## Unit: 12: Shakespeare in the New Media

Dr. Joseph Koyippally

New media presents Shakespeare on the digital stage and across diverse languages, cultures and performance formats. How it affects Shakespeare in his presentation and reception are major issues in Shakespeare Studies. Like this video which is digitally produced and transmitted, digital highways are crowded with digital texts. New Media process them over the Internet using the digital format. While digital technology facilitates faster analysis of the Shakespeare corpus, overcrowding and lack of gatekeeping make it difficult to find reliable material over the Internet.

In this unit, we will try to understand 1) New Media, 2) Internet Shakespeare, 3) YouTube Shakespeare, 4) Social Media Shakespeare and 5) New Media in Shakespeare Studies.

**New Media**

New Media consists of the forms of mass communication which use digital technologies. Information Technology and electronic communication are the foundation of the new media. It is defined by digital generation and is characterised by interactivity. These distinguish new media from 'old media' like television, radio and print.

Generally speaking, the new media platforms are the Internet, email, websites, website games, web ads, virtual worlds, online video/audio streams, online social forums, online education apps, Internet telephony, human-computer interface, computer animation, blogs etc. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Telegram etc. have become part of the daily life of the modern generation who actively use new media.

In 2016, seven years after it came out with an issue on Shakespeare and New media (ed. Katherine Rowe. vol.61.3, 2010), the premier Shakespeare journal *Shakespeare Quarterly* came out with a new issue on #*Bard* (ed. Douglas Lanier. Vol. 67.4, 2016). This was in recognition of the changes in the new media expressions of Shakespeare. Within seven years, new media expressions of Shakespeare changed considerably with new platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Vine; genres like blog, vlog, web series etc.; remediation like a graphic novel, video games, remixes etc.; and sophisticated reception, transmission devices and networking capability. One can only wonder what it would be like after another 7 years.

It also wanted to include electronic format and present audio forms of the articles, measuring up to the new media challenge. Strong computing and network capacities, a variety of affordable digital devices, and the speed at which new media develops require a recalibration of the presentation of Shakespeare to the users of new media. Shakespeare as a cultural phenomenon constantly seeks new ways to express itself.

Shakespeareans overcame the stagnation in Shakespeare Studies through an interdisciplinary approach. These new fields of knowledge challenge Shakespeareans to match up to the developments in their disciplines, the new media approach to Shakespeare, and also keep pace with the developments in film and media studies. Digital literacy, new media and new-age learners keep the field interesting and active with their contributions and interventions.

Shakespeare gets expressed in almost every media. Even shorthand was used before the regular use of dictation machines, word processors, and computers process Shakespeare. There is a *Hamlet* which appeared in shorthand, although it was a version from *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare*. Many Shakespeare scholars like Alexander Schmidt, WW. Greg, EK. Chambers and Joseph Quincy Adams thought that it is the inadequacy of the shorthand pirates that caused the variant readings between the different versions of Shakespeare's plays. In 1605, Thomas Haywood complained about how his *Queen Elizabeth* was so badly pirated that it was "scarce one word true" when printed:

> …. The cradle age
> Did throng the Seates, the Boxes, and the Stage
> So much that some by Stenography drew
> The plot: put it to print: (scarce one-word trew:) (Heywood)

This could explain the variant readings between the early versions of *Hamlet*, *Henry V*. *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Romeo and Juliet,* and *Taming of the Shrew*. His early editor Lewis Theobald was conscious of this possibility as he says "many [Shakespearean] Pieces were taken down in Short-hand, and imperfectly copied by Ear, from a representation." The technology of the age played its part in processing Shakespeare.

In Shakespeare's time, people had enough time and more for leisure. Though Polonius said "Brevity is the soul of wit" (*Ham*. 2.2), and Portia said "Waste no time in words" (*MV* 3.4), we know that they hardly did justice to those words. After all, the Elizabethans could afford four hours in the afternoon to watch plays in theatres like the Globe. They devoted a lot of time for courtesies and for waiting upon the king, queen, and nobility. Even Shakespeare, the King's Man, did. The Elizabethans not only wrote long epics but also read them revelling in the felicity of expressions, suggestive language, and the use of language techniques.

