1 Introduction

During the 'Teaching Shakespeare' seminar of the British Shakespeare Association conference in 2021 one of the participants, Abhishek Sarkar, warned in his paper on teaching Shakespeare in Bengal that it would be 'eminently possible that Shakespeare in the following decades will be confined to a select minority of especially committed academics' (Sarkar, 2021). Concerns such as these are not new at Shakespeare conferences. At the '(In) Significant Shakespeare' seminars, which David Ruiter and I organised in 2021 (World Shakespeare Congress, Singapore) and 2022 (Shakespeare Association of America, Jacksonville) and also at the 'Shakespeare, Here, Now: Locating Relevance in Early Modern Drama' seminar (British Shakespeare Association, Liverpool 2023), which I participated in, similar sentiments were expressed by those present. Nor are these concerns new or even restricted to Shakespeare studies. In the preface to the updated edition of Nussbaum's book on the role of the humanities in education the 'first thing to be said is that they [the humanities] are clearly in trouble all over the world' and five years after her first edition, Nussbaum's rallying cry has been translated in over twenty languages (Nussbaum, 2017: xiii). The arts and humanities, and with them Shakespeare studies, are increasingly under fire and have to demonstrate their significance to avoid further budget cuts. Traditional arguments about Shakespeare providing a moral infrastructure which cannot be translated into mere economic profitability, about Shakespeare's enduring universality and the infinite variety of human characters in his plays, or about the challenging and ever-changing perspectives that his work offers seem not to cut the ice anymore in these discussions.

Responses to both the internal and the external calls for significance are varied. Virtually all Shakespeare conferences and symposiums, whether in Singapore, Stratford-upon-Avon, Townsville, Seoul, Liverpool, Jacksonville, the Cape Winelands, Budapest or online have of late aimed at connecting Shakespeare studies with the broader challenges of present-day society and many of its burning issues, such as migration, racism, xenophobia, populism, poverty, and moral, social and ecological sustainability, with keynote speakers arguing that the time of sitting on the fence is over. Theatre productions, special issues, articles and books likewise aim at demonstrating the deep and

intricate entanglement between Shakespeare and social justice (e.g. Ruiter, 2020; Thurman & Young, 2023; the Bloomsbury 'Shakespeare and Social Justice' series). In education too, there is a move from a traditional, historically contextualised and text-oriented perspective towards a more action-oriented approach in which social awareness and justice figure prominently, and culturally relevant and anti-racist, feminist and decolonising pedagogies gain ground (e.g. Bickley & Stevens, 2023; Dadabhoy & Mehdizadeh, 2023; Eklund & Hyman, 2019; Karim-Cooper, 2021; Panjwani, 2022; Semler, Hansen & Manuel, 2023; Smith, 2021; Thompson & Turchi, 2016). In addition, Shakespeare is being increasingly applied outside its immediate literary and theatrical circle as a tool to help people recover or develop specific skills, as among inmates, persons who suffer from PTSD or other mental health issues, persons with learning disabilities or even managers to help hone their leadership skills (e.g. Bates, 2013; Cavanagh & Rowland, 2023; Johanson, 2023; Mackenzie, 2023; Stavreva, 2022).

In engaging with many of these topics, we, as Shakespeareans, inevitably and knowingly enter the terrain of other disciplines. The 2021 British Shakespeare Association conference explicitly asked for 'new interdisciplinary approaches in order to develop innovative ways of performing, writing about, and teaching Shakespeare' (British, 2021). Dadabhoy and Mehdizadeh argue that 'literary studies, and Shakespeare studies more specifically, can learn from other disciplines such as sociology, cultural studies, and education' (2023: 11). Likewise, it may also work the other way around and Shakespeare courses focused on today's societal challenges may prove a valuable addition for students outside the English department. This general move towards interdisciplinarity and relevance raises inevitable challenges for Shakespeare studies. One may wonder to what extent Shakespeare scholars are qualified to teach about topics that are not their immediate specialisation. In *Anti-Racist Shakespeare*, Dadabhoy and Mehdizadeh indicate how Shakespeare or English literature teachers may feel limited by a lack of expertise and admit that they are 'asking instructors to be race scholars as well as Shakespeare scholars' (2023: 33). Moving Shakespeare into any of #MeToo, #BLM, #Autocracy or #CultureWars debates is entering a terrain that instructors in the social sciences have explored in far more

