

**A Shakespearean in the World:  
An Interview with Professor Alexa Alice Joubin  
(Professor of English at George Washington University, USA)  
黃詩芸的學思歷程**

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*This interview was conducted by Professor Min-Hua Wu (吳敏華, Professor and Chair, Department of English, National Chengchi University and President, Taiwan Shakespeare Association) on 1 February 2026 as a dialogue with the keynote speaker, Alexa Alice Joubin (黃詩芸), in anticipation of the 2026 Wenshan × Taiwan Shakespeare Association International Conference, to be held on 29 November 2026.*

## **I. Intellectual Formation and Scholarly Trajectory**

**MHW** As the recipient of the Modern Language Association's (MLA) Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies, your scholarship on Shakespearean adaptation, performance, and especially global and Asian Shakespeare has become foundational, to the point that your work is now indispensable reading in the field. Looking back to your early years as a scholar trained in comparative literature, did you anticipate that your research would assume such a central position in contemporary Shakespeare studies? How do you understand this trajectory in retrospect?

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**AAJ** Thank you for this retrospective question. As Søren Kierkegaard writes, life can only be lived forward, and it accrues meanings when it is understood backward (179). For all my life, I have been looking for a place to call home, which is why I became interested in how narratives are transformed when they move across boundaries of all kinds. As a foreign-born scholar in the US, I have always felt like an imposter. I am anxious I would not be taken seriously. I am worried that I would not look legitimate. I was very self-conscious of being a minority. I have tried to stay aloof. Even though I am passionate about what I do, and research is my life’s work, I have tried to be emotionally and personally detached from academic inquiries. Initially, I did not even want to talk about my Taiwanese origin to colleagues in the US for fear of being ousted. I have since learned to “speak what we feel, not what we ought to say” (5.3.393), as Shakespeare reminds us in *King Lear*, because the personal is a valid category in the critical enterprise. So here is my story.



Caption: Alexa Alice Joubin giving a public lecture at the Mostly Mozart Festival at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York. Photo credit: Lincoln Center.

I was born to Taiwanese parents in a farming village in southern Taiwan. On sultry summer evenings, my grandmother would tell me fairy tales under a starry sky, stories about her life under Japanese colonial rule, and stories of the stones, crickets, and the village. This is how I developed an insatiable appetite for stories—historical, fantastical, political, heroic. I was a nerdy kid who loved reading and creating stories, which, as I later learned, are called

narratives. In school I was a most unwelcome daydreamer. I was being suffocated by the exam-oriented curriculum. There was no breathing room. In that stifling environment, stories gave me breathing room.

Stories offered me a way out and gave me hope. As a college student at National Tsinghua University in Hsinchu, I majored in the practically impractical major known as English literature, because I dreamed about the infinitely expanding world beyond the small island where I grew up. I developed an appetite for armchair travel, namely traveling through stories, traveling through time, and traveling across borders of all kinds. My curiosity set me on a path of studying cultural globalization that took me to Strasbourg and Montpellier in France, Göttingen, Munich and Trier in Germany, Oxford and Cambridge in England, and several other cities and countries.

Shakespeare's stories and the stories different cultures tell about Shakespeare eventually led me to California. American humanities education plants seeds for great changes in people's lives. As a wide-eyed graduate student at Stanford, I learned how to ask probing questions and take history to task, and how to find a path through a dark forest of conflicting ideas. To achieve these goals, I studied a number of languages, including Latin, classical Chinese, modern Japanese, German, and French. I learned how to read closely and contextually for untold or silenced stories, and how to build sustainable intellectual communities through effective written and oral communication. When it came time to choose a topic for my doctoral dissertation, I initially wanted to stay with a conservative, safe topic in a more established field: Renaissance tragedy. I am thankful that instead I discovered and participated in the creation of global Shakespeare as a new field of study. I am forever indebted to Professor Patricia Parker (Margery Bailey Professor of English and Comparative Literature), whose relentless pursuit of perfection continues to inspire me, and to Professor Haun Saussy (member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and former president of the American Comparative Literature Association), who pushed me to take the road less traveled.

Comparative Literature (German, Japanese, English, Classical Chinese, French, Latin) was my starting point, but I have since ventured into the fields of critical AI, disability, race, gender, performance, and film studies. While I

keep exploring new research topics, I never gave up my first love: story-telling. To me, the world is made up of stories. Stories full of sound and fury. Great stories are often strangers at home. They defamiliarize banal experiences and everyday utterances while offering something recognizable through a new language and form. Stories, like people, travel and move around. Stories connect us to other times and places.

Now, I am based in the District of Columbia. It is a privilege and a unique responsibility to teach in downtown Washington, D.C., three blocks from the White House and next door to the World Bank, Department of State, National Science Foundation, the International Monetary Fund, and the Smithsonians. My international and local students alike take pride in studying in the nation's capital. Meanwhile, the Capitol Hill is a proud host to institutions that foster humanistic ideals, including the Supreme Court, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress is the largest library in the world. Today its collection includes over 178 million books and a vast collection of photographs, sheet music, sound recordings, and films on over 838 miles of shelves. As my students tell me, literature helps them put human faces on globalization. Knowledge of cultural globalization can help us avoid cultural imposition and move towards cultural sharing and building common ground.

Story-telling makes us human because it helps us understand the human condition in key contexts. I am proud to have answered my calling to tell stories.



Caption: Alexa Alice Joubin giving a public lecture in the Folger Library's Founder's Room. Photo credit: Basile Joubin.

**MHW** What drew you to global Shakespeare studies as a racial minority in the US?

**AAJ** Some people have wondered why a Taiwanese American woman would write about Shakespeare, a canon that does not belong to her heritage. I study Shakespeare in order to make and hold space for everyone by inserting what feminist writer bell hooks calls an “oppositional gaze” (12). This oppositional gaze enables me to look from a location that disrupts the status quo. I adopt such a gaze to examine works that have been labeled as belonging to communities other than my own. I am creating a new critical space. I make observations of insider-outsider relations in and beyond Shakespeare. That said, I reject the expectation to write only from my personal perspective for testimonial purposes even if some people believe that the personal is always political. Revealing instability in environments previously assumed to be stable, I hope to create sparks that engender new ideas and paradigms.

