

From Arden to Vrindavan: *As You Like It*, YouTube Bazaar Notes, and the Creative Remediation of a “Waterloo” Text

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Abstract

The YouTube Shakespeare phenomenon has been addressed in several studies including those by Christy Desmet (2009, 2014) and Stephen O’Neill (2014, 2015). This paper builds on their work to examine closely the visual, aesthetic and aural strategies of a YouTube video that seeks to make Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* more accessible to a group of Bengali-speaking students in small town West Bengal, India. The paper examines (a) the means by which the video creator works to activate prior knowledge in his target viewers, (b) the consequent degree of cognitive success he appears to have achieved in terms of summary and explanation, and (c) this video not just as a teaching tool, but as a piece of creative remediation in its own right, and an original contribution to YouTube Shakespeare. The easy access to the visual dimensions of the global popular afforded by immersion in a digital environment both necessitates and enables more flexible and innovative approaches to bringing alive the sometimes archaic language in canonical literary texts, in this case, Shakespeare’s plays. The paper demonstrates how the video allows the creator to harness the capabilities of one of YouTube’s key pedagogical affordances: the digital image, in conjunction with the site’s potent play and gaming possibilities, as well as the sense of community in shared space that it fosters in regular users. The creator’s deployment of images is apparently idiosyncratic; but these images are culled from a wide variety of online loci that are particularly relevant, comprehensible, and attractive to the demographic he addresses. This strategy enables him to use the exciting possibilities of play, exploration, and cross-cultural connection to engage students

effectively in a text recognized as challenging in the Indian context. A related broader argument made here pertains to the role of such digital videos in the shaping of the Global Shakespeare that scholars such as Alexa Huang have highlighted in the last decade. Teaching/explainer videos like the one analyzed in detail here, which combine the exoticism and excitement of globally sourced digital images and the youthful power of play with specific local references and an accessible vernacular voiceover can make a crucial contribution towards reshaping a new generation of glocal non-Anglophone iterations of Shakespeare.

Keywords

YouTube, affordances, glocal, remediation, learning community

This paper closely examines the visual, aesthetic and aural strategies of a YouTube video that seeks to make Shakespeare's *As You Like It* more accessible to a group of Bengali-speaking students in small town West Bengal, India. Sherer and Shea (2011) demonstrate the usefulness of online videos in scaffolding student learning and engagement, remarking on the "explosion of Web.2 tools" that facilitate this process. Following several other scholars, Roodt and Peier (2013) emphasize the difference in the learning style of the Net Generation student, whose technical literacy requires a rethinking of teaching strategies and techniques to substantially include the digital.¹ Though Juhasz (2009) sees some educational value in YouTube videos, she argues against the site as an intellectual resource, insisting that it cannot help build communities, relies on popularity, humor, speed, shallowness, celebrity, and distraction, and tends to reflect the "hand of (the) amateur and the space of the mundane" (148). Burgess and Green, on the other hand, lay emphasis on YouTube as a "bottom-up platform for vernacular creativity" and on the positive contribution of "user-created, self-mediated expression... (to) the growth of knowledge" (2009, 6, ix). The easy access to the visual dimensions of the global popular afforded by the digital environment both necessitates and enables more flexible and innovative approaches to bringing alive the sometimes archaic language in canonical literary texts, in this case, Shakespeare's plays.

In order to explore YouTube's potential as a Shakespeare learning resource in an Indian educational context, this paper analyzes a YouTube explainer video that seeks to make Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (AYLI,