detail. At the same time, even though our forays into other disciplines are increasingly being advocated and discussed in academia, the reality of collaborative teaching projects across disciplines in universities is scarce, as I will discuss in more detail in Section 1.1. While we have started engaging with social sciences in research and teaching, most of our teaching is still limited to students of Shakespeare or literature within the traditional English department or to students from other faculties taking courses in the English department. The amount of cooperation, let alone collaboration, between Shakespeare teachers and those in the social sciences departments is few and far between and in this Element I aim to move beyond these barriers and demonstrate, by way of four recent case studies, how teaching Shakespeare may also take place outside the English department and result in structural partnerships across departmental borders. The four case studies give a sense not only of the opportunities but also of the hurdles, on a personal, a pedagogical and an institutional level, in teaching Shakespeare beyond the English literature department, and provide possible ways forward on the road to transdisciplinary Shakespeare pedagogy.

The developments in moving across disciplines do not stand on their own, but fit a wider pattern in academic institutions towards convergence in research and teaching. Two elements are of specific importance in this educational approach: (1) The approach is driven by specific, current societal problems and aims at examining and addressing these and thereby enhancing society; (2) convergence education works across and integrates multiple disciplines, recognising that one needs several perspectives, disciplines, methodologies and forms of expertise to address these challenges. While originally the approach more focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (the so-called STEM group), convergence education and research has started to include disciplines within the social sciences and humanities as well. Some authors have argued for including the arts (with a capital A) explicitly in the STEM group and advocated calling it the STEAM group instead (Harris & Wynn, 2012; Guyotte et al., 2014; Robinson, 2017). Likewise, authors have argued how convergence research in the social sciences can, for example, be of use in addressing and mitigating institutional racism. In

their research on addressing structural racism and its implications for health inequity, Neely et al. have spanned disciplines including education, epidemiology, social work, sociology, and urban planning in order to 'facilitate and encourage future transdisciplinary collaboration to dismantle structural racism and disrupt its role in shaping health inequity' (2020: 381). The term 'transdisciplinary' that is used in the previous citation is one that is increasingly applied. Although definitions of transdisciplinarity still vary among scholars, there is general consensus on the inclusion of at least two specific aspects: (1) the focus of the research and the teaching is on real-life problems in the world around us and (2) the research and teaching transcends and integrates disciplinary paradigms (Bernstein, 2015; Crowe et al., 2013; Flavian, 2024; Interagency, 2022; Leavy, 2011; Pedersen, 2016).

Transdisciplinarity can perhaps best be understood as part of the following continuum: disciplinarity – multidisciplinarity – interdisciplinarity – transdisciplinarity. Disciplinarity exists within the context of one specific discipline, sharing basic assumptions and methodologies; the stronger these (institutionalised) boundaries, the further specialisations tend to develop within one's discipline. Multidisciplinary approaches tend to involve two or more disciplines, each of which brings their own knowledge to bear without specifically aiming to integrate concepts or methodologies. Interdisciplinarity involves learning from and integrating knowledge of several different disciplines, knitting them more closely together in a process to deepen understanding or improve skills. Without wanting to discredit the benefits of disciplinary teaching, both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches have stimulated disciplines in cooperating and collaborating and contributed to exposing the limitations of taking a disciplinary approach. A transdisciplinary approach goes a step further on the continuum as it transcends disciplines in that it is fundamentally problem-oriented rather than discipline-driven. Building on and transgressing several disciplinary boundaries it responds to real-life problem-based questions and requires disciplinary crossing to help students in addressing complex political, social and environmental problems. The social justice–oriented perspective is an important element in transdisciplinarity and Leavy argues that there 'is a moral imperative driving the need for transdisciplinary approaches to real-world issues of import' (Leavy, 2011: 50). The

