

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
Geoffrey Way, Washburn University

Respondents: Elizabeth Rivlin, Clemson University

“Theorizing Cultural Appropriation” Group

Helen A. Hopkins

PhD student Birmingham City University and Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Appropriation and Representation in the Collections of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

This paper addresses the implications of considering cultural appropriation through objects and collections, namely the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s (SBT) international collection. Popular discourses of cultural appropriation often focus on the problematics of the powerful (usually in the global West) profiting from the use of ‘things’ that have symbolic significance to the less powerful (usually in the global South or East). The profiting from the culture, skills, and artistry of the powerless is complicated with Shakespeare, since the cultural matter being appropriated is tied to Western and British power. The SBT collections reveal international responses to Shakespeare through gifts, communications, and creative artifacts that symbolize the meaning of Shakespeare within the culture of the giver. They represent, therefore, potential appropriations of Shakespeare that should be considered in light of object theory, museum theory, the historical context of the gift, and an awareness of the (continuing) operations of cultural imperialism as well as cultural diplomacy. This paper considers cultural appropriation in terms of diaspora, identity, colonialism and cultural history, and my own role and position as curator (thus, appropriator) of this collection. As such it outlines the stratagems employed in my larger study, which through critical engagement with the SBT’s collections aims to query the place of Shakespeare and Shakespeare studies in discourses of nationalism, inclusion, and representation.

Carol Thomas Neely

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Implicating Incest in *King Lear*: 1969-2016

In this paper I will explore how incest becomes available to the “work,” *King Lear*, following the publication of Stanley Cavell’s “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*.” I enlarge Margaret Kidne’s claim in *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* that the Shakespeare work is a “dynamic process that evolves over time” and challenge her view that boundaries between “work” and “adaptation” are possible. Each instance takes from and gives back to the work-in-progress. If there is no fixed author or work to damage, what does it mean to talk of a “faithful” or “unfaithful” adaptation (a term emphasizing historical contexts) or an ethical or unethical appropriation (a term emphasizing the acts and intents of makers)? Criticism, production, and adaptation/appropriation—Cavell’s 1969 essay, The Woman’s Theatre Company’s 1987 *Lear’s Daughters*, Nicholas Hytner’s 1990 RSC production, Kristian Levring’s 2000 film, *The King is Alive*, the Canadian television series, *Slings and Arrows*, Season 3 (2003-06), and the Belarus Free Theatre’s *King Lear*, performed at the Globe in 2012

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
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and at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater in 2016—interact to implicate incest in this play. These instances participate in larger historical change: cultural shifts in incest discourse and critical trends in *Lear* criticism that attend to the daughters, complicate their roles, withdraw sympathy from Lear, and intertwine the domestic with the political. Each iteration uses the motif to different formal and ideological ends.

Ana Weinberg

PhD candidate, Centre for Adaptation Studies, De Montfort University

You can't appropriate Shakespeare!:
Exploring the limits of the term "cultural appropriation"

In the discussion of Shakespearean indigenizations and tradaptations as "cultural appropriation" seems to follow Linda Hutcheon's term, where authors understand it as something "which exists syntactically in tandem with 'salvaging'", and which "is both interpretative and creative". However, this use is conflating the "adaptive appropriation" of a cultural object, which in adaptation studies is shortened to "appropriation" with the wildly different "cultural appropriation". Let me be absolutely clear: the "adaptive appropriation" of a cultural object is not synonymous with "cultural appropriation". We have to remember that the term, before being borrowed and softened by adaptation studies, referred to stealing.

In a power-dynamics system the dominant culture is asserted as "truth" (valuable, intrinsic, universal, foundational). Using these "truths", these elements that a dominant culture has projected as its own, does not entail appropriation because those using them are, in fact, functioning as subjects. There is no power assertion, no "taking". James O. Young correctly identifies that the physical appropriation of land is linked to oppression, but views such as his fail to identify that cultural appropriation is still a process of what can only be defined as taking possession of. The term "cultural appropriation" exists to articulate a very specific kind of pillaging undertaken in a power-dynamics system. It should not be used to describe an adaptive process, especially when dealing with such a piece of Western cultural capital as Shakespeare. As Linda Hutcheon identifies, Shakespeare "can be adapted and adopted by the British in the name of patriotism and national culture" but that outside of Britain "that power must be adapted into differently historically colonized contexts before being transformed into something new"—adaptively appropriating Shakespeare is nothing short of a survival strategy: it is negotiating your own culture, subsuming and adjusting yourself to an imposed value system.

