

Situated Interpretation: Teaching Shakespeare with Live Performance

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Writing back in 1997, W.B. Worthen observed that “actual stage performance” had been largely “omitted from the catalogue of ‘discourses’ that inform criticism” (*Shakespeare and* 154). Now over twenty years later, the situation has changed: one of the liveliest areas of Shakespeare studies is performance criticism—that is, the study of Shakespeare-related theatrical production, performance, and reception. Just as important, actual performance has become an established part of pedagogical practice. As several recent articles attest, Shakespeare instructors routinely incorporate performance-related exercises in their classrooms (e.g. Bevington; Boyer; Costa; Esposito; Hartley, “Dialectical Shakespeare”). It is also relatively common to require or encourage students to attend a live production, such as one might see at a Shakespeare festival or professional theatre, for instance the Guthrie or Folger, or at a regional, university, or community stage. Yet despite this field-wide investment in performance, the viewing and analysis of live productions in teaching remains a curiously unexamined convention in Shakespeare pedagogy.

Initially, this claim may sound counterintuitive, if not patently incorrect. Since the 1980s, publications in Shakespeare pedagogy have increasingly emphasized performance approaches to Shakespeare, presenting course and lesson plans with the foundational idea that a Shakespeare play is “not a poem to be interrogated for its themes, its symbolism, its imagery, but a script” for

enactment in performance (Sauer and Tribble 35).¹ As this literature has repeatedly shown, early modern plays are productively taught with and through performance methods—a distinct, if varied set of teaching practices that employ student acting and production, performance history, and film to help students realize how to “transform the words on the page into imagined voices and imagined actions” and therefore to experience early modern drama as drama (Rocklin, “Performance is More” 50).² Furthermore, many theatres, such as Shakespeare’s Globe, The National Theatre, and the Royal Shakespeare Company provide online resources for school and university instructors, including suggested activities, still production images, videos of scenes, and interviews with actors, all of which also help instructors to familiarize students with issues in performance. Yet these activities and resources are not the same as seeing as live show, and they present different opportunities and challenges from those involved with having students view a fully staged drama live. Even with these many publications and resources, teaching live theatrical performance has only received passing attention in the published criticism on Shakespeare pedagogy.³

As a relatively common tool and object of analysis in teaching Shakespeare and dramatic literature in general, live performance deserves further attention within the pedagogical literature. This is even more true now, since the development of digitally relayed live broadcasts has widened access to theatre, creating greater possibilities for incorporating some version of a live production into a course. As with any activity, such incorporation benefits from conscientious framing, since otherwise a live performance can end up being just an ancillary enrichment experience—interesting but not necessarily related to the objectives of the course.

This is especially true of live performance, since some students may never have been to the theatre before and therefore may have little sense of what to look for when watching a play. As Sarah Werner points out, students often need help “thinking in terms of how performances make meaning” (344).⁴ Even students with considerable experience may need guidance to evaluate a production critically in ways that relate to the course outcomes and aims. Thus, as Lois Potter has observed, students need to be “carefully prepared” to attend a Shakespeare play; they “need to learn how to ‘read’ a production” (236). For this reason, it is worthwhile to share theories, methods, and activities for teaching and teaching with live performance. Ultimately, a robust pedagogical literature on teaching live performance can help experienced and newer instructors to incorporate such performances even more reflectively and effectively into their Shakespeare and drama teaching.

Some questions that need to be addressed include: What theories of performance might undergird teaching with and about live performance? How do instructors prepare their students to see a show and help them to analyze a production in relation to specific course outcomes and aims? How might live performance productively frustrate or diverge from efforts to frame the experience for students in advance? How can framing live production beforehand enhance or diminish students’ experience? How are approaches to community, university, or digital relays of theatrical events like or unlike those that involve attending a live professional show? How might teaching with film inform the teaching of live performance, and how is it different? How do instructors address the financial and logistical hurdles of teaching live Shakespeare? Why has live performance been relatively neglected in the field of Shakespeare pedagogy? It is not

possible to address all these questions in the space of a single article. I raise these issues here to suggest the range of issues to be explored in bringing live theatre into course planning in Shakespeare, and in those courses that include dramatic literature generally.⁵

The present article offers one point of entry into the topic by discussing an approach to a type of course that always incorporates live performance, those in which students study individual plays and then attend live, usually professional productions of most or all of them. In line with the broader trends in the field, this type of course has received no attention in the pedagogical literature, whether in English or modern language pedagogy, or in the fields of theatre or performance studies, and this gap extends to any course designed around the study of selected plays (whether classic or contemporary) and then viewing them live.⁶ In the teaching of Shakespeare, this type of course is usually called something like “Shakespeare in Performance,” but to avoid confusion with those that emphasize student acting, student production, or film analysis, which are often similarly titled, I will refer to this type of class as “Shakespeare on Stage.”

Admittedly, relative to survey courses in Shakespeare or those emphasizing student performance, Shakespeare on Stage is a less common, even rarefied offering. It tends to be found at metropolitan universities near professional theatres and through study abroad programs in England, although there are notable exceptions, including my own course, which I teach at a rural university in Southeastern Idaho.⁷ This class involves taking students to a festival a six hours’ drive away, but many other colleges and universities are nearer than this to a relevant venue, since there are over 200 Shakespeare theatres and festivals in the United States and

hundreds more worldwide (Gregio 83–128; 137–140; Homan 117; Edmondson and Prescott 301).⁸ With the advent of digital relays, such as those from the Globe or the National Theatre, instructors in smaller cities and rural areas can also put together courses that involve reading and viewing multiple plays in a single term through a selection of live university or community productions and relayed broadcasts. Thus, although this kind of course is less common, opportunities to offer it are growing.

In terms of teaching live performance, more important than the relative commonness of the course is its nature: *Shakespeare on Stage* is an especially useful place to begin to discuss approaches to teaching live performance because live theatre is the course's reason for being. For this reason, the course requires a guiding approach to and conception of performance—in relation to the text and as an art form. In this respect, an extended discussion of *Shakespeare on Stage* can help those who want to develop or revise their own *Shakespeare on Stage* course, while offering a comparative model of course design for those instructors who want to reconsider or learn more about how they might incorporate even a single production into their planning.

