

2018 SAA Seminar: Remediations of Early Modern Drama 1
Leaders: Sally Barnden, Queen Mary University of London
and Nora J. Williams, Emerson College

Anna Blackwell, De Montfort University
“A horse? A horse? A horsie!”:
King Richard III’s continuing cultural afterlife

On Thursday the 26th March 2015, having been reinterred in Leicester Cathedral earlier that week, the remains of a medieval body positively identified as King Richard III were celebrated in a widely broadcast service of remembrance. During the ceremony the Bishop of Leicester, Tim Stevens, referred obliquely to an ongoing effort to rehabilitate Richard’s character by separating the historical figure from his famous but damning characterisation in Shakespeare’s play. Stevens cautioned the congregation, however, that ‘whether we bear a white rose or a red rose [...] we recognise at the graveside that all our journeys lead us to this place where reputation counts for nothing’. The Cathedral is similarly vague on the contentious issue of Richard’s reputation. One display near Richard’s new tomb asserts diplomatically, ‘Was he good or was he bad? The answer is he was both, as are we all.’ For the media as for countless artists and writers, though, the question remains not only unanswered but in need of answering.

This paper will explore the constant and cross-media negotiation of history and theatre that have shaped Richard’s reputation and it chart some of the directions that his identity has taken in recent years. It will do this by paying particular focus to the relationship between his current popular identity and internet-based fan cultures and fan practices.

Brandon Christopher, University of Winnipeg

Inky Cloaks and Cloaking Inks:
Adaptation and Intermediality in Nicki Greenberg’s *Hamlet*

At first glance, Nicki Greenberg’s comic book adaptation of *Hamlet* (2010) resembles neither a conventional comic book nor a traditional mass-market copy of the play. At 415 pages, measuring 8 ½ by 12 inches and weighing 4 ½ pounds, the book is something of a formidable object. Rather than evoking either of the present-day traditions of mass-produced books from which it might logically claim its lineage, Greenberg’s *Hamlet*, published in hardcover with a bound ribbon bookmark, with dimensions vaguely reminiscent of early folio editions of Shakespeare’s works, lays claim, merely by virtue of its most basic physical design, to a degree of cultural capital not usually afforded books full of drawings of oddly-shaped creatures fighting and fornicating, which is precisely what this book is.

This essay argues that Greenberg’s adaptation uses Shakespeare’s play to put pressure on one of the central tensions of the comics form, the interplay between text and image. In so doing, the comic draws a connection between itself and its source text as similarly intermedial texts, whose meaning is generated through the productive, inextricable interplay between language and visual image. Text and image, though, also become, in the comic, opposing signifiers of the play’s two traditional modes of consumption — the theatrical and the textual. Greenberg’s *Hamlet* argues, through its form, for a collapsing of print and performance, going so far as to imagine, through its use of mixed media backgrounds and its generally disjunctive visual styles, an idealized multimodal narrative model that moves beyond the visual and the verbal to encompass a full sensorial experience.

2018 SAA Seminar: Remediations of Early Modern Drama 2
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The book's cover, with its use of multiple, disjunct styles and techniques, gives a reasonably good sense of the visual effect of the comic. At the centre of the cover stands Hamlet in an approximation of what is likely his most recognizable and imitated pose. Here, though, rather than contemplating Yorick's skull, Hamlet holds his own face. Where his face should be is simply a black void. Indeed, in the middle of the cover's rich colour palette of red, blue, and purple, Hamlet's entire body, a featureless black silhouette, reads as a void. His head, an enormous splattered drop of ink, is almost perfectly centred, drawing the eye inward.

The book asserts itself as a physical object. "Staged on the page," as the book's cover announces, Greenberg's comic does double work, recalling the play's status as performance text while also working to collapse the distance between print and performance. Greenberg's comic is, to borrow Hamlet's term, exceedingly "inky." The characters are hybrids of imaginary animals and inkblots, occasionally dripping and pooling on the page, and the panels of each page are surrounded by gutters of pure black, whose overbearing darkness threatens at times to overwhelm the action of the play.

