

Digital Processes: Enabling the Teaching of Shakespeare(s): An Interview with, and Response to, Tom Bird (former Executive Producer of Shakespeare's Globe).

BELL, Henry

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Title: Digital Processes: Enabling the Teaching of Shakespeare(s): An Interview with, and Response to, Tom Bird (former Executive Producer of Shakespeare's Globe).

Author: Dr Henry Bell, Sheffield Hallam University. h.bell@shu.ac.uk

Abstract: This interview and response explore Tom Bird's reflections on how digital processes functioned within an educational context in relation to Shakespeare's Globe's large scale, international work delivered between 2012 and 2016 - specifically in relation to the 2012 *Globe to Globe Festival* and the 2014-2016 *World Hamlet* tour. The response contextualises the key points raised by Bird within the wider perspective of Rex Gibson's concept of teaching Shakespeare(s), applying this critical reading to current teaching practice, UK GCSE English Literature exam materials and educational resources created by Shakespeare's Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Key Words: Teaching Shakespeare, Digital Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Globe, Globe to Globe, Rex Gibson.

Interview with Tom Bird:-¹

The interview below is an edited response from face-to-face interviews conducted by Christie Carson, Amy Borsuk and Henry Bell on the 20th April, 2018. The nature of the interviews dictated that themed content was addressed through conversation as well as direct question asking. The editorial decision has been made to present the responses to these questions as

¹ Bird is currently Executive Director of York Theatre Royal (since 2017) but is interviewed for this journal in relation to his time at Shakespeare's Globe (2007-2017) where he worked as Executive Producer from 2012 and also Director of the Globe to Globe Festival for the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. In relation to the scope of this themed issue, whilst in these roles Bird programmed and ran, alongside Dominic Dromgoole, the 38 theatre companies from around the world to perform at the Globe to Globe Festival (see footnote two) and also sourced and programmed the venues to receive the World Hamlet tour (see footnote three).

continuous prose. All participants have seen the edited versions of these interviews and have granted consent for their responses to be represented in this way.

Tom Bird: With the Globe to Globe² festival and World Hamlet,³ the digital side of the projects were both an afterthought - being honest, they were originally conceived as live projects and then the various opportunities to digitise both of them arrived. With Globe to Globe, the Arts Council and the BBC launched a programme called The Space⁴ which was launched in the middle of the planning process for Globe to Globe and they were desperate for a large-scale flagship cultural product.

I think it is interesting that Globe to Globe and World Hamlet were fundamentally privately funded projects, as everything the Globe does is, but the digitisation of the content was supported by the public sector. Every time public money comes into the Globe it can be a problem because there are no reporting structures, there is no need for the levels of transparency than there is in the public sector. I believe this led to a misunderstanding of how important The Space was to Globe to Globe and how people experienced Globe to Globe. The Space posted the films they made of the shows two or three days later so you had a sort of digital festival running concurrently. Lots of people caught on to Globe to Globe because of The Space, because they could look at the content and think, 'actually this is quite interesting, this might be for me.' We put out a press release at the end of the festival

² A festival of 38 productions of Shakespeare's complete dramatic works, as well as an interpretation of the epic poem *Venus and Adonis*, which was produced at Shakespeare's Globe in 2012 as part of the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Each production was delivered in a different language by a theatre company of a different nationality (Dromgoole and Bird, 2012).

³ A two year tour of a production of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare's Globe conducted between 2014 and 2016, it visited 197 different countries and 202 different venues (Shakespeare's Globe, 2016)

⁴ Described by themselves as 'A digital agency established by Arts Council England and the BBC to help promote digital engagement across the arts and cultural sector.' (The Space, 2019). The Space posted digital captures of each production for free during the festival and are now hosted by Shakespeare's Globe's online streaming service, Globe Player.

describing all the new audiences - hundreds and hundreds of thousands and I just don't think it would have happened without the digital aspect of the project.