In what follows, I share my approach to teaching *Shakespeare on Stage*, including the layout of the course and specific assignments. Yet, because viewing and analyzing live performance is the *raison d'être* of this class, I begin by describing a concept of performance that informs the course design. Here I draw on classic and more recent understandings of the relationships between text and performance to present an approach to theatrical production as “situated interpretation”—that is, as an artistic engagement with text/script that is mediated and shaped by critical reception and performance history as well as current cultural and artistic

milieu. Then, because it is helpful to see how theory can shape practice, I detail how I design lessons to teach performance as situated interpretation. For some readers, the specific exercises I describe will be familiar, since I draw these from existing approaches to teaching Shakespeare with historical contextualization, close reading, and performance. Yet in presenting these here, I seek to demonstrate one way that such activities might be sequenced to prepare students to view and analyze live performance in appreciative, yet sophisticated and informed ways. That is, I seek to show one way to structure a Shakespeare on Stage course by sequencing established teaching methods within a performance-oriented framework in order to promote a specific skill, performance analysis.

Situating Pedagogy and Interpretation

Performance is the focus of Shakespeare on Stage, and my approach to performance has been shaped within specific institutional and pedagogical contexts. To introduce this approach, a few words about these contexts are in order. I teach Shakespeare on Stage as a six- or eight-week summer course that focuses on three to four plays, chosen because they are in repertory at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. The course culminates in a four-day trip to the Festival to experience the plays in performance and to attend other Festival activities, such as daily seminars with actors and costume designers. The students are mainly first generation and non-traditional students from agricultural or working-class backgrounds in rural Idaho. Most have almost no background attending live theatre, and it is not unusual to have one or two students who have never seen a play (whether live or recorded). As a summer class, which also carries an additional

fee, the course enrollment is typically lower than one during the semester, usually around ten students.⁹ Also, because a significant amount of class time occurs during the four-day trip, the course meets for one three-hour session per week, which I schedule for the evening because many students work during the day. The combination of small class size and extended class meeting time allows for a variety of teaching techniques, including lecture, discussion, viewing of film clips, and especially active performance by students.

Shakespeare on Stage is an upper-division class offered by the Department of English. It thus attracts English and English Education majors, although at my institution, students majoring in other subjects enroll too, often because the upper-division courses in English have few prerequisites and students who need to graduate will take the class to meet the university's upper-division credit requirement. At ISU, Shakespeare on Stage poses challenges emerging from its positioning as something of an open access, upper-division course in English that further connects students to ideas that may not have come up in other English courses, specifically analysis of theatrical performance. The course needs to be relevant, accessible, and engaging for upper-division students who have little to no college-level background in literature, Shakespeare, or theatre, and those who have more, even much more experience with these subjects. Regardless of their major and academic background, most students come to the course with some techniques for close reading and analyzing literature developed in secondary school or college. I rely on this shared background to inform a common starting point for approaching the plays: textual analysis and close reading. To create an effective and rewarding course, I then design the class to bridge students from textual analysis to performance analysis by moving students from an

understanding of the text of the play as the main object of study toward an ability to analyze live theatre as an artistic mode. While this trajectory emerges from my own context, I expect that many instructors find themselves in similar situations, with students who need assistance bridging from close reading or historicist criticism to less familiar theatrical appreciation and analysis.

Because of the need to bridge students from the study of text to an analysis of a theatrical event, I have found that it is useful to design the course *vis à vis* a working conception of a relationship between text and performance. My course thus develops around a concept I have come to call “situated interpretation” in which performance is understood as an interpretation of a play that is shaped in relation to the text, but which is also in conversation with traditions of reception in criticism and performance, as well as with contemporary social, artistic, and political concerns. In Shakespeare performance criticism, ideas of the text’s relationship to performance exist along a continuum that prioritizes textual interpretation (at one end) and the contingencies of performance (at the other). As I discuss below, emphasizing one of these priorities over the other can pose challenges for teaching and learning in a class like Shakespeare on Stage. In this course, the concept of “situated interpretation” exists at a midpoint on this continuum as an alternative to other concepts that emphasize textual analysis or the performance event. A brief discussion of two other concepts, which prioritize text or performance, can help to clarify what “situated interpretation” is and why it serves as a useful concept for my own Shakespeare on Stage, and potentially for others.

At the text end of spectrum is the idea of performance as paraphrase or “a visual gloss” of the text (Riggio 3). This notion is intuitive, and many students come to the classroom expecting a production to be “faithful to the text” (Ellinghausen 37). Some instructors reinforce this idea with a common practice: assigning students to watch a film, or even a live production, to promote or reinforce an understanding of plot. This method is useful, since it can help students become familiar enough with the plot that they can then pay attention to language, imagery, themes, and structure. Yet underlying the “visual gloss” view is the sense that performance is valuable because it helps with the exposition or reinforcement of an authoritative Shakespearean text. Indeed, the more a staging adheres to the text—or to some dominant interpretation thereof—the more it is said to be authentic (Friedman 50). Performance theorists criticize this emphasis on fidelity and “authenticity,” since underlying such notions is an “ideology of print” (Kidnie 110) whereby a Shakespearean text has innate value, while performance is worthwhile only insofar as it relates to or “abides by” the text (Friedman 50). The text thus has prime importance, while performance is a secondary, derivative activity (Kidnie 110). The “glossing” view even endows the text with something like “scriptural status” and assumes that the text “expresses unitary and determinable interpretive obligation” (Shand, “Reading Power” 245).

