

**Unit: 13: The Internet Shakespeare**

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As we have seen in the last unit, the Internet is a huge Shakespeare resource. Let us look at what the Internet does to Shakespeare. It helps to transport a Shakespeare text, its performance and other artistic expressions of it from one place to another in digital format over the Internet Highway. The digital age dissociates meaning from information, which is presented as a constant encoding of data in downloadable format. Enabling data to appear in multiple contexts in the same form has cultural implications. This creates the illusion that information is stable across contexts as information flows unchanged from one device to another. The abstraction of information as a decontextualized entity reifies it as quantifiable. So Shakespeare becomes a quantity of data, whether one processes it or not into knowledge and wisdom which are the higher rungs of DIKW pyramid.

Let us try to understand Shakespeare's presence on the Internet by looking at 1) The Internet, 2) Hypertext, 3) Shakespeare sites on the Internet, 4) Shakespeare's credibility, and 5) What is next in the field.

**The Internet**

Let us imagine a live stage performance of *Umabatha*, the African adaptation of *Macbeth* at Natal among the Zulus. Also, imagine that we are capturing the performance using a high definition digital video camera and uploading it on the Internet. What we do is converting the performance into binaristic sequences of coded data. In doing so, we are trying to create the performance into bits of information, or programmable chunks of data. The uninterrupted flow of coded sequences creates an illusion of a performance by giving us the 'information' called *Umabatha*. However, what it failed to carry is the context of the performance. We need to imagine it in our context, which is another context. What one download is decontextualized information. As a text devoid of its context lacks 'meaning', a Shakespeare text that travels from one digital device to another as a decontextualized stream of coded data, Shakespeare gets into new contexts with every device and every user of the device.

The Interconnected Network popularly known as the Internet is a grand system of computer networks connected with one another. To connect them to one another, it used electronic, wireless and optical networking technologies and the Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP). It is a grand system of connected smaller academic, business, public, government and private networks. It carries a wide variety of information resources like interlinked hypertext documents, and applications of the World Wide Web, electronic mail, internet telephony, file sharing etc.

The internet was started in the 1960s for the US military. The academia started using it since the 1980s. The Internet transformed itself into the present popular form in the early 1990s when the computers of large corporations, institutions, business firms and houses were connected and was put to commercial use. Since then, it has overhauled traditional communication media and comprehensively changed life in every field. Newspapers, telephone, radio, television, surface mail etc. gave way to online news and video streaming websites, internet telephony, internet television, and email and became close to everyday life through instant messaging, live streaming, and social networking platforms. Online service providers, onlineB2B services, online shopping etc. changed the world like never before.

Online admission, online classes, online resources, and online examination make the Internet indispensable in modern education. It allows to store, transfer and download digital versions of texts, documents and manuscripts. The digital format quickly carries data from any place to all corners of the earth. Digital corpus makes it easier to analyse literary texts with greater clarity and accuracy. Internet is also a storehouse of audio and video versions (recitation, performances play and cinema). Academic lectures, professional as well as amateur performances and productions also enrich educational resources on the Internet. Sites known as meta-sites keep a tab of relevant websites on a topic and update their data. Many Shakespeare meta-sites are available on the internet.

The four centuries of Shakespeare legacy, scholarship and production histories have created a huge amount of data. Even before the advent of the Internet, Shakespeare had been a well-researched topic. In the Dewey decimal classification system, Shakespeare is 822.33. On the Internet, if you search for the word 'Shakespeare', about 215 million sites become available in less than a second. In a university library, books are carefully selected and so, are authentic materials. But, there is no such guarantee about internet sites, unless you go to the right platform to search. In the case of Shakespeare, narrowing down to a few hundred sites is even more so.

### **Hypertext**

Apart from being a digital repository, the Internet makes vertical and horizontal searches possible. For example, if you refer to Wikipedia, and come across the word Shakespeare, you can find it marked in blue and an underline. If you click it, it will guide you to another page. This ability to link between different texts and their external links make the Internet browsing different from reading a printed book. This feature, known as hypertext, changes the way we approach a text. You can never finish reading a hypertext-linked text as one link leads to another, challenging the linearity of the printed text.

