject, new media has become the lauded medium for expressing difference, undecidability, and play. For example, the "logic" of remediation in new media, in the formative work of Bolter and Grusin, reveals the way repressive constructions of the other, which marginalize identities within the dominant culture, are mirrored and exposed in the structure of new media. Though Bolter and Grusin are cautious of McLuhan's claim that the "medium is the message," and are mindful of Raymond Williams' concern regarding media not "causing social change" in a necessarily controlled or predictable "set of causes" (Williams 1975, 76-77), they nevertheless illuminate the importance *of* the medium *to* the message.

Indeed, through the phenomenon of remediation, Bolter and Grusin's description of new media suggests the ways in which the constructed nature of epistemological difference can be made manifest without necessarily excluding difference, reinforcing constructions, or precluding alternate truths. The interpretive freedom Wray seeks to realize in her classroom can be understood as an effect of remediation. As Wray claims, in film "a canonical Shakespearean script is here experienced in a moment of revision" (Wray 2009, 148). These revisions expose stable notions of truth to the pressures of experience and invention, and ultimately reveal "truth" to be open to interpretation. Precluding alternative epistemological truths and reinforced constructions of identity is a real problem for feminist scholars and teachers. As Teresa de Lauretis reveals, this dilemma

is one we face almost daily in our work, namely, that most of the available theories of reading, writing, sexuality, ideology, or any other cultural production are built on male narratives of gender, bound by heterosexual contract; narratives which persistently tend to re-produce themselves" (de Lauretis 1987, 25).

As Ayanna Thompson's discussion of YouTube posts makes clear, however, sometimes these democratic spaces of critical involvement, even concerning acts of remediation, merely serve to reinforce dominant discourse — as, for example, in comments about a version of *Othello* on YouTube, where "responses explicitly and implicitly work to recreate and reinstate the power of Iago's rhetorical position as 'the Man,' the one who controls the positions and actions of both women and minorities" (Thompson 2011, 161). Yet, as I will discuss latter, who plays "the Man" can potentially alter even that message.

For now, I want to return to Bolter and Grusin and argue that their theory of remediation suggests the ways in which new media bring together and potentially overturn the binary oppositions that underwrite constructions of difference in older media. Truths, for example, associated with male narratives (or, in this case, "the male gaze," or "transparency") compete and combine with their binary opposite, the "hypermediated" (a gaze characterized as feminine due to its excess, albeit one that is again a creation of male narratives) (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 240). Remediation potentially exposes perspectives that express desire and bias.

There is a possibility, however, that in these alternative ways of thinking and writing the critic, like the feminist scholar, can reinforce the very bias she/he works to overturn. Marcel O'Gorman, in his attempt to promote the transformation of scholarship through new media, seems to agree with O'Dair's perspective when he claims that academic rigor is a product of print culture. He capitulates to this way of thinking when he associates rational thought only with print, offering alternatives to critical writing and reading strategies in concepts like Ezra Pound's "logopoeia," which is based on the logic of poetry but privileges context and expectation above meaning (O'Gorman 2006, 28). This is also true of Gregory Ulmer's "puncept" (1988) which, following the structure of puns, claims to allow for a more poetic association between seemingly unrelated words or ideas in writing. These alternative organizational strategies, which are meant to replace more rational and rigor-based models, no longer appropriate for a post-print visual age, situate new media as non-rational. Rather than exposing the struggle between representations of ways of knowing, this approach dogmatizes these insights into practices. Conversely, I would argue, that what is important is the freedom of coinciding truths. According to Bakhtin (and, I would add, Shakespeare and Derrida), in "the ideological horizon of any epoch and any social group there is not one, but several mutually

contradictory truths, not one but several diverging ideological paths" (Medvedev and Bakhtin 1978, 19). Such closed, prescriptionist approaches to thinking are part of the struggle in the current era.

