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The Radical Historicity of Everything: Exploring Shakespearean Identity with Web 2.0

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a semester-long project designed to determine how effectively interactive Web 2.0 technology can facilitate collaborative research in undergraduate learners. The study was conducted during a 2007 advanced Shakespeare course at the University of Central Florida that focused heavily on a new historicist approach to studying literature. In this paper we first establish the theoretical foundation for this particular approach to literary studies, then discuss more in-depth how the collaborative, inter-connective nature of wikis allowed students to witness first-hand some of the concealed assumptions enmeshed in the creation of historical explanation or narrative. We also discuss how, in thinking about the past, this technology allowed our students realize some of the stakes in describing history for the present. In other words, having students create wikis based on the social identities that recur in Shakespeare's works developed an implicit awareness of motives for "doing" history. We also show how employing open source technology in a localized classroom setting can assuage some of the gaps we experience in trying to provide enough period coverage while also attending to theoretical apparatus and students' experience of meaningful connections to material. On a larger scale, creating inquiry-based projects can alleviate some of the humanities' disengagement from the "real world" that many have been suggesting of late.

...I don't think or know much about the people in Shakespeare's time other than they liked going to the theater and this made his works popular.

People in Shakespeare's time ate drum sticks and lived short, dirty lives.

Everyone loved Queen Elizabeth...

The above statements are a sample of responses submitted by upper-division Shakespeare students to a question posed at the beginning of the semester: "What do you know about people in Shakespeare's time?" These quotes reflect some of the "facts" gleaned by students from other classes, movies such as 1998's *Shakespeare in Love*, or perhaps even from the local Renaissance Faire, where turkey legs and dirt paths are part and parcel of the historical experience. The responses typically read as if students are holding something back, as if they are not sure to what potentially

humiliating end their answers might serve. But their replies to a second, correlative question suggests that these snippets really do represent what they "know," or are at least part of what they think about when they think of the citizenry of sixteenth and early seventeenth century England. To the additional query — "is history important in understanding a literary text?" — everyone assured us that it is. One student, elaborating as if writing for an exam, answered, "Yes, history gives a text more context and make meaning more apparent, make parts of the text more meaningful." Another stated the same thought more casually: "Yes. The time period affects the writer that affects the piece." No one in a class of thirty-eight responded negatively, yet their cautious responses suggest that such reading was simply mandatory and without immediate relevance; that reading literature historically was just another academic exercise expected of them as English majors in order to move forward to graduation.

The overarching goal of this class is to read Shakespeare in a reflective and ultimately relevant way through the integration of historical context. This objective may seem simple at first, but it is one that has repeatedly proven difficult to accomplish. Past efforts have found that 1) Non-history majors frequently enter literature courses having experienced history as an amalgam of mere facts to be memorized rather than material texts worthy of analysis and application, and 2) time-strained professors "trained in their own specialties [may] know very little about areas outside their own fields of interest" and thus lack the kind of multi-layered knowledge of a particular period or topic needed to facilitate deep textual inter-connection [Schultz 2001, 142-3]. Textbooks such as the Bedford Shakespeare "Text and Contexts" series that present canonical standards along with key primary sources and interpretive essays do help stave off some of the institutional fragmentation of historical understanding. However, such texts are ultimately self-contained authoritative volumes that don't necessarily help students become more sophisticated, self-reliant researchers who engage fully with the complexity of the period at hand. Lectures and other scholarly interpretations of data and significant texts limit students' experience of history to a set of prescriptive conditions to read for, rather than part of a narrative that, like the imaginative literature itself, is the result of an intellectual, dynamic process of interconnected cognitive acts performed by socially, culturally, and politically interested beings. This contradiction that favors historical "truth" over literary ambiguity looms always at the back of the classroom. As Donald Ulin writes, for those of us "juggling history, poetics, and the theory necessary for an adequate imbrications of the two...what are we to do with all of this material, given the time limitations involved in a semester and our students' own limited grasp of history and theory?" [Ulin 2007, 71].

The project described here was undertaken by a literature professor and a humanities librarian at the University of Central Florida and was designed to meet this challenge by merging our specialties — Renaissance literature and information literacy — in one semester-long Shakespeare course. Our goal was to design an engaging, critical, and theoretically reflective project wherein theory would emerge "naturally" as students experienced a full range of written and visual texts pertinent to the vaster understanding of our given time period. As will be discussed in greater detail, we found that the collaborative possibilities of wiki technology allowed students to witness first-hand some of the concealed postmodernist assumptions enmeshed in the creation of historical explanation or narrative. Our students were able to make original and meaningful connections with both literary and historical material even as they struggled with one another's interpretations of primary and secondary sources. The inquiry-based design of our project brought to light deeper and compelling questions regarding historical narratives. We will discuss how, in thinking about the past, this technology provided a unique venue through which our students were able to realize some of stakes in describing history for the present. We will also examine the effectiveness of employing open source technology to assuage some of the gaps we experience in trying to provide enough period coverage while also attending to theoretical apparatus and students' experience of meaningful connections to material. On a larger scale, creating inquiry-based projects can alleviate some of the humanities' disengagement from the "real world" that many have been suggesting of late. In other words, our classrooms can be laboratories where important questions regarding collaborative analysis arise first while we begin to work on the larger "Humanities 2.0" projects called for by Cathy N. Davidson in the May 2008 issue of PMLA. And finally, if our goal is to transmit the riches of the past, it is always with an eye towards the future, and releasing curious and critical citizens into the world from the confines of our discipline-specific classrooms is no doubt one of the most important aspects of our work.

