Shakespeare and Performance Pedagogy: Overcoming the Challenges

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS Although performance-based pedagogy has clearly given new life to

Performance pedagogy; the study of Shakespeare, with 'performance' or 'active' approaches becoming increasingly dominant as a method, acquiring the status of *the* 'proper' way to teach Shakespeare, it is important to examine shakespeare; pedagogy; performance; active approaches the limitations of this method. This article will begin by surveying the theoretical basis for performance pedagogy and the spectrum of performance methods available and will then go on to address three issues: limitations of time, deficient student acting and lack of teacher expertise. The issue of time can be addressed by the cost– benefit analysis of methods, the use of alternative approaches, the incorporation of film and desk-based performance. Poor acting can be improved through the acting exercises of Cicely Berry. Teachers can compensate for a lack of theatrical expertise by taking courses and studying the materials recommended in the article.

The performance method of teaching Shakespeare can no longer by any stretch of the imag- ination be designated a 'new' methodology. Based upon the performance theories of Grice, Schechner and Worthen, the earliest 'performance' or 'active'[1] methodologies for teach- ing Shakespeare were initiated by Homer Swander in the 1960s (Showalter 2003, 80) and began to bubble into being in the 1970s, a burst of pedagogical creativity embodied in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* special edition of 1984 that was devoted to this topic. In addition to the efforts of individual academics, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Cambridge University Press, the Royal Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare's Globe,

among others, have fostered and developed this approach to teaching Shakespeare. In his introduction to the 1990 special teaching issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Ralph Allen Cohen (1990) concludes that performance pedagogy has become so accepted as to represent a methodological 'given' and that 'the argument for its benefits has won the field' (iii). Performance pedagogy has become an – or perhaps 'the' – established practice for teaching Shakespeare.

While this may have been theoretically true, as a university student in the 1990s, I never encountered this methodology. Nevertheless, as a novice teacher confronted with the dif- ficult task of teaching *Julius Caesar* to a group of easily-bored adolescents, despite having

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never heard the words 'performance pedagogy' or 'active approaches', I quickly seized upon performance as the most efficient way to engage the interest of the class, as I am certain many other practitioners have done in the past.[2] But I was the only teacher in that institu- tion to do so. Indeed, *English Journal*, the flagship publication of the National Council of Teachers of English (which focuses on secondary school English education) in the United States, did not dedicate issues to this topic until 2002 and 2009, which suggests the much later dispersal of this method to the high school classroom. However, it is impossible to know with certainty precisely how prevalent these active approaches are because to date, no comprehensive survey of Shakespeare teaching methods has recently been undertaken in the United States, while in the UK, the first such survey in 30 years is only now beginning (Olive 2017, 2).

It is therefore difficult to know precisely to what degree performance methods have moved from the scholarly publication to the classroom. Nevertheless, performance or active methods dominate conference workshops and in-service courses, suggesting that these methods are widely used.[3] In the 2008 British government publication, *Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages* (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008), these active approaches pervade the text, which includes contributions from the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Globe, and in 2013 *The RSC Toolkit for Teachers* (Royal Shakespeare Company 2013), a guide that advocates the use of performance methods in the classroom, was sent to every government-funded secondary school in the UK (Winston 2015, 54). On the other side of the Atlantic, the Folger Shakespeare Library's 'Declaration on Common Core State Standards' (O' Brien 2017) similarly highlights the centrality of performance methods in Shakespeare education. Books and articles published over the last two decades often focus on performance, but – perhaps more tellingly – even books that do not espouse an explicitly performative or active approach nevertheless often centralise such methods without providing an explicit rationale, as if these methods should be taken for granted.[4] When performance methodologies have assumed such a taken-for-granted status, then clearly they have truly 'arrived'.

And for good reason – the advantages of performance or active methods are numerous: increased student engagement, overcoming resistance to the study of Shakespeare, focus on close-reading of the text, active learning and giving students agency are some of the more important benefits of this pedagogy. These advantages are well-documented in the research literature, and, familiar with the published encomia for this method, when I first implemented this pedagogy, I had high expectations. Those expectations were fulfilled, but I also encountered problems and limitations, which are rarely documented in the research literature. Encountering other Shakespeare instructors at conferences, I soon learned that these challenges were shared by my colleagues. The purpose of this essay is to take a frank look at the problems and limitations and to focus on how they may be overcome. It should be noted that all the problems that I will discuss in this essay *can* be overcome if one is aware of their existence and makes a conscious effort to work through and around these issues.

In terms of level, I experimented with using performance methods in undergraduate, graduate and even high school classrooms, so the observations in this essay are broadly applicable. While differences among these levels

certainly exist and are often significant, nevertheless, the differences were less marked than the similarities. The same issues recurred with regard to performance methods, despite the gulf in age, knowledge and experience that otherwise divided these students.