Elite discourses purporting to find a lack of reason in popular culture are founded on the idea that practical rather than critical thought characterizes the masses and, furthermore, that the value of practical thought invites the pollution of the market into the sacred spaces that constitute academia. O'Gorman, however, usefully points to the materiality behind the marketplace as "irrational" contestation of this elite discourse:

> It is the spirit of the baroque regime . . . the ocular madness definitive of the baroque which seems to reign supreme in postmodern culture. This baroqueness is heightened to an unprecedented degree by electronic technologies of representation and reproduction, which insure that every facet of daily life is saturated with pictures. Western culture as it stands today is often viewed as a veritable ocular orgy, a culture that invented the term "eye candy" (2006, 28).

In his appreciation of the market and the sensibilities of the populace, O'Gorman (like Bakhtin) sees in this "ocular orgy" the possibility of a liberating discourse that will not only further democratize learning but will usher in new forms of social cognition. This new epistemology, suggests O'Gorman, will lead to new ontologies that may possibly overturn older socially constructed traditional categories of being.

It would seem, therefore, that new media offer a revolutionary potential, especially considering their capacity for alternative constructions of identity. These alternatives do not have to be positioned outside of canonical critical discourses or canonical literature in order to be democratic and even revolutionary. This discourse of liberation, oppression, and the potential hierarchical inversion introduced by the market, which renders some scholars anxious about the canon and leaves others celebrating the collapse of official discourse, has long been evident in Shakespeare's work, in particular in *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Indeed, media scholars have yet to appreciate how central Shakespeare's works are to understandings of new media.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, for example, is ostensibly about the antics of romantic love, but it is also an overview of the epistemological anxiety around the purity of noble ideas and the pollution of grotesque realism introduced by the lower classes. The play suggests that the critical perspective created by the haphazard stumbling of a grotesque populace produce something much closer to "truth" than does the perspective of the learned. Moreover, the lower-class's bodily disruption of transcendent notions around love and art involves the audience in the pleasure of

critique and the liberality of laughter in denying such fantasies. When Theseus reads of "the thrice three Muses morning for the death / Of Learning, late decease'd into beggary" (5.1.52-3), among the revels in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we learn that anxiety over the corruption of purity in scholarship are not unique to our own period. Immediately after this revel, Theseus finds a farce written by "hard-handed men," or laborers, who, in an accidental spirit of remediation, confuse the genre of comedy and tragedy and the forms of poetry and drama, and turn a classical story of romantic love into a bawdy farce.

The aristocracy instantly seizes upon the laborers' play, referred to as "a tedious brief scene of young Pyramus / and his love Thisby, very tragical mirth" (5.1.56-7). Theseus mockingly asks, "Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief? / That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow. / How shall we find the concord in this discord" (5.1.58-60). In fact, the play "Pyramus and Thisby" echoes in performance and rehearsal much of what is also found in *Romeo and Juliet*: that is, the remediation of poetry into drama and the concrete representations of rhetorical figures as actualities. Rather like the medieval allegories of the past, Starveling announces, "This lanthorn doth the horned moon / present" (5.1. 244). Likewise, the physical presence of the actor playing 'Wall' complicates the allegorical wall that typically separates the lovers, when the lovers talk and try to kiss through his chink.

Shakespeare's artistic decision to penetrate imaginative fantasies is further evident in *Romeo and Juliet*, where he makes Petrarchan "tropes come true" (Slater 1988, 142). Juliet, who is both sexually passionate and virtuous, "fiend angelical, / Dove-feathered raven" (3.2.75-6), is a Petrarchan paradox. As Rosalie Colie points out (1974), this oxymoron (or paradoxical figure of speech), is also a cultural paradox in the early modern period. Juliet represents, in Bakhtinian terms, simultaneously the classical and the grotesque body. Not coincidently, in the above scene, then, the authorship of *Romeo and Juliet* is alluded to, written as it is by a playwright who was himself not that far removed from the "rude mechanicals," who never "labor'd in their minds till now" (5.1.73).