Vanessa I. Corredera, Andrews University

**"I told you not to go in...":
Horror and the Framing of Blackness in *Get Out* and *Othello***

Thanks to its remediation of the horror genre in order to create a racially polemic film, writer and director Jordan Peele's 2017 breakout horror-thriller *Get Out* has not only achieved critical and commercial success, but it has also substantially affected the way we think about and approach race in media and in culture at large. Despite obvious overlaps in its narrative, however, Shakespeare's *Othello* maintains a less clear-cut position regarding issues of identity and difference, even to this day argued by some to be "not about race." Despite this continued marginalization of race in *Othello*, reading it as an analog to *Get Out* suggests that it may become particularly difficult in this day and age to divorce the play and race. Indeed, putting these two "texts" in conversation with each other proves useful, for even though both stories end with a white woman dead at the literal hands of a black man, *Othello* remains a play mired in questions about how and whether it can be staged (or filmed) in a way that shakes off its legacy of vexed racial dynamics. *Get Out*, however, does not suffer from such questioning; instead, it achieves the difficult feat of spurring multicultural audiences to root for the black Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya) as he successfully murders the Armitages, an upper-middle-class white family. *Get Out*'s unexpected success indicates that in terms of race, *Othello* just might be able to work successfully in the 21st century. In fact, I propose that *Get Out* proves an important tool for reorienting how we conceive of *Othello*'s racial dynamics. Specifically, through its central concepts of the "coagula" and "the sunken place"—concepts that explain the social threats to and psychology of black individuals amidst a predominant and predatory white culture—the film articulates a racial framework that illuminates how and why Othello experiences the plot of the play differently than those around him. In other words, *Get Out* literalizes the horror of Othello's racial experience; thus, if we use it as a framework for reconsidering the tragedy, we can re-mediate *Othello* by tapping into a more thoughtful racial narrative than the "noble Moor to savage" that haunts even modern productions of the play.

2018 SAA Seminar: Remediations of Early Modern Drama 3
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Amanda Di Ponio, Huron University College

**Maintaining Ephemerality:
A Case Study in *Coriolanus***

At the close of “The Shakespeare Cinemacast: *Coriolanus*”, Michael D. Friedman predicts that with “the continuing advancement and proliferation of digital technology in the twenty-first century, audiences outside major theatrical centers are likely to expect more frequent and convenient access to landmark Shakespeare productions through various media” (480). Friedman anticipates that these performances will be typified as popular and commonplace, ideally a seamless blend of high and popular culture. The consumption of Shakespeare in performance on stage, however, will not necessarily cease to be a high culture activity in part because early modern drama is still primarily disseminated via the medium of theatre.

This paper seeks to examine one such means of advancement and proliferation: the National Theatre Live Cinemacasts, an initiative of the Royal National Theatre in London, which has broadcast staged dramatic productions of classical, early modern, modern, and contemporary drama to audiences worldwide via the cinema. Beginning with *Phèdre*, starring Helen Mirren, broadcast across select screens in London in 2009, and continuing through to the anticipated 2018 season which will broadcast live theatre to over 2,000 venues, the NT Live initiative seeks to not only reach a larger audience, but entice a new audience to the theatre. However, NT Live – regretfully – resists further dissemination of their culture product via internet streaming or DVD release, both viable and receptive means of consumption of this potential popular audience. Further, the NT Live’s reluctance to release the recordings of their live stagings may maintain the integrity of performance in their attempt to maintain or replicate the ephemerality of the theatre experience prevents them from reaching a wider audience which seems contrary to their mission to extend their reach.

Through a comparative case study of Josie Rourke’s 2013 production of *Coriolanus*, starring Tom Hiddleston at the Donmar Warehouse and Ralph Fiennes’s 2011 feature film, this paper considers two particular attempts – ephemeral and/or successful – at popularizing and commercializing early modern drama.

David W. Hartwig, Weber State University

**Remediated Nature in Performance:
Peter Brook’s *King Lear***

In this paper, I examine Peter Brook’s paradigmatic productions of *King Lear* through their apocalyptic *mise-en-scènes*. I argue that the 1962 RSC stage production presents a Brechtian remediation of the play’s/Brook’s idea of “nature” which can be instructive for/as theatrical ecocriticism. Brook’s 1971 film adaptation is thus a further remediation, of both Shakespeare’s play and his earlier stage production. I draw on ecocritical discourse and adaptation studies to create a reading of these two interrelated visions of Shakespeare’s most nihilistic play and the eco-apocalyptic theatrical and cinematic rhetoric therein.