The theoretical justification for performance pedagogy

According to Edward Rocklin (2005), the justification for performance pedagogy can be traced back to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, in which he discusses the cen- trality of 'language games', as further developed by Austin's speech-act theory. Educators utilising this methodology take literally the title of Austin's seminal work, *How to Do Things with Words*, in order to reframe the text as a script whose function is to produce a per- formance, a performance that will embody an interpretation of the play. John Barton, the Royal Shakespeare Company director whose video series and book *Playing Shakespeare* is an essential resource for anyone engaging in performance-based teaching, centres his approach around the 'pragmatic question', 'How does Shakespeare's text actually work?', later on explaining that 'we want to show how Shakespeare's own text can help to solve the seeming problems in that text' (Barton 1984, 7). He explores questions about how various 'technical' features of the text, such as blank verse, elision, prose, antithesis, etc., can inform the actor's practice by functioning as the kind of stage directions largely absent from the folios and quartos. He thus demonstrates how analysis of the text can drive performance by interpretation of the intentionality of its key elements.

Citing Barton's practices, Rocklin (2005) takes things one step further by simplifying Barton's question to: 'What do these words *do?*' (75). What does the title *do*? What does this line *do*? What does this word *do*? Finding the connection between any given fragment of discourse and its purpose, its function as a performative becomes the basis for classroom analysis. This analysis, rather than focusing on the production of a final product, focuses on the *process* of interpreting a dramatic text through embodiment combined with linguistic and rhetorical study (Esposito 2016). Embodiment thus encourages students to go beyond the traditional forms of textual interpretation normally taught in classrooms to forms that incorporate physicality (Flynn 2017). In contrast to textual study, embodiment allows for more nuanced exploration of the non-verbal elements of dramatic texts (Esposito 2016).

Analysing the ambiguities in the script, the dramatic choices left to the discretion of the actor or director, allows the class to explore the implications of different ways of performing the same lines: 'one of the simplest but most fundamental skills we must master in learning to read drama is the skill to discover how the same speech can be used to perform different or even radically divergent speech acts' (Rocklin 2005, xviii). The example that Rocklin cites is simple, but powerful; Hamlet's first words in the play of this name are 'A little more than kin, a little less than kind' (1.2.68), but this line has radically different implications, depending upon to whom the actor chooses to address it:

> [D]ifferent Hamlets can be sharing their contempt as a secret with us as spectators, putting us in the one-up position; or be seeking to create or perpetuate a division within the court, perhaps to produce a moment of turbulence in the King's carefully orchestrated sense of har- mony; or be directly confronting the new ruler with a challenge to his authority that forces the king to make an instantaneous decision about how he will meet this insulting action from his stepson. (Rocklin 2005, xix)

Actually performing this scene highlights the necessity of making such a choice and brings to the forefront the notion that 'when a character speaks, he or she is doing something through language' (Rocklin 2005, xix).

The true uniqueness of performance-based teaching lies in the manner in which it gives agency to the student by placing the words of the author in the mouth of the pupil and allowing her or him to embody, and thus interpret, those words. As Rocklin writes:

If the current paradigms in English often define themselves as teaching students to read either *with* or *against* the grain of the text, a performance-centred paradigm widens the curriculum by teaching students to read *through* the grain of the text. That is, reading drama encourages students to develop their own power by rehearsing and shaping that text in performance. (Rocklin 2005, 82)

An essay written by a high school student for *English Journal* takes a similar point of view: 'When you read it by yourself silently, you're examining Shakespeare from the outside and trying to look in. When you're acting it out, though, you're inside the play, looking out at the world. Then it comes alive' (Almansouri, Balian, and Sawdy 2009, 36). Students are not merely discussing the text, but rather working *through* it.

Of course, this type of enhanced textual focus is one of the primary goals of the English literature classroom. Michael LoMonico therefore refers to performance in the classroom as 'a form of close reading: it's close reading on your feet' (LoMonico 2009, 24). The act of performance entails a precise and unremitting engagement with Shakespeare's scripts, an important step in acquiring the kind of 'textual power' that Scholes recognises as the culmination of English literature pedagogy (Scholes 1985). When physically enacting these texts, no words can be ignored, thus 'a practical, performative engagement with the text almost always engenders a far greater understanding of the play' (Van der Walt 2016, 99). Marshall Gregory similarly explains how performance embodies knowledge: 'Actors cannot perform merely on the basis of knowledge *about* a character or a historical period or a dramatic genre. Such knowledge is not irrelevant or unimportant, but before it becomes useful, actors have to learn to take knowledge *about* and transfer it into the ability to *do*' (Gregory 2006, 322). Abstract knowledge becomes action and lived experience. In her book describing the practices of the Globe Education programme, Fiona Banks explains that performance marries the physical to the intellectual, making 'deeper and lasting' learning possible (Banks 2013, 5).

