Shakespeare's Global Communities
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'Shakespeare's global communities' examines the current role Shakespeare plays in global theatrical and literary culture, taking the 2012 World Shakespeare Festival (WSF) as a core case study. Part of the 2012 London Cultural Olympiad, the WSF is an intercultural celebration of Shakespeare as 'the world's playwright', involving 'thousands of artists from around the world' in the performance of all of Shakespeare's plays, as well as many new works inspired by them (http://www.worldshakespearefestival.org.uk/about/). Such a venture reflects the existence of a rich global conversation taking place around the figure of Shakespeare, linking diasporic and intercultural communities through a shared interest in the interpretation, performance, adaptation, and appropriation of his dramatic and literary works.

'Shakespeare's global communities' proposes to investigate and analyse this global conversation, asking the central research question, 'what does the WSF reveal about Shakespeare as a site for intercultural community building in the twenty-first century?' Key sub-questions include:

- How do the performances and debates emerging from the WSF reflect how different communities (whether in terms of geography, demography, occupation, cultural heritage, or professed interest group) mobilize Shakespeare to address concerns important to their community identity?
- What does Shakespeare have to offer to such communities that other cultural figures do not?
- How do new social networking technologies reshape the ways in which diverse global communities connect with one another around a figure such as Shakespeare?

Because theatre is by nature an ephemeral art form, one of the scoping study's chief concerns is to capture as much data as possible from this major event, which might otherwise be in danger of passing by without sustained critical evaluation and comment. This is where crowd-sourcing comes in. In the first instance we assembled a group of 16 researchers to cover the 70+ WSF performances that will take place across the UK from April to October 2013. Our plan was for these researchers to write initial reviews of each production, for these reviews to be posted in our project website (www.yearofshakespeare.com), and for wider audience feedback to then be sought through a discussion forum and through Twitter (using established WSF hashtags). While our core research team has only slightly grown (to about 20), we have enlisted the help of about 10-15 additional academics in order to source a review for each production.

As I write this our website is being rapidly developed for our 23 April launch date, and so the effectiveness of our audience feedback strategy has yet to be tested. One of the reasons it has been important for us to try to capture a broader audience response is because we feel that, to date, academic work on intercultural Shakespeare has failed to address the very different expectations and expertise that diverse audiences bring to such hybrid works of art. We hope that our project will highlight how critical feedback from more diverse communities of stakeholders (including theatre practitioners, audience members, cultural institutions, as well as academics) may broaden and enrich understanding of what constitutes a 'successful' performance in terms of community and cultural engagement. For us, engagement means exciting and motivating people to become part of something that they might normally let pass them by – in other words, opting in to something going on that has the potential to reshape

aspects of their typical daily lives. The WSF hopes to engage people through a variety of intercultural Shakespeare performances, and we hope to engage people in a discussion about them.

In order to accomplish this goal and to pursue the questions outlined above, the project prioritizes the following objectives:

1) Completing 'desk-based' research reviewing existing work on Shakespeare's global communities and the ways in which audiences and cultural institutions participate in such community formation, with particular focus on how the WSF contributes to such debates.

2) Creating an online archive documenting WSF performances that includes critical comment from audiences and theatre practitioners as well as academics.

3) Compiling a virtual bibliography of this literature and linking it to the interactive online archive so as to facilitate further knowledge exchange among academics, audiences, practitioners, and the wider public.

4) Bringing together a core and extended team of academics committed to participating in and analysing the performances throughout the UK that are showcased in the WSF, both in the online forum and in two one-day workshops (see Collaborating Activities).

5) Writing a final research review that brings together findings from each of the objectives above, identifying areas in which the new data collected from the WSF highlights the need for further work in the field of Shakespeare's global communities.