

2019 Seminar Abstracts: #OpenSecrets
Marjorie Rubright, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Kathryn Vomero Santos, Trinity University

**Shakespeare for Building Inclusive Corporate Cultures:
 A Proposal for a New Nashville Shakespeare Festival Business Workshop**

Deann Armstrong, Vanderbilt University

The not-for-profit arts organization Nashville Shakespeare Festival (NSF) generates some of its revenue from sales of Business Workshops. These workshops, which are often used as companies' training or team-building sessions, aim to engage employees in workplace-relevant conversations around scenes from one of Shakespeare's plays. In response to the SAA #OpenSecrets seminar's innovative prompt and NSF's expressed wish to enhance its current offerings for Business Workshops, the following document proposes a #MeToo-timely NSF Business Workshop on building an inclusive corporate culture. The workshop's scenes are drawn from Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*.

“Virginal Fencing” on Campus

Ariane M. Balizet, Texas Christian University

In November 2018, US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos proposed sweeping changes to Title IX regulations. These changes promise looser institutional responsibility over the response to sexual misconduct from educational institutions and more stringent legal definitions for sexual harassment. Clearly designed to protect students accused of sexual assault and silence survivors, the proposed revisions to Title IX echo some of the darkly satirical exchanges in the final two acts of *Pericles*, in which Marina leverages her rhetorical skill and virginal virtue to reform her clients at the brothel, much to the frustration of her Bawd. The fantasy that a young woman's virtuous words can prevent her sexual assault—and the corresponding justification for sexual assault on the basis of a girl's lack of virtue—seem particularly relevant today, as the US government prepares to nurture rape culture by reassuring perpetrators of sexual assault and harassment that they can continue to act with impunity, and underscoring the harmful belief that rape prevention is the responsibility of girls and young women.

Facts Won't Solve the Sexual Assault Crisis on College Campuses. But Shakespeare Might.

Alexandra Carter, Tufts University

The Department of Education's proposed amendment to Title IX increases the standard of proof required in the adjudication of sexual assault cases on college campuses, an increase that, the proposition argues, will “ensure a fair and reliable factual determination” for investigations. Many critics have noted how the proposed changes to Title IX favor those accused of assault over those who have survived. In this essay, I bring Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* to this debate, specifically the play's skepticism of facts and proof, in order to demonstrate the inefficiency of “the fact” as the privileged metric for determining truth in sexual assault cases. Ultimately, I

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argue for the important role of the Humanities classroom—and of Shakespeare specifically—in shifting campus cultures around sex and consent.

Phoebe.

Kerry Cooke, Mary Baldwin University

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind, a woman of considerable privilege belittles and dismisses Phoebe, an uneducated and underprivileged woman. We *know* this. And yet, we rarely, if ever, discuss it critically. Quite the opposite. *As You Like It* is consistently highlighted by feminists for its “witty” and “voluble” heroine. Moreover, we understand Rosalind’s and Celia’s bond to exemplify the power of sisterhood. I will suggest that this disjunction is caused by our commitment to the notion that gender-based alliances supersede all others. In so doing, we – more than Rosalind – have dismissed Phoebe.

Prison Shakespeare and the Open Secret of Abuse

Jenna Dreier, University of Minnesota

In this essay, I draw from my recent firsthand research on one of the newest Prison Shakespeare programs for women, as well as the oldest, in order to investigate how the open secret of abuse has informed performances of Shakespeare in women’s prisons, and specifically informed each group’s approach to adapting *The Taming of the Shrew*. Rather than privileging what these performances can teach us about Shakespeare, these are the early pages of a study that will explore how women’s engagement with Shakespeare in prison offers a unique lens for better understanding the dynamics of the open secret of abuse in women’s prisons as well as for understanding how evolving philosophies for prison arts programming have intersected with that open secret over a period of thirty years.

**The Open Secret of Sampling:
 Women's Embroidery and Seventeenth-Century Botany**

Mary Learner, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Helena and Hermia's sampler in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* emerges as an essential representation of women's knowledge of botany made possible through a literacy of sewing. This essay not only interprets Shakespeare's literary representation of embroidery and natural knowledge but also explores "sampling" as a new feminist methodology. I argue that sampling highlights an open secret present on the surfaces of women's textiles and texts of the experimental science, which becomes evident by tracing visual and semantic links that have gone unrecognized in modern scholarship as a result of anachronistic assumptions about genre and gender.