Perhaps the strongest appeal of this method lies in the power it gives to the pupil. In traditional classrooms, most of the authority lies in the hands of the instructor, the 'one person' who sets the lesson plans, lectures or directs discussion, assigns tasks and deter- mines the final grade of each student. Showalter, Rocklin and other performance theorists point out that a lesson in the classroom is really a performance by the teacher with the students as a captive audience, whereas performance-based teaching reverses this hierarchy by 'invit[ing] them to develop their own power through rehearsing and shaping that text in performance' (Rocklin 2005, 82). The teacher's dominance is reduced because the text becomes the property of the pupil as she or he mediates and interprets it through her or his body. This promotes the kind of 'active learning' that has been demonstrated to be more effective than the mere passive reception of lecture material:

Students who see themselves as passive receivers of packaged wisdom are likely to learn less than those who find themselves actively engaged in a process of discovery. This is true not only because they are more apt to remember what they have struggled to learn than what they have been told, but also because they are apt to learn more as a by-product of that struggle. Or, to put it even more positively, if they are simply to absorb what I say, they can never learn more than I know; but if they are asked to search for themselves, they may find something I have overlooked. (O' Brien 1984, 621–2)

When students take ownership of their learning, then they are motivated to do more and go further. As Banks observes, they cease to view Shakespeare as a 'dead cultural icon whose meaning is set in stone' and instead 'make it relevant to themselves, thus reinventing Shakespeare for the current age' (Banks 2013, 6).

This championing of active learning processes, of course, has its origins in modern edu- cational theory. Interestingly enough, however, these concepts are also reflected in acting theory, with its focus on Stanislovkian action; as Uta Hagen and Haskel Frankel (1973) writes: '*Real thinking precedes, is accompanied by, and follows action. Real thinking is active*' (65). Performance pedagogy enables this type of 'real thinking' by transforming literary interpretation into an active, embodied process of dramatic discovery of Shakespearean plays. No longer a tangential framework superimposed upon independently existing texts, analysis of the plays becomes intrinsic to the

development of a performative enactment.

Along with endorsing this type of active learning, advocates of performance-based teach- ing often argue that Shakespeare's intention for his dramatic texts was that they should function as scripts to serve as the basis for performance. However, recent research has blurred this narrative: Worthen describes the tripartite nature of Shakespeare's work, how it simultaneously inhabits the world of the theatre, of orality and of literature:

> Shakespeare's plays were written at the intersection of three institutions that continue to exert pressure on drama and performance. First, they were written as saleable commodities in a new mode of cultural and economic production, the emerging professional theatre. Although writing was used very differently in that theatre from how it is today, Shakespearean drama par- ticipated in the invention of a recognizably modern institution, in which playscripts are trans- formed into a different kind of commodity, dramatic performance. Second, Shakespeare's plays also responded directly to a rich oral culture. Our understanding of language and knowledge have been forever altered by the impact of print; yet the Western stage remains an important site for the transformation of writing into the embodied discourses of action, movement, and speech. Finally Shakespeare's plays were also part of an emerging publishing industry. The fact that Shakespeare's plays were printed not only saved them from oblivion, but also marked the beginning of a fundamental transformation in their status (and in the status of drama), from performance to print commodities. (Worthen 2003, 3)

Shakespeare's dramas were composed as scripts, but they were not *only* scripts; they were also incorporated into Early Modern oral culture as well as into print culture. Indeed, Lukas Erne (2013, 37) has demonstrated that Shakespeare's works were bestsellers during his lifetime, suggesting that from the outset Shakespeare's works were important not only as playscripts, but also as texts. Nevertheless, despite the dramas' profitable moonlighting as texts, the primary purpose of these works was clearly theatrical enactment, and approaching the texts in this way clarifies for students the function of many dramatic elements.

Defining a spectrum of performance-based methods

There is a broad range of methods that fall under the rubric of performance pedagogy. To quote the succinct, if somewhat facetious, statement offered by Louisa Newlin: '[T]he academic community's discovery that Shakespeare wrote plays is startlingly recent' (1984, 598). At its crux, this is precisely what the performance method entails: a realisation that the plays of Shakespeare are, in fact, scripts and that it behoves the instructor to teach them as such. In the words of Swander:

> Having freed ourselves from the illusion that Macbeth is a novel by Bradley or a poem by Leavis, we must not waste the next thirty or fifty years under the illusion that what we possess is a film or-even-a play by Shakespeare. What we have is a script – of a very special kind. (Swander 1984, 528)

As with any scripts, the plays of Shakespeare offer a range of possible interpretative options for the actor or director to choose. A metaphor that is often deployed in discussions of per- formance pedagogy is that of the musical score or a recipe, which provide a pattern without dictating the finished product (e.g. Banks 2013; Blair 2006; Flachmann 1984). Although these musical and culinary metaphors have their flaws, they do point to the transformational work of actors. Or, in the simpler words of Schechner: 'It cannot have a meaning except when you begin to behave it' (1999, 139). Performance pedagogy asks students to 'behave' the plays – or to analyse the behaviour of other actors.

