

Online appropriations: collaborative technologies, digital texts, and Shakespeare's authority

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Abstract: This article considers the impact of digital technologies on Shakespeare's status as author. Digital technology encourages a more democratic engagement with literature which privileges the reader and thereby moderates the author's powerful hold over their text. As a result, it is to be expected that with the increased availability of digital tools, Shakespeare's status and conventional, universalist readings of his works might decline. Technologies have the potential to open up Shakespeare's works to new kinds of readers: these include academics studying Shakespeare's works perspectives outside the traditional disciplines of literary and performance studies, but also the general public who appropriate Shakespeare when shaping their online identities, or contribute to digital repositories of Shakespeare references. My paper considers the contradiction that while, in theory, digital technologies invite the reader to wrest control from the author, in practice those tools are sometimes used to bolster Shakespeare's universal value and genius. I consider the ultimate effect on Shakespeare's author status when digital technologies are applied to his works, and suggest that one way to measure this might be to explore appropriations of Shakespeare's characters online by individual internet users.

1. Introduction

Terry Eagleton's suggestion in 1983 that Shakespeare's works and other canonical literature might one day become obsolete and that, extending this idea, it is impossible to identify any literary text as unquestionably, objectively "good" or valuable, strongly contradicted received knowledge in conventional, historical Shakespeare criticism and New Criticism. Eagleton's insistence on the materiality of the literary text—that its meaning is dependent on the context in which it is read, and that there is a kind of transformation at work in each reading and rereading—offered a healthy critical rejuvenation of Shakespeare studies, meaning that Shakespeare could be read through the frameworks of postcolonial, Marxist, and gender theory, for example. These ways of reading necessarily position the Shakespeare text in the context of its production and reception, and in doing so, some of Shakespeare's assumed authority and status is inevitably lost. This is surely a good thing for literary studies, as the reader is no longer locked into a limited frame of reference where all of Shakespeare's characters must be seen as timeless archetypes, and all his moral questions universal ones. Without dismissing Shakespeare, the contemporary student of

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literary studies is offered a much more exciting critical position from which they can reread Shakespeare.

It might be assumed, with the recent availability of digital texts including hypertexts and digitised versions of Shakespeare's plays, that the process hastened by Eagleton would become even more prevalent, and discussions of Shakespeare as a kind of universal "visionary" would cease. However, this has not entirely been the case: in fact, digital access to Shakespeare's texts has produced a contradictory reassessment of Shakespeare's status, which at once takes away from his authority, and increases his influence. This article examines new digital outlets for Shakespeare, including *Hyperhamlet*, an online intertextual version of *Hamlet*; online versions of Shakespeare's plays available via sites like Project Gutenberg and Shakespeareonline.com; and more popular uses of Shakespearean references by internet users. The article will consider both the loss of authority which is engendered in the appropriation of Shakespeare in public, digital contexts, and the reinstatement of authority which inevitably accompanies the resurgence of Shakespeare's popularity when his works are accessed, edited or reinterpreted in online culture.

Authorship is an area of ongoing debate in Shakespeare scholarship. This article argues that new online appropriations of Shakespeare parallel the model in mainstream authorship studies which views Shakespeare as a figure of agency subject to appropriation. Shakespeare as a hazy figure reassembled by textual scholarship is a disputed concept in recent authorship studies which suggest that Shakespeare actively sought fame and authorial recognition. Jeffrey Knapp, for example, argues in *Shakespeare Only* that Shakespeare engaged directly with popular theatre in his quest for fame. Lukas Erne and Patrick Cheney take similar positions in their respective recent monographs, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* and *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*, both arguing that Shakespeare deliberately worked towards acquiring fame in his lifetime by paying attention to the written text as well as the theatre, writing as much for page as for stage. Ongoing arguments in authorship studies tend to argue either, with these recent prominent studies, that Shakespeare was a figure of agency who directly promoted his own author status and public persona, or alternatively that Shakespeare did not exist as the genuine author of the works attributed to him. This alternative approach implies that Shakespeare's status can be appropriated if research proves that other writers and collectives have been responsible for many of the works now attributed to him. These two positions are explored by ten contributors to a recent special issue of *Shakespeare Studies* (volume 36, 2008) which addresses the question from two opposing positions: those who consider evidence for Shakespeare's own engagement with authorship, suggesting he was interested in early printing and publication, and those who, instead, challenge the notion that Shakespeare was the sole author of works attributed to him and instead offer evidence of collaboration. The question has also been the subject of heated debate online following an article in *Times Higher*

Education: scholars debate whether or not it is useful to ask if William Shakespeare was indeed the author of the works popularly and historically attributed to him (Reisz).