In fact, I first encountered “Shakespeare” while studying in Germany on a scholarship. During my German sojourn, I discovered that the most frequently performed playwright in that country is not Goethe but William Shakespeare. As I would find out later, Shakespeare was an important figure that helped establish a unified German cultural identity and literary tradition in opposition to French classicism. I soon learned that all over the world Shakespeare has been a common cultural touchstone for centuries. A Renaissance poet associated with a theatre called the Globe, Shakespeare had become a global author long before globalization became a catchphrase. There are now Globe theatres in Germany, New Zealand, Japan, the United States, Canada, and elsewhere.

When I first visited London, work was under way to reconstruct Shakespeare’s renowned Globe Theatre near its original site on the South Bank along the River Thames. I gleefully donated a brick to the project. In the mind of a student from a small island nation that has not been recognized by the United Nations and most countries since 1971, that brick was a material connection to the world beyond international politics, to a fascinating historical space, and to the intangible cultural heritage of a “brave new world,” as Miranda would say in *The Tempest* (5.1.217). Storytelling is in fact the foundation of Prospero’s magic. The magician frames the world he and his daughter live in with stories that help them heal from the experience of exile

and forgive their enemies. I wanted to find a brave new world of my own. I was either passionate enough to be blind or foolish enough to be passionate about academia, so I decided not only to study abroad but to pursue a career in the US I had no family connections in the country.

What I was not aware of as I stood at the construction site of the great theatre in London was that globalized art means business. The modern Globe is not only a sign of cultural rebirth of London's once-shady South Bank but is also a perfect example of how the humanities can lead to economic prosperity and transform communities. We can also learn a great deal about another culture through stories its members tell, and we can always learn about ourselves by comparing how another culture reads a story we know, such as *Hamlet*.



Caption: Alexa Alice Joubin at the Globe Theatre in London. Photo credit: Alexa Alice Joubin

Shakespeare showed me how to turn the foreign shore into my native habitat. Shakespeare did not invent the human, but the works and rewritings that fall under the name “Shakespeare” gave me some vocabulary to deal with the strange and rewarding journey that is life. Life is raw, unscripted, and full of surprises. Global Shakespeare was a ticket to take me to the wider world.

**MHW** Much of your work bridges literary studies, performance studies, film and media studies, and cultural theory. At what point did you become conscious of working *across* disciplines rather than within a single methodological tradition, and how has this interdisciplinarity shaped your understanding of Shakespeare as a global cultural phenomenon?

*The Necessity of Multidisciplinary Methods:*

**AAJ** At universities, students come from different backgrounds and majors. These students are themselves “multidisciplinary,” which calls for

multidisciplinary pedagogical methods. While interdisciplinary research often involves the transfer or fusion of methods between disciplines, multidisciplinary projects are situated at the crossroads of disciplines either because the subject matter is itself multidisciplinary in nature or it can best be understood through multiple perspectives. Multidisciplinary scholarship catches things that may otherwise fall through the cracks between established fields.

As an immigrant who engages in multidisciplinary work, I have received a number of labels. Depending on the context, I have been seen as a Shakespearean who works across time periods and cultures, as an Asian studies scholar at the crossroads of performance and film studies, as someone who is expected to represent minority communities in some form, and as a digital humanities educator who brings critical race and gender studies to bear on each other. My research also brings literary and critical AI studies into a conversation about diverse modes of cognition.

I never quite feel at home in any single department, because my work does not fit in any single discipline that is structured by periodization. I teach performance studies in an English department and an international affairs program, and examine cinematic representations of stagecraft in a theatre department. My focus on ephemera is a misfit in East Asian studies departments where most scholars work with printed texts and the codex books. Within the humanities, theatre is a marginalized site for cultural meaning.

Despite these challenges, I have made multidisciplinary methods the foundation of my socially reparative, feminist, and anti-racist work, because these methods address fetishization of singularity and purity. Moving across, and residing between, disciplines has also made me an interloper. However, interlopers can make better observations of insider-outsider relations from an external standpoint. Another advantage of becoming strangers to oneself is to amplify transcultural criticism.

The concept of a cultural other typically calls to mind that which is distant and foreign and that which is located elsewhere. It imagines difference as an imposition onto normative society. My research topples this conceptual

arrangement of belonging by drawing attention to a society's othering processes rather than stigmatizing people who might be labelled as others.

In my view, every field of research and investigation, even the natural sciences, reveals that we are connected to one another through the human. While teaching at Lincoln College, University of Oxford, I enjoyed the high table dinners where professors across every possible field mingle with one another. A philosopher may have a productive conversation with an astrophysicist, for instance. Astronomy is a “humbling and character-building experience,” as Pulitzer Prize winning astronomer Carl Sagan aptly puts it in his *Cosmos and Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*. It is sobering to see the folly of human conceits in the immense temporal and spatial scale of the universe.

On my university's recent Trustworthy AI Initiative's roundtable, I had the good fortune to debate concepts of authorship and creativity with a legal scholar and an aerospace engineer. I have also co-authored a study on AI and trust with a systems engineer, computer scientist, emergency medicine physician, behavioral scientist, and a scholar of public health. Multidisciplinary work is essentially a series of inspiring dialogues among different stakeholders.

### *Multidisciplinary Cohesion:*

**AAJ** My projects may seem all over the map, but they are anchored by one central question: “Who gains or is denied access to equitable representation, and why?” in early modern and contemporary AI contexts. An example of my exploration of this question is my book *Race* (2019) which argues that racialized identities are profoundly constituted by exclusionary gendered narratives.

In fact, that same question about representation has driven my research agenda. Focusing on post-1950 adaptations of Western classics, my *Shakespeare and East Asia* (Oxford UP, 2021) demonstrates how films and theatres offer site-specific vocabularies to understand competing narratives about gender, sexuality, race, and able-bodiedness.

Shakespeare studies requires multidisciplinary approaches. The influence of globalization has profoundly changed Shakespeare performance today, and directors and actors have used Shakespeare as a vehicle to enhance social justice and promote diversity. Shakespeare studies is an umbrella term that names so many fields that go beyond textual analysis of a body of canonical poems, plays, and sonnets. Shakespeare studies in the twenty-first century is a tent that seems to be large enough to help transform the humanities, and a great deal of outreach work including digital humanities has come out of the field. There is a lot of positive vibe and intellectual energy. The field is more and more innovative even though it has the baggage of being one of the most canonical fields of study.

