

ABSTRACTS, final roster: Seminar #40, Shakespeare Society of America Conference 2014

Susanne Greenhalgh, University of Roehampton

Suiting the Word to the Action: Documenting Shakespearean Performance on Radio and Television

Radio and television interviews with, and contributions from, actors about their craft and roles form a distinct and arguably dominant documentary mode within media which habitually complement and illustrate the actor's observations with clips from their performances. Briefly setting this kind of broadcast programming in its historical and institutional contexts, I will go on to look in detail at one contemporary actor's trajectory of commentary, discovery and demonstration as recorded on radio and television. Lenny Henry is a Black British performer from Wolverhampton who started (and still continues) his career as a stand-up comic, but has chosen to develop himself as a Shakespearean actor, playing Othello for Northern Broadsides (also adapted for radio, BBC Radio 4, 2010), and Antipholus of Syracuse in *The Comedy of Errors* at the National Theatre, alongside completion of an Open University BA degree, an MA at Royal Holloway, and a current PhD. In a number of programmes (*Lenny and Will*, BBC Radio 4, 2006; *Lenny and Will Act 2*, BBC Radio 4, 2006; *Lenny Henry Plays Othello*, BBC Radio 4 2009; *Lenny Henry: Finding Shakespeare* ITV1, 2012) Henry poses as a naïve and uniformed novice, embarking on a quest to understand the appeal of Shakespeare, for someone self-presented as an outsider in terms of class, accent and race. The paper will consider and compare how far each medium's documentation of Henry's 'journey' with Shakespeare results in a celebration of traditional approaches to Shakespearean language and character, while also registering the ways in which such approaches are changing in a British theatrical and educational culture which is increasingly diverse and multicultural.

Michael P. Jensen, Contributing Editor, *Shakespeare Newsletter*

"Not Much Ado About Something: The Politics of Documentary Manipulation"

In 2003, the Public Broadcasting System series *Frontline* presented Mike Rubbo's film *Much Ado About Something*, which seems to prove that Christopher Marlowe wrote the works of William Shakespeare. This is done by a series of false statements, leaky logic, and editing techniques typical of many documentary films that aid Rubbo in promoting Marlowe's authorship while seeming to discredit Shakespeare's. This chapter corrects the facts, exposes the logical errors, and explores the editing techniques that make Rubbo's presentation seem reliable.

Ted Leinwand, University of Maryland, College Park

A Somewhat Empirical Look at PBS's Shakespeare Uncovered, "The Tempest with Trevor Nunn"

I begin with a more or less objective, six-page description of the Nunn/Tempest documentary, complete with occasional time stamps. My neutrality is admittedly compromised by an encroaching impatience and snarkiness, reflective of my responses when I first viewed this video. I then proceed to describe and comment upon the editing; the banal establishing shots; the documentarian's appeals to authority—talking heads (from Nunn to Marjorie Garber to Helen Mirren to Archbishop Rowan Williams); the predictable biographizing (Nunn insists that more than any other play by Shakespeare, this one "takes us to the essence of the man"); and I wind up

by glancing very briefly at one other installment in the series (“Hamlet with David Tennant”) and by suggesting some alternative approaches to boilerplate Shakespeare documentaries.

Katharine Ormsby, University of Connecticut

“A Shakespeare Road Trip: Searching for Shakespeare in *Looking for Richard* and *Muse of Fire*”

Like Al Pacino’s 1996 *Looking for Richard*, Dan Poole and Giles Terera’s 2013 *Muse of Fire* documents the search for a Shakespeare who engages modern audiences. Pacino and Poole/Terera travel around the United States and Europe conducting interviews with scholars, directors/actors of the stage and the screen, and people on the street with the goal of, as Poole and Terera note, “reveal[ing] Shakespeare rather than conceal[ing] him.” My paper explores how *Looking for Richard* and *Muse of Fire* search for Shakespeare on multiple levels and how they invite audiences to participate in their endeavor. Both films are “road movies” that document literal journeys, framing their searches as quests involving trips to sites associated with Shakespeare (e.g. Stratford-upon-Avon) as well as unexpected locations (e.g. the Las Vegas Strip). Additionally, both films document a search for Shakespeare through performance. The documentarians and the actors they interview all admit to “struggling with Shakespeare,” linking the performers experiences with those of students and non-specialists. My paper examines the intersection of these searches—the quest narrative and the emphasis on location-in-performance—as well as the documentaries success in helping audiences overcome “Shakespism,” defined by Poole as “an irrational aversion to Shakespeare and his plays.”

Johnathan H. Pope, University of Newfoundland

“Sermons on Shakespeare: Documenting Devotion in *Shakespeare Uncovered* (2013)”

Near the conclusion of the inaugural episode of PBS’s documentary series *Shakespeare Uncovered* (2013), actor Ethan Hawke is presented with a copy of the First Folio at the Morgan Library, which has been placed on a stand on a low table by the curator. The curator has left the room when Hawke approaches the volume reverently, turning to the pages containing *Macbeth* and kneeling before the text to quietly read aloud *Macbeth*’s “sound and fury” soliloquy. This paper examines such devotional gestures in the series in relation to *Shakespeare Uncovered*’s emphasis on evoking a sense of awe from the audience. The series’ didactic – and often Anglo-centric – emphasis on Shakespeare’s eminence is achieved by simultaneously staging the reverence of its actor/director hosts and the authority of canonical Shakespeare scholars. Consequently, *Shakespeare Uncovered* implicitly engages in a discussion of Shakespeare’s relevance in the twenty-first century by presenting the playwright as a figure of worship rather than one with whom we engage and to whom we talk back to. Consequently, as a documentary series, *Shakespeare Uncovered* documents and constructs its audience as well as Shakespeare.