The Ends and Means of Literary History

New historicist and cultural materialist approaches to literature emphasizes the value of reading literary and non-literary

texts from the same period as if they are in constant exchange with each other. Each version we present, whether through our lectures or the texts we assign, holds certain biases, focuses on individual intellectual interests, or otherwise produces gaps in historical narratives. History is a narrative that is always constructed, and even if we try to keep our own ideologies in check, we may unwittingly fall into pitfalls caused by practicalities, such as time constraints and overcrowded classes. With only one or two weeks to spend on *The Tempest*, for example, should we concentrate on colonial exploration and expansion? Race? Servitude? Gender? Magic? Each is represented in the play, and each takes part in a wider early modern discourse that sought to define and place emerging categories within boundaries familiar to audiences of the time. Each has its own rich historical narrative as well as a complicated representation in the play. However, spending time covering one category through lectures, handouts, multi-media presentations and class discussion often comes at the expense of racing through or entirely omitting another topic of exploration.

Having students create wikis based on issues of social identity in the early modern period allowed us to address these concerns and develop an implicit awareness of motives for "doing" history. Although some have tagged the new millennium as the "post-identity age," issues of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability still inform the lived material realities that students, "in going about their daily lives, must contend with" [Stanley 2005, 192]. Social identity was very much on the minds of early modern English people as well. In the years that make up Shakespeare's life (1564 to 1616), there was an enormous output of manuals advising an increasingly literate public on how to be a good servant, wife, soldier, husbandman, magician, and king. Economic, religious, and other complicated paradigmatic shifts created an anxiety of identity featured in many of the plays. In the popular comedy *Twelfth Night*, for example, male actors become women who then disguise themselves as men, servants imagine rising in station through marriage, and those of noble birth act in ways unsupported by traditional decorum. Creating wikis based on the identities that recur throughout Shakespeare's plays would keep historical research focused and relevant both to our students' lives and to the period we were studying.

Since many students came to class with some previous exposure to Shakespeare's works, we asked them to generate a list of categories they had encountered in such plays as *The Tempest*, *Othello*, and *MacBeth* and other texts we would read throughout the semester. The primary identities listed were "Men," "Women," "Nobility," "Servants," "Religious Types," "Professionals," "Magicians and Witches," "Colonizer and Colonized," "Fools," "Poor Folk," and "Villains." Students then formed small groups of three to four members and chose a specific identity to focus on for the duration of the semester. Each group was then charged with creating a wiki based on the identity they had chosen. The wikis would include an array of primary and secondary sources that would serve as a research guide — a customizable course-specific database — that this and future classes could consult and continue to develop. We said very little about how the wikis should look or how the content should be organized. We wanted to give the groups as much creative freedom as possible in deciding what these resources would be with one stipulation: the wikis needed to include the types of historical and literary resources emphasized above. We hoped this approach would allow quality time to be spent on neglected topics such as the medical profession as represented by Lady Macbeth's doctor, even if classroom discussion, as is typical, favored the play's more glamorous villains and witches.

Moreover, we anticipated that amassing literary, historical, and critical materials focused on issues of social identity would provide direct access to what Jameson called "the radical historicity of everything" — that is, the notions of gender, poverty, race, ethnicity, etc., "everything we may be tempted to think of as permanent" [Jameson 1981, 372]. Indeed, these are the very topics the class was assigned to explore. In generating these topics, it was obvious that our students had already responded to the literary creations with some spark of recognition. According to Ulin, initial self-recognition is a factor built into literature itself by writers resisting "conventions of referentiality in favor of abstraction [and] idealization," and is thus typically responded to by readers who "have been taught to seek literature's eternal verities in preference to anything of local or historical" importance [Ulin 2007, 71].

Shakespeare especially has achieved an appeal based in part on his artful capacity for abstraction. Students come to class expecting to "relate" (earnestly or cynically) to *Romeo and Juliet* as the great tragic romance of all time since they have already become familiar with the play's themes through work in high school and through popular culture. Historical interpretation has the potential to unlock difference in even the most familiar literary works. However, doing so forces us to engage in de-familiarization, which opens texts to additional possibilities for thinking about identity and presents us

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with the origins and implications of our own ideological moment. Pedagogically speaking, real historical work, which entails judging the perspectives of authors of primary documents as well as works of literature, can distance students from their preconceived notions as much as it can provide a background for them. For example, placing the suggestive, personal jests shared by Romeo and Mercutio within the discourses of male friendship in the period exposes students to different modes of male behavioral acceptability, which may offer options to some of the homophobic discourses circulating today. To witness other possibilities for understanding given identities is to dislodge stereotypes at their root, exposing each as a vacillating, ever-evolving qualifier that has little claim, if any, on an absolute negating "truth."

Why Wikis?

One of our biggest challenges in designing this project was choosing the appropriate medium to achieve our goals. Wikis were a candidate because of their easy editing functions and low learning curve. However, there is also a stigma attached to wikis thanks in large part to the ongoing debate over the value of Wikipedia. The lack of accountability and formal training of many Wikipedia users, as well as the absence of a peer review process, often frustrates educators when its error-ridden entries are cited as "authoritative" in research papers. A recent example of this sort of backlash is the case of the Middlebury College History Department's decision to ban Wikipedia citations. Brock Read writes that "The problem with Wikipedia in the eyes of many scholars is its open editing system. The site permits unregistered, anonymous users to edit content alongside more traditional contributors" [Read 2007, para. 4]. Read goes on to quote Don J. Wyatt, Chairman of the History Department at Middlebury College, who says, "Wikipedia is very seductive: We all are sort of enamored of the convenience and speed of the Web. From the standpoint of access, it's a marvelous thing. But from the standpoint of maintaining quality, it's so much less" [Read 2007, para. 7]. This point about convenience vs. quality will be discussed later, but for now we want to focus on the openly accessible quality of wikis and why this makes them such useful tools for collaboration.

