

Shakespeare Association of America, Vancouver 2015

Seminar 0.5: Broadcast Your Shakespeare

Convenor: Stephen O'Neill (National University of Ireland Maynooth)

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Abstracts:

Carson, Christie (Royal Holloway University of London): 'Performance, Presence and Personal responsibility: Witnessing Global Shakespeare'

When I committed myself to the idea of working on a book for Cambridge University Press that would document the Globe to Globe Festival of 2012 I went from thinking it would be impossible to cover every production to believing that it was essential to do so. The objective in 'being there' for every show was to bear witness to the events but also to experience everything that the participants on stage and off were feeling. I wanted to have a 'body' of knowledge by the end of the six weeks that could only be acquired through physical presence. With the Globe to Globe *Hamlet* tour 2014-16 the opposite has been true. I witnessed one of the very first performances of the production that would tour the world at Middle Temple in April 2014. I then contributed a blog post to the online website and have tried to follow the tour virtually since. The fact that all of the Globe to Globe Festival productions were available online during the Olympic year and 34 of them are now again available to download in full online stands in contrast to the record of the *Hamlet* tour which is entirely made up of ephemera and eye witness accounts. In this paper I will consider the difference between real and virtual experience in the global theatrical world and will ask the question: what are the critical and theoretical procedures required to estimate and to appreciate 'global' Shakespeare? Does 'being there' matter in the 21st century if we can all witness the same production from the comfort of our living room?

Haughey, Joseph P. (Northwest Missouri State University):

The early decades of the twentieth century can be marked by the emerging broadcast technologies that came in lockstep one after the other – the phonograph, the radio, and the early cinema and its photoplays – each impacting the secondary-level English classroom and changing the study of Shakespeare in high schools. Through a historical examination of *English Journal*, the central publication of NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) and also one of the earliest outlets for the voices of English teachers, from its origin in 1910 through the 1950s, my paper will trace how English teachers thought about and incorporated early recordings (phonograph/film/radio) in their Shakespeare instruction, and how these technologies influenced student classroom experience with the Bard. In the early twentieth century, the phonograph offered teachers the unprecedented opportunity to bring professional Shakespearean language into the schoolhouse in ways never before possible. As teachers took notice, they shared their strategies for implementing new technologies. By 1921, the use of the phonograph in the English classroom had become so popular that it inspired Jessie Thompson to compile and publish a list of useful selections, complete with identifying

Victor and Columbia catalog numbers. Both companies specifically produced phonograph recordings for the English classroom – Shakespeare more than any other author – and often advertised these in the pages of *English Journal* alongside teacher accounts of their use. As the twentieth century progressed, phonograph and radio eventually gave way to newer advancing technologies, much like current technologies that are displacing those of decades past. Though the technologies used in classrooms today have evolved significantly – many high-school students today have likely never seen or used a phonograph – the historical voices of the first teachers to implement these original broadcast technologies provide insightful perspective into how technology has influenced and continues to influence the teaching of Shakespeare.

Hendershott-Kraetzer, Kirk (Olivet College): ‘Juliet, Tumblr’

Performing a simple “Juliet” search on Tumblr turns out to be far from a simple act, one that results in a bewildering, polyvalent display of accounts that Tumblr suggests one might follow, a constantly expanding array of posts that users have hashtagged with “Juliet” or whose titles contain the word “Juliet” in some form or another, and individual posts which themselves may contain Juliet-related text, still images, GIFs, memes, embedded videos, or some combination of these. Continuing with previous work on constructions of Juliet in popular culture (in one-hour scripted television dramas and on Facebook), I will examine ways in which Tumblr constructs the character Juliet and assess the implications of these constructions on how a user might understand this complex character. Included will be an attempt to explain the nature of Tumblr itself: while it would be easy to write off the Tumblr Juliet as a Jamesonian pastiche, it is worth assessing whether the platform and its representations might more productively be described as a mosaic, a traditional pastiche, a post-modern parody of a pastiche, even a kind of post-modern panopticon in which an all-seeing observer struggles to completely see an unruly band of “inmates” that endlessly strives to exceed the bounds that contain it.