I coined the term “global Shakespeare” and went on to co-found the open-access MIT Global Shakespeares digital performance archive (<https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/>) with support from the Mellon Foundation and MIT. Through that open-access project, I have spotlighted works by minority artists and scholars, created undergraduate and doctoral internships in digital publishing, and enabled free access to primary research materials. I model best practices in my work as a mentor and editor; *Shakespearean International Yearbook* and my book series on global Shakespeare have featured diverse voices and launched the careers of minority and early career researchers.

### *Challenges:*

**AAJ** This is not to say that it is easy to claim multidisciplinary. First, the disciplinary silos impose an uneven burden on scholars working in marginalized fields. They have to explain the relevance of their work to those in the dominant fields. It is challenging to do multidisciplinary work, because it involves navigating territories where one may be seen as an outsider or an interloper. It is even more challenging to do so in the time of hate in which we live, because students and readers often bring our racial and gender identities to bear on the work we do, creating superficially positive and sometimes negative associations.

A scholar of Asian descent, for instance, may be expected to write about Asia or Asian America in a particular way. Conversely, those who work in

marginalized fields are compelled to explain their work's relevance to more dominant fields. This is a form of racist ghettoization caused by institutionalized racism that disciplines one's identity and research output. It is problematic to align perceived personal identities with scholarly specializations.

Due to the current structure of academia and hierarchies of cultural prestige, Asian studies specialists, for example, have always been obliged to know their Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, and Anglo-European critical theories, though scholars of Western theatre tend to regard knowledge of Asian directors as the responsibility of those who specialize in the subfields. The Euro-American norms have pre-determined what is worthy of scholarly interest.

A second challenge is periodization. Rigid periodization is a symptom of power-knowledge structures. When the production and dissemination of knowledge favors and supports Anglo-Eurocentrism, it creates disciplinary silos that obscure long, global histories. They render non-Western knowledge less relevant. For example, the story of Asia is not and should not always be political, though the Western media often gravitate toward stories of political dissidents. Stories of political oppression must be told, but dichotomized views do not get us very far.

A third challenge is the fetishization of political merits. In global studies, there is undue emphasis on the nation-state as a category to organize knowledge. This has led to assumptions about non-Western genres' alleged deviation from Anglophone practices and, in turn, has often instrumentalized "the global" for the purpose of diversifying the scholarship and curricula in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada.

According to this view, the aesthetic meanings of Asian cultural production are either indecipherable or uninteresting. As Rey Chow observes, there is still a tendency to ghettoize non-Western cultures (3). This institutionalized bias has put the burden of multidisciplinary on minorities. For example, in order to communicate the importance of their work, Asian studies scholars often adopt a comparative approach and write about how Asia fits into the hegemonic, Euro-American history. Disciplinary biases emerge at the

intersection of willful ignorance and knowledgeable ignorance, the insistence on knowing the world through a twisted angle.

*Solutions:*

**AAJ** To counter dominant assumptions driven by this power-knowledge structure, I propose we see cultural exchange as a network of non-linear influences. This model can capture both the divergence and convergence of cultures. Asian “divergence” from Anglo-European norms is often accompanied by convergences, or a *mélange* of people, motifs, and dramaturgy.

Multidisciplinary work is even more important for the post-pandemic world. We live in a time of hate, and hate is a product of social silos that parallel academic disciplinary silos based on periodization of subject matter. Multidisciplinary work, therefore, can be one solution to hate, because it builds bridges. The transcultural and transhistorical dimensions of multidisciplinary work can expand the purview of postcolonial studies and decolonize the study of non-Western cultures and of the white canon.

Now, still looking in from the outside, I embrace my marginalized positions, which enables me to have a bird’s eye view of issues in a time of hate. My solution is to examine similar, or cognate, cultural phenomena, such as cross-gender casting, across extended periods of time and locations. This enables me to draw conclusions from global patterns. Details I learn in the *longue durée* of comparative theatre historiography, for example, are as valuable as the “singularity” of any given event.

Having realized that disciplinary boundaries are erected and patrolled by gatekeepers who need them to validate their own authority, I have learned to work with, rather than work out of, the gap between disciplines. Tools from various disciplines help us catch things that may otherwise fall through the cracks between established fields.

An example is my latest research on trans performances of Shakespeare. Gender is an important vector of representation in our contemporary performance culture and engagement in early modern genderplay. When contemporary directors transpose Shakespeare into different cultures and

media, they transform notions of gender. To fully understand the concepts and practices associated with transness in the cultural space of performances, we need to combine insights from medical, legal, philology, performance, psychology, and early modern studies. In July, 2025, the new theatre company Trans What You Will staged a production of *Twelfth Night* in London with an all-trans and non-binary cast. I had the good fortune of participating in that project as a consultant, and am proud to have seen Sir Ian McKellen giving a down-to-earth introduction before the show. The project highlights trans joy, a term that refers both to trans individuals' positive experiences and to critical delight deriving from trans-inclusive cultural criticism, such as reading *Twelfth Night* through trans theory. Trans as method goes beyond questions of membership (who belongs to which proverbial club) to analyze the what, how, and why of the communal aspects, or sociality, of gender practices.



Caption: Alexa Alice Joubin with Sir Ian McKellen in London. Photo credit: Basile Joubin.

## II. Diaspora, Language, and Lived Experience

**MHW** During our conversation after the 2024 International Shakespeare Conference held by The Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon, you reflected on the cultural difficulties you encountered when relocating from Taiwan to the United States. Would you be willing to elaborate on how this early diasporic experience shaped your intellectual commitments, particularly your sensitivity to displacement, translation, and cultural negotiation?



Caption. From left: Min-Hua Wu, Miriam Lau, Yueqi Wu, Alexa Alice Joubin, and Basile Joubin at the International Shakespeare Conference in Stratford-upon-Avon, July 24, 2024. Photo credit: Basile Joubin.

**AAJ** Like a shipwrecked Shakespearean heroine, I became an Asian woman only after immigrating to the United States. Growing up in Taiwan, I did not have or need a marked, or remarkable, identity because it was considered semiotically superfluous. In the United States, I became noticeable, racialized, and gendered. I did not pass through and could not pass by, similar to how a creature in a zoo would feel. I am the visibly non-white and audibly foreigner-sounding person.

Now, as a diasporic person, I have sometimes been made a stranger to myself. When visiting Taiwan, I speak with an accent that is fossilized from the time I emigrated. There is a growing gap between me and the friends and family I left behind in terms of our worldviews and affective practices. I am neither here nor there due to the collision of cognitive differences. In the US and UK, I find that as a woman of color whose first language is not English, there are times when I am expected either to explain myself or to be nice and forgive microaggression even as I seek refuge from politics that cause personal harm. An academic bully, acting on behalf of their clique, physically intimidated me while telling me, at a public convention, that I should not complain about their behaviors and that I “should be grateful” that they allowed me to be in the program to begin with. How I am labeled impacts how my composite identity is made to perform in each social space. Identitarian differences are solidified only after they have been noted and expressed.