Donna Woodford-Gormley
New Mexico Highlands University

Cultural Appropriation/Cultural Bridge

Cultural appropriations of Shakespeare are common in Cuban theatre. Cuban playwrights often rewrite Shakespearean works in ways that makes them overtly Cuban. The works of Seth Panitch's Company Havanabama, which has performed Shakespeare plays in Havana and the

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
Geoffrey Way, Washburn University

U.S., using a combination of Cuban and American actors, and Asolo Theatre's *Hamlet, Prince of Cuba*, which was performed in Florida in both Spanish and English, differ from these other cultural appropriations in the number of cultures involved and in the multiple levels of appropriation. Panitch is an American director who has directed Cuban and American actors in both countries. Company Havanabama's plays appropriate Shakespeare, but they also appropriate the different acting styles of the two countries and they appropriate the international tensions between the two nations, even as they attempt to bridge them. Michael Edwards, director of *Hamlet, Prince of Cuba* is an Australian who was initially resistant to Shakespeare plays, from which he felt excluded. However, after being told that Shakespeare "takes on the voices and personalities of anyone who is doing it," he became a passionate advocate of appropriating Shakespeare. *Hamlet, Prince of Cuba* appropriates not only Shakespeare but also Cuban culture and the tensions between Cubans and Cuban-Americans. These two directors are both non-Spanish speaking outsiders to the cultures they are appropriating, and both are motivated by a desire to bridge cultural divides. Their works balance delicately between the desire to bring cultures together and the dangerous temptation to appropriate the treasures of another culture or to erase cultural differences through appropriation.

"Shakespeare and Appropriation in Prose and Poetry" Group

Rebekah Bale
Institute for Tourism Studies, Macao

Appropriating the Darkness: Scandi-Noir and *Macbeth*

Maurizio Calbi points out in his contribution to *Spectral Shakespeares*, "Restless Ecstasy': Addiction, Reiteration and Mediality in Klaus Knoesal's Rave *Macbeth*' that this self-reflexive adaption "sees itself as an addition to a series of adaptations of *Macbeth*, and especially to those set in a criminal underworld and/or that associate the witches' "metaphysical aid" (1.5.28) with the power of addictive substances," (p118)

The connection between the figure of Hecate and the role of addictive and psychotropic substances continues in Jo Nesbo's adaptation of *Macbeth*, for the Hogarth Press. As with Knoesal's version, Hecate is a male drug lord, whose powerful tentacles stretch deep into every facet of society. In Nesbo's creation, the drug (brew) is powerful and addictive of course, but also a means to assert power and control when one has neither. Macbeth, at the beginning of the novelization, a reformed addict, returns to the drug at the point where he ironically possesses the most power but is the least able to deal with it. Giving a drug and by extension its provider, Hecate, this much power does provide modern readers with an excuse for Macbeth's bloodthirsty behavior. "The drugs made him a different person" is a common enough refrain in the midst of the contemporary opioid crisis. In the Scandi-noir version, the drugs, the decaying urban setting and the endemic police corruption are both cause and effect.

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
Geoffrey Way, Washburn University

Walter Cannon
Central College Iowa

Yeats Reading and Playing Shakespeare

I want to focus on Yeats's interest in, and use of, Shakespeare during the especially chaotic period in Yeats's life at the turn of the twentieth century. The plays he was working on then for the beginning of the Irish National Theatre housed at the Abbey, *The King's Threshold* and *On Baile's Strand*, along with Yeats's extended essay on Shakespeare, "At Stratford-on-Avon," present us with a kind of case study of "cultural appropriation" and how intent might implicate ethics.

Yeats's use of Shakespeare seems content-driven, at least in Young's catalogue of appropriative types, and centers mostly on the binary engine that he discovers in Shakespeare and which he clearly uses in at least several of his plays, an engine that drives character and plot. But there is more here since his other writings expose his own intent (perhaps mal-intent) for what it is: he wants high art, not rhetoric (which he has famously disparaged), but his main purpose in the theater is, in fact, highly rhetorical. He wants to move audiences in a particular way. Furthermore, he wants to make a case against the views of family friend (and eminent Shakespearean) Dowden's Victorian, utilitarian Shakespeare, and does everything he can to counter those ideas and to create Irish drama that rises to the level of high art regardless of what Irish audiences might have wanted.

Kirk Hendershott-Kraetzer
Olivet College

Shakespeare in Panem

Scholarly attention to the hyper- and metatextual relationship between Susanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* and *Romeo and Juliet* appears to be surprisingly thin, despite the explicitness of Collins' characterization of Peeta and Katniss as "the star-crossed lovers from District 12," and despite (or perhaps because of) relatively intense and widespread popular interest in that relationship. This essay will begin with an inquiry into the ways that Collins' novel critically engages with and transforms its Shakespearean progenitor, then turn to an analysis of recursive, popular engagements with *Romeo and Juliet* based on readings of Collins' novel, in an attempt to begin to further understand the collective understandings of Romeo and Juliet as they circulate in culture. I believe that I will find a kind of double appropriation in action: Collins' appropriation of her Shakespearean source-text, and her fans' appropriation of her book in their readings of Shakespeare.