2018 SAA Seminar: Remediations of Early Modern Drama 4
Leaders: Sally Barnden, Queen Mary University of London
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Melissa M. Johnson, University of Minnesota

Rebranding Shakespeare:
A Case Study of the Good Tickle Brain Webcomic

From Superman to Spiderman to Archie and Jughead, comic books are a pop culture staple, delighting and shaping the reading habits of enthusiasts young and old. With the proliferation of the internet, webcomics (quite simply, comics published on a website) have taken the genre to newer and broader audiences. It's no surprise that webcomics have expanded into the realm of Shakespeare as well. Created in 2013, Good Tickle Brain is a webcomic mostly adapting and explaining Shakespeare's works for the dual purposes of education and entertainment. While the artwork of Good Tickle Brain is unsophisticated and the content relies heavily on abridging and retelling plot points of the plays, most of which, scholars would argue, Shakespeare lifted from other sources, Good Tickle Brain has become so successful that products bearing its name and logo sit in the gift shops of many Shakespearean theatres and its creator, Mya Gosling "now work[s] full-time drawing stick figure Shakespeare comics, which is pretty cool when you stop to think about it"¹ So how has Good Tickle Brain managed to corner the market, so to speak, on web-based Shakespearean kitsch, and what is the effect of its success on how we perceive the cultural capital of Shakespeare? What does Good Tickle Brain's success say about Shakespeare in the digital age? Furthermore, how is Good Tickle Brain contributing to Shakespearean education and what do readers take away from the webcomic? This paper interrogates the position of Good Tickle Brain within the larger realms of technological Shakespeare and consumer Shakespeare, the webcomic genre and innovative educational tools, and all of the spaces in which these elements overlap.

Corey McEleney, Fordham University

Shakespeare's Movie Magic:
Medium Specificity and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

This paper addresses the question of remediation by examining what happens to Bottom's translation, the central magical event in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when it is itself translated to the medium of film. Reading several film adaptations of the play—Vitagraph's 1909 silent version as well as the star-studded 1935 Warner Brothers' production directed by Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle—in relation both to Shakespeare's playtext and to the context of early cinema's experiments with trick cinematography and editing, I show how the visualization of magic through technical devices such as substitution splices, lap dissolves, double exposures, and freeze frames highlights not only cinematic artifice but also the limitations of the theater (much in the way that Shakespeare's play itself does). Movie magic, I suggest, thus forces us to confront the controversial and contested problem of medium specificity; it can also thereby help refresh our approaches to Shakespeare adaptations and to adaptation studies more generally, which tend to focus on historical and cultural questions instead of issues of form, aesthetics, and (re)mediation.

¹Gosling, <https://goodticklebrain.com/about/>

2018 SAA Seminar: Remediations of Early Modern Drama 5
Leaders: Sally Barnden, Queen Mary University of London
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Carol Thomas Neely, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

***King Lear* and Incest:
The Work in Progress, 1969-2000**

I am exploring how and where and with what consequences incest becomes available to the “work,” *King Lear*, following the publication of Stanley Cavell’s “The Avoidance of Love: Reading of *King Lear*” (1969). One goal is to develop Margaret Kidne’s claim in *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* that the Shakespeare work is a “dynamic process that evolves over time” and to challenge her view that adjudication between “work” and “adaptation” is possible. Another is to trace how remediations/interpretations interact with each other across media. Criticism, adaptation, production, and film--The Women’s Theatre Group’s 1987 *Lear’s Daughters*, Nicholas Hytner’s 1990 RSC production, and Kristen Levring’s film, *The King is Alive* (2000) –implicate, circulate, and re-mediate the motif of incest and the work itself. Incest discourse, though potent, is spoken belatedly and represented indirectly. Implied incest, however, circulates across instances and advances current understandings of this “work” that deny or reshape redemptive readings, withdraw sympathy from Lear, complicate and de-stereotype the daughters, and entwine the erotic with political institutions.

Rachael Nicholas, University of Roehampton

**Remediating Shakespeare in Performance:
Livestreaming and the Audience**

Now an established, and largely accepted, part of our contemporary theatre ecology, theatre broadcasts record and distribute live performances to wider audience networks in cinemas and online. Whilst these broadcasts may have the potential to open up new ways of engaging with Shakespeare, arguably they have more often reinforced, and explicitly sought to remediate, traditionally ‘theatrical’ relationships between performances and audiences. This is especially true of cinema broadcasts—the larger Shakespeare institutions who can afford to distribute work in this way (e.g. Royal National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford Festival Ontario) present fixed works to audiences in darkened auditoriums, and, although audiences might discuss the work or provide feedback through social media, they have minimal-to-no influence on the production itself. Drawing on the results of an online audience survey, in this paper I will suggest that online broadcasting, or ‘livestreaming’, offers a challenge to this one-way model of production and reception. I will focus in particular on how audiences communicate and the multi-way dialogues that surround these productions. The disruptive potential of this dialogue is exemplified by 1623 Theatre Company’s adaptation of *King Lear - Lear/Cordelia* - which I discuss in order to demonstrate how livestreaming can be utilised as part of an adaptive process in a way that not only shifts traditional relationships between production and audience, but offers up new interpretations of Shakespeare’s play. Overall, I suggest that beyond being a way of reaching wider audiences, online livestreaming poses a fundamental challenge to our understanding of what it means to be an audience of Shakespeare in performance today.