Questions of racial and gendered otherness loom large in my academic life as an immigrant and as a woman of color, but identitarian differences are solidified only after they have been noted and expressed discursively. As I

stake claims of my racial and gender positionality, there are also moments when I question my belonging in traditional academia.

**MHW** Many public narratives of Asian migration to the United States are framed through the rhetoric of the “American Dream.” In your own experience, how adequate—or inadequate—is this narrative for capturing the affective realities of migration, academic labor, and identity formation? How might scholars rethink this trope more critically?

**AAJ** The so-called American Dream, a fantasy of self-sufficiency, is a misnomer. Coined by James Truslow Adams during the Great Depression in 1931, the term gives the false impression of meritorious equality and a system that rewards efforts equitably. The term compartmentalizes failures as siloed events or even personal faults. Informed by the Protestant ethic of hard work and an individualized self-help ethos, these tendencies reflect the operation of discrimination as a form of distraction that burdens victims with affective labor, a type of immaterial labor that changes other people’s emotional experience of the world.

Academia has historically favored pedigrees, prioritized select demographics, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of meritorious awards are named after white men. Systemic injustice is often obscured by the system’s insularity. People become caught up in the system without being aware of it. When academia fails individuals, the stories often go untold. Racism and sexism work by denying evidence of oppression or rendering the whistleblowers unreliable narrators.

Women of color, in particular, have borne a disproportionate burden of double marginalization due to their race and gender. A contemporary example is Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s struggle to find a place in academia. Perceived by mainstream society to be “speaking in tongues like the outcast,” women of color are a minority in terms of power relations, not always in terms of their numbers (163).

Race and gender are two sides of the same discriminatory coin, because race-making practices amplify prescriptive social scripts of gender, and gender expressions are racialized. Racist misogyny is exemplified in the

manifestations of ideal femininity that are coded as white. Another example is the misogynistic anti-Asian racism being fueled by racialized myths about women of East Asian descent as both subservient dolls and femmes fatales. At the core of these intersectional forms of discrimination are toxic ideas of purity such as pedigree and cliques.

As a Taiwanese-American, I am both hypervisible and invisible. I am ostensibly categorized as a woman of color, but it is a perfunctory gesture. It is a form of tokenism to give the appearance of inclusiveness. Informed by essentialism, some biases may be presented in a seemingly positive spirit for diversity in a superficial sense. While I am visible due to my differences to mainstream America, I am an illegible and unknowable other. Asian Americans are not typically included in conversations about women of color, because American discourses about race rarely include people of color beyond Black communities who are deemed better-known minorities.

My experience as an outsider has shaped my research and teaching. We can develop a culture of care without personally identifying as a minority. In telling my story of arrival, and of the how and why I arrived here, I found new ways to fight questions of provenance. Instead of asking me where I am really from, why not have a conversation with me on how I arrived here?

**MHW** Your fluency in Chinese has clearly enriched your work in comparative literature and Shakespeare studies. How has working *between* languages sharpened your critical awareness of untranslatability, cultural residue, and epistemic asymmetry in global literary circulation?

**AAJ** Literary translations appeal to readers by virtue of echoes they evoke between cultures, because translators work with, rather than work out of, the space between languages. Translation exposes the fundamental instability of languages as systems of communication by drawing attention to shifting meanings of words or cognates. I have witnessed how the works of Shakespeare have transcended their English identity to become part of the world's stage.

When Shakespeare's plays move through different cultures, they reveal unexamined assumptions about human nature and tell surprising stories about globalization. Umberto Eco notes how literary translation tends to modernize

the source by relating a work to contemporary readers (22). *Hamlet* can become a more politically charged work in translation.

Take, for example, a slice from Hamlet's inquisitive mind: "To be or not to be, that is the question" (3.1.64). The versatile verb "to be" is as ambiguous in English as it is in many other languages. It has been translated into Russian, German, and Arabic as "to do," "to die," and "to have" (but to have or not to have what!?). Translating this speech into Japanese will require substantial rewriting, because Japanese does not have the verb "to be" without semantic contexts. Working with Japanese, a language more complex than English from a sociolinguistic point of view, a translator would have to wrestle with more than 20 first- and second-person pronouns to maintain the ambiguity.

In the twenty-first century, Shakespeare's verse is becoming ever more foreign, even to native English speakers, except for many common expressions such as "playing fast and loose," being "tongue-tied," recognizing it is "high time," and so on. This is not to say that we should "translate" Shakespeare into plain English. However, it is useful to know that Shakespeare's texts have a translingual property. In *Macbeth*, for instance, the words incarnadine and red are used interchangeable in Macbeth's confession of guilt in the porter scene: ". . . this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red" (2.2.58-60). Macbeth's alternation between the words of Latinate and Germanic roots is both a type of built-in redundancy and a form of self-translation. In the editorial history of *The Tempest*, Miranda's line to Caliban, "abhorred slave" (1.2.422), is often reassigned to Prospero and frequently in performances as well. Editors and directors are uncomfortable with such strong language which potentially taints Miranda's image of innocence. These examples show that Shakespeare's plays are inherently translational in the dramaturgical and gestural senses. Translingual echoes occur when semantically linked phrases mean similar but not identical things in more than one language.

### III. Translation, Adaptation, and the Ethics of (In)Fidelity

**MHW** In *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* (2014), which you co-edited with Elizabeth Rivlin, you theorize the ethical stakes and the "pleasures of infidelity" involved in appropriating Shakespeare. How would you now,

more than a decade later, refine your understanding of the ethical boundary—or productive tension—between translation and adaptation?

**AAJ** Ethics remains a core research question for me. Stage and screen adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays raise ethical questions—that is, questions about how human beings should act and treat one another. For example, through theories of ethics, we might ask the following questions:

- In which contexts might cross-cultural enterprises be naturalizing the values associated with Shakespeare to exploit unequal power relations among artists of different backgrounds?
- Conversely, to what end are artists using the brand of Shakespeare? How do festival organizers tap into the ideological purchase of being global (which means being connected to several locations) by inviting productions that feature diverse casts and cultural references?