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**My Love Affair with a Dead White Guy:
 Teaching High School Shakespeare in the Era of #MeToo**

Jasmine Lellock, Newton South High School

As a high school teacher and Shakespeare scholar, I grapple with how best to integrate and represent the voices of my students in the works that I teach. In the time of #MeToo, students especially need to see their concerns and experiences reflected in the works that they read. To this end, this paper considers ways in which teaching Shakespeare can keep him relevant. I consider how we can allow Shakespeare to speak to and with students, not for them. I share my strategies for teaching Shakespeare, as well as the words of my students in response to reading his works through the lenses of queer and feminist theories. Further, I explore the effects of reading Shakespeare in tandem with companion pieces written by women, LGBTQIA+ authors, and people of color.

What a Crot of Shakespeare

Jessica McCall, Delaware Valley University

I have embraced the experimental, free-wheeling invitation of this year by writing a series of crots. If there is any grand design (I'm not sure there is), it is to illuminate that, like Shakespeare, I am just a dude thinking of the world in words, words, words and whether by coincidence or design Shakespeare happened to be with me through so many of my #metoo moments. In terms of "public-facing," I see potential for scholars playing with form. I often find Shakespeare to be one way I can reflect and try to understand how what I've lived through has made me who I am. For a forum like the SAA this form can offer no scholarly argument, no witty insight into the turn of a phrase, but it is stories, not scholarship, that I take back with me to the classroom. It is stories, not wit, which drives my scholarship. Why does it matter? That question haunts me and it was through breaking form that I realized an old, dead white guy I've persisted in arguing does not matter, ended up mattering to me in ways great and small. Not because he was Shakespeare, but simply because he was there.

**'of ladies most deject and wretched':
Hamlet's nunnery scene and the ethics of staging sexual assault**

Emer McHugh, National University of Ireland

My piece considers Hamlet's nunnery scene, and the tendency to depict sexual assault in that scene in many modern productions. It asks why we tend to use rape and sexual assault as shorthand for bad behaviour, titillation, and shock, as well as asking how can we engage with misogyny in Shakespeare and early modern drama responsibly and thoughtfully, and as progressives and as feminists.

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**“...this would not be believed in Venice”:
 Undomestic Abuse in Early Modern English Drama**

T.J. Moretti, Iona College

This essay questions the ways that Shakespeare’s *Othello* is a dramaturgic accessory to the kinds of open secrets that allowed serial abusers to operate with impunity and pursue successful careers. It reads *Othello* alongside scholar William Gager’s defense of wife beating in 1608 and Margaret White’s 1602 allegation of rape against Christopher Beeston. In the process, it questions the extent to which spectacles of abuse on a stage (or a screen) distance or make “undomestic” such abuse for theatergoers and spectators. It therefore leans toward the potential dangers of such plays to make passive certain spectators who might pass over news of abuse in their own communities. It also asks how victims of domestic abuse might respond to a play that dissociates violence and sexual assault from the audience’s domestic sphere.

Women on Stage

Paige Reynolds, University of Central Arkansas

The perspectives of Shakespeare’s male characters continue, even now, to shape the cultural narratives (and often the artistic choices and critical responses) surrounding his plays. Regardless of how destructive such perspectives and narratives are to women, they are relentless, revealing the most damaging kind of nostalgia for a past that was partially defined by the exclusion of female bodies and voices (as we are frequently reminded).

**Staging an Open Secret:
 The Whisper Network in *All’s Well That Ends Well***

Marsha S. Robinson, Clinton, WA

In *All’s Well That Ends Well* Parolles, defends Bertram’s behavior as the privilege of gender and class, claiming that he loved his alleged victim as a “gentlemen loves a woman”. . . .He lov’d her . . . and he lov’d her not” (5.3.243-45). Parolles’ testimony discloses an open secret. He publically articulates the ethos of a society which normalizes the betrayal of women. In *All’s Well* that ethos is exposed and denounced by a powerful whisper network, an alliance of women who turn to each other for support in a world in which challenging sexual abuse often reaffirmed female powerlessness.

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Directing *The Changeling* through a Feminist Lens

Charlene V. Smith, Alexandria, VA

With the development of intimacy choreographer and advocacy groups such as Not In Our House, feminist theory in Shakespeare studies should consider not just historical context and staging choices, but theatrical process as well. This paper explores how feminist thought can be applied throughout the life of a production using Brave Spirits Theatre's (BST) 2018 production of Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* as a case study, a production whose specific goal was to be a step-by-step reclamation of a play whose meaning and interpretation had overwhelmingly been controlled by men.

Shakespeare and Consent in the Era of #MeToo

Kathleen Kalpin Smith, University of South Carolina, Aiken

Following the directions of the #OpenSecrets seminar, this paper aims to be a public-facing article on pedagogy, consent, and Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*. The article argues that classroom discussions of Helena, Bertram, and the bedtrick in *All's Well* provide a unique opportunity to incorporate a nuanced discussion of consent into the class. Students' discomfort with Helena's actions creates an opportunity for research and reflection of historical and contemporary understandings of consent.