The massive, incredible, work that The Space did with 37 HD films of Shakespeare in different languages wasn't conceived at all as an educational resource from the Globe's point of view. I knew it would be an educational resource anyway, so I didn't feel I needed to demand that it had to be an educational resource. I insisted on as much subtitling as possible, which was quite complicated, and made sure that happened. The Globe to Globe films are still being used in educational contexts around the world, in Western China, for example, which is really exciting.

The various digital interactions that occurred with World Hamlet were always conceived as an educational resource by the British Council. This led to plenty of good things happening like, for example, when we played in Kiev, the British Council live broadcast the show to the whole of the Ukraine and to a lot of students and schools.

Having said this, the difficulty of bringing in educational elements with *Hamlet* was by far and away the most frustrating aspect of the whole project. The Globe Education Department could have put together a digital resource pack and sent it via something like DropBox to a community who were seeing the show or who were interacting with the show in every country but the Globe's departmental structure didn't really facilitate that. If I was to do it again, that's what I would do.

There were quite big capacity issues as well - the scale of that project was so huge that we just weren't able to give what it would have been good to be able to give in terms educational digital support - like stopping for a moment and saying, 'let's shoot 10 minutes of the show before we do the actual show itself.' There was, however, plenty of really amazing content - partly made by Dr Penelope Woods and Dr Malcolm Cocks but also the talking heads (from audience members). These became a way of us actually making the rest of the

project happen quite quickly. Quite early on, a Rwandan woman saw the show at the university performance and went on camera and talked about the links between what it means to do a play about revenge in Rwanda at this particular moment. That, for the first time, created at the Globe a realisation of the shifting social relevance of the project from place to place. It also allowed us to claim a sort of validity - because the content was digital we could send that out quite quickly and show how *Hamlet* has affected this person in Rwanda. We put it everywhere we could - the blog project, but also social media and YouTube as well as embedding it in emails that I sent to producers around the world and to journalists to highlight that this is a worthwhile thing.

We were as interested in audiences in Rwanda genuinely on the given night as much as we were interested in an audience in London. So there wasn't a massive compulsion to digitise the project on the road for the benefit of audiences in London because we weren't funded by audiences in London. I think it can be quite easy to underestimate the digital infrastructure around the world, you sometimes think, 'oh they won't have the resource to use this' and then they find ways to make it work. Often we would arrive somewhere and someone would be filming the show in HD and live streaming it so the production must exist, digitally, in lots of different places now.

There are challenges to this too - you find that people take that resource that you create and cut it up and suddenly populations are presented with a trailer with some of your show and then a picture of the President. This happened all the time; we were used as sort of soft propaganda for a theatre who wanted to get one over on all the other theatres in the country. This also happened in a teaching context with universities getting one over on all the other universities in the country by booking the show for free.

From a producer's perspective, I think you assume that the content creator has a degree of control, which they don't have: I think the digital realm means, unavoidably, that

the content creator surrenders a huge amount of control - in theory copyright law stops this - but in practice, once you get outside your own jurisdiction it goes out the door completely. Your content can therefore be taught in a way that was completely different from the intention of the project. Hypothetically, it wouldn't bother me if there was a classroom in Rwanda and a 14 year old that has got hold of that trailer and was using it as educational material. We didn't have the capacity to stop people recording the whole thing so there is probably an educational film of our World Hamlet in every country we visited - you just surrender control.

If I was to do it again, it would be wonderful to be more liberal and open minded with how people interacted with the project on a digital level - it would have been brilliant to have contracted actors and said, 'we have a complete open door digital policy, we would like to enable the project to be used educationally by saying everyone can make a film of this, in any way they want.' I think you are much better off finding a way of employing your artists that accepts and celebrates that's going to happen and therefore make it more teachable because you are not putting fences around it. With World Hamlet we were doing it after the fact, asking if it was alright if, for example, the British Council broadcasts this live all around Kazakhstan.