These are just some of the questions driving critical engagements with Shakespearean adaptations from the past five decades.

As J. L. Austin theorized in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), words do not have meaning in and by themselves, and this is especially true for drama. Words—in any language—acquire meaning when spoken in context and embodied by actors. Drama is a type of “high-context” communication, to borrow Edward Hall’s theory. Drama is a series of social interactions in which most of the information is either in the physical context or implied.

Speaking of the common misconception of Shakespeare’s untranslatability, it is useful to bear in mind that dramatic messages do not rely on explicit words. The myth that Shakespeare is all about, and only about, his words is actually a symptom of cultural bias.

My recent work has gone beyond the question of fidelity in adaptations to examine global Shakespeare as a concept and industry. I put Anglophone Shakespeares on equal footing with non-Anglophone performances in order to deconstruct the tendency of national profiling that falsely assumes that each performance tradition exists in a silo. Adaptations that draw on global

Shakespeare as a working concept range from Akira Kurosawa's Japanese-language film *Throne of Blood* (1957), which appropriates Noh masks and stylized movements to interpret Lady Macbeth's psyche, to Iqbal Khan's 2012 Royal Shakespeare Company English-language stage production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, which borrowed from Bollywood conventions to interpret rituals and gender roles. There is much commonality and synergy between Anglophone and non-Anglophone productions.

I propose that we theorize global Shakespeare through questions of ethics. Acts of appropriation carry with them strong ethical implications; a crucial component is one's willingness to listen to and be subjected to the demands of others. In the pull and tug of appropriating a work, the previously obscured voices can regain moral agency. Appropriation as an act of quoting others can be an exercise of channeling, letting through, and enabling feeble voices. These metaphorical citations create moments of self and mutual recognition.

My research on the question of ethics informs my advocacy work. One of the core values of the humanities lies in understanding the human condition in different contexts, and I found that complex cultural texts provide fertile ground to build empathy and critical thinking. One strategy for building inclusive societies is radical listening, a set of proactive communication strategies to listen for the roots of stories that allow for equal footing of the storyteller and listener. We can learn to listen for motives behind stories rather than the "plot" of the narrative. Literature is a cluster of complex texts that sustains both past practices and contemporary interpretive conventions.

Through thinking critically about the past in the present, we can engage with history with an eye toward changing the present. Shakespeare studies can and should be connected to ongoing traditions of resistance, such as the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements. This form of presentism decenters the power structures that have historically excluded first-generation students, students of color, and differently abled students. We live in a time of hate, and we must answer fully the challenges of all forms of violence, including racism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and other types of bigotry.

**MHW** Some scholars argue that literary translation demands a higher degree of ethical restraint and formal accountability, whereas adaptation permits

greater interpretive freedom and cultural domestication. From your perspective, is this distinction theoretically sustainable, or do translation and adaptation exist along a continuum of ethical and aesthetic decision-making?

**AAJ** This bifurcated approach rests on the false premise that translation is a workshop of one-to-one correspondence or equivalence, while adaptation carries more artistic license. Both translation and adaptation are recombinatory arts of creativity. Shakespeare's texts are not static artifacts. They are inherently translational and performative. Translational differences and performative possibilities draw attention to the instability of Shakespeare's texts as well as their variegated terrains that are open for interpretation.

Literary translation and adaptation are treated as connected phenomena in my German-language monograph, *Weltliteratur und Welttheater: Ästhetischer Humanismus in der kulturellen Globalisierung* [*World Literature and World Theatre: Aesthetic Humanism in Cultural Globalization*], published in 2012. I argue that aesthetic humanism—as a secular investment in shared cultural values—counters various practices of subjugation such as colonialism and cultural imperialism that have dominated the recent historical record of globalization. This is notable in the translation and adaptation of Shakespearean comedies and sonnets, and the satirical and humorous narratives of Lu Xun, Mo Yan (2012 Nobel laureate), Gao Xingjian (2000 Nobel laureate), and other writers. This is the case because aesthetic humanism promotes multiple perspectives on the continuously unfolding revolution of modernity.

To demonstrate how translation and adaptation go hand in hand, let us take a look at Caliban's word, language, in *The Tempest* ("You taught me language"). Language could refer to a verbal or non-verbal system of communication. It could also refer to the style of a speech in terms of chosen vocabulary and phraseology. Translators handle this deceptively simple word in a wide variety of manners. For example, Christoph Martin Wieland translates the word in German as *Reden*, or speech. In Japanese, it is rendered as human language, as opposed to languages of the animal or computer language. Take another word from *The Tempest*, for example. Prospero announces in Act 4, Scene 1, that "our revels now are ended" (4.1.148). The

word reveals in the Elizabethan context refers to royal festivities and stage entertainments, but it carries different diagnostic significance in translation. Christoph Martin Wieland uses *Spiele* (plays) and *Schauspieler* (performer) to refer to Prospero's masque and actors ("Unsre Spiele sind nun zu Ende" in German, *sic*). Even translators working in the same language have different interpretations; they are in effect adaptors and rewriters.

There are many other words that connote multiple explicit and implicit meanings, such as the loaded adjective, fair. Fair in early modern English could refer to being beautiful or virtuous. In translating "In the old age, black was not counted fair, / Or, if it were, it bore not beauty's name" in Sonnet 127, renowned Egyptian playwright Mohamed Enani chose the Arabic word *hasnā* to convey righteousness and *jamāl* for beauty, a word derived from camel. In contrast, Taiwan-based essayist and translator Liang Shiqiu rendered "fair" as *biaozhi* (comely, good-looking) and beauty as *mei* (aesthetically pleasing). These cases show that translation is an interpretive process. How a story is told and in which register is as important as the content of the story itself.

The cultural practices of translation and adaptation need not be pitted against each other, for they are two peas in the same pod. Canonical texts make multiple stopovers around the world on their circuitous and global routes to new cultural meanings. These stop-overs involve such cultural transformations as translation and adaptation. Literary translation conveys a sense of cultural otherness and a creative interpretation of the text at hand.

**MHW** In Asian operatic traditions—such as Chinese *xiqu*, Japanese *noh* or *kabuki*, and Korean *changgeuk*—Shakespeare is often radically transformed to fit local aesthetics and performance conventions. How do you evaluate the ethics of such transformations without falling back on Eurocentric norms of textual fidelity?