Lewis, Cynthia (Davidson College): ‘Hearing a Play’

My upper-level “Radio Shakespeare” class last spring semester was more than an interdisciplinary, pedagogical experiment. It was also a crash course in radio performance and Shakespeare performance. In collaboration with Davidson College’s classical radio station, WDAV, my class of ten students, some English majors and some main stage actors, performed *The Merchant of Venice* in its entirety. I had used performance in teaching before, having offered a course for many years in which students produced a play from the ground up and performed it publicly at the semester’s end. “Radio Shakespeare” was a reincarnation of “Performing Shakespeare”; the initial aims of the new course were to economize on rehearsal time and on theatrical apparatus, like costumes and a set, while still giving students the experience of performing a play. None of us quite expected how much we’d learn through this process about Shakespeare’s language; none of us realized how much we’d always taken a live audience for granted. Without that audience and with only the play’s language to convey character, plot, and tone, the nature of performed Shakespeare changes drastically; at the same time, the actors’ and audience’s interaction is far more focused, strenuous, and, in some ways, rewarding.

Moberly, David (University of Minnesota):

Most scholarship on digital Shakespeares has focused on the western, Anglophone landscape, at times making assumptions about the effects of the “digital revolution” on the afterlife of Shakespeare’s works that presuppose western patterns and attitudes toward both digital and Shakespearean texts. This is, in fact, a common issue in the larger discourse of digital humanities scholarship today. As one prominent scholar in the field, Franco Moretti, has lamented, we simply haven’t adequately applied digital approaches to texts in non-English languages. This certainly applies to non-English, digital Shakespeares. My piece aims to take recent work in “digital humanities postcolonialism” and apply it to Arabic-language iterations of Shakespeare online. It will point out the unique struggles the Arabic language has had in establishing an online web presence in a space dominated by Latin-alphabet and Anglophone assumptions that extend even to the governing principles of the Internet itself. These factors, in turn, contribute to what is a highly fragmented and decontextualized online Arab Shakespeare—one that has only increased the playwright’s cultural capital as Arab web users have adapted his work to support a variety of local, social agendas.

Mullin, Romano (Queens University Belfast): ‘Remembering Shakespeare in the digital age: Twitter revolution, or waste of time?’

From recording revolution, to the repetition of the quotidian details of life, Twitter is central to how society communicates and individuals fashion digital identities. The multinational nature of Twitter’s demographic has resulted in its theorisation as a site of multiple communities of knowledge – a space where experiences can be fostered on a global scale. Twitter has also had a profound impact on Shakespeare studies. From the RSC’s 2010 *Such Tweet Sorrow*, to the numerous academic profiles committed to promoting Shakespearean research at the forefront of digital technologies. Non-academics with an interest in Shakespeare have also revolutionised the way in which the Bard is imagined and deployed online. Following the broadcast of the BBC’s *Hollow Crown* series as part of the Cultural Olympiad, which accompanied the 2012 Olympics in London, a plethora of fan-based accounts were set up in which global audiences could network and discuss the series and related Shakespeare events. The most successful of these, the @HollowCrownFans Twitter page, has over eleven thousand followers and has been at the forefront of publicising not only the television series, but has been instrumental as a site for the dissemination of other Shakespeare-related issues, including plays, documentaries, films and novels. This paper explores the relationship between the *Hollow Crown* series and the @HollowCrownFans community. It will address the place of Shakespeare within such digital communities, and assess how they reimagine the Bard within a shared digital framework that involves user-created contributions such as video mashups, memes and fan-generated intertextual art. In exploring the role of @HollowCrownFans, the paper will question the place of the Bard within a digital world, and interrogate how new technologies, in contrast to older media, reanimate the parameters around discussing Shakespeare and his legacy.