My paper does not attempt to prove or disprove William Shakespeare's independent responsibility for specific works. Instead, it engages with Shakespeare the public figure, and the impact on his reputation and authority from appropriation in digital contexts. Mainstream authorship critics face a challenge from new technologies which extend the questions over Shakespearean authorship beyond any biographical or textual scholarship and into the realm of public perception. The influence of public perception is most prominent in current digital examples—and this is the focus of this article—but has a precedent in earlier examples such as Cato's Letters, eighteenth-century letters published in journals, which will be compared briefly. Shakespeare the cultural figure is now the object under question and subject to appropriation, rather than Shakespeare the dramatist with an eye on fame or Shakespeare the prolific (or collective) poet-playwright. Although the canonical author figure has become a rigorously contested concept within literary studies, this paper is also concerned with spheres where the concept of the canonical status of the author prevails, including popular conceptions of the author in mainstream culture, including social interaction online, and academic research on Shakespeare from outside literary studies.

2. Shakespeare Online

Both Open Source Shakespeare and Project Gutenberg's digital repository allow users to search an online text for a specific word, term, or character, making it very quick and easy to find out how many references to a particular word exist in a play. This relies on users taking the decision to search the text in this way, though: those users of a digital text might equally choose to perform a traditional linear reading, which is supported if the user chooses to read the text online rather than downloading it, as the full text is presented page by page on the browser screen, rather than as a whole text to scroll (downwards and upwards) through. Open Source Shakespeare has additional features—for example, the site allows users to undertake concordance exercises. *Hyperhamlet* (<http://www.hyperhamlet.unibas.ch>, an online version of *Hamlet*) takes digital Shakespeare a stage further by explicitly encouraging selective searching of the play rather than linear reading, and is one example of an online, purposely searchable electronic version of *Hamlet*, created by a team from the University of Basel. This is an editorless edition, in many ways: at the foot of the homepage is a plea for contributors, who can add to the text by using a reference number to record their input. *Hyperhamlet* is presented as a new edition of Shakespeare's play, a hypertext version of *Hamlet* and also a point of access to all other texts

that refer to *Hamlet*. The text allows the user to find references to a word or a line from the play in two ways: by performing a keyword search, or by reading an adjoining window which indicates where and how often that text is referred to in other texts. In this way, the site is encouraging users to read the play in fragments. By splitting the screen in two, it insists on Shakespeare's referentiality, but also alters the way that the text is perceived visually by setting up an alternative path across and through the text. This is an example of what J. D. Bolter describes as a distinction or competition between the clean page which exists in the book, and the competing page, which exists in both the magazine and the webpage. On both magazine and web pages items compete for attention, to compel non-linear reading (Bolter 67). The literary text is becoming a negotiable site; without a fixed location or route through the text, users can read according to their own purposes. Yet, at the same time, there may not be two identical readings (never mind interpretations), because technotexts and "hypertextual writing [...] can change for each reader and with each reading [...] readers of a hyperfiction [...] can only assume that they have travelled in the same textual network" (11).

When textual properties influence the way that the text is read, there is a distinction made between competing notions of authority: "the traditional views of the author as authority and of literature as expression or as mimesis do not seem to correspond to the experience of reading hyperfiction" or other technotexts (Bolter 170). To digitise Shakespeare is to restructure and fragment the formerly linear and whole text. Reading Shakespeare is now informed by the online, searchable, digital format of the texts: readers no longer need to read the play in a linear form; instead they can search for a term like "sickness" or "blood" and count and categorise the number of such references made by each character, diagnosing instead of analysing. The individual determines the text as he or she performs it, challenging the authority of Shakespeare over his texts while ostensibly acknowledging it.