**AAJ** We can assess these artistic transformations with the method of thick description rather than reverting to some Anglophone norms of performance. Coined by analytical philosopher Gilbert Ryle and popularized by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, thick description is a qualitative research method that contextualizes observable and non-apparent traits of artworks. It is not sufficient to describe these productions superficially, which would

amount to thin descriptions. Thick description attends to motivations for characters' behaviors as well as the reception of such behaviors (Joubin 6). Close reading, a method of literary criticism, analyzes the techniques and structure of short passages within a work in order to derive nuanced meanings of a turn of phrase rather than of historical contexts of the piece. In contrast, thick-description analyses of performances typically draw upon cultural and historical contexts and make detailed references to the works' social and political milieus.

As I argued in *Contemporary Readings in Global Performances of Shakespeare* (2024), thick description helps us combat several problematic tendencies in scholarship, including national profiling that constructs linear, synchronic narratives that flatten the cultural production based on stereotypes of its nation of origin. Thick description can effectively handle multiple layers of cultural significance.

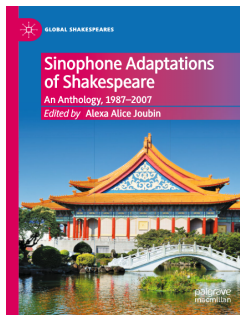
Thick descriptions reveal deep connections among works that may otherwise seem siloed. As such, they de-colonize assumptions about global Shakespeare. For example, I have uncovered the mutual impact of Asian performances and Western filmmaking. Asian Shakespeares have influenced Western artists such as Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, and George Lucas. The narrative structures of Akira Kurosawa's films, such as *Ran* (1985) and *Throne of Blood* (1957), have provided inspiration for Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, and George Lucas. Kurosawa tends to begin his films in medias res and offers vignettes of epic history. In *Throne of Blood*, we are introduced to the Macbeth figure as he gallops with Banquo through the thickets of the iconic Spider's Web Forest. Characterized by webs of tangled branches, strong verticals of tree trunks, and heavy rain, the scene draws us in with its perfectly lateral, fast-tracking shots. Similarly, George Lucas begins *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope* (1977) with Princess Leia battling the troops of Darth Vader, plunging audiences into action already unfolding before the start of the film. Lucas and Kurosawa share the same narrative strategy of reaching for the general through specific details.

Learning about these connections is the first step toward treating Asian performing arts as original epistemologies rather than derivative adaptations or ethnographic case studies for Western theories.

Thick description is applicable as a method for close reading of Shakespeare's texts as well. Even English-language performances engage in translational behaviors, because audiences would find many scenes confusing without seeing the actors performing them. Some scenes would lose their dramaturgical impact if only read and not performed. Examples include the mock trial in *King Lear* (13.16–52 [Quarto]) where, without modern stage directions, it would not be immediately clear that Lear is speaking to a piece of furniture, a joint-stool; and the fifteen characters in Act 5, Scene 2 of *Love's Labor's Lost*, eight of whom are in disguise.

#### IV. Sinophone Shakespeare and Comparative Perspectives

**MHW** Within the subfield of English-Chinese Shakespeare studies, have you observed notable differences between Chinese-language Shakespeare translations or scholarship produced in the United States and those published in Sinophone regions in Asia? If so, what institutional, cultural, or ideological factors might account for these differences?



**AAJ** Even though there are some Asian American productions (mostly in English), there are few Chinese-language translations produced in the United States. However, I and my team have translated some Sinophone plays inspired by Shakespeare into English in *Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology, 1987-2007*. This is known as “back translation”: Sinophone artists translated and adapted Shakespeare’s plays from English into Chinese or Taiwanese, and my team translated these Sinophone plays into modern English. All translations are hermeneutic engagements across cultures and history. George Steiner asserts in *After Babel* that “Great translation must

carry with it the most precise sense possible of the resistant, of the barriers intact at the heart of understanding” (378). Haun Saussy identifies what he calls “translatedness” of back-translation (76). This sense of translatedness, in my context of back-translation, lifts the proverbial tapestry to reveal overlooked literary mechanisms in both Shakespeare and Sinophone drama.

I will now address the question about scholarship in the US versus in East Asia. In China, the primary lenses seem to be Marxism and historical realism. When it comes to global Shakespeare scholarship, Mandarin-Chinese scholarship published there tends to draw heavily on Marxism, literary translation studies, and descriptions of local productions. Shakespeare tends to be viewed as giant of the Renaissance era, though some publications also aim to solidify Shakespeare’s universality by demonstrating the validity of a “Shakespeare with Chinese characteristics.” A key journal is *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* published by Zhejiang University.

In contrast, Sinophone and Taiwanese scholarship (published in Chinese or English) is informed by Taiwan’s or the Sinophone diaspora’s evolving identity that is always in flux. Researchers and artists tend to regard Shakespeare as a brand name or an equal interlocutor. Critical approaches range from postcolonial methods and interculturalism to feminism, multilingualism, and vernacularism.

Scholarship in the US is currently driven by critical theories such as critical race theory, premodern critical race studies (PCRS), queer and gender theories, and social justice concerns. The consensus seems to be that Shakespeare is a site of power struggle and offers material for social critique. Shakespeare occupies a central place in academic debates about neoliberalism, multiculturalism, and the role of the humanities in a technocracy. The question of translation, however, is marginalized. Regarding global Shakespeare studies, there is sometimes a tendency of national profiling, an assumption that film and theatre in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada are normative and aesthetically universal, whereas Asian works bear only location-specific meanings.

**MHW** Your work has contributed significantly to the theorization of Sinophone Shakespeare. How do you see this concept intervening in, or complicating, existing models of world literature and global Shakespeare?

**AAJ** In contrast to the term “Chinese-speaking,” which presupposes the central position of China as homeland in a settler colonial mentality, Sinophone is a more inclusive notion that points to a network of cultures. Shu-mei Shih uses the Sinophone to refer to communities that are connected to or are resisting various forms of dominant Sinocentric ideologies. The Sinitic languages include Cantonese (often the language of choice for Hong Kong performances and films), Hokkien (one of the primary dialects spoken in Singapore), and Hakka and Southern Min (which feature in many performances in Taiwan). Examples include Cantonese culture in Hong Kong under British rule (which is distinct from Cantonese culture in Guangzhou) and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region after 1997; Hakka and Taiwanese cultures in Taiwan; and Tibetan culture in the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Using this capacious concept, we can more effectively examine Sinophone works that have emerged from the multilingual, polyphonic, site-specific performance cultures. These cultures are in dialogue with one another beyond nationalist contexts and sometimes circumvent “China” altogether. The Sinophone framework helps us move beyond the limiting scope of national profiling to consider intraregional networks of Shakespearean performances. Sinophone is an equally useful concept for understanding theatre productions in China that are wrestling with the idea of a monolithic Chinese culture.