Bottom's inclusion of the bodily instances the complexity of Shakespeare's art. Theseus mocks the players' ineptitudes throughout their performance. The play, however, reveals that their oxymoronic language — a parody of Petrarchan conventions — is more apt than Theseus is aware: love, in the play, is violent and feckless, faithless and kind. The nobility's mistaken judgment of the rude mechanicals' play as insignificant undermines the hierarchy of knowledge, bringing the audience's attention to the nobility, who are equally unaware of their follies and yet remain haughty fools despite their own bungling farce of love. This farce, however, lacks the redeeming laughter that the lower classes enact. The latter's performance opens up the fissures of official discourse by introducing the grotesque body as a critical overturning of the fantasy of transcendence. As Bristol

observes, regarding the fairy world, "the presence of 'hard-handed men' — weavers, carpenters, joiners — within an epically distanced mythological realm bring that realm into crude contact with the contemporaneous world of productive life and familiar language of the street, the workshop and the marketplace" (Bristol 1985, 178). This argument could also extended to the myth-saturated world of the court.

      Though the mechanicals seem largely unconscious of their bawdry, it is their own rudeness that produces the interpretation that functions as an astute criticism of the constructed nature of transcendent truths in the play. This critique parallels the nobility's often tediously clever and humorously weak literary criticism. The traditionally pedantic "logical quibbles" and "verbal conceits" (L'Estrange, 1878, 257) that mark the exchange between Demetrius, Lysander, and Theseus are boring because of their essential lack of mental work:

> *Lysander*. This lion is a very fox for his valor.
>
> *Theseus*. True; and a goose for his discretion.
>
> *Demetrius*. Not so, my lord; for his valor cannot carry his discretion, and the fox carries the goose.
>
> *Theseus*. His discretion, I am sure, cannot carry his valor; for the goose carries not the fox. (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.24-30)

This humor and logic based on tradition appear anemic next to Bottom's surprisingly elaborate farce. Shakespeare's close reading of culture, like Bottom's, is deeply critical and yet it was not associated with print culture primarily. Its medium was the stage. The complexity of Shakespeare's works were, in part, a product of the liberty afforded him by the stage, a liberty that involved his audience in the production of his meaning.

      In a teaching context a few semesters ago, I experienced something approaching the liberty Shakespeare himself may have found through the stage, through a student-initiated project involving student performances of Shakespeare via YouTube. I had been teaching Shakespeare almost completely through textual analysis and historical background, rather than through student-centered interpretation and performance. First, I was conscious that my students had been taught *Romeo and Juliet* in high school. Second, I worked from the assumption that they had been taught a romantic view of the play that would probably not have focused on grotesque realism. I therefore wanted to introduce a more feminist approach. To this end, I sought to lead the students through a close reading of the play in which we examined the fetishizing of chastity and the criminality of Juliet's sexuality. For example, we analyzed the similarities between the invocations to night spoken by Juliet and by Lady Macbeth. The first reads:

> Come, civil night,
>
> Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,
>
> . . .
>
> Hood my unmann'd blood
>
> . . .
>
> With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold
>
> Think true love acted simple modesty
>
> Come, night; come . . . (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.2.10-17)

The similar passage spoken by Lady Macbeth follows:

> Come, you spirits
>
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
>
> . . .
>
> make thick my blood;
>
> . . .
>
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
>
> Shake my fell purpose. . .
>
> Come to my woman's breasts . . .
>
> you murdering ministers,
>
> Wherever in your sightless substances
>
> You wait on nature's mischief.
>
> Come, thick night. (*Macbeth*, 1.5.38-49).