2018 SAA Seminar: Remediations of Early Modern Drama 6
Leaders: Sally Barnden, Queen Mary University of London
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Stephen O'Neill, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

#strangerscase:

Sir Thomas More, the Refugee Crisis and Social Media

Sir Thomas More, a play synonymous with Shakespeare's hand, is back in the news. Or rather, a particular moment in the play, its dramatization of the May Day riots, resonates presently. This is Scene 6, attributed to Shakespeare, where More seeks to calm the rioters in London, who are targeting those deemed strangers. This paper aims to critically examine the remediation of More's "the strangers' case" in various platforms and contexts, attending in particular to its current association with the refuge and humanitarian crises in Europe. I use Storify, an online application that enables users to curate narratives from existing content, to track the uses of More's speech. These uses range from Ian McKellen's recitations at various events to Stephen Greenblatt's inclusion of the speech as evidence that Shakespeare is a cure for xenophobia. They include the Shakespeare Association of America itself, which cited More's speech in reaction to Trump's travel ban. In exploring the speech's reception on social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube, the paper considers how and to what ends Shakespeare is being mobilized as a figure of tolerance, diversity and intercultural exchange. It further considers the appropriateness of a recourse to Shakespeare in times of crisis.

L. Monique Pittman, Andrews University

History's Now:

Immediacy in Richard III, NOW, and House of Cards

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin place the transparency of immediacy and the visibility of hypermediacy in a dialectical relationship informing the act of remediation. Though the visibility of representation varies, both immediacy and hypermediacy drive towards an authentic experience of the real: "the real is defined in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response" (Bolter and Grusin 53). In many ways, the mixed modality of theater similarly balances between immediacy and hypermediacy to trigger affective immersion. William Shakespeare's *Richard III* famously remediates the history of More, Holinshed, and others by opening with an invocation of the immediate, an incipit that a recent documentary film about the play spotlights. *NOW: In the Wings on a World Stage* (Dir. Jeremy Whelehan, 2013) documents the Bridge Project Company's *Richard III* directed by Sam Mendes and starring Kevin Spacey (2011-12), a production launched at London's Old Vic and transferred to twelve cities across the globe. In the same year as the documentary film distribution (2013), Netflix released its first season of *House of Cards* with Spacey as the politician, Francis Underwood, at the center of its seamy landscape. Spacey insists in multiple interviews, "The truth is Frank [of *House of Cards*] wouldn't exist without Richard III." The indebtedness dives deeper than the Mendes production since Michael Dobbs's original book trilogy (1989-1994) and the BBC television adaptations of Dobbs's work (1990; 1993; 1995) acknowledge Shakespeare's history play as reference. This project will examine direct address representations of "now-ness" in the *NOW* and *House of Cards* (Season One) network of *Richard III* remediations as well as consider how recent revelations about Spacey's history as a sexual predator demonstrate that the shifting "now" of audience reception must be considered an influential hermeneutical reframe.

2018 SAA Seminar: Remediations of Early Modern Drama 7
Leaders: Sally Barnden, Queen Mary University of London
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Karra Heather Katherine Shimabukuro, University of New Mexico

Queering *Private Romeo*

Alan Brown's 2011 movie, *Private Romeo*, reimagines *Romeo and Juliet* as two gay teenagers attending a military academy during "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." This alone makes it a queer text, and many examinations of it stop here. Yet *Private Romeo* is also a queer text because it allows us to queer the familiar, the routine, the boring-- *Romeo and Juliet*. For these reasons, it makes an excellent text to use with students for introducing them to queer theory, the idea of queering a text, how adaptation works, and how adaptations can challenge not only the original text, but our preconceived notions of it. I will share out a presentation where I will ask you to share your first interactions with: the death scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, when you first learned that boy/male actors played Shakespeare's roles, and how these first impressions influenced your experience of the text. I will then ask you to consider how your impressions have changed, shifted, adapted, since then. The presentation will also provide the death scene for *Private Romeo*, and how I use the death scene as an anchor point, to explain how this text and adaptation can be used to reach our students and teach them a variety of approaches, but also how these adaptations allow us new ways to study the source text.