Olive, Sarah (University of York): “In shape and mind transformed”: Televised Teaching and Learning Shakespeare’

Reality television offers the BBC the opportunity to fulfil its dual imperatives of education and entertainment, frequently constructed as anathematic. This article considers three recent examples of televised teaching and learning Shakespeare: *When Romeo Met Juliet* (2010), *Macbeth, the movie star and me*, and *Off By Heart: Shakespeare* (both 2012). It demonstrates the programmes’ fit with the reality genre through their common ingredients of authenticity, contained locations, hybridity, experts, fallible and flawed participants, articulation and reconciliation of social difference. Moreover, all three programmes share an emphasis on a reality television staple: transformation, in terms of the participants’ knowledge, skills and personal growth, but also in relation to television audiences and the British education system. Concerning educational policy particularly, reality television Shakespeare is an example of the UK’s Coalition government’s policy of out-sourcing (or privatising) key public services, with the stated intention of achieving a transformation in terms of the quality and effectiveness of provision.

Rasher, Sarah (St. Augustine College): ‘How to Fail at Shakespeare’

Despite the growing recognition of video games as a literary medium with rich potential for broadcasting Shakespeare to young audiences who crave interactivity, game developers have had little success translating Shakespeare as they have other canonical writers like Dante and Milton. There are obvious obstacles to creating a Shakespeare game: Shakespeare’s emphases on language, interiority, and interpersonal relationships are at odds with the conventions of most commercial games, which usually focus on the completion of physical tasks and elide the interior lives of their protagonists. I contend that developers must approach Shakespeare games by exploiting the similarities between Shakespeare and video games, rather than by compensating for their differences. Video game theorist Jesper Juul, in *The Art of Failure*, argues that games are rare among art forms in that they force players to confront failure and its associated emotions; Juul observes that Shakespearean tragedy is one of the few other artistic experiences that addresses failure directly. I wish to extend Juul’s argument by noting that we frequently feel we are failing at Shakespeare - as beginners because his language is often difficult, and as experienced scholars or performers because his work is so nuanced. Therefore, I will propose two methods of “gamifying” Shakespeare that embrace the uncertainty that Shakespeare engenders while defining boundaries of what it means to fail at Shakespeare. The first proposal is an extension of Shakespeare games that readers have been playing since Shakespeare’s lifetime: the informal group reading of a play text. Using social media, groups like Social Shakespeare on Tumblr have already explored a more rule-based, conditional, and gamelike version of this activity; the shift arises mostly from perceiving ad hoc performance as a type of game. The second method employs the Twine engine, a development tool for text-based games. The emphasis on narrative in this type of game allows the developer to preserve Shakespeare’s language while opening possibilities for interactivity. Such a game would require the player to accept that we can be faithful to Shakespeare even if we diverge from his plots - and perhaps more faithful, as a result of interrogating his characters’ interior processes.

Page, Jennifer (Northwestern Oklahoma State University): 'Night of the Living Bard: Shakespearean Appropriation/"Resurrection" in Twenty-first Century Zombie Media'

The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed the development of the mainstream zombie film: a departure from George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and all the cult films it inspired in the twentieth century. Characterized by substantial funding, ubiquitous advertisement, and sizeable audience, the zombie film is no longer a niche subgenre; zombie films, television shows, and texts are pervasive representations of a heterogeneous audience's literary and entertainment interests, and as a result, often feature profound themes or allusions that might be unexpected in a simple monster movie. The popularity of supernatural revisionist novels such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Quirk, 2009) and *Alice in Zombieland* (Sourcebooks, 2011) demonstrates that contemporary zombie media is a cultural contact zone that incorporates the canonical as it expands upon the popular. Following this trend, Jonathan Levine's film *Warm Bodies* (2013) also represents the convergence of such seemingly disparate themes in a zombie movie: reanimated monsters and Shakespearean drama. The film borrows key plot points from *Romeo and Juliet* and even features analogous character names; the parallels are so pronounced, in fact, that it could have justifiably been advertised as a modern adaptation of Shakespeare's beloved drama. Advertisements and reviews for Levine's film, however, focus far more closely on its reinterpretation of the zombie genre than its literary progenitor. It seems as though Shakespeare's works, and specifically *Romeo and Juliet*, have become so deeply ingrained in our cultural consciousness that its inclusion in a zombie movie is not shocking, or at least not worth noting in a press junket. *Warm Bodies'* appropriation of *Romeo and Juliet* is representative of a growing trend to incorporate Shakespeare's image or works, which are perceived by contemporary readers and viewers as signifiers of refinement, in more common, approachable, and ultimately less threatening forms of media. My paper will also examine the merging of "high" and "low" culture in the zombie-Shakespeare contact zone through Lori Handeland's *Shakespeare Undead* series, Shakespeare/zombie merchandising, and the Twitter user @Zombie_Bard.