We do not always return to the text after reading the hyperlink. When we read a book, we get specific information and if we have a difficult word, we refer to a dictionary and return to the original and we process data linearly progressing from page to page. However, the Internet which gives us access to a large quantity of data is a multi-linear and multimedia text using hypertext. It is like reading multiple books at the same time. On top of that, we can also use the multimodality of the Internet which permits us to read, hear or watch a text.

The Internet is also unreliable because unlike in a printed book it is constantly updated. So from the research point of view, as sites or links can disappear altogether, a researcher has to concentrate on stable sites or maintain an updated list of the sites used. This drawback is taken care of by the introduction of electronic books and Digital Object Identifiers (DOI).

The Internet is a convenient resource for research because it helps one to access data from many sites across the world using only a search engine. Sitting at home, and using devices like a computer or a mobile phone, one can access resources from a wide variety of sources like the online libraries, private collections, and dedicated services to refer, borrow, copy and paste the material you need for present use or future use.

Despite the advantages, one also finds it difficult to access up-to-date books and journals because most of these cutting-edge works are not freely available on the net. The publishers are conscious of this. They come out with electronic versions of books and make them available to paid readers.

The copyright issue is another major problem. Although many sites ignore copyrights and make copyrighted material available, there is no guarantee that the works accessed from such sites are

reliable. What one is likely to get on the Internet freely are all the books without copyrights. Application of the latest theory and findings or cutting-edge research works are unlikely to be published freely on the Internet. A reader has to be careful about accessing pirated copies of such works from the sites offering them. This is also true in the world of real books, where one must look at the publisher and the author of the book before buying a book.

### **Shakespeare Sites on the Internet**

Like Othello's fatal handkerchief, the World Wide Web which casts the Internet also has "magic in the web of it." It can prove fatal to many researchers. But, it is a necessary charm. Human beings who are wedded to the digital world have to keep this fatally ensnaring World Wide Web.

One has to be careful as one approaches Shakespeare sites and Shakespeare resources on the Internet. Passionate enthusiasts and gifted non-professionals often generate partially true and incomplete data on Shakespeare. The reason is that Shakespeare is everyone's and he is universally accessible. Informal operation of public web platforms also permits non-professionals to post their findings and observations along with those of the professionals and experts. Internet search often fails to distinguish between the two.

The tricky question is how to find out the credible sites when one searches for Shakespeare on the Internet. It is very important to check out on the credibility of the site from which you are taking a material. While the reliable websites give you the name of the author and the date of the publication directly, or indirectly from the information link provided. One also has to look at the date of publication of works which are available from the Internet.

One easy way to assess the credibility of the site is to look at the URL itself. Look at the following URLs.

As you can see these sites have endings such as .ac., .com, .edu, .gov, .net, .org, etc. these have special significance as you know.

.com	site of a commercial organisation or establishment
.ac	site of an educational organisation especially in North America
.edu	site of an educational organisation or establishment
.gov	site of a government of the country
.net	site of a networking organisation
.org	site of a non-profit organisation

Here also there are some confusions as some countries like Canada, France, and Ireland do not use .edu or .ac for the sites of their educational institutions; and again, not all .com sites are unreliable. Some .com sites like Britannica.com carry very reliable information. Some more useful .com sites related to Shakespeare are [Before Shakespeare](#), [Bell Shakespeare Blog](#), [Blogging Shakespeare](#), [Clamorous Voice](#), [Good Tickle Brain](#), [No Sweat Shakespeare](#), [Shakespeare in Ireland](#), [Shakespeare's Globe Blog](#), [The Shakespearean Student](#) etc.

Some other popular Shakespeare .com are:

[The Shakespeare Standard](#) which hosts articles, news and reviews, and newsletters besides being an educational resource, [Shakespeare's Words](#) which gives the glossary of the words in Shakespeare's works besides giving links to his full-text editions, [Shakespeare-Online](#) which gives the complete texts for each play and sonnet, historical background, study guides and detailed biography, [Shakespeare Authorship](#) which argues against the claims that someone else wrote Shakespeare's works, [Chop Bard](#)

which focuses on character, theme and action, and [PlayShakespeare](#) which contains reviews of Shakespeare productions.