Shakespeare wrote four centuries ago for an audience whose communication environment was very different from ours today. Andrew Marvel, who was born a century after Shakespeare, tells his 'Coy Mistress' (1681) "Had we but old enough, and Time, / This coyness Lady were no crime." It was only a lover's hurry. He still could use 46 lines, 301 words and 1313 characters to say that he has no time. On the contrary, Twitter restricts modern lovers to 140-character tweets.

Unlike the Elizabethans, the concerns of the modern generation are very different. For them, virtual communication devices and images with real-life clarity often make language redundant and merely functional. As people move from words to emojis, new signs are discovered. New media might have affected the attention span of the new generation, but its multi-dimensionality makes social-media a tool for the modern generation to communicate creatively, effectively and efficiently. Multimedia being the order of the day, intermedial forms associated with digital communication, social networking, and mobile devices influence new generation, Shakespeare. Let us look at some of the new media forms which are the most popular—the Internet, YouTube and Social Media.

New media Shakespeare can represent and influence what we mean by Shakespeare even as foreign languages and cultures increase distance and reduce Shakespeare to an idea and a subject.

**Internet Shakespeare**

The internet is a treasure house for Shakespeare Studies. How to find the right material is the only issue with it. It was not this difficult when I started doing PhD in Shakespeare in 1990. Then, access to and availability of data was the major problem. JNU's large library and other Delhi libraries were not

enough. We envied the researchers in western universities as they got better and easier access to organized data. For example, I had no idea how the Folio or Quarto editions looked like. Copies of facsimile copies were all I could get. Twice removed from reality.

Then, when internet facilities were introduced in JNU I could download a 4 MB Shakespeare corpus from the MIT over 4 hours. My friends from the Computer Science department were needed to break the large data and transfer it to my 8086 desktops in four 1.44 MB diskettes. The digital corpus of Shakespeare changed my approach altogether. Its plain text format was difficult for reading long passages. But, its search, copy and paste facilities compensated the difficulty. This may sound like a story. The giant leap in new media is equally a phenomenal story.

Today, many sites make the entire Shakespeare available in a click. One can browse through all Shakespeare texts including his Apocrypha, commentaries, folio and quarto editions effortlessly. These provide you with the content and context of Shakespeare, they arrange his texts very neatly in your preferred order—alphabetical, thematic, chronological, play-wise…. etc.

His publication and video appropriations in resources like YouTube have a significant effect on Shakespeare's status as a cultural capital. As the Internet has lowered the barrier of learning, knowledge is no longer confined to classrooms and campuses. It is made readily available and presented to anyone even from and to mobile phones, and without any prerequisites.

The Internet also provides sites for many Shakespeare resources. The Folger Shakespeare Library website gives us, for example, information about Shakespeare's past and present. The websites of The Globe Theatre, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and many Shakespeare associations across the globe bring us close to Shakespeare, even as they promote themselves through these.

The popular interventions in the form of responses create many paratexts which illuminate the videos and enrich our understanding of Shakespeare. These bust the myth that Shakespeare belongs to high culture, and affirm that like the other forms of capital, he can also be created or destroyed. A maximum of 3000 spectators watched him in the Globe on a crowded day in London at the height of his career. Today, millions watch, hear and debate him on the Internet stage. But here, he is reshaped as a modern cultural capital and gets homogenised as a product of mass culture.

New Media is simultaneously both an opportunity and a challenge. Even as it popularises Shakespeare, it also allows new Shakespeare discourses and complicates Shakespeare by permitting the uploading of authentic and unauthentic Shakespeare material. The Shakespeare clutter on the Internet needs to be studied. Such proliferation of the new forms of self-expression makes New Media Shakespeare a site of productive tension.

**YouTube Shakespeare**

YouTube, started in 2005, is now a subsidiary of Google. It is used to upload, rate, share, add to playlists, report, comment, and subscribe apart from watching videos. Registered users upload videos and comment on others' works. It hosts video clips produced by individuals and corporations. Many of these come from TV shows, music videos, short films, documentary films, audio recordings, movies etc. it also has many short original videos, and educational videos like this one.