borders between the aforementioned approaches are, however, far from clear-cut and the pedagogy in Dadabhoy and Mehdizadeh's *Anti-Racist Shakespeare* (2023), which the authors define as interdisciplinary, might equally be qualified as transdisciplinary, considering the important 'emancipatory aims' (32) underlying the publication. In this Element, the four case studies are dealing with transdisciplinary teaching and structural bridging across disciplinary boundaries within universities, a topic which earlier research on Shakespeare pedagogy has rarely touched upon. Next we consider recent calls for and research on collaboration across boundaries within Shakespeare studies, and in particular as related to teaching and indicate in more detail what seems to be lacking and to what extent this Element addresses these gaps.

1.1 Crossing Boundaries, Teaching Shakespeare

In crossing boundaries, one of the first questions to be asked is, 'why Shakespeare?' Should we use a White hegemonic icon with a contested history, tainted by accusations of both cultural supremacy and a limited, Anglocentric perspective? And more to the point, should we use this supposedly timeless, universal icon in addressing social (in)justice? It is a question that Shakespeare teachers have to address these days and they do so in a variety of ways as exemplified in the collection of essays on teaching social justice and Shakespeare (Eklund & Hyman, 2019). Desai was inspired by James Baldwin's essay 'Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare' (Baldwin, 1964) and argues how reading Shakespeare can 'promote imaginative experimentation and collaboration' (Desai, 2019: 34). Jones describes how the wide availability of Shakespeare productions and adaptations, such as in MIT's Global Shakespeare archive stimulates students to move away from a 'timeless universal icon [. . . and] value a multiplicity of timely, locally active Shakespeares' (Jones, 2019: 62). Using Shakespeare in this way helped her students to overcome a tendency not to draw too much attention to themselves and instead engage more actively and openly on topics of social justice, Jones argues. Osborne draws attention to the perilous state that the arts and humanities are in due to a decline in funding and a general scepticism about their economic value, particularly in rural parts of the United States. He argues how Shakespeare has the power to enrich students and prompt

them to suspend and question their own values, also drawing on his own personal experiences as a student: '[M]any of the students I teach are, like I was, economically underprivileged first-generation students for whom university-level humanities study provides one of first among already few opportunities for self-transformation' (Osborne, 2019: 107). Della Gatta presents an argument for the usefulness of Shakespeare in a timeframe where disinformation, alternative facts and fake news have resulted in a questioning and manipulation of truth. She argues how teaching Shakespearean plots and language may serve as a 'platform for learning to distinguish between fact and fiction [. . . and] discussing how characters know what they know' (Della Gatta, 2019: 169).

Teaching Shakespeare in connection with social justice is not always an easy process, as is borne out, for example, by Demeter, who describes how his class on antiracist Shakespeare and African-American literature worked counterproductively as it only seemed to reinforce 'Shakespeare's position at the top of a cultural, curricular, and ideological hierarchy, while framing oppositional responses thereto as impotent rejoinders' (Demeter, 2019: 74). Even here, though, the author argues that this does not mean that Shakespeare cannot be used to address antiracism, but rather that we cannot simply rely on juxtaposing oppositional perspectives. In a similar vein, Kemp argues how the Globe's comparison of cross-dressing characters in *Twelfth Night* to the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth (Tosh, 2017) is not helpful for his students as it 'places undue emphasis on the garment and thus problematically blurs trans identity with the language of disguise' (Kemp, 2019: 40). Like Demeter, Kemp does not discredit the use of Shakespeare, but argues for lectures which shift away from the interior/exterior divide and focus instead on using Shakespeare characters that experience homelessness or sexual violence, which he argues are much closer to transgender experiences. As teachers of Shakespeare and social justice, we have to choose our battles and our strategies wisely.