Performance pedagogy can thus be defined as an approach that treats these works as scripts to be performed, rather than texts to be read. The practitioner focuses on the gaps in the script, on the possibilities inherent in play texts, allowing students to make choices – to 'behave' the plays – and helping students to analyse the interpretative decisions of others. Rocklin's definition of this method is more inclusive than most:

> The core of a performance approach asks students to analyse, cast, rehearse, sometimes mem- orise, and perform part of a

play, as well as to observe, respond to, and critique these per- formances. But performance also includes reframing a wide array of concepts and practices traditionally employed in the literary study of drama. And this model also teaches students to work with performance records, film, and video. (Rocklin 2005, xvi)

Rocklin's definition encapsulates the broadness of this form of pedagogy and the variety of activities that are advocated in the name of performance pedagogy; both engaging in performative experiences and analysing these experiences, as well as the performances of others, are included. Similarly, Milla Cozart Riggio points out the wide scope of performance pedagogy as 'more than simply an approach or an option – provid[ing] a holistic frame with a broad range of options and implications' (1999, 1).

At one extreme, some advocate that performance-based teaching entails performing an entire play (not merely a part, as Rocklin stipulates), with memorisation, costumes, rehears- als and an audience. At the other extreme are those who, while supporting performance pedagogy, assert that 'it will not do to replace one extreme with the other and turn the classroom, so long an adjunct to the study, into an antechamber to the theatre ... I believe that Shakespeare's plays are best realised in the theatre of the imagination' (Hawkins 1984, 519). In this approach, performance pedagogy becomes a sensibility, an attitude toward the text rather than a literal enactment of these dramas.

Mostly inhabiting the space between these extremes, instructors suggest a range of activ- ities, some involving actual performance, others a performance sensibility (see Figure 1).

While relatively few engage in a full-blown, full-length staging of one of the plays, as for example Kelman and Rafe (2013) do in Australia, staging selected scenes in the context of a schoolwide or regional Shakespeare festival has become popular. Perhaps the most common form of performance takes place within the classroom, involving the acting of individual scenes or soliloquies prepared by the students themselves and commented upon by the class, although choral readings are also a frequently cited method. These performances sometimes involve costumes, props and memorisation, sometimes none of the above. They may require an extensive investment of time on the part of the instructor and students, or

Formal Informal Improvisational Video Theatre of the Performance Performance Exercises or audio Imagination

Figure 1. a spectrum of performance-based activities.

little preparation. Michael Boecherer (2010) observes that such performances have the advantage of being closer to Shakespeare's Globe because of the simpler, more utilitarian setting, without scenery or elaborate special effects. Whatever the specific method used, the idea behind it is to make the plays come alive for the student as embodied performance because '[t]o study Shakespeare's plays and not to take part in them or at least to see regular and frequent productions, is like studying Mozart and never actually hearing a note of his music' (Wilders 1994, 143). Indeed, one strand of performance instruction suggests literally setting Shakespeare to music by integrating popular

music into classroom performances of both plays and sonnets, as, for example, Luhrman does in *Romeo+Juliet* (Buhler 2016, 231). More commonly, many instructors attempt to incorporate rehearsal-room techniques into the classroom (e.g. Edmiston and Mckibben 2011). Thompson and Turchi (2016) empha- sise the importance of using such techniques in a focused, purposeful manner so that the process of learning is productive as well as engaging.

Another classroom technique derived from the theatre is improvisation. These improv- isations may involve creatively resolving lacunae in the text, for example, in *Julius Caesar* answering the question: after the conspirators left, what did Brutus actually recount to Portia about the nature of his dilemma and plans? Pupils can be asked to create and enact this omitted scene, delving into character and plot. In other improvisational techniques, students can be asked to personalise a dramatic situation, to enact a scene in pantomime, to develop an understanding of characterisation through role-playing techniques or to engage in warm-up improvisational games before acting in an actual Shakespearean scene. Some improvisational techniques can actually stray quite far from the text at hand, the purpose being to eventually return to the text with greater insight and understanding. One such technique analyses character performatively by asking students to create a non-verbal representation of the relationships in the play (Esposito 2016):

> Live sculptures depict the relationships among characters in each scene of a drama. Students freeze in place, becoming individual statues in a larger grouping. Through spatial placement, bodily position, gesture, and facial expression, they create a tableau summing up the connec- tions among characters. (Hakaim 1993, 67)

This is a silent version of the 'spectrogram' advocated by Allie Howe and Robert Nelson (1984, 633), which physically depicts relationships within the play. Another such activity

proposed by Hakaim is to enact a 'talk show' that focuses on major thematic issues: 'I like to schedule talk shows ... with topics like "Fathers Who Oppose Their Daughter's Marriages," "Arranged Marriages Today," "Men Who Love the Same Woman," ... "Do You Believe in Fairies"...' (Hakaim 1993, 70). Other improvisations can include generating a rhetorically parallel situation; for example, when studying Lady Macbeth's successful persuasion of her husband, students can enact a situation where students are trying to persuade a peer to allow them to copy her or his homework (Cantwell 2014, 26). Improvisations can also focus on the social environment of the plays, such as having the residents of Verona meet to brainstorm solutions to the problems with street violence (Winston 2015, 49).