I am not massively surprised that the majority of digital Shakespeare resources are Anglo or English centred but, from my slightly niche perspective, I am a bit disappointed. I would love that to change obviously. An international approach to Shakespeare just makes you irreverent towards the plays themselves it's such a cliché but it's true - outside of this country and North America there is no problem with cutting the text, at all. I suppose this irreverent approach could lend itself to teaching with digital resources because otherwise you have a film which is four hours long, and you can't really sit a class down and watch it in a seminar for that length of time or, from the students' perspective, you aren't going to sit and

watch it on your mobile phone. For me, this backs up the realisation that the UK is the exception in terms of the protectionism of the artefact. Copyright, again, is a massive obstacle to a wider range of productions being used - the rules are different for educational contexts and that's a very important part of this discussion. Often this is a way of pushing it through, often actors would have problems with digital usage but when we said that a teacher wanted it, they would always say yes.

My favourite digital resources that I was with involved with at The Globe were the three productions of *Henry VI*, the year after Globe to Globe, which we played on the battlefields that are mentioned in the trilogy. Often we would show up, be playing in a pub car park in Yorkshire, and a lot of the people in the village helped us recreate the Battle of Towton, which had happened there.

In Barnet it rained heavily all day but that was the closest we came to the digital capturing of the content directing the live action. The BBC, who gave us the money to make the films, said they wanted to put a little camera in Henry's crown and it would be this thing called 'Crown Cam', so you can choose to watch the entire 9 hours of *Henry VI 1, 2 and 3* from the point of view of King Henry VI. We entertained it for ages and spent money on a costume to make it work and it became a big part of their production process. Being honest, it got in the way, so it was a bit of a pain. When the shows went out live on BBC online, in Barnet, in this kind of clearing where the Battle of Barnet happened, it rained so, so hard.

It's an interesting question to think if I had to give a teacher a box set of productions of the complete works, whether I'd choose to give them Globe to Globe or Globe on Screen. In terms of staging, if you gave them the Globe on Screen it's quite a small variety whereas the definition of 'how to do Shakespeare' would be much broader if you gave them Globe to Globe. If it was a theatre student, I would definitely give them Globe to Globe because, in terms of style, you would see right across the spectrum of what you could do on stage with

Shakespeare. In terms of teachers and schools being able to afford and access these materials, I don't think there is any point in The Globe charging for the Globe to Globe films in terms of what the rental or purchase fees brings in against the overall turnover of the organisation.

Response from Dr Henry Bell

I was struck, when interviewing Tom, how candid he was about the various digital projects he oversaw at Shakespeare's Globe in relation to what could have been done differently to enable more innovative, inclusive and beneficial digital resources for teachers. There was some advantage, therefore, in interviewing Tom at a moment when he no longer was employed by Shakespeare's Globe as well as when several years had passed in order to provide honest reflection on these large scale projects. My short response to this article is focussed on Bird's views in relation to his vision of a freer and more flexible release of digital resources for teachers and how this concept speaks directly to two key concepts in the field - the for/with/by framework of de-centred Applied Theatre projects and Rex Gibson's principle of teaching Shakespeare(s). Moreover, I will demonstrate, through some of my own practice, how digital teaching can function 'on-the-ground' in this way, how the current (2020) UK GCSE English Literature curriculum can encourage the use of linguistically and culturally pluralistic digital Shakespeare resources and, finally, address how current digital teaching resources clash or align themselves with Bird's vision of a digitally flexible relationship between classrooms and theatre companies that utilises a broad, international spectrum of resources.

As both an applied theatre practitioner and teacher, I felt a responsibility to encourage all the participants interviewed by the myself and the co-editors of this themed journal to consider how the resources which form part of their digital platforms, or theatre

projects, could be considered beyond how they function *for* the recipients of their work but also *with* and *by* the users for which they were designed.⁵ In this regard, Bird's consideration of how little control he had over recorded versions of World Hamlet tour come into sharp focus.