Digital reading practices defer the authority previously held by an author, to a reader or to multiple readers. So digital reading practices in more general terms have a tendency to question the authority of a text and its author, and to defer authority over things like the way the text is read—both in material terms, and interpretatively—to the reader who can negotiate, comment on, and add to the digital text. Digitised Shakespeare texts represent an insistence that Shakespeare is no longer restricted to traditional spheres of comprehension, which had been largely limited to stage and page. Instead, "our imagination of Shakespearean drama is shaped by the forms and moods of digital culture" (Worthen 228). This is a positive development which, within literary studies and related fields, adds a further dimension to recent Shakespeare scholarship with a focus on contexts of production and reception rather than universality. After Eagleton, literary theory addresses the hitherto unquestioned status of Shakespeare, by historicising the plays instead of insisting on their timelessness.

This inevitably grounds Shakespeare as a product of his time and restricts some of the authority that might once have been afforded to his plays and to Shakespeare as a historical figure.

One influential example of historicised research is Lisa Jardine's *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (1996). Here, Jardine outlines the opposing interpretations of cross-dressing in *Twelfth Night*. From a modern perspective, cross-dressing and the resulting same-sex desire in the play is generally perceived as homoerotic and subversive, and some readers have seen Olivia's confusion and distress towards the end of the play as punishment for her illegitimate desire for Cesario, who she later learns is the female Viola. However, both examples of same-sex desire—Olivia's desire for Viola (disguised as Cesario) and Orsino's desire for Cesario (the disguised Viola)—must be interpreted differently once the original context of production is taken into account. Jardine explains that at the time Shakespeare was writing, the condition of service was a more compelling category than gender (70), and being desired by your master was an expected "duty" undertaken by the servant: "For dependent youth, obedience was both a condition of their economic support and an internalised state" (68). Boys and women were, Jardine argues, equivalent objects of desire, because within the households of the Early Modern period, both "dependent youths and dependent women are expected to 'submit', under the order of family authority, to those above them" (66). And eroticism is figured differently in both periods, as Jardine goes on to explain: while the expectation of submissiveness in a partner, no matter what their gender, was the erotic symbol, twentieth and twenty-first century readers see the gender confusion as the location of the play's erotic content (77). It is clear to see from this brief example that the play cannot be considered to convey a universal message about desire, its main subject. Instead, the reception context fundamentally alters the way that desire and the erotic in the play is understood. Jardine's work, among many other explorations of reception and production contexts, has become accepted in Shakespeare scholarship as a welcome corrective to previous positions which saw Shakespeare as an ultimate authority over literary value, and a spokesperson for all human problems and joys.

An interesting new critical approach to Shakespeare's texts is to be found as a subsection of medical research, and here, too, the trajectory of Shakespeare's reception mimics his reception in the more usual fields, including literary and performance studies: reverence, opposed with more historicised responses. A number of the articles published on Shakespeare in recent years from the field of medical research reinstate Shakespeare's universality, genius, and foresight, to present Shakespeare as a kind of master-doctor of his time. One interesting example is a short article by Norton, Paris and Wonderlich on Shakespeare's description of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD, or "mad cow disease") in *Macbeth*. The article suggests that although it was not until the early twentieth century that CJD was found in humans, Shakespeare "showed an uncannily

prescient understanding” of the disease and its transmission through eating infected “human and animal organs” (Norton, Paris and Wonderlich 299). The findings are supported by a detailed table of symptoms as described in *Macbeth*, and their associated prion disease, to illustrate that the dominant variant of the group described is CJD. Note also J. M. Berg, whose exploration of Shakespeare’s knowledge of genetics offers not only a reinstatement of the timelessness that characterises conventional Shakespeare criticism, but also an exaggeration of it in the impossible wish that he was still around to tell us how to classify our diseases and even to predict diseases yet to come:

One wonders what poetic gems might have emerged had he lived to witness and address recent biological and clinical advances in the field of genetics. The science, dramatic in itself, would surely have been abundantly enriched by his art. (Berg 170)

Yet some recent medical approaches consider Shakespeare as more human and bodily than ephemeral and unknowable, as Shakespeare the individual existing in history has become an object for medical examination. John Ross compiles evidence of Shakespeare’s physical condition to allow contemporary medical scholars to investigate whether or not Shakespeare himself had syphilis (Ross 399). Literary responses to illness and the body in Shakespeare similarly reject the position that Shakespeare was a medical visionary which was once posited in more conventional works of literary scholarship. For instance, according to Aubrey Kail in *Shakespeare’s Medical Mind* (1986) not only was Shakespeare’s medical knowledge beyond that of any ordinary playwright—remarkably, it was also superior to that of any “physician” (13-14). In place of this is historicised work which challenges the author’s status, found in examples such as David Hillman’s *Shakespeare’s Entrails* which is concerned with how a number of Shakespeare’s plays demonstrate obsession “with the contents of the human body, both literal and imagined” and the anxiety of contrasting “inside” and “outside” (1). Here medical history and literary theory are used together in a historicised way that doesn’t simply celebrate Shakespeare, but makes observations about what the text can reveal about the human body as a site of negotiation since the early modern period. With the availability of collaborative online technologies, though, the text itself becomes a site of negotiation in a literal sense.