While at first glance such activities may seem excessively detached from the substance of the play, they can be surprisingly helpful in helping students to grasp characterisation and conflicts. While there is some debate about the productiveness of these techniques and whether they all fall under the rubric of performance, the classroom use of video productions has been the most controversial of all performance-related issues. James Bulman, for example, has reservations regarding the use of film:

> For the uninitiated – those who have not learned to read Shakespeare intelligently – the tape may become the play, as fixed as any Hollywood production, not merely an interpretation of the play. Worse, the lazy student may allow viewing the tape to serve as a substitute for reading the text, and be never the wiser. (Bulman 1984, 571)

Bulman's fears may be misplaced, however, because a recent study has demonstrated that students actually apprehend the text more readily when viewing a performance, rather than reading (Shoemaker 2013), so despite its interpretive limitations, film may still be worth bringing into the classroom. (Of course, by now, with the easy availability of Shakespeare video on the internet, instructors have no hope of preventing students from accessing videos on their own.) If, despite its potential problems, the utilisation of video in the classroom is accepted, the next question is how to use it: before, during, after, or even *instead* of the reading of the play? There are advocates for all of these (e.g. Shohet 2010), and film is also cited as an important element in generating engagement in students who spend much more of their free time in front of a screen than in front of a text (Samson 2013). As one Sri Lankan scholar asserts, noting that film aids both comprehension and pronunciation, film can be particularly useful to non-

native speakers, for whom early modern English may be especially challenging (Fonseka 2013). In any case, a performance-oriented approach requires students not merely to passively watch the video, but to critique, to compare and contrast different versions, to view any given audio or video recording as an interpretation because 'there can never be a performance of Shakespeare that is not at the same time an *interpretation* of Shakespeare' (Reynolds 1991, 199).

Viewing live performances can also invigorate the classroom study of Shakespeare, and of course such outings are encouraged by both Globe Education and the Royal Shakespeare Company. In fact, live performance is considered so integral to the study of Shakespeare that it is incorporated into the Royal Shakespeare Company manifesto: 'Do it on your feet; see it live; start it earlier' (Winston 2015, 13). To make viewing live performances possible for more children, the Royal Shakespeare Company initiated a programme called 'Young People's Shakespeare' to bring abridged performances to schoolchildren in England. Live performance certainly brings an energy and excitement to the study of Shakespeare that is difficult to replicate with other methods; however, for those of us at a geographical disadvan- tage, for whom viewing a theatre performance is simply not possible, technology provides

viable substitutes in recorded live performance as well as cinema. While video recordings do not share the immediacy and excitement of live performance, they have the advantage that one can stop at any point for discussion and that they can be viewed piecemeal.

Other forms of performance pedagogy incline more toward the sensibility side of the scale. Pupils are often asked, either orally or in writing, to review or to compare and contrast the performances they observe, or to analyse a scene prior to their own enactment of it. Pupils may be asked to make directorial decisions about scenery, props, costumes or other aspects of production, without necessarily enacting these choices, but rather defending them orally or in writing. Looking at the text, students may be expected to subdivide scenes into 'beats' or other units, which they then summarise by assigning a 'headline', linking to an emotion, or ascribing a purpose to the character. Punctuation, meter, stage directions and linguistic issues such as code-switching may be analysed with a performance orientation, not necessarily an actual performance, in mind.

One example of such an activity is Rocklin's 'What does repetition do?' exercise in which he asks students not to engage with an actual performance, but with the theatre of the imagination:

> As you reread *Richard III*, please note all the repetitions, of any sort and on any level ... Then ask yourself: 'If I noticed this repetition during a performance, or if I notice it now in reading and let it guide the imaginary performance in my mind, then what do I make of the connection? What has the dramatist for the performance invited me to discover? What meaning emerges from the experience of this repetition?' (Rocklin 2005, 226–7)

As Rocklin envisions it, performance is not merely a type of activity, but also a way of thinking about the text; thus, a physical performance is not a precondition for engaging in performance pedagogy.

Even though such a wide range of activities, orientations and techniques belong in the category of performance pedagogy, all of these activities have certain underlying assump- tions in common, of course; they all assume that to perform is to interpret, that '[a]cting out a scene is a form of close reading: it's close reading on your feet' (LoMonico 2009, 25). So, I will discuss some of the problems associated with the different forms this pedagogy assumes in the classroom and how these problems may be overcome.