Sawyer, Robert (East Tennessee State University): 'The Voices of America's Shakespeare'

One week after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, John Houseman, the celebrated actor and Shakespearean director, was summoned to Washington, D.C. for a meeting at the State Department. Once he arrived, he was asked by the government representative if he would lead the propaganda branch of the Office of War Information, even though the project had "no equipment or personnel." In spite of the lack of resources and vision, Houseman soon became director of the nascent radio program grandly entitled the Voice of America, which first began to broadcast in twenty-seven languages around the globe in 1942. Just five years before Houseman's appointment to the VOA, he and Orson Welles had produced a ground-breaking production of *Julius Caesar* in 1937 at their new venue, The Mercury Theatre. Subtitled "Death of a Dictator," and commonly referred to as the "Fascist" *Julius Caesar*, the play clearly attacked tyrants such as Hitler and Mussolini by using recordings and sound clips, as well as newsreel

type footage, to contextualize the message of the actors onstage. When they broadcast the production over the airwaves on 11 September 1938, Welles ingeniously employed H. V. Kaltenborn, who was known by “millions of radio listeners” as the primary American voice reporting on Nazi aggression in Europe, to do the narration. In fact, at the same time he was working on *Caesar* for Welles by providing commentary as the plot progressed, he was also broadcasting daily on the imminent invasion of Czechoslovakia. The ability to record, then amplify, and then re-broadcast Shakespeare was enabled by the growing diversity of media ecology available in the period, including advances in the telephone, the telegraph, the tape machine, the radio, and the gramophone. Unlike the singular sound of the Voice of America, however, these voices speaking Shakespeare were diverse, complex, and oftentimes as radical politically as they were technologically.

Thompson, Sara (University of Maryland): ‘Beyond Cat Videos: YouTube, Shakespeare, and the Hipster’s Role as Conservator through New Technology’

The title of my dissertation is "Vintage Gear, Craft Beer, and Shakespeare: A Study of the Post-Modern Hipster, Alternative Shakespeares, and the Production of Cultural Capital in the New Millennium". As this title suggests, I am focused on the appeal of Shakespeare to the current subculture known as the "hipster", broadly identified as middle-class young adults with an interest in arts and intellectualism, who also have a penchant for objects of the past and ironic humor. Their nostalgic impulse is often chalked up to an ironic appreciation, but my work demonstrates that the hipster's famous (and infamous) irony is much more complicated and much less insidious than many outside this subculture might think. I argue that there are new theatre companies and artists whose interpretation of Shakespeare fits into the model of hipster irony (just like handlebar mustaches and vinyl records) by serving as an object of the past that can be adopted and appropriated for a new generation. YouTube is a media that has been embraced by the hipster (among billions of others, of course), and has become a conduit of Shakespeare performance that can reach numbers of spectators never-before imagined. My paper looks specifically at a series of videos produced by the New York Shakespeare Exchange (NYSX) called "The Sonnet Project" (<http://sonnetprojectnyc.com/>). NYSX is a company that I have identified as serving a largely hipster population, due to their location (various neighborhoods around New York) and performance style (they are the proud originators of the NYC “Shakespeare pub crawl/drunken actors performing Shakespeare” phenomenon), and their Sonnet Project employs what might be described as “artsy” video production techniques to record Shakespeare's sonnets in various locations around the city and then turns them into short films that are free to viewers online through YouTube. For this seminar, I will explore the films produced by NYSX so far and how their style fits with the hipster aesthetic and can, as a result of that aesthetic, be seen as a potential model for other Shakespeare artists who are keen to reach out to young (hip?) adult audiences whose technological savvy is contrasted with a desire to conserve art and culture from the past.