3. Online spaces and collaborative authorship

Technologies like those used for Wikipedia can offer something new, by operating as a multi-authored digital text that is in constant flux, that destabilises the notion of textuality or authorship. Wiki technologies extend the positions set

up by the seminal essays by Barthes and Foucault, “The Death of The Author” and “What is an Author?.” New wiki technologies, like the essays, invite interpretive possibilities far beyond authorial control and incite debate about authority and authorship and textuality. Users are invited to ask questions such as: Does a text have to be printed? Does it have to end, or can it constantly change, as new ideas emerge? Does it matter who wrote a text, or how many people contributed to an idea? Can I add something to this text, to make it even better? If the aim is to challenge Shakespeare’s status and the traditional interpretations of his plays, collaborative digital technologies can play an important role: multiple users can add to a debate, and especially where those participants are non-specialists, readers are more likely to move beyond the idea that there is one correct and permanent interpretation of a text.

Furthermore, the digital text is unfixed. It can be accessed from any point via a search engine; it may be full of hyperlinks, meaning that the reader can jump back and forth, in and out of the text; and it can be negotiated since wiki technologies mean that multiple authors may edit a text, rendering it subject to constant change, challenge, and reinterpretation. Such technologies are not limited to encyclopaedic information: *Hyperhamlet* is mediated via multiple links to intertextual references and secondary sources. There is no single route through the text and it is constantly evolving. R. Koskimaa asks, “how does one go about interpreting a work which one can never read exhaustively?” (177). The reader must think in fragments. The digital text exists in the context of a space accessed by multiple users, which defines the online location and the digital text. Any thinking about textual structure must consider the somewhat uniform structure of the play, which, despite variations between editions, is organised into a linear form separated by acts and scenes, and notice the much less rigid structure of a website or a chatroom, which is created when the play script becomes digitised and takes on the character of an online text.

Readers in the digital age are shaping the text and as they read it, shaping themselves, and this is a property of the text itself, not an effect of something that has been violently done to the text: “‘Textuality,’ like the intensified ‘intertextuality,’ requires that we consider the unfixity of the text, the promiscuity as opposed to integrity of its identity in an age when the text has a diverse non-book existence, [a] mobility and openness to change across time and place, [...] permeability” (Sutherland 5). With a lost linearity comes the loss of Kermode’s sense of an ending, because “as we refashion the book through digital technology, we are diminishing the sense of closure that belonged to the codex and to print” (Bolter 79). For Bolter, when the existence of hypertexts mean that the user or reader’s power is extended, the reader not only moulds the text’s shape or structure, he or she also becomes a performer: the reader “performs the text, perhaps only for herself, perhaps for another reader, who may then choose to perform the first reader’s text for others” (Bolter 173). Thus the reader effects

a refashioning of the concept of the text. This is a necessary function of the hypertext and has theoretical precedents:

poststructuralists claimed that a text was no more important than its interpretations, because the text could not be separated from its interpretation. Now, in the electronic writing space, where every reading of a text is a realization or indeed a rewriting of the text, to read *is* to interpret. (Bolter 183)

It could be argued that digital technology is the most important new development since print technology in influencing the way that people—readers or audiences—engage with stories. While literary theory is alert to intertextuality and referentiality, digital contexts enable mainstream readers to directly participate in such referential practices. More now than ever before, in a digital context, the text is shaped by its users and authorship is only an optional field of attention: hypertexts render Shakespeare’s plays referential, intertextual, and non-linear. The kind of rereading produced online does not exist in a vacuum: “as the vibrant new field of electronic textuality flexes its muscle, it is becoming overwhelmingly clear that we can no longer afford to ignore the material basis of literary production” (Hayles 19).

