



# The Encyclopaedia of Shakespeare's Language Project: Reaching out

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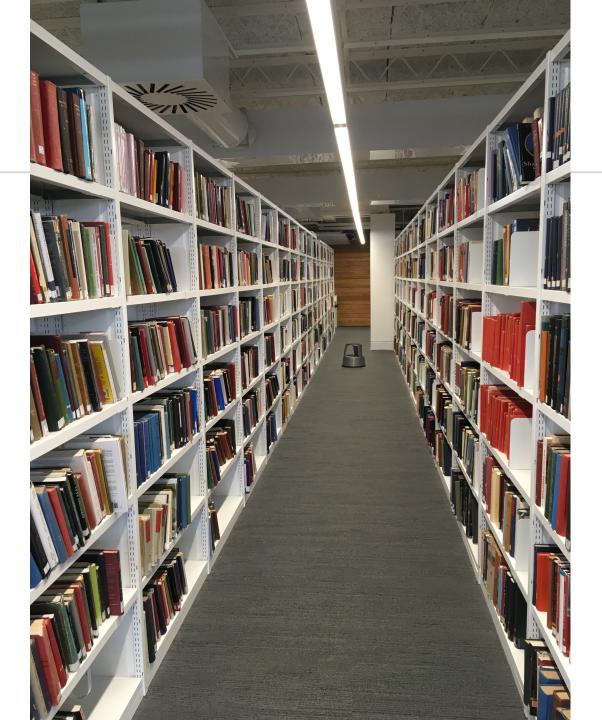


















#### The key output: The encyclopedia

#### Two volumes:

- (1) a kind of dictionary, and
- (2) a compendium of word patterns relating to characters, character groups, plays, play-genres, themes, etc..

To be published by Bloomsbury in paper and electronically.



# The challenge: Students in universities and schools, and beyond

#### Comments from undergraduates (TheStudentRoom; our study):

- We as students are overexposed to him [Shakespeare], forced to put the same overrated value on his work as some "academics" with whom we might not agree have done.
- The plots are pointless, boring and completely irrelevant.
- Shakespeare uses overcomplicated sentence structure to say simple things which makes him seem pretentious and hard to understand, with old and outdated vocabulary.
- I've never really seen the relevance of Shakespeare when it comes to teaching English. I mean he might as well have written his plays in a foreign language.
- If I could go back in time, I'd kill Shakespeare so that today's schoolchildren wouldn't have to study his crap.

# Meeting the challenge



#### Possible solutions:

- Emphasize the performance (e.g. The Globe in London)
- Simplify the text
- Get rid of the text

**BUT** this is a project about the language.

# Meeting the challenge



#### Outreach work

- Annual summer school
- A mini-MOOC
- Lectures, demonstrations, workshops, etc.
- Website, Twitter, etc.
- An app

# Meeting the challenge



## Working guidelines

- Don't assume that the audience likes what you are talking about (e.g. Shakespeare).
- Work with what they think they know (e.g. the myths about Shakespeare).
- Use technology familiar to them, e.g. the internet, computer programs, apps.
- Go out to them wherever possible, rather than expecting them to come to you.
- Enable them to study at a distance.
- Target areas where they have difficulty or feel blocked.
- Use humour!

# **Tackling the myths**



#### How many words did Shakespeare invent?

'Learning' from the internet.

- "Shakespeare coined more words than other writers, around 1700 words ..."
- "The English language owes a great debt to Shakespeare. He invented over 1700 of our common words ..."
- "Shakespeare introduced nearly 3,000 words ..."
- "Shakespeare is credited by the Oxford English Dictionary with the introduction of nearly 3,000 words into the language"
- "Shakespeare invented a quarter of our language"
- "Shakespeare invented half the words in the English language"
- "Shakespeare is our language"

# Our computer-based methods



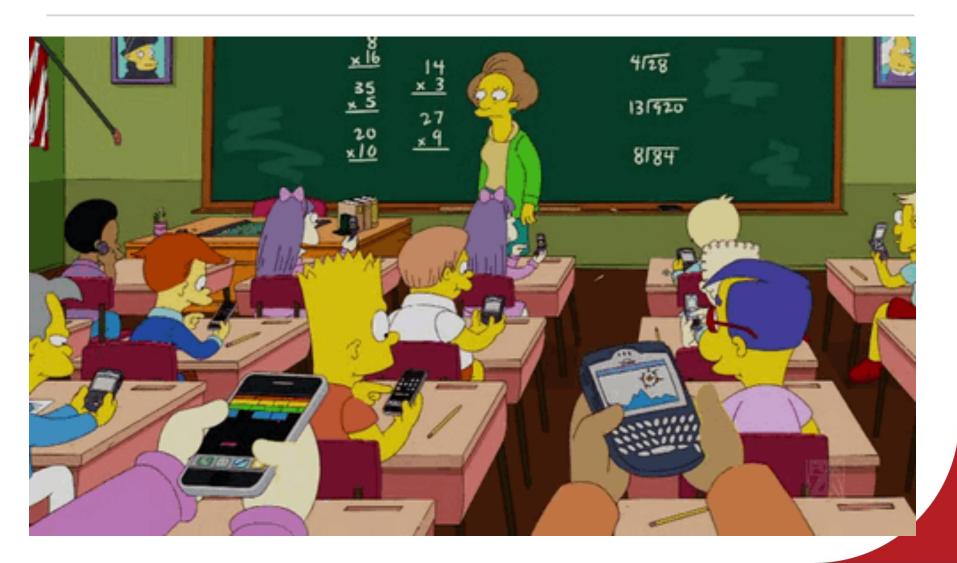


The annual summer school.

The MOOC will deliver the same methods at a distance.



# Devise a mobile app with a 'lite' version of the Shakespeare dictionary



# Devise a mobile app with a 'lite' version of the Shakespeare dictionary



- By 2016, the Shakespeare Pro app had been downloaded over 8 million times (https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/most-popular-shakespeare-app-celebrates-400th-anniversary-300251505.html)
- Ailles, J. L. (2014). 'Is There an App for That?': Mobile Shakespeare on the Phone and in the Cloud. *Outerspeares:* Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation, 75-110.



# Target areas students find difficult

What do people find difficult when they encounter Shakespeare's language?

# Some preliminary results from the Reading Shakespeare's Language pilot study (with Sean Murphy and Mathew Gillings)



## Preliminary results. What causes difficulty?

- Words trump unusual grammatical constructions, ambiguities, metaphors, etc.
  - In most cases, because they are completely unknown. Top examples include: yclept, Gramercy, trow, fain, woo't, mar, haggard
  - ➤ Occasionally, because their known sense does not seem to fit the context (e.g. ripe, rebuked, bully, wench).
- Sentence structure (especially long sentences)
- Metaphors (especially extended ones)
- Historical and cultural context



# Looking ahead .... going global

- Shakespeare is the person most associated with UK arts and culture (2016 British Council report).
- A 2011 joint RSC/British Council study estimated that 50% of the world's schoolchildren and at least 64 million children a year study Shakespeare. For many of those studying the English texts, English will be an additional language.



# Looking ahead .... going global

## Our goals:

- (1) We would like to find out what students of differing languages and cultures find difficult when they read Shakespeare's texts, And adapt our resources accordingly.
- (2) We would like our dictionary app to accommodate such children, and to include "language learning" games.

#### What we need is:

Time, money and collaborators.

## And looking even further ahead:

We would like to assess the quality of and improve translations of Shakespeare's texts.