Hypothetically, it wouldn't bother me if there was a classroom in Rwanda and a 14 year old that has got hold of that trailer and was using it as educational material. We didn't have the capacity to stop people recording the whole thing so there is probably an educational film of our World Hamlet in every country we visited - you just surrender control.

In this hypothetical case, a Rwandan learner could author a response to Hamlet by curating digital content from this trailer with other digital materials. This speaks to the other interviews conducted by the editorial team of this themed issue - Robert Delamere's thoughts in relation to mix tape culture, as well as Digital Theatre+ creating a closed platform for users to cut together their material, but also Margaret's Bartley's reflections on how many learners using Drama Online are clip-focussed in their interactions with digitised Shakespeare performance. By accepting the loss of control over content, Bird is moving away from the notion of learners having content created 'for' them and moving towards a more pluralistic approach which enables and trusts learners to have content fashioned 'by' them. What excites me about this approach is that it is not simply an utopic vision for the a copyright-free future, rather it speaks directly to the principles of the 'active approaches' method at the centre of the work of Rex Gibson whose influence can be found not just in the work of the Royal Shakespeare Company but also in the million people who have purchased a Cambridge Schools Edition of a Shakespeare script (Wienand, 2016).

⁵ This concept is given prominence in Prentki and Preston (2009)'s key foundation text, *The Applied Theatre Reader* (10-11), leading both students and teachers of Applied Theatre to be aware of the importance of these notions in challenging traditional hierarchies in performance and teaching. The popularity of this concept when delivering undergraduate teaching in this area was a key reason behind the choice of this framework.

Before more directly considering the parallels between Bird and Gibson's worldview, it is necessary to consider how a text, key within the field but written in the early period of mass internet usage, can be relevant to a consideration of digital teaching practice in 2020. Gibson's 1998 work *Teaching Shakespeare* concludes with an appropriately timely passage in relation to the thoughts of the interviewees for this themed issue,

The internet enables students to create their own websites, publishing their work in a variety of forms, including videos of their own enactments of Shakespeare. In designing their Shakespeare websites, students become directors, actors, writers, illustrators, designers and programmers, In such ways, appropriate use of new technology can imaginatively expand possibilities for active Shakespeare. (Gibson, 1998, 246)

The eleven chapters which comprise *Teaching Shakespeare* are a persuasive account of not just how to teach Shakespeare in an active method but also an exploration of why these means are important for teachers. Aside from a brief section of the use of video (200-203) and half a page devoted to CD-ROM and the internet (223), the majority of these exercises and approaches are non-digital, partly due to the period in which the book was written, but Delamere and Bird's vision of learners creating their own curated responses to Shakespeare through digital means speaks directly to the methods relating to Gibson's belief that 'Shakespeare celebrates plurality' (23). Gibson's approach to video could also be read to include Bird's aspiration for audience members to use their filmed clips of live Shakespeare which they have attended: 'A detailed critical viewing reminds students that there is no such thing as *the* video, only *a* video that presents one particular vision of the play.' (202)

Another, un-intentioned, conceptual dialogue between Bird and Gibson can be found in Bird's stated 'disappointment' in the English language focus on the use of digital resources from Shakespeare productions in the classroom. Non-English language productions, for Bird, '[make] you irreverent towards the plays themselves' and, unlike the English language

versions of Shakespeare's work accessible via Globe On Screen, 'the definition of 'how to do Shakespeare' would be much broader' with the multi-lingual, international digital resources available from the Globe to Globe Festival. By advocating for students to have access to a multitude of interpretative approaches to Shakespearean text, Bird is echoing the principles of one of the most direct passages of Gibson's 1998 text:-

Forget 'Shakespeare', and think of 'Shakespeares' (...) The plays are capable of and invite diverse interpretations. They resist the notion of definite performance. (Gibson, 1998, 24)