A matter of time

When considering individual pedagogical practices within the framework of perfor- mance-based instruction, the issue of time is central to any cost–benefit analysis one may attempt. Certainly, the Achilles heel of performance

pedagogy is time, as Miriam Gilbert explains:

> No one will argue that getting students to perform a scene in class, or even to work on an exercise related to a scene, is anything other than a very slow way of dealing with a play. It takes students time to prepare, either in or outside of class; it takes time to watch the performance, and even something that runs only five minutes will take twice that long by the time chairs are arranged, the scene performed, and the chairs rearranged. More importantly, only a small section of the play can be considered, even if students have prepared carefully contrasting scenes. (Gilbert 1984, 602)

Whereas more traditional approaches to teaching Shakespeare can be quite time-effi- cient, covering large blocks of text by requiring students to read or watch the plays and

do substantial written work at home, performance-based methods are inherently more time-consuming, as they usually require the observation of some form of performance, usually by the class as a group. Returning to Figure 1, in looking at the spectrum of perfor- mance activities, it becomes clear that the closer an activity is to the performance end of the scale, the more time-consuming that activity is likely to be. To take the most extreme example, a performance for an audience of an entire play with costumes and props will require a great deal of planning and rehearsal time, whereas the reading of the drama in the theatre of the imagination can be done as a homework assignment. Assigning pupils to create and perform parallel modern scenes will require a greater investment of time than simply watching those scenes on video or viewing on YouTube modern parallels created by others. In an interview, Styan explains that the investment of time entailed by such performances is worthwhile because it represents a more powerful, experiential form of learning:

> I can give a lecture, on *Twelfth Night* say, which brings out all the important points one after another, and the whole thing is over in fifty minutes. However, not one bit of it, not one word of it, will have the same value it would have if the students had discovered it for themselves. (Peat 1980, 146)

This is even truer in high school, where long lectures are unlikely to sustain student attention. Many proponents of performance cite this reduced pace as an advantage that leads to closer, more careful examinations of the play. Despite the importance of these arguments, with so many high school teachers facing increased testing and curricular standardisation, time is more of a problem than ever; and time is always a constraint in a 14-week university course, which often constitutes the students' *last* course in Shakespeare.

Performance methods in the wrong hands have the potential to squander a great deal of time while accomplishing little: 'Drama used effectively in the English language arts classroom can increase students' interest, participation and, most important, their thinking about text, themselves, and the world. Conversely, drama used ineffectively can waste time and become a haven for chaos' (Perry 2007, 123). Of course, this statement is to some degree true of any method, but performance, because of its time-consuming nature, is particularly vulnerable to this fault. It is all too easy for an instructor unfamiliar or uncomfortable with theatrical practice to waste hours arranging the technical details of performances, while giving scarce attention to the higher purpose of the activity: 'locating and solving the impor- tant cruxes which define it as a unique and challenging work of art' (Flachmann 1997, 58). After all, the primary purpose of Shakespeare in the English-language arts classroom is not to produce entertainment, but to enhance the learners' language arts skills.

Indeed, although most performance or active techniques do promote literacy, some of the activities that are presented to teachers under the rubric of performance have only the most tenuous relationship to literacy instruction. I have attended a number of workshops where we were introduced to activities that were a great deal of fun; however, I saw no clear connection between these activities and the literacy goals of the English classroom. I am referring to acting exercises that have little bearing on the Shakespearean text being studied. For example, one such time-consuming activity, which would have taken a full class period, involved students standing and repetitively shouting several lines that were a minor feature of the text. I'm not sure if the purpose of the activity was to make

the students more at ease with performing or to show them that Shakespeare can be fun (or both). Even though teaching students to enjoy and to become comfortable with Shakespeare is an important

goal, when hours of classroom time are devoted to this kind of 'fun' at the expense of literacy instruction, I believe that a cost–benefit analysis is in order.

In many cases, limitations of time are a significant obstacle to teaching complete plays through performance pedagogy. The problem is usually surmounted by prioritising scenes, taking decisions about which scenes deserve a significant allotment of class time, which deserve a smaller measure of class time and which can be quickly dispensed with. Of course, one winces at the very thought that any of Shakespeare's texts could be subject to such cavalier treatment, yet such measures are often necessary if time-consuming performance methods are to be incorporated into the classroom.

The danger in this is that just as a microscope can distort the perspective of the viewer, in examining part of the play, the relationship between the parts and the whole may be lost: in focusing the class on only a few selected scenes in a given play, the structural functions of those scenes may be rendered unclear. Students may be left with an excellent under- standing of the elephant's eyes, his ears, his trunk, but with no understanding of how these parts come together to form a complete elephant. To mediate this problem, I recommend that teachers incorporate alternate performance modes or more traditional lecture–dis- cussion methods into the performance classroom. So, while some scenes would be taught using time-swallowing performance methods, the rest of the play could be 'covered' using approaches closer to the 'sensibility' side of the scale. For example, one such approach is to use video performances that include closed-captioning in order to 'cover' scenes, and YouTube videos can be utilised in a similar way (Desmet 2009; Shohet 2010; Walton 2006). Alternatively, the integration of non-performative methods into the performance classroom could compensate for the limitations of time imposed by this method.

Another option is a form of performance that is denigrated in the professional litera- ture – performing the text while students are safely ensconced behind their desks. To many practitioners, this type of performance does not merit the label: 'Performing Shakespeare does not mean having students sit at their desks reading aloud, or having students stand in front of the room reading aloud' (LoMonico 2009, 24). However, desk-based performance can be much more than just reading; it can constitute an extemporaneous – and faster – form of performance that can help accommodate the curricular demands of performing Shakespeare.