4. Romeo_uk77

Technologies permit reinterpretation, and the most radical appropriation of Shakespeare might be said to come from youth culture in the public sphere where, after all, digital and social networking technologies are used most frequently.

Access to digital space is mediated by an online identity, sometimes in a form that corresponds with the user’s real-world identity in certain respects, such as Facebook accounts which usually show the user’s real name and photograph. Other times, online identities exist in much more elaborate forms: self-invention manifests in new online textual identities like chatroom identifiers, Instant Messaging identifiers (IMs) and avatars. Online identities enable the repression of unwanted characteristics and allow users to create a more desirable self who functions like a well-written character on the transient stage of the chatroom or online forum. There is, online, a contradictory “popular” engagement with Shakespeare: many users select names and images that make reference to Shakespeare’s characters. On the one hand, this could be seen as an attempt to gain cultural capital. By adopting Shakespearean character names, users might acquire an “embodied” (Bourdieu) form of cultural capital—in Bourdieu’s terms a form of cultural capital which associates the individual with a highly valued area of learning. However, because the avatars are not, in

fact, the users' actual bodies, this embodied cultural capital remains somewhat spectral and imprecise. In using Shakespeare's characters, there is a process of ownership of those characters and their stories, and in "retelling" the identities of those characters, stories and characters are altered and authority passes from Shakespeare to the computer users.

These online identities include the appropriation of existing identities with recognizable and admired characteristics, and Shakespeare provides a number of appropriate personas for this purpose. Popular readings and reinterpretations of Shakespeare's characters and plays, enabled by those same online sources, set in motion the re-creation of the self in a more satisfactory form. People are referring to Shakespeare's character names to reconstruct the self, not necessarily based on devoted reading, but perhaps based on popular conceptions, leading to a glut of lusty teenage Romeos and heartbroken, woeful Ophelias. Popular Shakespeare-inspired usernames include those which refer to Romeo, Ophelia, Macbeth, Othello, and perhaps more surprisingly, Shylock and Caliban. One such avatar-mediated digital context is Yahoo's suite of online applications, including a site where users can pose questions and provide answers (<http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/>), but which in actuality has become almost a social networking forum, where users have visible profiles and all of their questions and answers can be accessed by other users. In order for a new user to gain belonging amongst the other Shakespeare-minded users, they would need to select a name from more awkward permutations available at Yahoo which include: romeo_uk77, Ophelia_7713, Macbeth_uk, Othello_1978, shylock159, and caliban_7760. Such users can then construct an avatar from body and clothing parts, and one Romeo active online appears with Italian colouring, long hair, and a feathered hat. This Romeo plays up his assumed persona by asking the question, "What are the signs of falling in love? Please tell me! It's driving me crazy!" Alternatively, users can select their own images, and one Ophelia, asking and also helpfully answering questions on topics as diverse as the patron saint of lost things, and how to define immoral behaviour, represents herself under the image of Antoine-Auguste-Ernest Hebert's *Ophelia* (1876), her wild hair strewn with flowers, shading hungry and vengeful eyes. These users explicitly engage with the kind of self-construction that occurs when creating an avatar, by asking further questions about why certain choices are made over the way that an avatar looks. The presentation of the self is clearly very significant and not something to be taken lightly. It is the Shakespearean persona that permeates the user's questions and answers in this extended forum or network, and allows that user to answer questions with an authoritative tone.

The phenomenon of adopting Shakespearean character names for the purposes of public interaction is not new to the digital age. Cato's Letters, for example, written by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon between 1720 and 1723, were published in the *London Journal* and the *British Journal* on a variety of topics, including ministers' corruption, freedom of speech, libel, loyalty and

flattery. The letters make frequent reference to Shakespearean characters in addition to Cato, whose persona is adopted as a pseudonym. Young Cato is a friend of Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and he has very little speech in the play, in contrast with the loquaciousness attributed to him by the letter-writers. David Brewer has also discussed how eighteenth-century readers invented afterlives for literary characters, in his *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825*. Brewer describes educated readers' desire to "see more" (1) of a character, leading to their creation of ongoing stories. These included a number of Shakespearean characters including Yorick and Falstaff, as well as more contemporaneous literary figures, such as Tristram Shandy. However, the presence of Shakespearean pseudonyms in social networking contexts does take the phenomenon into a more mainstream context. The newspapers and periodicals which published letters written by those readers with Shakespearean pseudonyms would have catered for an elite readership, the kind of educated minority readership who would be likely to be familiar with Shakespeare's plays. Coming across Romeos and Ophelias in an open-access, fully flexible and unrestricted online forum is quite a different thing.