With my own teaching, I can demonstrate, to some degree, how Bird and Gibson's perspectives could come together to function in the current realities of teaching Shakespeare. I write this response to Bird's interview in Nicosia which I am visiting as part of an Erasmus+ teaching visit to University of Cyprus where I am teaching English Studies undergraduate students about Teaching Shakespeare. Here, during a lecture about Gibson's pluralistic approach to teaching Shakespeare, I showed the students clips from Isango Company's production of *Venus and Adonis* at the Globe to Globe festival to help illustrate how these concepts can be considered in practice. This production not only combined vast linguistic diversity, being performed in Isizulu, Isixhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, Afrikaans and South African English, it also demonstrated a rich variety of styles including, opera, dance and physical theatre.

My experience in and Cyprus was eye opening in that having the digital materials to be able to show a group of students, who had previously approached Shakespeare's scripts from a literature perspective, could get this crucial point across before then exploring, on their feet, some of Gibson's active techniques in relation to plurality. In this way, active methods met digital processes - Dr Stella Achilleos, Assistant Professor at University of Cyprus commented,

The use of video clips from the Globe to Globe production of *Venus and Adonis* was very effective in demonstrating to students the immense interpretative potential offered by Shakespearean plays. (Author Correspondence, reproduced with permission)

As Bird himself states, non-English speaking productions of Shakespeare have, in his experience, enabled an irreverence to the texts which are part of exactly the sort of resistance to 'authenticity' which Gibson advocates. It is worth briefly emphasising that Gibson's de-centred approach is no longer a niche method on how to teach Shakespeare's works, one example of how this plural approach is now mainstream, in the UK, would be the assessment task found in AQA's English Literature A Level⁶ B assessments in which learners must 'explore different interpretations of your [set] texts.' (AQA, 2017) and, moreover, where each exam question includes the phrase, 'Remember to include in your answer relevant comment on Shakespeare's dramatic methods.' (AQA, 2017). This focus on interpretation over the search for authentic meaning opens up the potential for digital processes to augment pedagogical approaches. Earlier in the year I visited a secondary state school in Sheffield to assist Year 13 (17-18 year olds) with their interpretative approaches to *King Lear* in preparation for this assessment. A large part of this workshop was a practical seminar in which the pupils tried to connect the creative decisions made in the Belarus Free Theatre's adaptation of *King Lear* performed at the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival to key themes of the play. The teacher in charge of this class commented in anonymised feedback to me that,

I was struck by how, despite no one in class speaking or understanding Belarusian, the clips from the production sparked lively conversations about how to put the text on stage. I think it helped them to realise the range of possibilities that are out there - my only concern, as an English teacher, was that they could justify the choices made with the script - but the pupils all managed to find a way to do this. (Author Correspondence, reproduced with permission)

⁶ Public exams studied, traditionally in the UK, between the ages of 16 and 18.

This speaks directly to Bird's suggestion that, 'in terms of style, you would see right across the spectrum of what you could do on stage with Shakespeare.' As someone teaching Shakespeare across educational institutions as well as age groups, it strikes me that rather than positioning these non-English language productions as outside of the norm, I think an urgent re-consideration of syllabus materials is called for to enable teachers to make the most out of digital resources such as the Globe Player's Globe to Globe digital recordings.

This experience, in part, explains why I share Bird's disappointment when I hear of teachers focusing their classroom explorations of Shakespeare with digital versions of English speaking Shakespeare productions - often created for teachers by well-funded, large sized theatre companies. This concept is where the two principles considered in this response thus far can meet. In both Cyprus and Sheffield, rather than accessing an educational programme created 'for' me and the students which I teach, I was able, through The Space's versions of the Globe to Globe productions, curate my teaching materials which enriched, rather than created the specific educational and cultural position of the lectures or workshops I was giving. The spectre of copyright hangs over much of what Bird had to say and it is perhaps for these reasons that publically funded companies choose to create educational content rather than open up access to the productions which they make and trust teachers to mould these resources into their own methods.