The search facility in this open-source and inexpensive learning, and teaching web resource which shares many archival Shakespeare clips are very useful. Historically important films like the *Death of*

*King John*, which is once thought to have been lost are recovered and made available thanks to the Internet.

Since its establishment, YouTube has become a major part of popular culture. As a widely available free platform for publication, it connects the world through the intermedial forms it hosts. As a neutral platform for the democratization and demystification of Shakespeare, it reiterates the idea that Shakespeare is universal and transcultural. Whether it helps Shakespeare or hurts him depends on which side of the fence you are in seeing Shakespeare as a cultural capital. One thing is certain. YouTube reinvention of Shakespeare has redefined Shakespeare radically.

Stephen O'Neill gives us an overview of the importance of the new media in Shakespeare Studies in his book *(Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard)*. Shakespeare might not be as hot and popular as some sensational topic. YouTube is not only a useful resource but also a post-human agency in the construction of contemporary Shakespeare. Even as it helps institutions like Folger Library and RSC to promote themselves, it also transports the videos of scholarly lectures and performances of professional and amateurs to the ends of the earth.

It also functions as an archive of Shakespeare performances and films; a Shakespeare space for enthusiasts, and a resource for scholars and students. The unmediated presence of amateurs and professionals on YouTube creates clutter in the Internet highway making it difficult to scour the right material. YouTube's complex algorithms and protocols do influence our searches without our knowledge so much that it cannot be seen as an innocent platform. It is a commercial one and an accidental Shakespearean archive. Still, it plays a major role in Shakespeare studies and pedagogical approaches to the Bard. Even this video is uploaded through the commercial platform provided by YouTube.

YouTube hosts many resourceful lectures like Ann Thomps-on's "Annual London Shakespeare Lecture: 2014"; Christopher Gaze's "Shakespeare is everywhere"; David Bevington's "David Bevington on Shakespeare: The Tempest"; Eric Rasmussen's "The Secrets of the Shakespeare First Folio"; Harold Bloom's "Harold Bloom on Shakespeare"; James Shapiro's "Shakespeare in America", his debate with Nigel Smith on "Shakespeare vs Milton", and his panel discussion with Jonathan Bate, Nick Bagnall Simon Harrison and Beatriz Romilly on "What can those who teach and study Shakespeare learn from those who perform his plays and vice versa"; Marjorie Graber's "Harvard Lecture on *Othello*, and *Macbeth*; Stephen Greenblatt's "Shakespeare's Freedom"; and Tiffany Stern's "Shakespeare and the Stage".

YouTube Shakespeare videos generally cover topics such as advertising, authorship debate, cultural discourses, education, postmodernism etc. An example is *The Small Rewrite*, one of the most-watched YouTube videos on Shakespeare. It is a YouTube video featuring a discussion between Shakespeare and his fictional editor. As they discuss their new play, *Hamlet*. The editor's radical changes and cuts of the "boring" and long soliloquy accidentally creates the iconic "to be or not to be", although it frustrates Shakespeare our fictional Shakespeare.

Another one is *Sesame Street: Patrick Stewart Soliloquy on B* (Soliloquy on B), which is nearing one million hits. It is a famous YouTube video of a dressed-up Hamlet holding the letter 'B' instead of a skull and parodying the to be or not to be soliloquy. Shakespeare actor Patrick Stewart's parody was originally a part of the American educational children's television series a *Sesame Street*. Patrick Stevens is known for his role in the *Star Trek* Series. This Royal Shakespeare Company actor had performed Prospero,

Othello, Mark Antony, Malvolio, Macbeth, Claudius and Ghost, Shylock and Shakespeare on stage; and Enobarbus, Claudius, and Ghost, Macbeth, and John of Gaunt for TV. Today the clip is viewed independently as Patrick elevated it to Shakespearean levels.

Almost all plays of Shakespeare are available as films, stage productions and amateur productions. These coming from various cultures and languages are found on the Internet. Many YouTube videos act as a guide to Shakespeare's pronunciation, grammar, music, and criticism.