In terms of teaching performance, the glossing conception is constraining. Productions of Shakespeare grow out of and reflect multiple aims and values. One production might follow a Shakespearean text quite closely, such as playing the uncut first quarto of *Hamlet* to explore “how it works” on stage. Another might emphasize some elements by cutting out others entirely, such as those performances of *Richard III* that eliminate or combine the numerous other

characters to streamline the story and heighten the presentation of Richard as a tyrant. In my experience, some students expecting a faithful, “authentic” gloss can become bewildered, even angered by productions that make major cuts or offer avant-garde visions. This conception also renders secondary any activities that help students to appreciate and evaluate aspects of performance not involving the text—costume, set, music, lighting—which in the “visual gloss” view can seem, like performance in general, to be little more than an “embellishment” (Kidnie 115).

At the other end of the spectrum is the idea that performance is not “opposed” to the text, or even “proximate” to it (Worthen, *Shakespeare and* 18). Rather, performance “operates at a necessary distance from the text as literary object” (Kidnie 108)—as an event in its own right. Performance consists of multiple components, only one of which is the text of the play (Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance* 3–6). As much as a performance might address the text, it is also fundamentally different from it. The text does not “dictate or originate” a production, since any show exists on its own as a work of art (Hartley, *Shakespearean* 42; 45). As such, the event will reach outward in the present to mold “a specific structure of experience for its audiences” (Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance* 12), while engaging contemporary political, social, and aesthetic concerns. This view unhinges performance from the text to value performance as its own artistic undertaking.

In terms of the pedagogical merging of literary and theatre studies, the event view is both fruitful and restrictive. It is fruitful insofar as it authorizes methods and activities that attune students to multimodal aspects of production: set design, costume, as well as the physical

arrangement of the space and the relative positioning of the audience and actors. Moreover, because performances are themselves collections of practices, which draw upon “other modes of cultural transmission, signification, and interpretation,” the event view also invites exploration of how performance engages current artistic or political concerns (Worthen, *Shakespeare and* 168). However, this angle puts so much emphasis on the autonomy of performance that, within a Shakespeare on Stage course, it might prompt one to wonder why it is necessary or useful to spend time studying a text of the play. If the text is only one component, and a potentially minor one at that, why spend a good deal time with it before going to see a show? One answer is that mechanisms of production become clearer if we see how they operate in relation to the text. Understanding the text enables us to more precisely discern how the performance deals with it, not to criticize it in terms of fidelity, but to use text as a signpost to appreciate how a performance works on its own terms.

The alternative of situated interpretation emphasizes the importance of the text. Yet it equally promotes the idea that performance emerges out of legacies and contexts that exist outside a text, including iterations of the play in editions, the history of the play in performance, the history of the performance company, the exigencies of the theatrical space, and broader political and social issues and trends. Thus situated interpretation begins with the now classic idea that plays are “blueprints for performance” or the “text as score” (Styan, *Shakespeare Revolution* 235), metaphors that imply that the text is an important starting point. Like a symphonic performance, the text/blueprint/score must be realized through the collective understanding and imaginative work of the director/architect/conductor with an ensemble of

actor-worker-players. Nevertheless, the idea of “situated interpretation” moves beyond “blueprint” and “score,” since as governing metaphors they are problematic in several respects. First, a script is not analogous to a score, since, as director Jonathan Miller points out, the relationship of words on the page to the range of ways they might be delivered is more varied and complex (39–41). Even more important in this context is that the script of a play, particularly a Shakespeare play, gives less information about the final product than a blueprint or score, since the script usually does not indicate tone, gestures, cadence, facial expression, or costuming, among other things (34). Moreover, these metaphors do not adequately convey that performance emerges from more than an exclusive interaction with the text; performance emerges in relation to traditions and current contexts. In this regard, Miller suggests an entirely different, but relevant analogy, genetic code (68), a metaphor that makes even more sense now than it did when Miller wrote, as genes have increasingly been understood to lock in certain attributes and processes, while context controls whether and how these attributes are expressed. Nature and nurture; underlying code and environmental expression.

But how then to describe that relationship in a meaningful way in the Shakespeare on Stage classroom? While not without its detractors, there is an established tradition of understanding performance as interpretation.¹⁰ I build on this idea, but in the class, I revise these understandings to propose a working conception of performance as *situated* interpretation—not something that occurs only in relation to the text or as a distinct event.

The concept of situated interpretation builds on the precedent of the two leading book series in Shakespeare and performance history, the Shakespeare in Production Series (Cambridge

University Press) and James Bulman and Carol Rutter's *Shakespeare in Performance* series (Manchester University Press). These emphasize that performances interpret plays, but do so in the context of previous stagings, current theatrical and acting conventions, and contemporary cultural milieu. In this sense, although the series' editors and authors do not use the term, they present performance as "situated," as an artistic endeavor that takes shape in the now, but also in relation to historical and contemporary traditions of criticism and performance as well as aesthetic, social, political, or intellectual concerns of the time.¹¹ For instance, the performance history of *Richard III*, as set forth by Julie Hankey, exemplifies how changing acting styles have informed new interpretations of the lead role. The eighteenth-century actor David Garrick, for one, sought to "overthrow this whole system of tragic acting" (28), bringing an increasingly naturalistic style, described by contemporaries as "easy and familiar, yet forcible," and helped to make Richard exciting and more believable, "the very man," "almost reality" (qtd. in Hankey 28; 30). Likewise, *Taming of the Shrew* has seen "startling permutations" in performance, although not strictly in terms of acting traditions (Schafer 1). Over the centuries, the politics of gender and women's rights have informed performances and audience reactions to the role of Katherine, for instance relative to early twentieth-century suffragist movements in the United States and Britain (25).

In a sense, the point that actors and theatre companies shape their work in relation to theatrical precedents and their own times is both long-established and obvious. Yet here I emphasize how I incorporate this idea into the teaching of a class based around live performance, since the concept provides a useful way to help students to think about theatre—a way that can

bridge students from literary studies to performance analysis. The idea especially suits courses like mine, where students see professional productions. As Andrew James Hartley states, productions are “in dialogue with all previous productions” (*Shakespearean* 21), if only to do things in another way. This is especially true of professional productions, since Shakespearean actors and directors, as well as set, costume, sound, and lighting designers, are themselves steeped in histories of performance, owing to their training, previous stage experience, and independent preparation. So, in a course where we experience professional productions, such earlier performance dynamics come into play, and knowing some of them can help students to identify some of what is deliberately reminiscent in or unique to a show.