An example which highlights what I would consider to be a culturally rigid, positioned approach to digital Shakespeare educational content is Shakespeare's Globe's 'Staging It' resource which enables users to choose from four pre-recorded versions of the same scene in order to 'virtually stage your own scene at the Globe theatre' (Shakespeare's Globe, n.d.).

These options all have an emotion attached to them, for example, with II.ii of *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream users can choose between versions of an extract of the scene when Lysander is either 'Assertive', 'Exhausted', 'Sweet' or 'Wary'. Although clearly designed with an attempt to not only involve the learner in digital materials but also empower them to create with digital materials - this resource is dependent on a singular directorial vision via the choice of camera angle and, despite the options for emotional changes from the characters, the interpretation remains broadly the same. For example, the text edition, national language, theatrical style and casting all remain the same. Perhaps a more plural approach to this would be to place several different interpretations next to each other and create an interface which could create a flexible way of stitching together moments? This would, however, involve Shakespeare's Globe having to have, within its digital archive, a diversity of interpretations of Shakespeare's scripts which opens up wider questions in relation the various directions it is pulled in as an organisation seen, in part as an 'authority' and a major UK tourist attraction.

The Royal Shakespeare Company has also attempted to enable learners to engage with digital content through their RE:Shakespeare app (Samsung, 2015). Here users can view scenes from a '360 degree' technique whilst changing the camera angle of scenes and, in other content areas, bring together elements of popular culture, like remixing Shakespeare's words with beat box artist Schlomo. The latter example, entitled RE:Mix feels like the element of the app which enables the most space for users to create. One can trigger individual words from lines from four Shakespeare plays in time with three different beat box beats. One could stick to the script and obey the rules from Shakespeare or, conversely, create one's own 'mashed up' lyrics to the beats from all four plays. The non-conformist in me could not help but focus on the later, creating my own musical response with the lyrics, 'To be/a horse/is/the food of love.' (Samsung, 2015). Contained here is the spirit of Gibson's *Teaching Shakespeare* since the user is encouraged to search for the multiplicity of possibilities with Shakespeare's words. There was, for me however, unease at the recorded opening to the app

of David Tennant, a middle aged white man, telling Shakespeare learners how his plays 'should' be experienced. Furthermore, the various games and activities within the app are all adult presented and young people are absent from visual representation - this led me to consider that the tone of the app felt like materials had been created 'for' a group of people.

These two examples from two of the best resourced Shakespeare companies in the world are perhaps examples of the sort of digital educational content which is going to be soon out of date. With more and more production focussed digital resources becoming available to teachers from around the world - not just the Globe to Globe films - but also the MIT Global Shakespeare database⁷ and A|S|I|A database,⁸ teachers now are in the position to present and work with multiple interpretations of Shakespeare's scripts across a huge diversity of languages and cultures. For this reason, Bird's call for theatre companies to stop 'putting fences around' issues related to copyright and educational usage at the planning phase is timely, as are his thoughts that large organisations with multi million pound turnovers not needing the fees which are often a barrier to international engagement. The digital world is moving fast in this respect and support 'for' teachers is perhaps best placed in making them aware of the wealth of materials at their disposal. A larger and more diverse library of productions exists in the digital world and access to them gives teachers and learners the chance to create digital processes in relation to Shakespeare(s) rather than be positioned into a singular notion of 'a Shakespeare' by a linguistically, culturally and geographically limited field.

⁷ Described by themselves as 'The Global Shakespeares Video & Performance Archive is a collaborative project providing online access to performances of Shakespeare from many parts of the world as well as essays and metadata provided by scholars and educators in the field.' (MIT) As of March 2019, there were 189 productions available to view for free.

⁸ Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive - described by themselves as 'a collaborative, multilingual online archive of performance materials. It is supported by several government and academic bodies, with contributions from theatre companies in East and Southeast Asia. Its aim is to provide resources for education and research in intercultural and Shakespeare performance.' (A|S|I|A). As of March 2019 there were 62 productions available to stream for free.

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