For better or worse, wikis coerce users into making connections with other users and with the material they present, and despite the ongoing debate over accuracy, wikis are being increasingly used by educators who like the ease with which they can put collaborative pedagogical values into practice. Most notable among these values is the opportunity for students to work together, beyond the confines of the classroom, to negotiate language use and the idea of "discourse" and enact a public presentation of knowledge through the blending of image, text, and sound ([Desilets 2005]; [Pennell 2008]; [Farabaugh 2007]). Our choice to use wikis was made for similar reasons, but perhaps most important was how their flexible functionality would provide students a venue through which they could engage with historical contexts first-hand. More than just presenting the typical list of disembodied facts delivered nervously during ten-minute oral presentations, the process of creating wikis would allow our students to forge important connections between historical acts and literary representations as a negotiating group. In so doing, they would produce a kind of narrative that has its own vested interests in their particular take on the world as well as on the early modern period. In other words, they would be taking the same kind of postmodern intellectual risk of historians whose work "inevitably entails taking a stand on key theoretical issues" and is "an intrinsically theoretical as well as empirical enterprise" [Fulbrook 2002, 4]. Moreover, this kind of interpretation would be expressed through students' ability to add value through their use of and interaction with resources by taking an active role in "remixing" them and exploring new connections and contexts.

The notion of context is worth discussing a bit more in-depth. One of the most common criticisms of Web 2.0 applications is that they devalue information through a lack of context and individual voice. Jaron Lanier, in his critique of Wikipedia entries, writes, "Accuracy in a text is not enough. A desirable text is more than a collection of accurate references. It is also an expression of personality" [Lanier 2006, para. 8]. He continues, "When you see the context in which something was written and you know who the author was just beyond a name, you learn so much more than when you find the same text placed in the anonymous, faux-authoritative, anti-contextual brew of the Wikipedia... You have to have a chance to sense personality in order for language to have its full meaning" [Lanier 2006, para. 10]. Wikipedia contributors generally operate anonymously, and when a large number of anonymous users contribute to a single site, the result is what Lanier calls the "hive mind" [Lanier 2006, para. 19]. For this reason, many of these sites have a tendency to seem more ephemeral and nebulous than traditional publications, a point that illustrates how, even as we move rapidly toward a more digital culture, we still cling to established notions of stability and authenticity. Ingrid Mason addresses this idea, writing, "Authenticity is crucial to society's understanding of historicity, whether measured in

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terms of centuries or seconds." She adds that "Digital culture wants to continually revise its past as much as project into its future" [Mason 2007, 202]. A tension exists between the notions of fluidity and fixity but, while both are important, it is fixity that gives information a sense of direction and purpose. In quoting John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, she states that fixity "frames information." Further, "The way a writer and publisher physically present information, relying on resources outside the information itself, conveys to the reader much more than information alone. Context not only gives people what to read, it tells them how to read, what it means, what it's worth, and why it matters." Context, in other words, creates "a sense of the past, present, and future — cultural and social, fixity and fluidity — on a continuum, irrespective of technology" [Mason 2007, 202]

It is our contention, however, that the pedagogical applications of Web 2.0 technology under consideration here provide an outlet through which educators can entice students to look beyond fixed notions of authenticity and create new contexts that emphasize flexibility in a way that is relevant to the current culture of information. James Hilton speaks to this point when he compares current trends in the information seeking behavior of college students to what he calls the "rip, mix and burn" era of music: "Today's students want to be able to take content from other people, they want to mix it in new creative ways — to produce it, to publish it, and to distribute it" [Hilton 2006, 60]. He suggests that students raised in the digital age tend to think of value in terms of their ability to remix and personalize information. The experience of contributing to a wiki does just that — it encourages students to explore and make their own connections instead of relying on authorities whose work is typically bound in the age-old symbol of authority: the published book. For this reason, we asked our students to combine information gathered from traditional sources such as books and journals with additional or differently explored primary sources, literature and images from online digital collections. By engaging with document creation from the ground up, they would be authorizing a vision of the past that related to their findings as well as their points of view that would be made apparent, finally, through their visual presentation as well as their written interpretation. In other words, instead of relying solely on the research paper in which students often mimic authority by reproducing formalized structures, wikis would encourage them to rethink their approaches to research and to defend both their points of view as well as the form through which they choose to organize and present their findings. As James Hilton suggests, allowing students to actively "remix and personalize" their research would help them find their voices as scholars fully engaged in the act of knowledge production.

Viewed in this light, consensus can be seen, not as a final goal, but as a starting point from which students are encouraged to look for gaps in knowledge, imagine alternative interpretations, and contribute to the ever-changing, adaptable structure of the wiki. This point recalls John Trimbur's classic essay, "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," which is worth examining here. Playing mainly off the ideas of Kenneth Bruffee, Trimbur notes some of the most commonly cited benefits of collaborative learning: it democratizes the classroom, allows students to share in decision-making, and teaches them to take an active role in group life. The desired effect, advocates claim, "is to reach consensus through an expanding conversation" [Trimbur 1989, 602]. He adds that "in Bruffee's social constructionist pedagogy, the language used to reach consensus acquires greater authority as it acquires greater social weight: the knowledge students put into words counts for more as they test it out, revising and relocating it by taking into account what their peers, the teacher, and voices outside the classroom have to say" [Trimbur 1989, 602]. But it is this idea of consensus that worries some critics, who claim that "the use of consensus in collaborative learning is an inherently dangerous and potentially totalitarian practice that stifles individual voice and creativity, suppresses differences, and enforces conformity" [Trimbur 1989, 602]. Trimbur asserts that the debate framed in these terms presents an either/or scenario that misses some of the more nuanced aspects of consensus. He doesn't want to dismiss the notion outright; rather, he wants to "revise it, as a step toward developing a critical practice of collaborative learning," and continues to argue that consensus "can be a powerful instrument for students to generate differences, to identify systems of authority that organize these differences, and to transform the relations of power that determine who may speak and what counts as a meaningful statement" [Trimbur 1989, 603].