In appropriating Shakespeare's characters for their own online self-representation, users are re-establishing Shakespeare's authority by referring to it as a marker of cultural capital. Yet at the same time, they are rewriting Shakespeare's texts by appropriating specific features and characteristics of those literary characters. This resonates with the medical scholars and historians who have both extended Shakespeare's reach by using his texts as part of medical history, yet disrupted the linearity of the texts by fragmenting them, extracting the required symptoms for their own purposes. Thus, they change Shakespeare based on a perception of Shakespeare's authority which ultimately relies more on reputation and the users' own needs than on the actual texts. Whether Shakespeare's authority erodes with the texts, or paradoxically grows without them, is perhaps dependent on how far Shakespeare is still expected to retain authority over his texts, and how far we extend the notion of adaptation, which Linda Hutcheon has defined in as diverse forms as "videogames, theme park rides, Web sites, graphic novels, song covers, operas, musicals, ballets" (Hutcheon xiv). If these avatars are adaptations, then Shakespeare's authority is reinforced; if they are appropriations, it is diminished.

The reader can assume the identity of a literary character, which is a necessary process if he or she is to adopt a Shakespearean name in the context of cyberspace. They do this through what Bristow describes as the "ritual" characteristic of tragedy. The audience is positioned with 'dual status: we are both *participators* and *witnesses*—we are taken into the subjective experience so that we kill and we die, say, with Macbeth; but we are taken into the objective experience so that we gauge and assess the total action as witnesses who survive it' (Bristow 195). This assumption of characteristics is, according to Bristow, dependent on ritual, and perhaps there is no more ritualistic medium than

cyberspace, constructed from ritualistic computer programming language and regulated by rituals such as logging on, using passwords and usernames, and conforming to the structures of online routines as well as those of web addresses, mailboxes and entry routes through websites.

However, ritual presumes continuity, and when those well-known characters are extracted from their firm and fixed textual identities, both the characters and their plays are vulnerable to a process of retelling which renders Shakespeare's texts in constant flux. Any act of appropriation or adaptation is at one level an act of recognition which reinstates the authority of the original. At the same time, the ability to fragment and reconstruct a popular vision of Shakespeare's texts, or a medical vision of those same texts, means that ultimately Shakespeare's authority has been superseded by a non-textual or anti-textual imagination. In response to a need to self-analyse and reconstruct, a rebirth necessitates the fragmentation of the old, fixed, textual order.

The use of a virtual identity in order to interface with other people, goods and services, means that the individual is now mediated across digital space, and aspects of that self exist across numerous digital forms, including social networking sites, which divide the individual into categories across which he or she can be compared and compartmentalised. In a sense, the geography of identity is dispersed because location—though observable with a computer's IP number—is largely irrelevant in cyberspace. Hayles notes that

in their general form, computers are simulation machines producing *environments*, from objects that sit on desktops to networks spanning the globe. To construct an environment is, of course, to anticipate and structure the user's interface with it and in this sense to construct the user as well as the interface. (48)

Thus, location itself is an unfixed concept, as the online user can be mobile and can log on and off at various locations and times. The location of the text, then, might determine its effect on the reading self: for Greenblatt, Shakespeare's traditional location, the theatre, is "the concrete manifestation" of power, and "the expression of those rules that govern a properly ordered society" by punishing "those who violate the rules" (253). Thus, theatre stands for a "concrete" location, bound by specific social codes. The internet might be seen as the opposite of this—it is necessarily ungoverned (in most cases) and out of any particular jurisdiction, and is not in any sense a guardian of morality, as it usually functions across cultural and social concepts of morality. Because it cannot easily be fixed under national laws, the internet opposes the functioning of traditional laws and states. Thus identity on the internet cannot be fixed according to national concepts: on the internet, the individual user is somewhat outside his or her nation, in an unspecified place.