'Shakespeare' means many things. A Shakespeare film might be faithful to the original, like Laurence Olivier or Kenneth Branagh. It might also use a different take like Richard Loncrain's *Richard III*, a loose adaptation like *Ten Things I Hate About You*, a shadow-like *The Forbidden Planet*, or a distortion like *Prospero's Books*.

**Social Media Shakespeare (Facebook/Twitter/blog)**

Social media, which advises the use of limited characters to communicate thoughts sound like Shakespeare: "Brevity is the Soul of Wit." (*Ham*. 2.2). The profusion of digital Shakespeare and the digital intrusion into everyday life often also carry Shakespeare with it. Facebook is an American online social media and social networking service, founded by Mark Zuckerberg and friends at Harvard. It is a top technology company along with Amazon, Apple, and Google. Shakespeare on Facebook is a topic for any transcultural and transmedia adaptation of Shakespeare.

After scouring Instagram and Google trends, Rebecca Armstrong's study on "What makes an author 'Instagrammable'?" found that Shakespeare is the most Instagrammed, writer. #shakespeare and #williamshakespeare have more than 2 million hits. His 22 works are already made into hashtags with #RomeoandJuliet contribute to 38 % of the 1.5 million Shakespeare Twitter mentions.

Twitter has "a surfeit of Shakespeares" (O'Neill 121). It offers adaptations, appropriations, avatars, re-imaginings, and transformations. These deploy Shakespeare's cultural authority differently and helps Shakespeare's 'digital ghost' (Rosvally 2017) haunt social media. Launched in 2006 and hosting, permits its users to message using "tweets" of a maximum of 280 characters. It was only 140 until 2017.

Despite its microblogging feature, Twitter has high Shakespeare presence. Tweeters use him to communicate complex thoughts. They have also tweeted the whole Shakespeare in early May of 2016. A typewriter was programmed in to type out *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* on Twitter used Shakespeare's words found in live tweets to do so with the collaboration of the tweeters who collaborated using the hashtag *#TheCompleteTweets* to supply it words in real-time by tweeting them. It completed the task in early December 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4Q4A145pRk

Tweeters collaborated to stage *Romeo and Juliet* on Twitter. With RSC collaboration, Twitter version of *Rome and Juliet* is known as *Such Sweet Sorrow* was tweeted by actors by keying in dialogues in five weeks. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuODHuWkFDY. Modern-day Romeos and Juliets remain well-connected. Had original Romeo and Juliet been networked through social media, they might have not committed suicide and instead transcended their group-restrictions and overcame their fatal communication errors. A Nextel Ad thinks otherwise, though.

Tersely coded Twitter expressions go viral, still, brevity need not be the soul of wit. When Shakespeare's namesake and Hollywood actress Ann Hathaway married to Adam Showman, nearly half a million tweeters thought her as married to William Shakespeare.

Social media is a network of students, amateurs, professionals and experts. As a medium of self-expression, it also provides alternative means to engage Shakespeare. The multivocality and democratic neutrality of the digital medium converges many performance cultures by forcibly overcoming social erasures.

Facebook, Instagram, blogs etc. are also widely used to promote Shakespeare and help learners.

**New media and Shakespeare Studies**

His 'accumulated history' makes Shakespeare an intangible cultural asset fit for accumulation, processing and transmission. This confers Shakespeare a certain power and prestige and implants in the social sphere. The new ways of relating to him vary with every change in media. His transcultural and transmedia adaptations in the networked, globalized, and digitized environment of the "brave new world" of new media is a subject in academic studies.

Cultural capital is an intangible asset. It is the measure of exchange in the cultural sphere. As new media emerged as the platform for cultural transactions, cultural capitals like Shakespeare got redefined. In the modern where real people remain more networked in virtual reality than in real space, and as Bitcoin digital money and Mechanical/Digital reproductions of art confound the notions of an asset, the value itself becomes questionable.

For example, the value of gold is not intrinsic or inherent in gold. Rather, we attribute it a value arbitrarily. Through universal consensus, it is calculated in terms of its potential exchange for human labour. The materialized form of capital which is the "accumulated labour in its materialized form", measures objectified social energy available as labour.