Trimbur's words echo a point made earlier about how historical interpretation has the power to unlock difference and, in so doing, can open a text to a greater array of possibilities. Consensus, then, becomes a source of conflict rather than a mere act of assimilation: "Redefining consensus as a matter of conflict suggests, moreover, that consensus does not so much reconcile differences through rational negotiation. Instead, such a redefinition represents consensus as a strategy

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that structures differences by organizing them in relation to each other." In this way, Trimbur continues, "consensus cannot be known without its opposite — without the other voices at the periphery of the conversation" [Trimbur 1989, 608]. Proponents of collaborative learning might claim that this argument distorts the goals of social constructionist pedagogy by disrupting the conversation to "force change in people's interest," but Trimbur adds that we need "to look at collaborative learning not merely as a process of consensus-making but more important as a process of identifying differences and locating these differences in relation to each other" [Trimbur 1989, 610].

We hoped to avoid the afore-mentioned pitfalls and use the technology in a way that would not only illuminate the interpretability of historical materials, but would promote the sort of difference that Trimbur is concerned with. It is one thing to present students with abstract theory, but quite another to have them engage with the phenomenon from which theory is created, and forms of history — be they literary, social, economic, or otherwise — are written from particular positions and involve judgments made in the present about who and what is important in the past. Our students would engage with "difference" on three levels: first, through researching how identities of the past were qualified by others, and second, by experiencing how these identities were interpreted by a playwright interested in representing them for entertainment purposes in a certain place and time. Third, the kind of substantive group negotiation engendered by wikis would enable students to recognize their own positions by having to account for the alternative perspectives of their classmates. Together, they would "hone their skills of inquiry by practicing them through collaboratively constructing a text," engaging in a kind of meta-historical conversation while working in a new kind of classroom sphere [Dwight 2003, 722]. Encountering interpretative practices on both textual and interpersonal levels would enable students to fully engage with the way apparently seamless veneers of history are built from multiple negotiations.

Information Literacy

We were also interested in what impact this technology would have on the information seeking behavior of our students. As stated above, we sought to embed research methodology into the general discourse in what might be thought of as an "integrated" approach to information literacy. While an in-depth analysis of information literacy is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that one trait many such programs share is that they treat research methodology as something that can be taught outside of, or as an add-on to, course content. The problem with this approach is the assumption that, after being exposed to what are often referred to as "one-shot" instruction sessions, students will be equipped to navigate a complex maze of resources and make appropriate course-specific choices. However, a number of studies have shown that, by and large, this is not the case. Davis and Cohen, for example, conducted a citation analysis of research papers in an introductory-level microeconomics course at Cornell University from 1996-1999. Their findings showed a fairly significant decrease in the number of "traditional" scholarly sources (books and journals) used by students during this time. "In general, students cited fewer books in 1999 than they did in 1996. Comprising nearly one third (30%) of total citations in 1996, book citations dropped to less than one fifth (19%) in 1999. This translated into a decrease from 3.5 books per bibliography in 1996 to 2.2 in 1999, with the median citation number dropping from 3 to 1" [Davis 2001, 311]. Although they didn't analyze the type or quality of "web documents" cited, one might surmise that a general increase in Internet usage during this time played a factor in the shift away from books and journals. As a result, the authors conclude that, since students are "very literal" when it comes to requirements, instructors should be more prescriptive with the types of resources they would like to see students use [Davis 2001, 313].

To test this hypothesis, Davis conducted a second study in 2000 in which he implemented three recommendations based on results from his 1996-1999 study. Those recommendations were stricter guidelines about what types of sources students should be allowed to use, the creation of scholarly portals to guide students to "authoritative" sources, and more instruction about how to critically evaluate sources [Davis 2002, 53]. However, even after implementing his recommendations, Davis's second study yielded no new results:

The results of the 2000 update suggest that the professor's verbal instructions had little (if any) effect on improving the scholarly component of research papers. The number of traditional scholarly materials cited this year was similar to previous years. Bibliographies grew, but only in respect to additional web sites and newspapers. When viewed as a percentage of total citations, the "scholarliness" of bibliographies continued to decline [Davis 2002, 59]

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Davis's response to these disappointing results was to suggest that "A possible crisis in undergraduate scholarship is at hand" and that librarians and professors should work more closely and "provide more clearly defined expectations in their assignments" [Davis 2002, 59]. In a similar vein, Robinson and Schlegl also found that library instruction alone has little, if any, effect on the type and quality of sources that students use. Building on Davis's results, they designed a similar study based on what they call "instruction and encouragement" (typified by Davis's approach) and their own "instruction-and-penalty" approach. They ultimately found that "instruction and encouragement has very limited effect on the quality of student research, but instruction-and-penalty does have significant effects" [Robinson 2004, 280]. When penalties were enforced, the quality of the bibliographies was closer to what Davis and Philips had seen in 1996 [Robinson 2004, 280–1].

While the original results from Davis and Philips may have been surprising, the results of the Robinson and Schlegl should be less so. Penalties are no doubt a strong motivational tool, but they don't address a larger issue that is at stake. Jason Martin recently surveyed 200 education majors at the University of Central Florida to determine what impact library instruction was having on sources used by his selected group of students. Martin concluded that, not only is there no clear association between library instruction and the type of sources used, but that student behavior is not so much informed by what they know to be right or wrong as it is based on comfort and convenience. His results revealed that, while 79% of the students surveyed acknowledged that library resources were generally more reliable that Internet sources, "52% of the respondents based their decisions more on convenient access than on the authority of the sources" [Martin 2008, 9]. However, instead of promoting a more prescriptive approach to instruction, Martin points out that, while more restrictions may prevent Internet sources from being included in the final product, this is only because students know they will be penalized if they do so, and there is no saying they won't rely on the Internet during the research process, or that they won't revert back to their old habits once the specific assignment is over. In other words, "they would not have gained a deeper understanding of the critical importance of using academic sources" [Martin 2008, 12]. This "deeper understanding" gets to the heart of one of the key components of information literacy: selfreliance. Instead of using library instruction to guide students through portals of pre-approved, "authoritative" sources, it is our contention that the best approach is to encourage students to be self-reliant, critical researchers. As the culture of information continues to evolve and become more complex, and lines between library catalogs and the Internet become increasingly transparent, distinctions between what counts as "scholarly" and "non-scholarly" will also become less obvious. In such an environment, emphasis should always be placed on the ability to seek, access, and assess quality information, but this should be done in a way that accounts for the wide variety of new and emerging sources of information.