In class, performance history itself is one excellent resource to call upon to help students conceptualize performance as situated interpretation, as it helps to familiarize students with how performance has realized and interpreted plays in the past, as well as how conventions of acting, staging, and cultural milieu have shaped performance. At the same time, such history can introduce students to ways of thinking about aspects of performance that exist outside of the words—intonation, speed of delivery, gesture, costume, set, music, textual cuts, stage business, stage design (e.g. thrust, proscenium), and so forth. Numerous pedagogical articles advocate using performance history in class to facilitate textual analysis and interpretation (e.g., Howlett; Levenson; Vaughn). Here I reorient that aim: introducing this historical material, along with textual analysis and performance history, to foster students’ understanding and analysis of live performance as an engagement with the text that is mediated and shaped by a history of reception and contemporary cultural and artistic milieu.

Situating Performance in Shakespeare on Stage

In *Performance Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare*, Edward Rocklin links Shakespeare's scripts to the art of teaching. Like Shakespeare writing his scripts, teachers are pedagogic designers (writer-directors), who create cues for student invention and learning (350). The challenge of Shakespeare on Stage is to script an approach that begins with what my students know best, usually textual interpretation and perhaps the glossing conception of performance, described above, and then, over the course of several lessons, to develop ways of understanding theatrical production. The specific methods described here are undergirded and shaped by the above theory. As I mentioned above, this approach does not require the invention of entirely new approaches. Rather, I hope to draw attention to how established approaches might be deliberately sequenced, since it is this sequence that bridges students from literary to performance criticism, and specifically toward the ability to analyze a theatrical production as a situated interpretation of a play.

As I plan the unit on each play, I first identify a major critical question about the work. A critical question helps to focus analysis of the play, and serves as a touchstone to ground conversations, even as they extend beyond the critical issue at hand. Most important, I begin with a central question, since it helps to provide focus around which to introduce the idea of performance as situated interpretation. While performances are in dialogue with earlier productions, they are also in conversation with criticism (Hartley, *Shakespearean* 22). Moreover, these questions are not in any pure sense generated by the text, but by the text as it has been understood, and thereby produced by critical and performance reception (Worthen, *Shakespeare*

and 174–75). Thus, any question condenses and calls up the need to engage with both critical and performance history, and in this way such a guiding question can help to prepare students to bridge the literary-to-performance analysis gap.

While I have planned units of this course around multiple plays and questions, I would like to describe how I teach this class by looking at one example, *Taming of the Shrew*.¹² With so many plays such as *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, criticism and performance run in multiple directions, making it more difficult to decide upon a single issue around which to structure classroom activities. *Taming* offers as an unusually clear instance, since one issue dominates its critical and performance history: Is Katherine tamed?¹³ The materials I discuss here will be familiar to experienced teachers of Shakespeare, and my hope is that this familiarity means that it is more possible to focus on how this content can be sequenced to move students from textually-oriented discussions to an understanding of performance as situated interpretation. That said, because some readers may not be as familiar with teaching *Taming*, or Shakespeare generally, I have tried use enough detail that extensive experience with the play is not necessary to follow the discussion below.

As I mentioned above, my class meets for three hours per week. I usually schedule two weeks per play, but here I divide the lessons into six forty-five minute segments, which might help readers to more easily imagine how to apply this model to their own contexts. I also describe some assignments that promote learning. What follows presents something of a platonic ideal. In each session, I devote time to students' questions and developing discussion from those, and I am happy to alter what I have planned when the conversation is lively and fruitful. For this

reason, as I indicate below, I always plan for some less structured time near the end of the unit, which allows me to catch up on some important aspects of the lessons, if the early sessions generate lots of conversation, or to foster student-generated discussion with a quiet group that needs a few class sessions to feel comfortable discussing a play. With a once per week class, I expect students to come to the first class having read the entire play, but to have questions about even the basics of the plot. With more and shorter sessions, I would normally spread out the initial reading over the first two or three sessions, depending on what works for the schedule and typical student homework loads.

Session One – Historical and Critical Contexts

Since overall aim of the unit is to move students from textual and literary concerns to performance ones, I begin with what is closer to my students' intellectual comfort zone, literary concerns and questions. The purpose of this session is to orient students to the play by raising the major question, is Katherine tamed, and developing it with the use of historical and critical contexts.

First, I present background on early modern ideas of marriage and practices of policing gender norms in marriage, for instance the use of the scold's bridle or the skimmington ride, the communal ritual for shaming husbands and their scolding or adulterous wives (Boose; Matz). As historians have shown, such practices were not necessarily deterrents or punishments for wives deemed ill-behaved, and I make this point relevant to textual analysis of the play by indicating that the question of Katherine's own taming is an open one. Although it can be spoiler for

students who have not completed reading the play, I do this by juxtaposing Katherine's final speech on wifely obedience (Shakespeare 5.2.136–179) with the ending of two contemporaneous “taming” plays. (In my experience, when it comes to Shakespeare, students do not mind and even appreciate spoilers because it helps them to understand what is going on as they read.)

These other taming plays are well-known in Shakespeare studies, but my students have never read or heard of them, and find them eye-opening. The first comparative play is *The Taming of A Shrew* (1594), the draft, source, or adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Shrew*. Both plays contain the opening frame involving Christopher Sly, but whereas Sly disappears halfway through act one of *The Shrew*, *A Shrew* has a complete frame, bringing back Sly at the end. When at the end of *A Shrew* the Tapster states that Sly's wife will curse him for staying so late at the pub, Sly replies that he will implement Petruchio's tricks to tame her:

Will she? I know now how to tame a shrew,
I dreamt upon it all this night till now,
And thou has waked me out of the best dream
That ever I had in my life, but I'll to my
Wife presently and tame her too
And if she anger me. (Anon. sig. G2^v)

In *A Shrew*, Sly is a drunk and a clown—not authoritative or exemplary. What then are we to feel about Sly as shrew-tamer? This ending calls into question whether Petruchio's tactics are to be valued as a model and thus opens up the possibility that there are multiple ways of responding to Petruchio's dominance and Katherine's seeming compliance at the end of *The Shrew*.