Pierre Bourdieu sees cultural capital as "a social relation within a system of exchange that includes accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status". It is "a metaphor for literary and artistic value". Here, value is recognized by the social world through the lens of economic capital. It objectifies abstract cultural capitals like literature and knowledge, and also their acquisition, appreciation and perpetuation.

Refereed journals like *Shakespeare Quarterly* work at slow speed and are incompatible with the new media speed. Internet Shakespeare is fast but has its flipside. It is here today and gone not tomorrow, today itself—as today moves so fast that tomorrow seems aeons away.

There are many Shakespeare online resources which provide text, audio, video and interactive multimedia support. The online resources address almost every serious question about Shakespeare. Many sites provide his complete text, detailed biographies, lectures and even study guides

Some examples for the simple and complete text of Shakespeare are the [Oxford Shakespeare](#) (), and [MIT Shakespeare](#) and [The Shakespeare App](#). The last one gives the whole text of 41 plays, 154 sonnets and six poems, and glossary and Shakespeare dictionary besides allowing search, copy, paste and share facilities.

The *No Sweat Shakespeare* gives modern English versions of his plays and many academic articles. It provides e-books, e-texts, quotes, facts, theatre, portraits etc. The *No Fear Shakespeare* gives the text of popular 20 plays and most sonnets, and their modern colloquial version helping one to overcome the fear of Shakespeare. Some of the other popular sites are [Internet Shakespeare,](#) [OpenSource Shakespeare,](#) and [The Folger Shakespeare Library](#), [Shakespeare's Summaries](#).

Shakespeare videos are from *Amazon Prime*, *[Digital Theatre](#)* and *[GlobePlayer.tv](#)*. have a wide variety. *[Shakescenes](#)* give video files of past Shakespeare performances. YouTube, is a rich source for Shakespeare plays, films and audios. Audio is available from *[Approaching Shakespeare](#)*, *[Speak the Speech](#)*, and *[LibriVox Shakespeare](#)*.

His translations at *[Project Guttenberg](#)* lists Shakespeare translations in English (206), French (42), Finnish (36), German (23) Dutch (10), Greek (7), Spanish, Catalan (3 each), Esperanto and Portuguese (2 each), and Italian, Latin, Polish, Tagalog (1 each) languages.

Ready to use Shakespeare lessons and materials are available from the British Council's Downloadable Schools' Pack, websites like [Teachingenglish.org](#), and [Henry4schools.fr](#).

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre website, give information and activities for EFL students interested in learning more about the Shakespeare through its education and gives details about the past and present productions of Shakespeare plays, including video clips in its *Discovery Space*. Some other resource sites in education are *[William Shakespeare Lesson Plans, Downloadable Shakespeare Worksheets](#)*, *[Teach Shakespeare to learners of English](#)*, *[5 Ways to Use Shakespeare in ELT, Shakespeare for Kids](#)*, *[Chestnut ESL/EFL on Shakespeare](#)*, and *[Shakespeare in Education](#)* and provide many educational resources related to Shakespeare.

Interactive contents like the Shakespeare games "choose-your-own-adventure". It makes players familiar with the culture, politics, and ethics of the time. The iPhone app *[Shakespeare's Globe 360](#)* helps one understand Shakespeare's Globe Theatre better through its interactive content. The virtual field trip *[Shakespeare Field Trip](#)* and *Converse Shakespeare* teach about Shakespeare, his works, and his life. The interactive *Agas Map of Early Modern London* zoomable to a street-level based on a woodblock map of 1561 is of London before the birth of Shakespeare.

The transplantation of Shakespeare to the digital sphere through which new media operates is mediated by technologies which reduce performance to information. Shakespeare who belongs to performance can be reduced to information, which is a lower rung in the data-information-knowledge-wisdom hierarchy. In an age faced with the problems of the mechanical reproduction of art, the use of digital technology which reduces everything to '0' and '1' will have a different take on Shakespeare's cultural depth. Whether he gets sacrificed twice for the sake of efficiency in storage and retrieval cannot be resolved using binaries.

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