

## Introduction: New Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare with Live Theatre

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Over the past three decades, a significant trend in Shakespeare studies has been the rise of performance criticism, including studies of historical and contemporary performance, analyses of local and global Shakespeare, and the theorization of live broadcast productions. On a separate, but related front, a significant trend in the teaching of Shakespeare has involved the rise of performance pedagogies, an umbrella term for a wide range of methods that include analyzing films, up-on-your-feet activities, and student productions, all of which help students to understand the Shakespearean play as a script and to read drama as drama. Yet these performance approaches to teaching are only just beginning to integrate some of the more recent developments in research, such as studies of global Shakespeare or edited, multi-camera recordings of full-length theatrical productions. This *CEA Forum* Roundtable aims to advance Shakespeare pedagogy by considering how recent trends within the field of performance criticism are inflecting Shakespeare pedagogy now, particularly approaches to teaching Shakespeare in and with performance.

Many developments in performance criticism grow out of studies of live theatre. For this reason, one way to connect research developments to classroom pedagogy is to explore how instructors draw upon currents in performance criticism as they teach students to analyze live

theatre and theatrical productions of Shakespeare. Given the current popularity of performance approaches in teaching, it is notable that the teaching of and with theatrical productions is itself a gap in the pedagogical field. This topic – the teaching of Shakespeare with and through the viewing of full-length, live theatre productions – has received almost no attention in Shakespeare, drama, and theatre studies pedagogy. This is puzzling since it is fairly conventional for instructors to work the viewing of one or more live productions into their classes at least from time to time. By integrating recent developments in performance criticism into Shakespeare pedagogy, this roundtable also examines this relatively unexamined convention and articulates some new ways to integrate live theatre in our teaching.

While teaching with live theatre is an established practice, it is not surprising that it has been overlooked, even as subfield of performance pedagogy. For publications on performance tend focus on using performance as a way to develop student facility with the text. For example, in *Approaches to Teaching William Shakespeare's 'Taming of the Shrew'* (2013), several authors come at the play through performance methods, but tend to present the text as the ultimate aim. Edward Rocklin asks students to consider textual cues for “context and action.” His teaching positions the play as a script, but his methods nevertheless repeatedly refer students to the text as they consider “the role of noise *in this play*,” or what “*the play* [has] done so far,” or what students are “thinking about *this play*” (my emphasis, 157). Bruce Brandt introduces film versions of *Taming* to assist “discussion of the attitudes about gender and marriage that are embedded in [the text of] *The Taming of the Shrew*” and thus “elicits a variety of readings [that] complicate students’ reactions *to the text*” (my emphasis, 174). Even more recent articles on

performance pedagogy in *CEA Critic*, the sister journal of *CEA Forum*, continue to present performance as a way to “make students *think* about Shakespeare’s words” and “transform students’ understanding of and connection to Shakespeare’s texts” (Costa 170, original emphasis; Esposito 186). Performance pedagogies have been methods for teaching the text, the ambiguity of the text, editing the text, how the text can be interpreted in performance. Nevertheless, performance as its own artistic mode has figured less regularly as object of inquiry in its own right.<sup>1</sup>

A few years ago, I published an article in this journal that explored some questions and approaches to teaching with live performance: “Situated Interpretation: Teaching Shakespeare with Live Performance” described this gap in the pedagogical criticism, while also discussing an approach to teaching one type course where drama is central, the kind where students study several plays and then attend live, often professional productions of each one. While that article was the first sustained effort to explore teaching full-length, live productions of Shakespeare, it was just a single essay, and it could not address a broad range of related questions, such as:

- How do we integrate the teaching of live performance with other trends in the teaching Shakespeare, such as those involving book history and editing or in-class performance?
- How do instructors work with local theatres to capitalize on their unique offerings?
- How is teaching a live broadcast or a recording of a live broadcast similar to or different from teaching a production viewed at the theatre?

This roundtable offers a slate of six essays, which are paired to explore each of these questions. In so doing, this roundtable highlights ways that faculty members from a variety of institutions

draw upon recent developments in performance criticism to shape their own performance pedagogies now.

**Pair 1: Bridging Pedagogies.** The first two articles address ways to integrate live performance with some other established ways of teaching Shakespeare. For instance, an important trend in Shakespeare pedagogy involves teaching with the history of the book, and more specifically with textual variants. In the opening article, Elizabeth Charlebois discusses one way to connect editorial and performance approaches in the classroom. She opens her paper by suggesting that textual variants raise crucial interpretive questions about a play. She describes how, after exploring a number of textual variants and editorial emendations with students, she asks students to identify what she calls performance cruxes, specific places in the texts that seem to especially invite or even necessitate performance to produce meaning. In the second article, Niamh O’Leary describes a class designed around her access to the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. This class explicitly seeks to bridge the gap between performance-based, in-class activities and in-person attendance at live performance. O’Leary presents a set of carefully scaffolded in-class, at the theatre, and post-performance activities that help students to become familiar with and apply some important concepts and ideas in performance studies to analyzing the text, as well as to understanding the ongoing importance of Shakespeare in communities, for example, the idea that the layout of a venue and audience dynamics shape both the production and reception of a performance.