The other passage comes from John Fletcher's sequel to *Taming*, titled *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed* (c. 1611). In Fletcher, Katherine has died and Petruchio remarries, only to be tamed by his new wife. For most students, on an initial reading of Shakespeare's *Taming*, Katherine's final speech suggests that she is tamed. *The Woman's Prize* indicates that this taming never occurred or did not last. Thus, early in *The Woman's Prize*, Tranio, husband of Katherine's sister, Bianca, observes that Katherine so beset Petruchio that even after her death, he remains traumatized:

For yet the bare remembrance of his first wife
(I tell you on my knowledge, and a truth too)
Will make him start in's sleep, and very often
Cry out for cudgels, colestaves, anything,
Hiding his breeches, out of fear her ghost
Should walk, and wear 'em yet.¹⁴ (Fletcher 26)

In Fletcher's telling, Katherine literally wore the pants in the marriage, a point that reinforces our central question, illustrating that the issue of whether Katherine was tamed was central even for its earliest audiences.

Following this historical and critical material, I introduce short quotations from classic criticism taking contrasting positions on the question at hand. Nearly any article on *Taming* weighs in on Katherine's taming, but I have found it helpful to summarize the main points of four now classic articles: Camille Wells Slight argues that Katherine is tamed, that Petruchio teaches Kate how to express her individual freedom within the confines of social constraints, and

that they thus create a relationship of “mutual understanding and cooperation” (187). In contrast, Linda Boose criticizes the idea that the play ends in “mutuality” (180). Historicizing practices of wife “taming,” she argues that the play romanticizes such practices, thus participating in a long tradition of obscuring domestic violence against women. In reply to Boose, Amy Smith draws on theories of gender performativity to argue that that the play demonstrates that gender roles are created through performance, and as such, that gender roles can be both created and remade (312), a point demonstrated at numerous times in the play including the ending. In an exciting historicist contextualization of the play, Eleanor Hubbard describes a case of real wife-taming from the period of *Taming*, showing that in reality “Petruccio’s aims and methods would have met with the deepest suspicion had they been deployed in a London home” (334). Such examples demonstrate for students the longevity and range of critical debate, highlighting that our central question is truly open for discussion.

Session Two – Close Reading with Performance

Once this debate has been established, I then begin to examine how we might explore the play in relation to these historical and critical polarities. To do this, I turn the class toward questions of textual interpretation as they relate to performance, and to do this I employ one common technique in the pedagogical literature, performance approaches to textual analysis (e.g. Rocklin, “What Does” 157; Brandt 174, Costa). With *Taming*, I ask students to work through the two episodes that frame Katherine’s (seeming) transformation, the scene where she first appears (1.1.48–104) and the final speech.

One especially useful performance approach is presented by Michael Tolaydo in *Shakespeare Set Free* which, although aimed at secondary teachers and students, translates well even to an upper-division university course. Students work through the given scene three times, first sentence-by-sentence, moving around the class in a circle, so that each student has a chance to read, while paraphrasing for meaning and understanding basic action. They then read through again, speech-by-speech, concentrating on issues of tone, emotion, and motives (43–45). Then some students get up and perform the scene, with students who are not acting serving as directors (45).¹⁵ This exercise helps students understand the language of the text, a process assisted by multiple readings. As they get the lines “up on their feet,” as Tolaydo puts it, students also begin to see the multiple interpretive possibilities of the play—why critics might read Katherine’s initial anger and her transformation differently. With this exercise, students develop a good understanding of the text, and they begin to develop a concrete sense of the ways that performance can express and realize different interpretations of the text.

Session Three – Performance History

Even as such activities orient students to the text of the play, they also set up the next session, which develops the idea of performance not just as interpretation, but as situated interpretation—situated within theatrical, political, and cultural contexts. This next session focuses on performance history. Usually drawing details from editions in the *Shakespeare in Production* or *Shakespeare in Performance* series, I present a lecture on how performances have engaged and interpreted the major critical crux, in the case of *Taming Katherine*’s relative

domestication, delineating different traditions of playing Katherine as everything from a “stock comic joke” to a “full-blown tragic heroine” (Schafer 34). I situate these interpretations in historical and cultural contexts, such as the suffragist movement (25). The lecture is illustrated with still production images, but I also foster discussion of these issues by showing clips from milestone films exemplifying major interpretive trends. Focusing on the final speech, I have brought in Samuel Taylor’s 1929 film, where Mary Pickford’s Katherine gives Bianca a knowing wink—a gesture that suggests that she is only pretending to be tamed and educating Bianca in the process. I show the Richard Burton-Elizabeth Taylor version, directed by Franco Zeffirelli, where Taylor seems to deliver the speech seriously, but then capriciously runs away, making it difficult to know whether she’s tamed or not (*Taming* 1967). I also have shown the 2012 Globe production, where Samantha Spiro’s Katherine seems genuinely changed and in a mutually fulfilling relationship with Petruchio (*Taming* 2012). Through it all, one objective is to illustrate that performances are interpretations—interpretations that are in conversation not only with some version of the text but also with histories of criticism and performance and the times when they are produced.

As we discuss these clips, I also seek to build students’ sense of what—other than the text—they might need to notice to make sense of performance: tone, body language, arrangement of actors in relation to each other on the stage, costuming, the relative crowdedness of the scene, music, and lighting. To do this, with each clip, I ask questions about performance: What motivates Pickford’s Katherine to wink at Bianca? What does that wink mean, exactly? Often, these conversations naturally open out into a discussion of other characters: obviously

Petruchio, but also others such as Bianca (how innocent is she?) and Petruchio's servant, Grumio, who in later adaptations became the star of the show: How much liberty does he have to resist Petruchio?