Some reliable podcast links are [Approaching Shakespeare](#) from the University of Oxford, [Let's Talk Shakespeare Podcast](#) from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, [Much Ado About Shakespeare](#) from the Royal Shakespeare Company, [My Own Shakespeare](#) from the BBC, [No Holds Bard](#) from the Seven Stages Shakespeare Company, [Shakespeare Unlimited](#) from Folger's Shakespeare Unlimited, [Shakespeare's Restless World](#) from the British Museum, [Clear Shakespeare](#), [BardCast: The Shakespeare Podcast](#), [In Your Ear Shakespeare](#), [Party Bard: A Shakespeare Podcast](#), [PlayShakespeare.com Podcast](#)), [That Shakespeare Girl](#) etc.

See the commercial sites like [A Character Study of Don John](#), [A Charlotte Mason Minute: Shakespeare](#), [Absolute Shakespeare](#), [Absolute Shakespeare Glossary](#), [BardBox](#), [Common Phrases Coined by Shakespeare](#), [Cookery O' the Kitchen "Keep"](#), [Double Dutch Discords](#), [English Literature Study Guides](#), [Encyclopaedia Britannica's Guide to Shakespeare Glossary](#), [Everything Shakespeare Summaries](#), [First Shakespeare Lesson](#), [Gene Tyburn's Operas in English Collection](#), [Gleeditions: Literature Unbound](#), [Holy Trinity Church](#), [How to Study Shakespeare](#), [How to Understand Shakespeare Words/Images of Shakespeare's Time](#), [Keith Scales: OFF THE PAGE](#), [Know Your Shakespeare Quotations?](#), [Lost quarto of Hamlet](#), [My Poetic Side: William Shakespeare Poems](#), [No Sweat Shakespeare](#), [No Fear Shakespeare](#), [Our Shakespeare Unit](#), [One Page Book Company](#), [Paper Landmarks—Globe Theatre](#), [Poetry Machine](#), [Shakespeare 101: A Student Guide](#), [Shakespeare at eNotes.com](#), [Shakespeare and Creative Dramatics at Home](#), [Shakespeare Dictionary](#), [Shakespeare and Food](#), [Shakespeare and Violence](#), [ShakespeareHelp.com](#), [Shakespeare Insults Generator](#), [Shakespeare Online](#), [Shakespeare Quiz](#), [Shakespearean Feast](#), [Shakespearean Insulter](#), [Shakespeare Solved](#), [Shakespeare Sonnet Shake-Up](#), [Shakespeareances.com](#), [Shakespeare's Coined Words Now Common Currency](#), [Shakespeare's Time](#), [Shawn and Shakespeare](#), [Study flowers in Ophelia's garland to learn folk beliefs](#), [Shakespeare](#), [Surfing with the Bard \(Amy Ulen\)](#), [Teacher's Guide to Studying Shakespeare](#), [Teaching Shakespeare to High School Students](#), [Teaching Shakespeare to Low Level Readers](#), [The Big Bad Bard: Studying Shakespeare](#), [The Globe Theatre Quiz](#), [The Hamlet Quizzes](#), [The Literature Network William Shakespeare](#), [The Oxford Shakespeare](#), [The Reduced Shakespeare Company](#), [The Shakespeare Art Museum](#), [The Shakespearean Code](#), [TheatreHistory.com: Shakespeare Index](#), [Top Tips for Teaching Shakespeare](#), [Tudor World \(Shakespeare Tours\)](#), [Types of Female Characters in Shakespeare](#), [Web English Teacher William Shakespeare](#), [What's So Great About Shakespeare?](#), [William Shakespeare](#), [William Shakespeare \(The Complete Works\)](#), [William Shakespeare Quotes](#), [Write Like Shakespeare](#),

When you come across a useful website, you should take care to record all the details about the website, the page, the URL, and the date when you accessed it. If the URL is very long and complicated, you can cite the main address, but indicate the link to follow.

Some of the reliable Shakespeare sites from where you can download useful materials are important World-wide Shakespeare web resources like [Internet Shakespeare Editions](#) which provides the original shape of Shakespeare's plays and is a good site to compare quarto and folio versions; [Folger Digital Texts](#) which gives the clean texts of all recognized plays and poems of Shakespeare; [Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project](#) from the University of Guelph; [The Shakespeare Resource Center](#) which collects links from all over the web to help you find information on William Shakespeare; [Shakespeare in Asia: A Multimedia Project](#) which is a multimedia website giving extensive information

and visual materials on Shakespeare in Asian countries; [Shakespeare Around the Globe](#); and [SHAKSPER](#) which is an international electronic conference with searchable online archive.