The result of a sustained analysis of these passages really disturbed a few of the female students in the class, not because they did not want to think critically or read closely, but because they wanted to refute my reading of Juliet's criminality. I realized their opposition through their project and through speaking with them afterward. My assumptions were wrong about their experience with the sexuality. Some of them knew and enjoyed the bawdry. In a YouTube video in which they performed "Pyramus and Thisby," they challenged the notion, as advanced within the text, that feminine sexuality is criminal. In an uncanny moment, in which I could see my approach as utterly alien to my intentions, the students made me realize that my attempt to illuminate the early modern view of female sexuality as criminal involved me in perpetuating that view, which the students would not tolerate. This reminded me of de Lauretis's claim that one can inadvertently reinforce ideology. More importantly, however, it suggested her notion that it is "the spaces in the margins

of hegemonic discourses, social, spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati" where empowerment for the marginalized becomes possible (de Lauretis 1987, 25).[4]

After this initial experience, I designed a class in which I could experiment with social media to test whether or not it would create more self-reliant students and foster self-directed learning. I wanted to determine what bearing these tools might have on critical thinking and the art of close reading and writing if made an integral part of the class. Moreover, I was teaching the class via Interactional Television, as mentioned. Students often complain of feeling disconnected in ITV classes and hybrids. While I was not able to overcome this completely, social media importantly helped the students feel more connected, as evidenced by the responses students gave in the Teacher Course Evaluations to the question "what did you especially like about the class":

> I really enjoyed looking at the different plays and tweeting about what we thought. I liked the online discussion and assignments, allowing us to be able to speak more freely without fear of being wrong or right. I enjoyed the many different mediums she used to encourage cooperative learning and feel she succeeded.

Twitter proved especially useful here. I set up an account on the micro-blogging site and followed only members with tweets pertaining to Shakespeare or those users who were Shakespeare scholars. I directed the students to create their own account and to follow these people as well. As Terri L. Towner and Caroline Lego Muñoz recommend, I encouraged students to create "a separate profile for professional use only" (Towner and Muñoz 2011, 51). In particular, the platform was used to facilitate questions both during and also after class. Although it was not used that frequently, Twitter proved attractive to those students who were not on the same campus at which I was teaching and who might otherwise have been reluctant to contribute because interaction through the medium of television was too intimidating.

One student in particular, who was very intimidated by public speaking, was able to use Twitter to deepen the others' experience of the material and to allow me to see the level of this student's engagement. Over the course of the semester, this student seemed transformed in terms of confidence and self-reliance. It was through one of this student's posts (first attempted on Twitter and then emailed directly to me later), that I once again experienced this liberated learning that seems to be especially facilitated by the use of social media.

In addition, by retaining many of the exercises from more traditional teaching methods (such as teaching the formal elements of drama and by applying this knowledge to the analysis of passages and to understandings of character, setting, audience), students learnt to produce close readings.

The learning potential of social media platforms was further pursued through student assignments. I encouraged students to research tweets and also YouTube videos. The information — or data — that was gathered from these exercises allowed students to participate in discussions about Shakespearean texts and characters. It also acted as important preparatory work for the students' essay assignments.

Voicethread is another of the social media platforms that I also incorporated into the class, but not until the middle of the semester. This platform allows a student or instructor to post an image or video. Each student can then comment on the post (either through voice or texts). The comments appear as icons around the image or video. The student or instructor can then click on the icon to read or listen to the responses and can continue responding to responses.

There were many instances of independent and critical thinking in this class. They not only focused on what a work such as *Othello* revealed about socially constructed identities in the early modern period; they also focused on how formal elements in the play contributed to these constructions or broke them down. For example, though I had attempted to stay away from traditional interpretations of issues of race, gender, and sexuality in order to test the hypothesis that social media would lead students to independent realization in this area, and to avoid perpetuating racist, sexist, or elitist discourse in the attempt to critique it (I mainly focused on problems with the history of performance in "Othello"), this proved more difficult than I had foreseen. Discussing the internalization of racist discourse in Othello's final speech proved irresistible. Social media fostered independent critical thought once again, and it did so even when students were led into a standard reading of certain passages, as exemplified in Stephen Cohen's article "Identifying with the Other in *Othello*." In his essay, Cohen reveals that in popular readings of *Othello* the focus has traditionally been on the internalizing of racism (Cohen 2011, 171). These readings culminate in a reading of act five, scene two, lines 361-5. One of the student's VoiceThreads, which I have transcribed, gives the standard reading of this passage, more or less as it was discussed in class.[5]:

> As we can see, [the] ending speech is very reserved and calm with an overall tone of deep regret punctuated by self-loathing, especially on the noticeable intonations, on the foreign words such as turban Turk, uncircumsized dog, and base Indian . . . Within the text . . . there is clearly some sense that at least Othello believes that . . . his foreignness is to blame for his rash actions. The use of foreignness as a negative descriptor in Othello's speech shows this. This is the secondary tragedy . . . Othello is a great man plagued by doubts and begins to believe the racist and ugly lies about his own race to be true.

Beyond the issue of "intonation," which may be, in part, the result of the focus on language in the linguistics and literature class that I taught, this VoiceThread is evidence that the students were critically analyzing (in the way that students often do in papers) the last lines of the play.

Cohen examines this phenomenon in his criticism in terms of recognition, a concept important to race theory, but he does so as if this were only important to members of his reading audience who were not part of ethnic minorities. A look at his discussion will reveal Cohen's good intentions and simultaneously what is sometimes problematic about these types of intentions. According to Cohen,

> Othello's tragedy evokes, through its depiction and production of empathetic identification, an ideology of difference: one that demands that we neither reject the other as inhuman nor reimagine it as a version of ourselves, but that we empathize with the other as other, no matter how disrobing or frightening. (Cohen 2011, 179).

It was after this type of discussion in class, in which the class had been referring to "us" and to problems of "recognition" with difference and "otherness" (in its represented "monstrosity"), that I received the following "almost tweet," in the form of an email from one of the students who, as I already mentioned, had felt uncomfortable about speaking in class:

> I wanted to post this question on Twitter but couldn't because it exceeded the word limit. But it's something that sparked my interest since last week's discussion. Regarding Othello being performed in blackface, you mentioned that it might help in bringing out a sense of "alienness" and exaggeration for the audience. But I'm wondering that it wouldn't change depending on who the audience is? For a black person isn't it perhaps alienating and off-putting to see themselves being kind of caricatured and performed in such an exaggerated, maniacal way? I wonder how these constructions affect the mentality and esteem of those it's being projected on.

Upon returning to class, this very insightful comment generated much discussion. Our discussion of Othello, as the above critical examination also reveals, had been directed at a white audience in ways that were problematic for a black audience.

Later, a student also discovered "Sir Patrick Stewart: Car Pool," an interview with the actor posted by carpool UK available exclusively on YouTube. The video demonstrates the role of art in sociocultural identity building, and is a particularly powerful instance of active audience participation in that process. In the video, Stewart, fascinated by the results of his experiment with

a "negative" Othello, describes black and Latino inner city school children's identification with a black Iago. The following is a transcript of the interview:

> I remember one school's matinee. Full of inner city kids. Must've been 95% black or Latino. And we came off of the curtain call. And the kids are going crazy. And Ron Canada, who played Iago, was the penultimate one to go on. And he came on and there was cheering, screaming, and a chant began: "He the man. He the man." And I looked at the stage manager in the corner, and I said, "I'm not going on. I'm not going on. Just bring the curtain down. That's the end of the curtain." And the stage manager said to me, "Hey, this was your fucking idea. Get on there, and I walked on and it went shoop [indicating silence], and I walked to the middle of the stage. And as I got to the middle of the stage, one black actor Teagle F. Bougere, who was playing Cassio, he stepped forward and pointed at me, and he said, "No. He the man. He the man." And the cast took it up, and there was this sort of chanting battle happening. It was one of the most exciting experiences I've ever had on stage. It was incredible. (2011)

This staging demonstrates a battle between the authority of the players and the audience regarding whose performance is of value. While the inner city kids value Canada's performance because they identify with him in terms of race or alterity, the cast values the performance of Stewart, who, color aside, is one of the most renowned Shakespeare performers of our time. The interpretive decisions of these kids are crucial to their own sense of identity. I only ask why anyone would want to ignore the importance of the social work literature does and why critics continue to believe that recognizing, even cultivating this "social work," would exclude critical thought or deeper understandings of language or literature?