In some cases, national boundaries were significant factors in the dissemination of Shakespeare and evolution of local cultures. In other cases, the nation-state was not as useful as an organizing principle through which to understand Sinophone Shakespeares. While at times Sinophone cultures had antithetical relations with one another, there was also significant cooperation that went beyond the nation-state. In other words, the concept of Sinophone engenders what I call a regional methodology. The region as method, situated within a transnational framework, highlights shared and conflicting patterns of cultural dissemination. This method disrupts nationalist and globalist paradigms.

## V. Institutional Cultures and Global Shakespeare Studies

**MHW** Based on your academic experience in both the United States and the United Kingdom, what do you see as the most significant differences between American and British traditions of Shakespeare studies, particularly in terms of methodology, institutional culture, and openness to global perspectives?

**AAJ** During my tenure as Fulbright Distinguished Chair in London, we discussed, in the classroom and in various workshops, how the British and Americans use different vocabularies to talk about racial relationships. Each country has its distinct vocabulary about social difference. For instance, the terms “migrant” and “refugee” signify differently in the UK and in the US. Discourses about race operate on diverse bandwidths, rendering such terms as “brown people,” First Nations, BAME (Black, Asian, minority ethnic), BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color), POC (people of color), and AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) only meaningful in certain contexts or time periods across Canada, the UK, and the US. Not all the terms are in use everywhere.

As an Asian American woman, I could only hope my presence enabled British students of color to feel represented, and inspired them both to examine exclusionary practices in our own times and to reevaluate Shakespeare as a gender-inclusive and anti-racist canon rather than simply a white oeuvre.

American and British Shakespeare studies share many similar concerns and forms, but they diverge in their integration of global perspectives. British editorial praxis and scholarship, as well as performance-as-research, has laid the groundwork for modern Shakespeare studies. The so-called American theories, notably New Historicism, have informed the latest British publications. There used to be the stereotypes about American theoretically-driven research and British philologically-grounded work. American scholarship involves high theory and is supposedly less rigorously archival. British scholars are supposedly deferential to heritage culture and to institutions such as the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and the Globe. These stereotypes are not true. There is a lot more convergence than divergence thanks to heavy transatlantic traffic and collaboration.

Both American and British scholarship have moved on from liberal humanism to politically inflected criticism. The American scholarly scene is characterized by large, highly professionalized organizations such as the Shakespeare Association of America and the Renaissance Society of America, while Shakespeare studies in the UK are more often organized around key series of scholarly editions such as Arden and Oxford and national institutions such as the RSC and the Globe.

Both have embraced global Shakespeare as a concept, though some scholars bemoan their reproduction of Anglo-American viewpoints. In some British publications, “global” Shakespeare meant merely touring productions that happened to have been staged at the Globe Theatre in London rather than performances in different parts of the world. Global Shakespeare is thus a tourist brand. Meanwhile, as much as US publishing venues highlight global coverage, the publications tend to recenter Anglo-American directors and audiences.

Canadian scholar Susan Bennett has critiqued the institutionalization and instrumentalization of global Shakespeare as a convenient concept to please both the conservatives and progressives in the US and UK. In some cases, the global is shorthand for Anglo-American prestige and a carry-over of established English-language authority on a supposedly world stage. She urges us to “seek out a fuller range of productions involving the whole world” instead of favoring a “canon of Global Shakespeare performances” (26).

There is a tendency to regard the global and the local as politically expedient, diametrically opposed categories of difference in an often-unarticulated agenda to preserve a literary elite. The global is imagined to be whatever the United States and Great Britain are not. With a combined population of over 400 million, these two countries have collectively maintained the dominant role in Anglophone cultural production. This phenomenon has contributed to the tendency, in English-language scholarship, to assume that the global refers only to the cultural realms beyond the US and UK. Critics often assign lower aesthetic merit to Asian works, implying that they are only of interest for their political, testimonial value. The myth about Shakespeare is, therefore, a form of cultural elitism. In this context, the local and the global start to sound like code words for highbrow and lowbrow.

**MHW** Taiwan occupies a distinctive position in global Shakespeare studies, with its rich history of translation, adaptation, and performance. How would you characterize Taiwan’s current visibility on the international stage, and what intellectual or institutional strategies might enable Taiwanese scholars to contribute more forcefully to global Shakespeare discourse?

**AAJ** Like me, Taiwan exists in a liminal space. Only a dozen countries formally recognize the island nation, and Taiwan’s self-determination has been under attack. Indeed, people often effectively ask of Taiwan: “What country, friends, is this?” (*Twelfth Night* 1.2.1).

Taiwan is increasingly visible internationally but only for its semiconductor industry. In academic and cultural exchange, more Taiwanese scholars and artists could proactively participate in key conferences and festivals to raise collective cultural visibility and project the island’s soft power. Not all international conferences carry the same weight.

The rich diversity of Taiwanese artistic and scholarly outputs is a real asset. Taiwanese institutions enjoy greater academic freedom than their counterparts in China or Hong Kong. However, educators and students remain focused on Taiwan’s identity in ways that are more meaningful for local debates. To raise international awareness of Taiwan’s rich diversity, new projects could connect these identitarian debates with ongoing global conversations about broader themes.

## **VI. Future Directions and Reflections**

**MHW** Digital media, streaming platforms, and AI-assisted translation are rapidly transforming how Shakespeare circulates globally. How do you foresee these technologies reshaping the ethics, aesthetics, and politics of Shakespeare adaptation and reception?

**AAJ** Digital media and technologies have greatly contributed to the rise of global Shakespeare—the incorporation of Shakespearean performance in cultural diplomacy and in the cultural marketplace. Shakespeare has evolved from a cultural nomad in the past centuries (a body of works with no permanent artistic home base) to a digital nomad in the twenty-first century.

Shakespearean performance has always been mediated by technologies of representation, both analogue and digital. There are always stage or other technologies that connect human storytellers and their audiences. Accelerated by the Covid-induced public health measure of social distancing, there is now a convergence of what were once distinct media such as film, television, theater, livestream, and other immersive or interactive media forms.