Project Overview

Early in the semester, an introductory session was dedicated to forming the groups described above, setting up accounts, and familiarizing students with the key wiki functions. During this session, students were also given a list of expectations for their online creations (see appendix 1). We created loosely constructed guidelines to allow the groups as much freedom as possible in deciding what should be included in their wikis while keeping the material task-relevant. After some initial apprehension from students who, after being told for so long not to use wikis, were surprised that they were being asked to create one of their own, this open-ended approach provided insightful discussion on the cultural importance of Shakespeare and of intellectual presentation more generally. As Doug Brent suggests, the online environment gives students ample opportunity to "figure it out from the inside, not the outside" [Brent 1997, para. 5]. In creating a historicist study guide for future researchers, our students would be gaining an insider's view of scholarly production. We also hope that this less prescriptive, open-ended approach would provide insight into the information seeking behavior of our students, what they value as emerging researchers, and gaps in their skills that would help us develop better research projects in the future.

In addition to the introductory session, the collaborating librarian, who also provided behind-the-scenes technical support, visited class regularly to provide instruction about using databases such as MLA and Early English Books Online (EEBO), and to conduct several workshop sessions later in the semester to help students in a more informal manner. During these sessions, we made a conscious effort to focus on strategies for seeking and assessing information gleaned from a wide variety of sources. Since special emphasis had been placed on primary sources, we

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talked specifically about how to search for such materials, not only through the UCF library catalog and databases, but also in the ever-increasing number of digital collections and other online resources. This approach would help us break free of the scholarly/non-scholarly dichotomy, which typically prompts students to rely on what is available in a single library collection, and focus more on research as exploration in interactive environments.

Calandra and Lee speak to this point in a recent article about their Digital History Pedagogy Project:

In seeking to position students as active learners who are regularly constructing knowledge, the Context for learning becomes important. Advances in digital media have led to the development of more complex, authentic, and engaging learning environments and tools. Through the use of such digital media, digital history can enable students as they attempt to construct historical understandings which reflect the complexity of the past [Calandra 2005, 325]

The *DHPP* is very much grounded in constructivist pedagogy, but is also influenced by recent scholarship in multimedia learning. For example, they cite Richard Mayer, who "suggests that a learner can be viewed as a knowledge constructor who actively selects and constructs pieces of verbal and visual knowledge in unique ways" [Calandra 2005, 325]. They add, citing Mayer, that "meaningful learning occurs when learners select relevant information from what is presented organize the pieces of information into a coherent mental representation, and integrate the newly constructed representations with others" [Calandra 2005, 326]. In the same vein as James Hilton (quoted above), they encouraged "physical manipulation of digital media by the learner that supports active, meaningful learning; but that also produces tangible, shareable knowledge representation created by the learner" [Calandra 2005, 326]. Their emphasis on manipulation and active learning in the digital environment speaks directly to our project and encouragement of students to construct their own understanding of the past, as it pertains to the life and times of Shakespeare, while promoting a more interactive approach to enhancing information literacy skills. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, the effects of this approach could be seen early on as students began exploring outside research almost immediately and their findings regularly became part of a more nuanced class discussion that shifted from the expected emotional, relatable appeal to a deeper, more historicized understanding of Shakespeare's works.

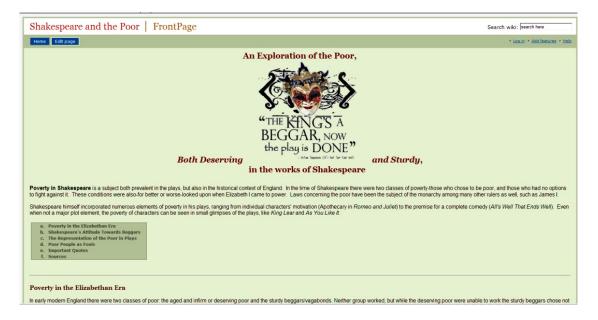
Theory into Practice

In their "Manifesto for Instructional Technology," Jim Dwight and Jim Garrison suggest that hypertext and hypermedia technologies like wikis are poststructuralist in nature, "open[ing] new realms of creative possibility" by rejecting "the notions of a fixed and final telos, absolute original, or ultimate fixed center (or foundation) to any process" [Dwight 2003, 699]. Our students' engagement with the collaborative capacity of wikis supports this claim. Less abstractly, interactive technologies that have the capacity to engage multiple voices and sources can challenge the ideological neutrality of fact, a foremost concern in poststructuralist historical and literary thought. The key issue for us was not collaboration's impact on factual accuracy - the concern many have about projects like Wikipedia - but rather a new perception about the plausibility of objectivity in interpreting history. What follows is a partial account of the metadiscourse drawn both from student wikis as well as the final reflective essays written during the last week of the course.