While desk-based performance is not ideal, nevertheless, it does have a great deal of utility in the classroom, and it certainly still requires pupils 'to make informed decisions' about the play; it represents a more primitive form of acting, rather than a different endeavour altogether. In fact, even for professional actors, the initial rehearsal is often a seated 'read through'. The element most bothersome to those who agree with LoMonico and Marshall, the lack of blocking and physical interaction, is precisely the advantage of this activity. Absent the necessity to focus on movement and interaction with their fellow actors, students can dwell upon the language, exploring the possibilities inherent in its richness without becoming distracted by other elements of performance, which can be overwhelming to the non-actor. Throughout *Playing Shakespeare*, Barton emphasises the importance of linguistic issues:

> I think the main thing is to trust the language. Every actor comes to this point when he approaches a text ... he thinks 'I know exactly how this character feels, I know the depth of his passion, and I know about what his brain is doing, but why have I got these flipping words

> in the way?' We have to come to terms with the fact that a character is not just what he says *but how he says it*. (Barton 1984, 15, italics added)

On her or his feet, conscious of being observed, needing to attend to movement, the stu- dent may find it difficult to

properly focus upon *how* the character speaks, on the iambic pentameter, on the presence of irony and on other key linguistic issues. Being permitted to sometimes perform from behind a desk can open an opportunity for the pupil to real- ise more fully the potentialities of Shakespeare's language by providing a bridge between reading and acting.

This activity also speaks to the issue of time: since in most classroom situations, perfor- mance-based teaching entails omitting large parts of the play, performing from the desk can provide a helpful compromise. Even though some of the richness of performance pedagogy is lost, the text has not been entirely omitted or lightly glossed over; rather, the focus has moved to linguistic elements of the play. As such, desk performance can provide a pedagogic bridge between time-consuming performance methods and traditional literary methods. A third advantage to this method is that it provides an avenue for the more introverted student to participate in performance: I have had many students who are too inhibited to stand up and perform, but who are willing to do so from behind the safety of their desks. This kind of performance, therefore, although not a substitute for more fully realised forms, can be a useful compromise and supplement in the classroom.

Generalising

One of the reasons that the performance classroom is particularly vulnerable to time-wast- ing is because student actors can do what John Barton refers to as 'generalising', acting that plays to the general mood or tenor of the scene, without reference to the specifics of the script. One of the fundamental assumptions of performance pedagogy is that students have to understand and interpret the words of the text in order to enact them; in the words of Michael LoMonico (2009, 25): 'Acting out a scene is a form of close reading: it's close reading on your feet'. This is certainly true for good acting. But a bad actor can perform chunks of texts with nothing more than the most general comprehension of what is going on. Furthermore, sometimes students seem to 'channel' a particular actor so, for example, they enact an imitation of Brando's Mark Antony, rather than constructing their own.

Theoretically, a teacher proficient in acting and performance methods can stop this sort of poor performance immediately and direct the student appropriately. However, an insufficiently knowledgeable instructor can waste huge swathes of classroom time by allow- ing this sort of pointless enactment of the play to go forward. A more traditional literary discussion or lecture class might also fail to use time efficiently; however, it is unlikely that hour upon hour would be spent on a mere literal, physical reading of the text. Performance done badly can squander large amounts of classroom time on precisely such a low-level enactment of the play.

To ensure that student-actors perform *through* the text and not around it, the teacher can turn to the work of Cicely Berry. This former voice director for the Royal Shakespeare Company has created a series of videos and a book, *The Working Shakespeare Library* (Berry 2004), in which she demonstrates acting exercises that focus on Shakespeare's language. The goal of these exercises is to arrive at a performed interpretation of Shakespeare's text by working *through* the words, not avoiding them or pushing them to the side, but coming to

appreciate their textures, their rhythms, the way they feel in the mouth, their embodiment in physical action. While students tend to see the text as obscure early modern language that needs to be 'translated' into contemporary English, these exercises help them to feel and apprehend the weight of Shakespeare's text.

For example, in one exercise Berry has the actors walk around the room and change direction at every mark of punctuation. Students come to understand the function of punc- tuation not only intellectually, but also to feel its meaning in their bodies. In other exercises, she has them, for instance, beat out the iambic pentameter, kick an object at the end of every line of text or perform a soliloquy as a dialogue. These activities help students to connect to the language by experiencing it in a new, embodied fashion. When such exercises are done before a performance, they help to avoid the above-mentioned sins of poor acting, such as 'generalising' and imitating famous actors. Even

beyond their benefits to student-actors, these exercises enrich comprehension and interpretation of the text and can also be a pro- ductive use of class time even when no enactment is in the offing.[5]

Lack of appropriate training

The potential for the problems of poor acting is partially rooted in the fact that performance methods are inherently acting and theatre-based, while most English teachers have received a literature-based education. It is edifying to read of a teacher who