New Media and Academic Rigor

By way of a final illustration that social media can facilitate deep discussions of language, sociocultural identity building and close reading, I want to reflect on our use of the Royal Shakespeare Company's "Sonnet 138—Trevor Nunn coaches David Suchet for Master Class" (1979). In the video, Nunn takes the innovative step of directing a sonnet so as to illustrate the dramatic nature of nondramatic literature. In linguistics and literature class, we were discussing "role relations" in semantics. This would be considered a formalist analysis of sonnet 138, and the close reading that occurs as Nunn directs this sonnet is remarkable. He reveals through the unfolding drama of the poem how much the argument springs from the realization of not only the speaker's particular identity but also what the speaker attempts to do through language to represent

that identity, his purpose and his audience. This analysis would have fit as well in the social media Shakespeare class as it did in the linguistics and literature one.

In fact, such an analysis could facilitate a discussion of the constituents or conceptual notions of semantic roles and traditional parts of speech. In both semantic analysis and in writing simple English sentences, thinking in terms of parts of speech such as verbs is crucial, so too are parts of speech in linguistics, as "semantic roles denote the underlying relationship that a participant has with the relation of the clause expressed in the main verb" (Kim and Sells, 2008). Indeed, much of what I taught in one class spilled over into the next. In one assignment in which I had the students memorize a passage in order to focus on language, it soon became obvious that figures such as alliteration served as mnemonic devices. We had looked at sound and meaning in a section of the linguistics class, but this approach would also fit well in a rhetoric and literature class. Words that share stems were there just when you needed them, when you couldn't remember what came next. I could have used the moment to talk about polyptoton or other figures of speech, as student interest dictated. I could have built a module or discussed a play primarily in terms of language, and YouTube would have enriched that experience.

What is more, it seems that the only place undergraduate students are going to be exposed to the art of language these days — its syntax, semantics, and style — is in literature or linguistics classes. According to Peter Elbow, whom Butler refers to as "one of composition's best known scholars" (2008, 136):

> The culture of literary studies puts a high value on style and on not being like everyone else . . .What could be more wonderful than the pleasure of creating or appreciating forms that are different, amazing, outlandish, use-less-the opposite of ordinary, everyday pragmatic? (Elbow 2002, 542).

The results of using social media in this class suggest that it does not endanger close reading and critical thinking. Nor does it undermine a deeper appreciation of language. What may endanger the success of students, however, is not teaching them how to navigate new online environments, to practice technology-enhanced research, and to interact with each other as online communities, related processes that in turn foster identity building. We know that with or without proper language, it is impossible to teach students how not to think.

Notes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to Maurizio Calbi, David Sterling Brown, Meg Lota Brown, and Stephen O'Neill for their guidance and suggestions on early drafts of this article.

2. Through the Office for the Responsible Conduct of Research, I applied to the Internal Review Board for permission to conduct human research. My project was approved. Once the students, whose data I wanted to use, consented, I was allowed to publish that data from the class, provided I withheld the students' identity, including age, race, and gender.

3. See for example, Andrew Carnie's explanation of the "utterly ungrammatical sentences" (2007, 34) that can result from not splitting infinitives. See also Steven Pinker's debunking of the idea that ungrammatical language use in "culturally deprived" American black children results in "'non-logical modes of expressive behavior'" (1994, 16).

4. This is not so say that students do not have agency, just that students have traditionally occupied this position in the power structure of the classroom, the position Anis Bawarshi describes as "passive recipient" (Bawarshi 2003, 123-4).

5. Permission to transcribe and publish the student's VoiceThread was granted by the IRB at the University of Arizona as part of the approval of this project.

Online Resources

VoiceThread. https://voicethread.com.

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