History as Mediated Interpretation

The notion that all historical interpretations are colored by perceptions emanating from a particular point of view was one of the primary theoretical precepts experienced by our students, many of whom were able to recognize how different authorizing institutions, namely government and the church, interpreted poverty, and the way creative writers such as Shakespeare are always invested in some kind of interpretation. One student working on representations of the poor stated in his final analysis that "Shakespeare's work is more than beautiful old language and stories; before doing this, I never would have been able to say that Shakespeare included references to such political and seemingly esoteric things such as houses of correction and criminals and beggars. I had read two of the plays before and I think these references just went over my head." The ability to meaningfully connect plays to important social concerns circulating at the time of their creation was fostered by having to make critical interpretive choices as a group: "We started our project taking for granted that the poor were victims," he explained, "until [one group member] mentioned the Friar [of Romeo

and Juliet]. His poverty was a choice." The group took a long time negotiating this second insight into poverty "because we kept arguing over if we should present both views." The title of their final wiki, "An Exploration of the Poor, Both Deserving and Sturdy, in the works of Shakespeare," demonstrates successful intellectual collaboration. The group finally defined the identity of the Elizabethan poor as "those who chose to be poor, and those who had no options to fight against it" (see Figure 1). This group effectively collected and situated appropriate Elizabethan tracts to witness agency and then measure how both views of agency could be true.



Another group member commented on their decision to explore both "the merry beggar and the resentful poor" in several plays. "I worried that our definition was too loose but it seems to me that Shakespeare always gives us both sides of the same coin." For this group, a less abstract view of the Elizabethan impoverished emerged through combining references to the poor in plays with poor laws and sermons, source materials typically referred to by scholars and advanced graduate students. In other words, by assessing primary and secondary source material, students achieved some scholarly authority. The off-line collaboration demonstrates some of the highest goals we hold for collaborative learning: responsible for creating their own body of knowledge, students worked outside of class to discuss and negotiate the information that each brought individually to the table, a move that ultimately led to deeper and vaster thinking about a subject. Many teams remarked upon Shakespeare's ability to double-deal with both positive and negative discourses of identities circulating in his era. This led them to think about the playwright as an active interpreter of his own period, and about the intrinsic capacity of "facts" to be interpreted in multiple ways.

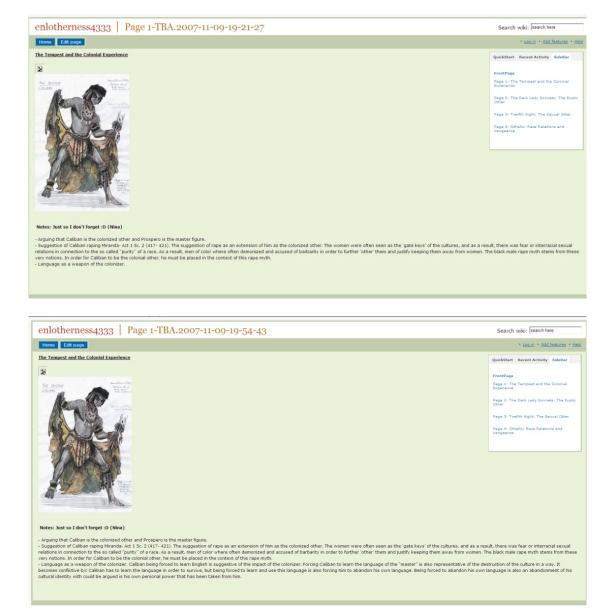
The students charged with creating a page dedicated to the "Colonizer and Colonized" put a considerable amount of effort into understanding their topic in relation to both explorer's reports of native populations such as Richard Hakluyt's "Reasons for Colonization" (1585) and to Montaigne's 1580 essay, "On Cannibals." Together these texts demonstrate conflicting views of entitled, exploitative colonization as well as a romanticized misunderstanding of "innocent" and unsullied native civilization. Face to face, the class could spend only one allotted hour comparing both, a conversation that ended with most students favoring Hakluyt's tract as the one that shed the most meaning, while the latter seemed only to useful in contextualizing Gonzalo's famous utopian speech. Online, however, students expressed an understanding of a different kind. Their wiki discussion of "Caliban as a Colonial Other" acknowledges how the class favored the one reading, but also suggests that a more sympathetic kind of "framework for representing Caliban" is also in play (see Figure 2). For these students, Caliban appears both as a potential rapist of Miranda and a victim of physically torment having had, "through violence, to learn the language in order to survive...and forced to abandon his own language."



This is not to say that at least one student would not have arrived at this more inclusive understanding through the process of writing an individual research paper. However, the editing history suggests that the collaborative process played an active part in increasing the whole group's sensitivity to Shakespeare's multiple interpretations of his subject. The three most significant edits to the page occurred throughout November when we were covering the play in class. One student began the page with a few simple reading notes, arguing that "Caliban is the colonized other and Prospero is the master figure." A week later, another student reminded the group that Caliban represented a kind of danger to the newcomers, carrying with him the threat of rape and potential for violence. The first student reminded everyone that this early suggestion of "interracial sexual relations" had negative implications that were alive and well in our own time (see Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5). In plays such as The Tempest and Othello, she stated that "men of color" are "often demonized and accused of barbarity in order to further 'other' them and justify keeping them away from women. The black male rape myth stems from these very notions." Her point was taken seriously as there was a week-long lull in the production of the page until the young woman finished it herself. The second student summed up the negotiation best when, in his final report, he suggested that his reluctance to continue posting on the subject came more from indecision than any real power-play between students: "I chose not to continue working on this page because it occurred to me that Caliban was never really there [in the play]. Our group couldn't decide if he was presented in a positive or negative light as a colonial 'other.' I think we never get to view him just on his own terms."