> called in his extensive contacts for reinforcement, contacts he had made over the years in the Houston theater scene. As a graduate student at Rice University, he acted with the Rice Players under the directorship of Sandy Havens. As an acting student at the Alley Theater, he worked with Kate Pogue, head of drama and fine arts at Houston Community College Central Campus. As a director of several Shakespearean productions by Baker College at Rice University ... where he had the opportunity to meet Corin and Vanessa Redgrave. (Johnson 1998, 45)

For those of us who lack this kind of résumé – and may indeed lack even a single course in practical theatre or acting – performance methods may not be as effective as is depicted in the literature. As Mary Maher (1997, 39) points out, not without irony: 'Everyone believes herself/himself to be an expert on the subject of acting and no one believes that a critic needs training in that field before s/he offers an opinion about a performance'. Much of the literature on performance-based teaching simply assumes that everyone – or at least every- one who teaches Shakespeare – is a competent actor, director and critic of Shakespearean performances; however, logic would lead one to doubt the validity of this assumption.

When I use performance in the classroom, I draw heavily on my one college course in acting – I am not at all sure that without this course I would be a competent practitioner of performance-based teaching. Nor do I believe that one course is enough, although in-service training can certainly provide a partial remedy. Certainly, if performance methods are to continue to occupy a central place in the pedagogical repertoire, basic theatrical skills, as well as film studies, will need to become an integral part of teacher training.

In the interim, teachers can supplement their acting skills by taking courses at univer- sities, community colleges and community centres. Such courses have the potential not only to help with performance pedagogy, but also to enrich teaching in general because teaching is, in many ways, itself a performance. Indeed, in an article about his experiences as a student in an acting class, Marshall Gregory describes that rejuvenating effect that

the class has, not only on his ability to perform Shakespeare, but also on his pedagogical practice as a whole (Gregory 2006).

The library can also help, although the sheer number of resources may be overwhelm- ing, so I will cite those that I have found to be particularly helpful: John Barton and Cicely Berry have both books and videos that can provide acting and directorial guidance, while Mary Ellen Dakin's *Reading Shakespeare Film First* (Dakin 2013) is a valuable guide for those who lack expertise in teaching film. Dakin's *Reading Shakespeare with Young Adults* (Dakin 2009) provides many useful performance-oriented exercises.[6] Similarly, the Folger Shakespeare Library has produced invaluable teacher resources both on their website and in the form of their *Shakespeare Set Free* series of books. Rex Gibson's work is also indispen- sable, particularly *Discovering Shakespeare's Language* (Gibson and Field-Pickering 1998). Besides the issue of training, acting and directorial talent is also an issue. Even though it is difficult to extrapolate from the absence of data, and as far as I know, no survey on the subject has been attempted, it seems to me unlikely that every English teacher is capable of pulling off performance methodology successfully since it requires a willingness on the instructor's part to 'play', to experiment, to invite a certain element of messiness and uncertainty into the classroom – and also requires a certain level of acting or directorial skill. I believe

that anyone who finds this method burdensome or who simply feels impeded by a lack of the requisite background would be best advised to engage in those aspects of performance methodology closer to the sensibility side of the scale and to utilise other methods concurrently.

But even theatrical talent and training isn't enough: the acting that takes place in a theatre is qualitatively different from the acting that takes place in the performance-based Shakespeare classroom. Theatrical acting is transformational; it represents an attempt to produce a unified and compelling interpretation of a given script. In the English classroom, performance often has a diametrically opposite purpose; it is used to explore a *range* of possible interpretations. That is, in theatrical performance, the text is a tool for producing the performance, whereas in the literature classroom, performance is a tool for analysing the text. So we need a kind of training that combines both theatrical and literary approaches to performance.

Conclusion

I view all the above problems as hurdles to be overcome, rather than as permanent obstacles to engaging with performance in the classroom. The advantages of performance, particularly the enthusiasm it generates in students, heavily outweigh its limitations. Nevertheless, in order to maximise the utility of performance in the classroom, teachers may want to consider the issues of time, as well as the potential for time-wasting, opportunities for training, and the use of additional resources.

Notes

1. In the United States, this approach is usually referred to as 'performance', whereas in Britain it is often called an 'active' approach. I will use the terms interchangeably throughout. 2. In the introduction to a book of essays she edited, *Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance*, Milla Cozart Riggio (1999) cites an example of a teacher contributing to a book of essays published in 1881, who was already clearly using performance techniques, without naming

them as such, and in 1912 and 1917 articles that cited the importance of pedagogical performance of Shakespeare's plays were already being published in *English Journal* (Haughey 2012). 3. One example: at the 2017 National Council of Teachers of English convention, there were eight presentations on the teaching of Shakespeare, and all of them appeared to focus on performance. 4. Even in pedagogical guides that do not purport to propagate performance methods, performance is often an intrinsic, taken-for-granted part of the approach. For example, see *Teaching Shakespeare to Develop Children's Writing* and *Holistic Shakespeare*, both of which include activities that fall under the rubric of performance, even though the author's emphasis is on other theoretical approaches. 5. I have found that these exercises can be productively used with non-Shakespearean texts as well. 6. Although these resources are intended for the high school classroom, with adjustments they can be productively used in other settings.

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