Live theater used to be a synchronous communal affair taking place in an architectural space, while performances on private screens are thought to be more asyn-chronous, intimate, and individuated. “Live” performances used to be distinguished from film—a more editorialized medium—by their cachet of being “ephemeral” and irrecoverable. However, these distinctions are going away, because more and more theatrical and filmic performances are mediated by the same digital screen interface.

Digital broadcasting is nothing new, for, in the past decade, prominent organizations such as the Metropolitan Opera and the Barbican Centre have broadcast their programming to theaters and cinemas around the world, both live and pre-recorded. In the summer of 2017, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts broadcast in real-time Washington National Opera’s performance of *Aida* (dir. Francesca Zambello) to the Nationals Park in Washington, D.C. Both the audiences in the Kennedy Center and those in the baseball stadium enjoyed the show live.

The global pandemic has further expanded the idea of liveness. By May 18, 2020, the London Globe had already garnered 1.9 million viewers on their YouTube channel. Theater seating capacity was no longer a concern. The Donmar Warehouse’s *Coriolanus* (dir. Josie Rourke, 2013), starring Tom Hiddleston, on “National Theatre at Home,” attracted more than half a million views and raised USD20,691 between 4 and 11 June 2020. The number of online participants far exceeded the total audience attendance a traditional theatrical venue could achieve within the same one-week period. The Donmar auditorium has only 251 seats; even the National Theatre has a total of only 2,417 seats across its three venues. That is the power of the digital.

We now live in a user-centric culture. We are no longer just readers. We are users of Shakespeare. Digital tools help us make necessary links between

different modes of literary representation and between different iterations of the human experience. Web 2.0 turns readers into users, foregrounding user participation as the purpose of the Web. Just as the printing press revolutionized the oral culture of Shakespeare's time, the digitally-enhanced user culture supplants the reader-centric experience that dominated the previous centuries.

Regarding AI, I would say that literary studies has a great deal to contribute to our understanding of generative AI's social roles. Shakespeare and AI would have much to say about each other. Shakespeare is a collection of canonized fiction that delights its audiences through its reinventions of literary genres. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a misnomer for linguistic probability machines that generate distinct genres through pattern detection and reproduction. Both Shakespearean and algorithmic genres concern artificial experience—encounters with the world that are mediated through artifice. Both could ignite conversations about the human condition and meaning making as a social process.

My research shows that Shakespeare has routinely been used to launch new technologies from telephone and celluloid film to AI. Missing in current debates about AI are Shakespearean insights. AI scholars should care about Shakespeare studies and Shakespeare should be part of the conversations about AI. Shakespeare's depictions of dreams offer an entry point to theorizing AI's so-called "hallucinations." Similar to AI's role-playing capacity, fictional characters are not humans but rather human-like artificial entities.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom wakes up in the forest after spending time as an ass with fairy queen Titania. He struggles to determine if it is a dream or an embodied experience, describing it as a "most rare vision . . . past the wit of man" (4.1.214-215). Adding another meta-theatrical layer to it, he decides to ask Peter Quince to write a ballad called "Bottom's Dream" that is so profound that it has no "bottom" (4.1.225-226). Similarly, in the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes is "so far transported that / he'll think anon [the statue of Hermione] lives" (5.3.86-87). Literary depictions of dreams and lifelike statues offer analogous opportunities to theorize meaning making in AI's re-combinatory technologies.

AI, particularly the version dominated and propagated by large corporations or so-called tech bros, is happening to us rather than with us. I have advocated for open culture to counter this harmful tendency. As an affiliate in the National Science Foundation Institute for Trustworthy AI in Law & Society and director of the Digital Humanities Institute, I have developed an open-source and open-access AI platform that enables professors (without any technical knowledge) to choose from several open-source large language models (LLMs) that are more transparent. They can then upload their course files to create custom-trained AI applications, all for free. My platform is called Teach Anything, <https://www.teachanything.ai>

To demonstrate how my project can empower everyone, I created an open education resource (OER) entitled *Screening Shakespeare* at <https://screenshakespeare.org> which is a media-rich online textbook. My other open-access project is *Introduction to Critical Theory* (<https://criticaltheory.info>). The AI applications on both textbooks are created using my Teach Anything open-access platform.

I deployed my custom-trained AI that draws answers only from the textbook and offers responses that are adapted to the users' levels. My AI operates in 58 languages. The project presents humanities research as a public good and sets a benchmark for ethical AI design and use in education. It centers both educators and learners as a community, not as products or consumers.

My project offers the first public-facing AI of its kind, empowering humanists to critically explore and test AI for inclusive education. Here are two demo videos:

- How to use *Critical Theory* with open-access AI: <https://youtu.be/RqU4UkpjQk4>
- How to use *Screening Shakespeare* with open-access AI: <https://youtu.be/QjO8QjUB56c>

**MHW** Finally, for early-career scholars working on Shakespeare beyond Europe and North America, what methodological advice would you offer as they seek to balance local specificity with global scholarly conversations?

**AAJ** I learned a few things as a graduate student and later as director of graduate studies. Other than academic training, the most important lesson from graduate school is managerial skills: time management, emotional management, and stress management. A lot of people know a lot of things. It is not enough to just “know a lot of things” in your field.

First, find a voice of your own. Our job is to carve out a corner for ourselves in a noisy room of the lively dinner party that is known as academia. The graduate school experience can sometimes seem daunting, because we are being rebooted and inducted. Let the façade down. It is helpful to let any sense of entitlement go as well. Be not afraid to start from scratch. If you give it everything you have got, the foreign shore will eventually become home turf.

The second thing I learned is to go all in. Jump right in. Start swimming. The water may be cold, but standing by the pool will only earn us regret later in life. During my second quarter at Stanford, I was scared to death when I was assigned to be a teaching assistant for a Shakespeare class taught by a renowned professor. I thought I should turn down the opportunity and wait until my English was impeccable. I am glad I did not wait on it. I learned new and useful skills on the job.

Third, let us look fear in its eyes and part ways with our old habits, old mode of existence, old comfort zone. This is the only way to move forward. Fear and social imposition have unfortunately dulled many lives and dissertations. Last, but not least, a finished dissertation is a great dissertation. It is a ticket to the club. Get it done. Write your magnum opus after you have landed a job. Don’t let anything stop you from finishing your degree.

We are on borrowed time, and we don’t have the luxury of living someone else’s dream. When my time is up, I want to be able to say that I have pursued a full life, a life that is raw, passionate, and not scripted.

What are your dreams?

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