Session Four – Theatrical Reviews and Performance Analysis

The next session further builds students' senses of how they might critically analyze theatre. For homework, I assign students to read published reviews of recent productions taken from journals such as those in *Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare Bulletin*, which are easy to find in databases such as the MLA Bibliography and Academic Search Premier. To discuss these reviews, I ask students first to identify what stood out for them about the review itself or the show being described? Then we address how the relevant productions seem to have worked with or against the critical and performance traditions discussed (at least according to the reviewer).¹⁶

At the end of this segment, I work with the students to make a running list of performance elements to consider as they think about performance. The list includes obvious things like costume, lighting, set design, blocking, tone of voice, and physical movement, but building on the reviews, which often discuss elements beyond these more obvious features of performance, students will also mention things like: layout of the theatrical venue, the mission or style of the production company, the place of a particular production in the company's history or season, contemporary artistic and political events, and even other roles played by the actors.¹⁷

Sessions Five and Six – Student Performance and Continued

Discussion

With each play, I repeat this sequence—a critical question, critics’ responses to the question, performance activities for textual interpretation, performance history, theatre reviews. In terms of planning, I keep the last two sessions more open so that I can use the session to respond to specific questions and to link the discussions back to issues of performance.

Although these sessions are more open, an important feature is student performance. As one of the major assignments in the class, each student must explore how a twenty-line (or so) passage from one of the plays has been performed. During a relevant lesson, they then perform the passage for the class in a way that attempts to get at the gist of one of these traditions of interpretation, or to diverge from these traditions. To begin their work, first I ask students to consult performance histories, usually where available the Shakespeare in Production editions of the play, which annotate nearly every line and scene with information on how that has been performed. They then perform the passage for the class, discussing their research and the interpretation they hoped to get across. Students are invited to use props or costumes, and they can choose to memorize the passage for the performance, or using a script, perform the passage in two distinctly different ways.¹⁸

The performances usually elicit lively conversations about character and performance choices. If at this point I need an activity to foster discussion, I have students write down one question that remains for them about the play and then use these to open up further conversations. Often these discussions return us to text-oriented analyses about themes, images,

symbols, and issues of character, such as the implication of the falconry metaphors or food imagery in *Taming*—those concerns that, in a different English course, might only involve examining the text. As we discuss these, I ask students to link these concerns with larger traditions of criticism and performance: How might the set or costuming play up the play’s falconry metaphors—feathers? leather? Where it is relevant and possible, I introduce more performance, asking students to read out and discuss passages, or performance history, indicating how these metaphors have been interpreted and incorporated in productions over time.

Ultimately, in repeating the full sequence of materials with each play, the aim is to habituate students to one way of thinking about performance as an accumulation of interpretive decisions made in the context of critical and performance traditions and current theatrical and cultural milieu—so that, by the time we arrive at the Festival, they are prepared to understand those performances as situated interpretations too.

Assignments

As I suggested above, crucial to this approach are assignments to build and reinforce students’ capacity to think about performance as interpretation and in terms of what, other than the text, is involved. The assignments also help to reinforce learning.

Beyond the performance assignment, a second assignment is a prompt book (O’Brien 147–52), which I have adapted from *Shakespeare Set Free*. Students develop a vision for performance, considering themes, ideas, or character motives and transformations they might want to emphasize, as well as set and costume design. They then choose a short scene (or a 100-

line or so section of one) develop a reading of it by annotating it with prompts and cues—entrances and exits, blocking, and gestures (e.g. kneeling), and circling major words and indicating tone. Students must also explore how the scene has been performed in the Shakespeare in Production edition, where available. In an accompanying essay, they describe and justify their vision of the play, placing this vision within the context of performance history, and then discuss how their prompt book illustrates this vision. As with the performance assignment, this project builds toward the idea of performance as situated interpretation, since it gives students a sense of how they might develop their own performances in the context of performance history and their own artistic and interpretative aims. Recently, a student set *Julius Caesar* in the context of an issue that's relatively close to home, the splinter fundamentalist Latter Day Saints (LDS) communities near my region. He set the play in a very rural and remote, fundamentalist LDS compound, providing a context in which the play could raise relevant questions about how much authority a leader might have, and whether he can be a prophet or, indeed, a god.

For the final assignment, I ask students to write a lengthy review of one of the performances from the Festival, placing that performance in the context of the critical and performance history we have studied and in terms of what they learned from the supplementary events at the Festival. Prior to seeing the plays, in addition to discussing examples of the genre in class, I also go over a brief questionnaire adapted from Lois Potter (236–37). This directs students to take notes on different aspects of the playing conditions, such as the size of the stage, costuming, props, the placement of the intermission, and other theatrical elements, which also

helps student to become attuned to how elements of the production work together to advance a situated interpretation of the play. In addition to the plays themselves, we take a backstage tour and attend the festival's daily seminars with dramaturgs, actors, directors, and costume designers. These seminars are always illuminating, and help students to understand the productions they have viewed in terms of the actors' and directors' training, background and visions, as well the exigencies of the current festival season, thus providing further insight into the ways a production is situated in a particular context.