See academic sites like [A Guide to Teaching the Interpretation of Shakespeare's "As You Like It"](#), [A Shakespeare Biography Quiz](#), [ASL Shakespeare Project](#), [Folger Shakespeare Library Online Resources for Teachers](#), [Interactive Shakespeare Project](#), [Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet](#), [Shakescenes](#), [Shakespeare Illustrated](#), [Shakespeare in Education](#), [Shakespeare Institute](#), [Shakespeare on the Internet: Sites of Interest \(Michael Best\)](#), [Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: "You Kiss by the Book"](#), [Speak What We Feel: An Introduction to King Lear](#), [Teaching Macbeth](#), [The Complete Works of Shakespeare](#), [The English Renaissance in Context](#), [The Folger Shakespeare Library](#), [The Furness Shakespeare Library](#), [Tools for Studying Shakespeare and Contemporaries](#), [William Shakespeare](#), and .net sites like [Elizabethan Costume Page](#), [Shake Sphere](#), [Shakespeare Resource Center](#), [The Last Will and Testament of William Shakespeare](#).

There are also paid sites which provide information on Shakespeare. [World Shakespeare bibliography](#) offers 127,000 documents and provides a detailed method of searching. It provides "annotated entries for all important books, articles, book reviews, dissertations, theatrical productions, reviews of productions, audio-visual materials, electronic media, and other scholarly and popular materials related to Shakespeare, and published or produced between 1964 and 2005." The University of Toronto's electronic bibliography is a useful link. *Iter* (Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance) also has a very strong index.

See organisational sites like [A Guide to Teaching the Interpretation of Shakespeare's "As You Like It"](#), [A Shakespeare Biography Quiz](#), [Ambleside Online Shakespeare Rotation](#), [ASL Shakespeare Project](#), [Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare](#), [Folger Shakespeare Library Online Resources for Teachers](#), [Friends of Shakespeare's Church](#), [In Search of Shakespeare Quick Tips](#), [Interactive Shakespeare Project](#), [LibriVox Shakespeare](#), [Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet](#), [Much Ado About Something](#), [Open Course Shakespeare](#), [Phrase Origins Quiz](#), [Shakescenes](#), [Shakespeare Behind Bars](#), [Shakespeare Field Trip](#), [Shakespeare Illustrated](#), [Shakespeare in Education](#), [Shakespeare in quarto Glossary](#), [Shakespeare: Subject to Change](#), [Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: "You Kiss by the Book"](#), [Speak the Speech](#), [Speak What We Feel: An Introduction to King Lear](#), [Tales from Shakespeare](#), [Teaching Macbeth](#), [The Complete Works of Shakespeare](#), [The English Renaissance in Context](#), [Tools for Studying Shakespeare and Contemporaries](#), [William Shakespeare](#), and [William Shakespeare's Plays and Poems](#).

### **Shakespeare Credibility**

One of the costs of popularity is the proliferation of unreliable information. Shakespeare being popular has many enthusiastic than accurate materials on the Internet. There are also very interesting conspiracy theory sites, some of which are very scholarly. This has led to the creation of scholarly rebuttals like [Shakespeare Authorship](#) page which is dedicated to the proposition that Shakespeare himself wrote Shakespeare, and not anyone else, as many other websites suggest. So, one has to be very careful in accessing reliable sites to get authentic data on Shakespeare.

You may compare the Internet with a big bookstall which does not distinguish between reliable and unreliable information. It is your job to find the right sites to access reliable data. There are good meta-sites or sites which lists other sites (aka gateways or portals) maintained by experts in the field.

In Shakespeare studies, the most popular gateway had been Terry Gray's [Mister William Shakespeare and the Internet](#) hosted by Palomar Community College, California. Unfortunately, it was closed down.

The next best is [Shakespeare Resource Centre](#) which was started in 1997 and is run by J. M. Pressley and the [Internet Shakespeare editions](#). It is still better to consult more than one gateway to be sure that the data available are up-to-date.