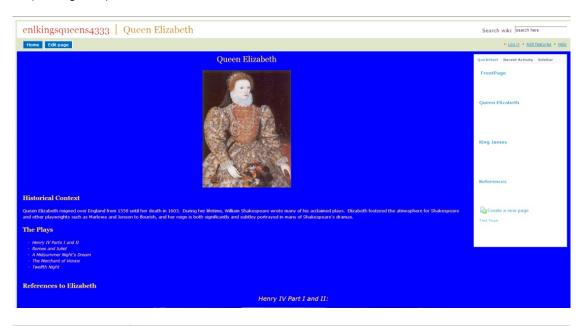


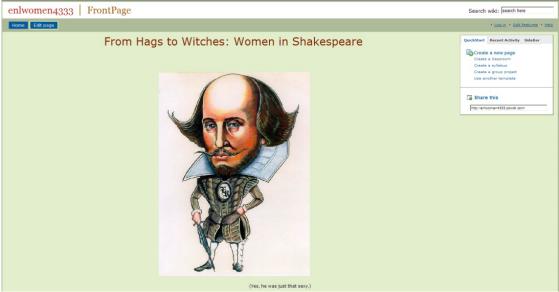
Literature as a Historical Construct

As the class struggled to think about what Shakespeare thought of people in his own historical moment, they also fought with the idea that Shakespeare was a historical entity or more specifically, a *product* of historical entities that invested in his works a certain cultural capital that is perhaps unsurpassed in English literary history. As one young woman working on the Nobility wiki suggested, "looking at works through 'royal' eyes put a new spin on each play. I began reading each play keeping in mind that Shakespeare had to be sure not to offend his monarchs and in the end, had to always uphold their right to the throne in some way. I have begun to think of him as a less brilliant and more sychophantic [sic] playwright...so in some ways this project hurt my appreciation of Shakespeare." Despite her engagement with James I's absolutist philosophy of kingship and the play, *Macbeth*, wherein James' distant relative, Banquo, is not complicit in the murder of King Duncan as he appears in Shakespeare's chronicle source material, this student was clearly longing for her formerly romanticized view of the playwright as a well-worded individual genius working beyond or in spite of the political realm of his day.

This student's grievance articulates not only her own individual struggle of disenchantment with Shakespeare-the-great-writer but also that of her peers, which was expressed less directly in words but perceivable through the images they included or failed to include in their wikis. Despite the depth and reflective range of historiographical textual interpretations, the limited range of the pictures suggests that the students were taking a somewhat different approach to visual presentation. The "nobility" group chose to include pictures of Elizabeth II's bejeweled crowns and lush

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century paintings such as John Waterhouse's *Miranda* (1916), works that were visually pleasing but ultimately did not support their textual analysis of what they saw as playwright's struggle to appease the crown (see Figure 6). Many groups chose to include movie posters of contemporary adaptations such as "She's the Man" (2006) and "10 Things I Hate About You" (1999), both of which fail to illustrate their historically-based arguments and speak instead to the sustained and general interest in Shakespeare's works today. Ideally, students would engage with both text and image to develop more accurate representations of each identity, but visually, the result of the final wikis is one of topical disconnection and, to our surprise, sometimes degradation. The first page of the wiki dedicated to women was, at the last moment, emended with a the cartoonish representation of Shakespeare under which one student in the group added the comment "Yes, he was just that sexy," a superfluous if not comical remark given as if the student recognized that the image of the male author misrepresented their topic and even devalued the analytic work therein (see Figure 7).





The disconnect between text and image presented us with an unexpected and interesting dilemma. Our initial reaction was that many groups had fallen into the trap of emphasizing style over substance. Many English majors have primarily been trained in textual rather than visual analysis, which is still an emerging area of English studies. Our students were both negotiating this new technology and struggling to define an appropriate audience for the work they were creating. For many, the Internet is primarily a place to engage in social interaction and the consumption of popular culture, a place to converse with peers rather than serious researchers with whom they may not yet feel authorized to speak. Notably, most pictures were situated throughout the pages in the upper halves of each field, or used as dividers

between topic sections, those places where a viewer would immediately encounter new written analysis and might expect, magazine-style, an image to "hook" their interest. If, as John Zuern suggests, "[t]he most complicated and ultimately most productive aspect of the transition from word to image in teaching is the capacity of images to do more than simply restate verbal messages, to resist, in fact, any mere repetition of the verbal statement," then the images the students chose resisted the socio-political analysis and the historical temporality in which they were urged to engage [Zuern 2004, 51]. For the students' imagined audience, images suggestive of a nostalgic sense of heraldry, love-lorn young heroines, and contemporary Hollywood actors, instead of being mere decoration, had the power to attract potential readers by maintaining some of the sentiment of which Shakespeare is popularly accredited with.

New Gaps in Historical Narratives

Overall, the project offered students a closer view of Shakespeare's plays as historical material broadly conceived. Characters in the plays were not cordoned off as timeless inspirational entities, but instead, became figures that required a special kind of consideration grounded in the playwright's historical moment. This primary goal achieved, new kinds of critique was elicited by students who, in seeking ways to conceptualize characters as a group and for the public internet, were made savvy of some of the pitfalls of "doing" history. Mid-point in the semester, several students realized that the specific kind of history required by the instructor was only one of many historical narratives available to explore. One student in the "supernatural" group found her intellectual enthusiasm reined-in by her group: "In looking at the witches and witchcraft and mostly Macbeth, I realized that I could go off in many directions such as [animal] familiars and food. My group had to keep me on target. They let me know that what you were looking for was a more sociohistorical view of the plays." The editing record of this student's work shows that this conversation occurred early on in the semester as she set up fields for these areas to fill in over a weekend, but later in the week she had shifted her interest to conform to both group and instructor expectation. Admittedly, she was limited by her group missing the creative component of doing a socio-political history that included food and animal relations, but in trying to maintain the integrity of the project, members of this group noted that the instructor valued certain historical narratives above others, that she was invested in certain questions that would force students to collect and make sense of data in a way that would inform certain readings. Some students also picked up on the way the project reified intellectual divisions in the same way specialties are developed in and supported by the academy. One savvy young woman commented, "I know a ton of information about the serving class and can talk more concretely than anyone about Malvolio's expected role, but not so much about other areas of interest. I think that this was a good project to help us understand Shakespeare's works, but it does limit us to only being experts on one aspect of his works."