In the recent volume *Reimagining Shakespeare Education* (Semler, Hansen & Manuel, 2023), the editors added as its subtitle 'Teaching and Learning through Collaboration', which runs as a red thread through the publication which explores collaborative projects in five different settings: schools, universities, the public, digitisation and performance. A second red

thread in the volume coincides with the movement towards aligning Shakespeare with social justice, exploring topics such as identity, diversity and community, all the while (critically) highlighting the potential rewards of Shakespeare education. In summarising these collaborative projects, the editors indicate how they are often 'prominences of energy arcing out from creative hotspots within institutional or organisational bases [. . . which] exemplify creative yearnings to reach out, rethink, reframe, do more, do different and do better' (Semler, Hansen & Manuel, 2023: 5). The crossing of disciplinary boundaries is one of the elements that the volume aims to address, although the editors simultaneously warn of the dangers of these specific, creative projects being stifled by funding and viability as institutional Shakespeare education is always in danger of routinisation and managerialism (Semler, Hansen & Manuel, 2023: 10).

The separate section on 'reimagining Shakespeare with/in universities' consists of four collaborative projects and each 'challenges and productively responds to boundaries – physical, geographical, institutional or socioeconomic – to enable pedagogical innovation in tertiary Shakespeare education' (Semler, Hansen & Manuel, 2023: 87). These projects include a collaboration between the University of Birmingham and the Royal Shakespeare Company in an effort to 'dismantle binaries between teaching, research and theatre practice' (Davies, 2023: 100) and another, more institutionalised, collaborative project between Shakespeare's Globe and King's College London who have offered a joint Shakespeare Studies Master's degree programme (Karim-Cooper et al., 2023). A third collaborative project took place across physical boundaries in a cooperation between the University of Warwick, United Kingdom, and Monash University in Australia. The authors argued how the geographical distance and the experimentation with the possibilities of technology to work across this generated not only a sense of fun, but also an awareness of differences in culture, knowledge and societal priorities as '"Local and Global Shakespeares" fostered a collaborative ethos and a uniquely affective and playful form of intercultural competence' (Gregory, García Ochoa & Prescott, 2023: 126). The final chapter of the section on university education brings together two groups of students who write and respond to each other's

essays: students of the course 'Shakespeare in Text and Performance' at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, and prison students of the class 'Shakespeare and Me', by Shakespeare Central, some of whom have extensive educational backgrounds, while others do not. Through this form of collaboration between very divergent groups, the teachers argue that students will not only understand the plays better but also learn more about themselves as 'they can draw direct parallels from their own lives to the complex predicaments and hard decisions faced by Shakespeare's people' (Cavanagh & Rowland, 2023: 137).

All of these collaborative projects in the university section are without a doubt impressive and they exemplify the challenges and potential benefits of crossing boundaries between countries, between universities and between universities and other institutions such as prisons and theatre companies. What seems to be lacking, though, is a more detailed analysis of crossing boundaries across disciplines and faculties within universities. To a large extent, we still consider these crossings from the perspective of Shakespeare studies, English literature or at best the humanities in general. Nor is this seeming lack of attention uncommon in other publications and case studies on Shakespeare, social justice and collaboration. Eklund and Hyman, in their introduction to *Teaching Social Justice Through Shakespeare*, indicate the necessity for crossing over to new fields of study, for engaging with 'the demands of the current moment [... and] for early modern studies to undertake a new kind of engaged truth-seeking and truth-making' (Eklund & Hyman, 2019: 5). There is a strong awareness of the necessity to 'encourage students to make connections between the classroom and the world beyond it – and to examine their assumptions about a range of social, racial, economic, and environmental issues and the people they affect' (Eklund & Hyman, 2019: 10). The essays in the volume are timely, inspiring and of immense value to teachers and students in connecting the variety of the many worlds of local Shakespeares to social justice (and injustice) and providing a classroom where students engage in active discussions and action in many different contexts. As such, they fully align with the editors' belief that they contribute to a cultural shift 'that sees that "time's up" for instrumental, exclusionary approaches to higher education, and which reimagines early modern texts as potentially fundamental to collaborative meaning-making