**Pair 2: Local Shakespeare.** As Niamh O’Leary’s article begins to indicate, when teaching live performance, instructors will usually find themselves working with local theatres

and companies. This fact raises a question: how do we make the most of these productions? In the next two articles, the authors discuss how they have capitalized on local offerings to create innovative and pedagogically effective classes. Jayme Yeo introduces a pedagogical project that started at her home institution, Belmont University, in 2016. Funded by a micro-grant from the Folger Institute, this project enabled her students to collect photos, interviews, and video footage from the Nashville Shakespeare Festival's annual performances and use it to create an online archive of the productions. While this project focuses on a local Shakespeare Festival, many of the assignments could translate into courses designed around classic or modern plays developed in collaboration with a university's theatre department or a local company. Allison Machlis Meyer addresses this question in another way. She has brought her Seattle-based students to local productions of Shakespeare acted with an all-female or non-binary cast. In her article, she discusses the ethical and pedagogical value of introducing students to non-traditional performances of Shakespeare, discussing how she fosters students' personal, creative, analytical engagements with these productions through assignments documenting their experiences, such as collaborative performance reviews, audience guides, and extensive interviews with cast and crew.

**Pair 3: Mediated Theatre.** Many instructors do not have access to live theatre. Yet professionally filmed and edited broadcasts and recordings of live productions have the potential to extend access to world-class productions. For instance, the National Theatre's program *NT Live* has broadcast to thousands of cinemas worldwide. In his contribution, Peter Kirwan lays out ideas to keep in mind when taking students to see these productions, for instance preparing

students to consider how camera angles and pre- and intermission interviews frame the experience. In the final essay, I discuss the current state of the research and pedagogical criticism on “mediated theatre”— recordings of live theatre (Bay-Cheng 37). Because this field of research is still relatively new, many instructors are not fully aware of the variety of issues raised and currently being addressed in the research in this area or the resources that are available. I aim to offer an introductory review of the literature on mediated theatre up to 2020. I describe several streaming services focused on mediated theatre, and survey some ways that mediated theatre currently appears in pedagogical criticism.

As is clear by now, this roundtable focuses on Shakespeare; nevertheless, our hope is that these essays will be relevant to a broad range of readers. In classes like Introduction to Drama and Introduction to Theatre, it is common to have students attend and review a theatre production, or (more recently) to have them view a professionally filmed version of one. Yet, as of the time of this writing in 2021, I have not been able to find published research on teaching (with) live performance in other fields, such as university-level English, drama, or theatre studies pedagogy. For this reason, the strategies and approaches presented here should also speak more broadly to college-level teachers of a range of global classical and modern drama taught at a variety of undergraduate levels in English and Theatre departments.

This roundtable originated in a seminar titled “Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance,” which occurred at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in 2018. The seminar considered a wide range of topics related to teaching live performance and the conversation went well beyond those essays here. For instance, one important strand of

discussion focused on how scholars approach and lead publicly-oriented seminars at theatres. Another strand raised questions about the challenges and rewards of incorporating performance approaches into distance-based, particularly asynchronous online, delivery. The seminar attracted an unusually large and lively audience, and the participants were animated and engaged in exploring this strangely unexamined custom of incorporating live performance in our teaching. Unfortunately, for reasons of focus and length, it was not possible to include all of those many, wonderful papers and topics in this roundtable, but the range of topics above helps to suggest the size of the territory around teaching with live performance that has yet to be explored. For now, I would like to thank the participants in the seminar whose wide-ranging experiences and insights deepened the papers that are included here.

I finalized this introduction in the summer of 2021, as we were beginning to emerge from the global COVID-19 pandemic. During the course of the pandemic, we moved most classes entirely online, cancelled scholarly conferences, and closed theatres. We looked forward to a return to in-person teaching in the fall of 2021 and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, and other venues, were just reopening. As a result of the pandemic experience, I feel a sense of fervor when I think about teaching in-person and teaching at and with live performance. As we look forward to regaining what we lost during that time, it is my hope that these essays will spark new ideas about how we engage and can re-engage students with each other, with Shakespeare, and with the Theatre, as we gather again and again.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An exception to point might be Ayanna Thompson's 2010 discussion of using recorded student-performances, posted on YouTube, in the classroom. Nevertheless, this article principally outlines the opportunities and challenges of using these videos. It does not provide an overarching or systematic approach to using such videos in the classroom, or to discussing these as performances.



## Works Cited

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