In this unfixed location, while there is a performance of the self, human performance as “healthy,” “wholesome,” and “whole” seems impossible when compared with the way that the self (and the text) is organised digitally: in fragments. Bolter suggests that, though “critics accuse the computer of promoting homogeneity [...] electronic reading and writing seem to have just the opposite effect” (11). When reading and writing electronically, the individual becomes fragmentary. Freud, of course, used psychoanalysis with the ideal of putting the fragmentary patient back together. Freud’s purpose was creatively perverted by psychoanalytical literary theory, which celebrates the fragmentary literary character, while digital textual practices extend this function by encouraging fragmentary reading and fragmentary thinking which might replicate the fragmentary individual. Electronic texts are, after all, “fragmentary and potential texts” (Bolter 11). This seems a straightforward proposition: digital texts encourage fragmentary reading which in turn produces a fragmentary reader.

Online users can create, and this ability is given as a property of the digital text: “because the encoded data can be processed through various applications (not just as ink and paper), it is readily susceptible to being exchanged, combined, remixed, edited by the user” (Worthen 234). Not only can they create online in this way, they can also create their own online identity, or self-create. The possibility of self-creation for the contemporary individual is contrary to the process of self-fashioning that determined the Renaissance identity. For Stephen Greenblatt, self-fashioning can be defined as “the achievement of [...] a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving” (2). “Distinctive” in this sense does not mean unique or individual, though. Instead, it involves the adoption of specific characteristics which define the individual as belonging to a specific type or group, usually connected to class and to a specific occupation. Self-fashioning is to do with the application of rules or “control mechanisms” (Greenblatt 3). Self-fashioning is an act of moulding the self to fit into a correct form as governed by society and “structures of power,” and for Greenblatt, the Renaissance “I” exists within the context of “the court, the church, the colonial administration, the patriarchal family” (6). The “I” who reads the hypertext exists in a different network of power structures. This online reader has more creativity, perhaps in part because of the level of anonymity achievable in the online space. In addition, online readers do not have to conform to rules governing dress codes and behaviour as was required of the self-fashioning Renaissance man. Contemporary identity is more fluid, based on self-creation more than self-fashioning, and enabled by digital reality. If, as poststructuralism asserts, to read is to interpret, to read is also to reinterpret the self when reading online is enabled via a virtual self, an avatar who represents the online reader’s identity and maintains a relationship between the self and the text.

Shakespeare has once again, in the digital age, been brought to a mass market, and a mass market of new users who are readers of digital texts. These readers perform the text using online user identities with avatars, thus rewriting both the text and, at the same time, themselves. Such use privileges the individual interpreter and in interpreting digital texts invites the individual to create an identity while recreating the texts. In this way, digital life opposes that notion of self-fashioning where the individual was compelled to conform to the kind of identity demanded by their social class and the overarching structures of the law, church, and monarchy. Yet at the same time, digital interaction is grounded in a specific materiality of internet capitalism where individuality must always simultaneously be seen as capitalist individualism. And digital renegotiation in relation to Shakespeare's texts is a phenomenon which is equally contradictory in academic and non-academic contexts: when individuals create Shakespeare-influenced avatars, they both dilute and extend Shakespeare's words. This digital appropriation of Shakespeare indicates the need to read Shakespeare's plays in thoroughly material ways which acknowledge that the ability of the reader to create meaning is as strong as the author's, in order to avoid reading Shakespeare as a genius or visionary.

The dislocation of the self from its bodily manifestation which is apparent in the use of avatars has an analogue in the Early Modern body. David Hillman claims that in the sixteenth century, language which had previously referred to the body became abstracted and took on extended meaning (an example is the word "crisis" which at this time began to be associated with more meanings that it had contained in its original sense, in reference to a turning point during illness [Hillman 5]). Because language shifted towards abstraction, so did the body, meaning that "the body now had to defend itself" and to attempt to create "a clearly defined boundary between the 'inside' and the 'outside'" (5). Hillman suggests that Shakespeare's texts marked the point at which "the division of a self into an inside and an outside" began (15). In this way, digitisation of Shakespeare's texts and mediated, negotiated reading practices enabled by users' unfixed online identities can be understood as a recent phenomenon with an early prototype in linguistic change. And this is perhaps to be expected: digital technology has demanded a similar influx of language to the one described by Hillman in the sixteenth century. Technotexts continue to place the user as much inside as outside of the cyber-location, to ensure complete interactivity with the digital realm. Similar functions might also be key to the continued growth of Shakespeare Studies, as the Shakespearean text continues to be shaped by its users and its digital context.

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