and liberatory action' (Eklund & Hyman, 2019: 20). At the same time, this volume too is largely limited to the English literature classroom, excluding cohorts of students who might also benefit from the approaches in this volume and offers scant evidence of collaborating with and teaching at other faculties and disciplines, with the large majority of contributors working at departments of English studies. The most recently edited publication on Shakespeare and education at the time of writing (Bickley & Stevens, 2023) differs from the aforementioned in that it also provides a historical perspective, although more than half of the contributions are focused on the twenty-first century and the editors state that 'perhaps one of the timeliest questions to emerge from the sequence of essays is how and how far Shakespeare should play an active role in promoting social equality, inclusiveness and justice' (Bickley & Stevens, 2023: 2). Responding to the threat to the arts and humanities in a neoliberal world, the editors argue how the 'writers in this collection testify to the vibrant potentiality of Shakespearean pedagogy', which includes another series of impressive and creative essays on teaching Shakespeare in conjunction with topics such as anti-racism, xenophobia, identity, transgender struggles and ecological challenges (Hahn, 2023; Hansen, 2023; Hennessey, 2023; Turchi, 2023). Once again, however, the reaching out does not include teaching across faculties and disciplines, and although the editors mention that 'the authors are by no means all university based (as is often the case with edited volumes)', the large majority is based in or related to the English departments (Bickley & Stevens, 2023: 1).

A specific branch of the social justice interest focuses itself not so much on a specific topic, such as sexism, gender identity or racism, but rather covers the theme of leadership as such, which they argue lies at the root of many of these problems. Within this sphere, there are two main approaches. On the one hand, there is a focus on political leadership, often connected to leaders who employ a populist, xenophobic and autocratic leadership style. Sometimes, these leaders are referred to directly, such as Donald Trump (Mentz, 2019; Wilson, 2020); sometimes they are only implied (Greenblatt, 2018). This approach often tends to include a personal element in the form of a strong sense of disagreement with these political leaders. On the other hand, there is a focus on managerial leaders, where the main idea generally is trying to teach or improve leadership skills. Of all the areas where Shakespeare is

being taught across disciplines, this is the area which has attracted most attention, with MBAs and business schools using Shakespeare's 'status' to tempt prospective students. In the next section (case study one) I explore this in more detail.

While I have argued that the main stream of research and teaching on Shakespeare and social justice and its calls for collaboration and venturing beyond the traditional English literature classrooms seems to exclude reaching out to students in other departments and disciplines, I do not mean to imply that students from other disciplines do not take English units. There is a fair amount of student mobility across units of study and at many English departments, including at our own university, non-English major students take literature courses. However, what seems to be lacking are explicit, thoughtfully built, structural partnerships across disciplinary units, even though several case studies in volumes on Shakespeare and pedagogy might well be suitable for such a venture. An interesting example is Hobgood's description of a class she taught in Japan on Shakespeare and disability studies. The class coincided with the mass killing of nineteen residents of a care centre for people with mental and physical disabilities by an employee who seemingly acted 'out of mercy' (Hobgood, 2019: 46). The combination of students lacking a general familiarity with Shakespeare, a societal stigma in Japan surrounding mental disability and the recent, horrible events led Hobgood to approach *Macbeth* through accessible adaptations such as the Manga Shakespeare series (Appignanesi, 2008) and the OMG Shakespeare series (Carbone, 2016) and the screening of *Throne of Blood* (Kurosawa, 1957). In this way, through the intermediary of insanity in *Macbeth*, the class provided a space for creating a dialogue about disability, which might not have been possible if the topic had been approached head on. Classes such as these employ Shakespeare to ultimately discuss relevant topics and Hobgood's own multidisciplinary background, in English, Teaching and Women's Studies, might help explain the potential which classes like these would have, not only for connecting with students of other disciplines, but also for crossing the boundaries between disciplinary departments. Somewhat comparable is a course that Kirsten Mendoza taught at Vanderbilt University 'that fulfilled a requirements for arts and sciences undergraduates' (Mendoza, 2019: 102). Kirsten Mendoza is