The point made by this student is representative of an issue that recurred in many final reaction papers; namely that, while the wikis provided students an interactive outlet through which they could explore characters and themes that would not have been part of regular lectures, there wasn't enough time to explore wikis other than their own. In the end, even though the wikis helped fill in some of the gaps that naturally occur in any class, the students didn't get to experience the full benefit of their work. The primary reason seems to be that they were so focused on building their own wikis that there was very little time for crossover or interaction between groups. This may be because they developed a sense of subject specialization described above, or because they felt a natural attachment to their own work. In any case, the nature of the research inadvertently enforced subject-specific boundaries while crossing the disciplinary limits of literature, history, and information studies. This replicated, in a smaller single-classroom form, the larger enterprise of university research, wherein "distinct precincts of the world" become "scrutinized by a small group of specialists reading and writing principally for each other" [Radway 2004, 205]. It is worth noting, however, that students continued to visit the wikis on a fairly regular basis after the semester was over, and in some cases they continued to update them even after final grades had been submitted. This continued involvement demonstrates how, even though many students fell into the trap of subject specialization, they nevertheless felt a great sense of ownership of their work and that wikis, in turn, have the potential to extend the life of a project beyond a single class or semester.

Findings: Regarding the Future of the Past

Collaborating on the historically specific identities at play in Shakespeare's works coerced students to contend with challenges inherent in postmodern knowledge production. This project, with its requirements to link image with text,

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illustrated how Shakespeare always comes pre-packaged as a cultural icon before students enter our classrooms. Further, it provided students the opportunity to appreciate Shakespeare through his works as a uniquely talented but, like ourselves, politically and socially invested human being. Students also recognized gaps inherent in knowledge acquisition when solely depending upon their professors as authorities. By recognizing these gaps, they were encouraged to explore both primary and secondary resources, text and image, in an attempt to challenge established interpretations of these works and make new connections — a potentially overwhelming task given the unwieldy nature of Shakespeare studies. As a result, our students grappled not only with issues related to historical and literary interpretation, but also with the breadth and scope of what they could hope to achieve in one semester. Our response was to emphasized quality over completeness and to encourage students to rethink their approaches to research and to become more sayvy users of information. After some initial anxiety, we found that they were, in fact, using a relatively high level of resources, especially when compared to other previously cited studies. For example, while the average number of citations in our project is on par with the Davis and Cohen study (12.3 per wiki to their final result of 11.9 per paper in 1999), the ratio of scholarly materials used (books and articles) in each project was much different. While David and Cohen saw a decline from 30-19% in three years, we recorded a much higher 43% of total citations from books and 22% from articles for a combined total of 65%. After weeding out books and articles that were from popular or otherwise "non-scholarly" publishers, we were left with 48% from scholarly books and articles. Additionally, nine out of the twelve groups consulted primary sources for a total number of thirteen citations among those nine groups. We included these in the "scholarly" category primarily because they demonstrated proficiency using an academic database (EEBO). Along with a few academic web citations, this brought our final scholarly/non-scholarly total to 59/41% (see appendix 2 for a complete breakdown of the citations).

Our scholarly/non-scholarly ratio is much lower than in the Robinson and Schlegl study, which achieved 86% using the "instruction + penalty" method that we previously argued against. It is also worth noting that, while we were happy with the results of the catalog and database searches, those results didn't transfer to the quality of online searches. 24.5% of all citations were from the Internet, which averages to about three web citations per wiki. This number is not overwhelming, especially considering we were working in an online medium, but relatively few of these citations were academic (only four out of 36 total). Although this is clearly an area to improve upon in future classes, we believe the results are significant enough to support our assertion about the value of integrated library instruction — that by making discussion about research methodology part of the general discourse throughout the semester, students would become comfortable enough with the library catalog and databases to use them at a higher rate than we have seen in previous studies.

Another area to be dealt with is the problem of subject specialization described above. This problem posed a challenge to one of our key hypotheses: that employing open source technology would assuage some of the gaps we experience in trying to provide enough period coverage while also attending to theoretical apparatus and students' experience of meaningful connections to material. Collectively, the project did start to accomplish this task. However, as stated above, because they were so focused on their own creations, there wasn't sufficient time for extensive crossover and exploration. One possible explanation for this trend might be that the groups striving for too much coverage, thereby resulting in entries that were often too general or uneven. In fact, many students asked about what we thought the wikis should look like and how long they should be, always striving, it seemed, for a sense of finalization or *fixity* described by Ingrid Mason who, again, asserts that there is a distinct connection between the notions of *stability* and *authenticity* [Mason 2007, 202].

It would be possible for a wiki, or a community of wiki users, to strive toward a finalized authoritative "edition," but, as Schroeder and den Besten point out in their analysis of the Thomas Pynchon *Against the Day* wiki, these projects seem to have more value when they "adopt a more playful approach which treats texts as having endless scope for further work" [Schroeder 2008, 183]. They further add that wikis promote "competition to complete the task" which, they say, would not occur if the wiki entries were organized alphabetically or by topic as in a traditional scholarly bibliography [Schroeder 2008, 184]. The unevenness of the entries, and the open-ended nature of the medium, expose gaps in knowledge and encourage users to fill in those gaps and make new associations. Wikis seem to be most effective, then, in projects that rely on interpretive rather than purely informative entries and "where endless detective work is called for,

and this may apply to other areas of e-research or online collaborations" [Schroeder 2008, 184]. The concerns our students had about completeness, and the affect this had on our project, points to an issue that is common among undergraduate researchers: an approach that focuses on compiling citations from recognized authorities as opposed to genuine interaction and discourse with those well-establish ideas. Texts and interpretations are often seen as being authoritative and not sources in which to locate difference and expose gaps in knowledge. Projects that employ open source technology, such as the one described here, have the capacity to release texts from what often seems like interpretive closure and, in so doing, they can reopen the seeming finality of printed materials as well as historical narratives.

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