You also have to be careful about the search engine you use. When you google for a topic, say 'Shakespeare', many results appear on your search engine. You are unlikely to go beyond one or two pages normally. Knowing this, the complex algorithm of your search engine is programmed to lead you to commercial sites. Commercial interests are also known to use software to boost up their popularity. Popularity being a yardstick in determining which sites should appear in the beginning, your search leads you to popular sites which need not be academically the best. Reliable pages would lie hidden many pages away.

A search for the "Romeo and Juliet", for example, is likely to list many websites marketing academic papers to students. You may use 'advanced' search features, Boolean expressions like (Othello AND race), or (Othello NOT essay) to bring down the number of results. In Google, you can use more word combinations to reach the desired result. By searching for "Romeo and Juliet" "tragedy" "-buy" essay" you can weed out the commercial sites and find the sites discussing *Romeo and Juliet* as a tragedy. You also have to be careful that the Internet searches with the words that you give, and not their connotations. For example, it does not distinguish between *Hamlet* the play, and hamlet, "a small village."

Even after doing this, you might find that many of the sites that you got are not useful. Many of them could lead you to course outlines mentioning the critical piece which you are looking for. One way to overcome this is to add the names of reliable journals in your search. Searching from meta-sites would be more helpful.

Apart from the texts of Shakespeare and criticism about them, we also find reliable information on Shakespeare's sources and historical documents related to him, his works, images, guides to Shakespeare pronunciation, Shakespeare music etc. From a New Historicists perspective, such sources are invaluable. Still, because of commercial interests, they are not readily available. The website of the [Furness Library of the University of Pennsylvania](#) hosts many Shakespeare -related images.

The Internet offers dictionaries and concordances of Shakespeare's works. It analyses Shakespeare corpus and gives keyword in context (KWIC) and collocational searches. For example, one can search for the word 'royal' appearing near the word 'blood'.

Shakespeare did not have an English dictionary. The first English language dictionary was not printed under forty years after his death. Still, dictionaries of difficult words in other languages were available during his time. However, the problem of multiple spellings used during his time poses its problems. Ian Lancashire's [EMEDD from the University of Toronto](#) helps one with the definition of a word in a particular period. The Oxford English Dictionary gives up-to-date historical documentation of words.

The Internet also offers information about the performances of Shakespeare's plays. Some of them even provide clips and commentary of movies and stage performance. Websites of theatre companies, Shakespeare festivals, and some universities specialise in Shakespeare hosts videos of Shakespeare performances from across countries, cultures, languages, and time. YouTube also provides short videos of professional and amateur performances, plays and movies of Shakespeare's plays.

Early English books online provide images of early books including Shakespeare's and Shakespeare's sources, John Hopkins University's Project Muse makes the full text of journals available online. JStor

is another site that makes the available full text of journals online. Project Muse and JStor are available to Indian students through INFLIBNET.

### **What is next**

The text of Shakespeare's plays available on the Internet is derived from texts which do not have any copyright. They do not tell us about the advanced editorial scholarship in Shakespeare. The website Internet Shakespeare editions, which already gives a facsimile of the First Folio and searchable transcriptions of texts, is planning to include material on Shakespeare editing in the last century. An effort in this direction can be seen from MIT and Folger Shakespeare Library in their Hamlet on the Ramparts.

The special issue of *Early Modern Literary Studies* in (No. 2. January 1998) raised the questions about what Shakespeare scholars wanted to see in the internet editions of Shakespeare's works, and presents a model for Internet Shakespeare Edition, and examines the possibility of hyper-textual interlinking and "dynamic" reading using text-analysis software. Later, its special Issue (No. 12. January 2004) examined the editing of Internet Shakespeare, the problem of presenting documents as text, image, and code, the role of the electronic editor etc.

One can only wonder if by dealing in data which is huge, the age is too caught up with information and is unable to process it to generate knowledge, and finally wisdom. The hierarchy of knowledge as seen in Milan Zeleny's DIKW pyramid, addressing the questions know-nothing, know-what, know-how, and know-why and resulting in Data, Information, Knowledge, Wisdom could be applied here. Like Jennifer Rowley who observes that there was "little reference to wisdom" in the discussion on DIKW and excludes wisdom in her definitions following that research, the modern digital study of Shakespeare could