Some Situated Interpretations

Does this approach work, helping students to think appreciatively and critically about how performances work? While I do not have quantitative data about the success of this approach, I can offer anecdotal assurance from my own experience and student work. The first time I taught Shakespeare on Stage I introduced performance as interpretation, without beginning with the historical and critical contexts, or even close reading. I began with performance and skipped some of the historical background and textual analysis. Some students were very resistant to the idea that performances might interpret Shakespeare, even expressing shock that directors and actors might, in the words of one, "mess around" with the text. While these reactions came from a minority of students, I felt that they expressed a puzzlement that went beyond the vocal few. It occurred to me that these students were coming at performance as a "visual gloss," wanting it to adhere to their version or vision of the text; at the same time, some seemed to assume that Elizabethan costuming was the style of dress that would most accord with

their notion of fidelity. Going back to the idea of intellectual scaffolding, I reflected that in this class, I had introduced too much new; the students defaulted to what what made the most intuitive sense. Now I introduce contexts, sources, and criticism first, then close reading with performance, then performance history, and then further discussion. With this sequencing, students seem more interested in and accepting that performance can be inventive and exploratory, whether apparently abiding of the text or avant-garde. And they are more engaged with the notion that interpretations are shaped by both tradition and cultural milieu. One of my summer students recently altered his conception of performance over the class, beginning the course by stating that a playtext was a “blueprint” for performance. At the end, the student wrote that it was “an interpretation of the director’s; an adaptation.”

Other students have become deeply attuned to the importance of immediate theatrical context for analyzing a performance. For instance, at one recent Festival, students studied and then attended *Henry V* during what was the inaugural season of the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s new, multi-million-dollar Shakespearean theatre, the Engelstad. One student grasped that the production was in dialogue with the old Festival space, the Adams Theatre, and with this new one. In his final review, he argued that the play, taking place in a new “wooden O” alluded to the old, while inaugurating a new age. This theme, he argued, took on special resonance in the new theatre, which announced a new era at the Festival. The student also noted that this theme was enhanced by elements of the production, such as casting the actor who played Henry IV in the two previous seasons at the Adams as the Chorus. The production offered a vision of Henry V as

an unequivocally triumphant king, but this portrait also resonated beyond the show to represent the triumph of the Festival at this milestone moment its history, a new coming of age.

Another student put the 2016 modern dress *Julius Caesar* in the context of performance history, arguing that the Festival's production connected with other major Shakespeare theatres through the incorporation of significant elements of milestone and recent productions of *JC*. For instance, the actor playing Julius Caesar doubled as Strato, the servant who assists Brutus's suicide, so that it is in a sense Caesar who kills Brutus—an idea mounted in the Globe production of 2014, which we had viewed in class. At same time, the opening of the production evoked a modern city alley, occupied by homeless people, thus signaling the play's contemporary vision of poverty and tyranny. The production, which played the conspirators as well intentioned if ultimately misguided, offered a vision of Shakespeare's contemporary relevance in artistic and political terms. Both students, in other words, could situate the performances, understanding them not solely as interpretations of the text, but as engagements with the text shaped by and situated within performance history and contemporary theatrical milieu.

To be sure, this way of introducing live performances of Shakespeare is not a comprehensive introduction to Shakespeare or, for that matter, performance criticism. For some readers, this approach may give short shrift to textual issues—scansion, imagery, and for others it may diminish the autonomy of performance. At the same time, this approach is not fully refined. Among other things, as I continue to teach it, I would like to incorporate more of the resources mentioned at the outset of this article—those associated with major theatre spaces,

such as the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Globe. Still, it is an approach that has worked. Some students have told me that the class makes them feel that they are “inside” the plays, meaning that they understand them well. I would add that they are also “outside” of them, able to read them critically and situate what they read and seen in historical and theatrical contexts. Ideally, by the end of the course, students have a way of talking about how the performances are situated as events, which exist within a complex matrix of each plays’ texts, historical contexts, reception history, and theatrical environment.

Situating Pedagogy in Shakespeare Studies

In closing, I would like return to the broader aim of this article, which is to invite further discussion about how instructors approach and teach live theatre in their courses. I hope that this article invites others to share their approaches, particularly in the developing area of live, relayed, and recorded live performance. As others take up this work, however, it is perhaps worth marking that such work will tend to exist in the paradoxical position of pedagogical articles, which to me often feel both new and not new; timely, and yet belated. For instance, since the time I first thought to write this article, the dissemination of live relayed theatre has accelerated dramatically, raising new questions about what “live” means and how to explore digital broadcast with students (Purcell; Way). Furthermore, even in terms of teaching with traditional live theatre, I have been aware that what I am addressing is not a gap *in the field* per se, since many instructors do teach live theatre. Rather, I am pointing out a gap between practice and publication, between the convention and the discipline-wide theorization and analysis of it.

Publications about our established (and transforming) conventions provide an opportunity to disseminate practice more widely, allowing new and experienced teachers to find novel or reconsider established approaches. In terms of live theatre, this work can help us to document why live theatre matters, and with this documentation, to make the case for teaching live theatre—amateur or professional, live or digital—more (or even more) often.

Yet this documentary function also suggests the way that pedagogical articles (at least in the field of teaching Shakespeare) have tended to function archivally, registering some existing pedagogical practices. In Shakespeare studies, as perhaps in literary and pedagogical studies generally, new trends and methods in research tend to lead developments in teaching (for instance, in terms of approaches and courses offered); innovations in teaching practice then tend to lead pedagogical publications, which often take the form of essays that further disseminate praxis. Performance pedagogies often compare the classroom to a theatre or rehearsal space. If this is the case, then Shakespeare-related pedagogical articles could be the analogue of the theatre review. Such publications capture and promote events and trends that are helpful to the field now; they address a topic or issue that exists in the now, but which is yet neither new nor now, since it has already occurred and been dealt with in the classroom. Like a review of a production, pedagogical publications can paradoxically often feel both exhilaratingly new and yet already past. They document and promote approaches that, even as they ideally foster newer, more reflective, and more innovative teaching practices, play catch up to what is happening on the ground—in our classrooms around the globe. Despite this inherent belatedness, it is still important to examine even our most established and conventional teaching tools and activities,

and to bring “actual stage performance”—in its many live and mediated instantiations—into the discourses that inform Shakespeare and drama pedagogy.¹⁹

Notes

1 In *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, Lukas Erne has challenged the idea that Shakespeare's plays were created, in the first instance, as scripts. W.B. Worthen challenges Erne's thesis, arguing that it constructs performance as secondary and derivative (*Shakespeare Performance* 33–49). Regardless of Shakespeare's intentions, performance pedagogies assume that the plays are scripts and can therefore be productively explored through performance.

2 When compared to literary frameworks, emphasizing the textual analysis of themes, images, and character, performance pedagogies have been identified as a very effective way to encourage student learning and engagement. (Gilbert 607–608; LoMonico; Costa; Esposito).

3 Lois Potter mentions taking students to see plays, but she does not discuss this as a technique, tool, or subject for teaching at any length (236). In 2018, I led a seminar on teaching live performance at the annual meeting of Shakespeare Association of America. The seminar featured fifteen papers and a lively audience. This participation suggests growing interest analyzing conventions of teaching (with) live performance.

4 I have also had this experience, which others document too. Writing in 1999, Lois Potter also indicates that her university-level students have little to no experience with live productions of Shakespeare, or drama generally (236). Banks describes a production at Shakespeare's Globe where 82 percent of the audience's 1,500 students, ages 11–16 had never seen a live Shakespeare play (32). Writing in 2018, Boyer at University of Toronto, also suggests that her students have little, if any experience with live theatre.

5 These are some of the questions raised in the papers and discussion in the 2018 Shakespeare Association seminar, “Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance.”

6 I have not yet found an article on this type of “drama on stage” course in theatre-, drama-, or pedagogy-oriented journals. Riggio’s edited collection *Teaching Shakespeare through Performance* excludes articles dealing with teaching related to Shakespeare theatres and festivals. Homan surveys the range of Shakespeare festivals and other venues that instructors can utilize in teaching, although he does not suggest what instructors might do to prepare students for viewing at the festival. Richmond discusses the earliest incarnations of a UC Berkeley study-abroad course at the reconstructed Globe.

7 For example, Shakespeare on Stage courses exist at Barnard College / Columbia University (New York City), Iona College (New Rochelle, New York), Southern Oregon University (in Ashland, OR), and University of Warwick (Warwick England, near Stratford upon Avon). Examples of Study Abroad courses can be found through the Brooklyn College Summer Program in London, University of New Hampshire’s Cambridge Program, Butler University, Georgetown University, High Point University, St. Mary’s College of Maryland Summer Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon, St. Michael’s College (Colchester, VT), Texas State in England – Shakespeare, Villanova’s “Shakespeare in London,” CEA Study Abroad, and the Oxford Study Abroad Program. In terms of exceptions, I have also found Shakespeare on Stage-type courses that promise the viewing of one or more professional productions at: Carleton University (the class involves a trip to the Guthrie), Kent State University (the class involves a

trip to the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA), Lawrence College (Appleton, WI), and Texas A&M International University (Laredo, TX) (the course description states that the class involves live and filmed Shakespeare).

[8](#) It is possible to locate similar theatres and festivals on other global regions, such as Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, Europe, and Asia (Gregio).

[9](#) The \$425 course fee covers tickets to at least four plays, round-trip transportation, and three nights' lodging in a dorm where, to help keep costs low, students can cook for themselves.

[10](#) For Miller, “performances of Shakespeare’s plays are interpretations” (55); Jill Levenson (115) and Walter Eggers (273) among others concur. Worthen points out that performance-as-interpretation is text-centric, constructing performance as less a work of art than a commentary or even paraphrase (“Reading the Stage,” esp. pp. 74–76; 82). I contend that interpretation can be more than paraphrase. Moreover, the text-centric notion can be destabilized if we read performance as an engagement with text *and* legacies of reception in criticism and performance.

[11](#) Christy Carson also advocates exploring performance in situated contexts. Her web-based *Designing Shakespeare* promotes “a situated analysis of the creative process and away from an evaluation of the creative product devoid of context” (278). The Royal Shakespeare Company’s site, “Exploring Shakespeare,” “increasingly makes it possible to place the current production into a context of earlier work by the Company,” even as it consolidates the authoritative status of the RSC’s educational sites (279).

[12](#) For instance, sessions on *Midsummer* have addressed why there so much violence in this play. Those on *Romeo and Juliet* have explored genre, and the play’s comic matrix. For *Richard III*, I have explored why there are so many characters in the play.

[13](#) Although one issue dominates the critical and performance history, the issue is can be framed in different ways: Is *Taming* a feminist or anti-feminist play? Or, are Kate and Petruchio playing a game at the end? For a masterful lecture on the question, “Is Kate Tamed?”, see Emma Smith’s podcast on *Taming* in the Approaching Shakespeare series from Oxford University.

[14](#) This edition lacks line numbers, so references are to page numbers.

[15](#) Michael McClintock uses this exercise with *A Shrew* (163–64).

[16](#) Reviewers are not ideologically or critically neutral, especially with a play like *Taming*, where it is difficult even to summarize the play in an unbiased way (see Emma Smith). On the “review discourse” surrounding *Taming* (Hodgdon 1–38).

[17](#) Often, making this list can require improvisation, since students working with examples from film will notice elements like camera-angles, close-up or medium-range shots. I use these comments to address differences between film and live performance, recording these elements on a different section of the board, titled “film.”

[18](#) A few days after the performance, students turn in a short essay in which they explain why they chose the passage, the interpretive choices they made, and how those choices relate to a larger issue in the play—usually the development of a character or a theme. To grade these, I factor the students’ evident preparation for the performance, but I emphasize their explanation of

what they were trying to do in the context of their work with the passage and performance history, not their actual performance ability. In terms of the performance, I am prepared to work with students on alternatives. For instance, a student with a severe stutter asked whether she could write out the memorized passage for me privately and then present to the class about how she would perform it, since it was easier to speak casually to the class than formally rehearse something.

[19](#) Research was partially supported by a course release grant from the ISU College of Arts and Letters in spring 2016. A version of this paper was presented in the “Part-time Shakespeare” seminar at the 2016 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA), and I am grateful for the comments and feedback I received. As mentioned above, I also explored these ideas with a 2018 SAA seminar on “Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance,” which confirmed both the absence of work in this area. I appreciate the seminar participants’ interest in exploring this topic with me.

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