Christopher Holmes
SUNY Maritime College

Socially Horrifying Shakespeare

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
Geoffrey Way, Washburn University

The odes of Anacreon, the satires of Horace and Juvenal, the epics of Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton; the sublime tragedies of Shakspeare [sic]; these are all excellent, all well enough in their way; but we must not attempt to copy them. They cannot be reproduced. We may read, we may gather sweets from all these flowers, but we must build our own hive and honeycomb after God's supreme design.

We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own.

- Orson F. Whitney, "Home Literature" (1888)

This seminar paper focuses upon appropriations of Shakespeare in some of the works of Orson Scott Card. Best known as an author of genre fiction, Card is a working playwright in his own right, particularly as an adaptor of biblical plays, and self-identifies as an LDS author.

Card's work shows a deep response to Shakespeare's. He has "updated" three of the plays (RJ; TS; and MV), rewritten one as a novella (*Hamlet's Father*), and drawn upon one for a loose adaptation (*Magic Street*). Moreover, Shakespeare pervades Card's fiction; the influence is everywhere, but particularly in the novel *Ender in Exile* (2008), in which a performance of *Shrew* is staged aboard an interstellar ship.

Card adopts, adapts, co-opts, and rewrites Shakespeare in myriad ways. As a polemicist, he also deploys Shakespeare tactically; in his own corner of the culture wars, Shakespeare becomes pretext for exploring the socially horrifying.

"Appropriations on the Small and Big Screen" Group

Elena Bandín
University of León (Spain)

The Ethics of Appropriation Behind TV Adaptations of Shakespeare's Plays in Franco's Spain

After years of studying the reception of Shakespeare's plays during Franco's dictatorship in Spain (1939-1975), I have reached the conclusion, among others, that his works were regularly staged to serve the propaganda interests of the regime in order to promote a national theatre. Similarly, the state television appropriated his plays to promote a national television. 'Estudio 1', the theatre series created for the first channel in 1965 by Televisión Española (TVE), the state-owned only television broadcaster during Francoism, was one of the emblems of the national television for almost 20 years by featuring filmed theatrical performances by several Spanish and international playwrights from 1965 to 1984. Weekly broadcast in peak viewing time, it was highly regarded by the spectators and became one of the landmarks of the history of TVE. Right from the start, the series showed his bardolatry for Shakespeare by regularly programming TV adaptations of his plays: *Julius Caesar* (1965), *The Merchant of Venice* (1967), *Henry IV* (1967), *Hamlet* (1970), *Romeo and Juliet* (1972), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1971) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1979). My research has been focused on the analysis of translations/versions used

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
Geoffrey Way, Washburn University

for the performances, on the reasons behind the selection of specific plays, on how they impacted Spanish audiences and on how these Shakesperean adaptations can be understood according to the political, social, cultural and economic context in Spain during the late 60s and early 70s of the 20th century. Nevertheless, I have overlooked the ethical implications of this type of appropriation by the state. Thus, in the present paper, I will explore some Spanish TV adaptations of Shakespeare's plays and I will reflect upon the relationship between ethics and politics when dealing with Shakespearean appropriations.

Thea Buckley
Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham

**Amal Neerad's *Iyobinte Pusthakam* (The Book of Job):
 Appropriating *King Lear* in Kerala**

A self-described mashup of the fable of Job and *The Brothers Karamazov* with *King Lear*, Kerala director Amal Neerad's award-winning 2014 Malayalam-language film *Iyobinte Pusthakam* (The Book of Job) appropriates *Lear* to retell the story of a family split during Kerala's creation and India's Partition. The film relocates *Lear* to a colonial South Indian tea plantation, where disinherited youngest son Aloshy (Cordelia) woos illegitimate Anglo-Indian low-caste hill-maid Martha (Edgar) and plots Communist revolution. Their societal transgressions occur at pivotal times of national transformation.

Neerad uses Shakespearean moral dilemmas to overlay his own ethical questions regarding caste, race, politics and environment. His film highlights what Poonam Trivedi terms an overlooked "local inflection of the caste differentiation" in Indian Shakespeare appropriations. Adam-and-Eve couple Martha and Aloshy (a conflated Edmund+Cordelia) champion a return to nature. They are juxtaposed with Job, a 'brown sahib' who perpetuates colonial inequities after he 'inherits' the plantation mansion from his British master, allows anti-tribal pogroms, and deals with sandalwood smugglers.

Should Job shoot the maddened threatened forest elephant, *Lear's* "storm"? Does Aloshy survive being tossed off a cliff by his elder brothers, whom he has shunned for attacking a low-caste servant maid? Can Royalist Job repair relations with his favourite son after discovering he is an anti-crown freedom fighter: "Aloshy, nee Communist ano?" [Aloshy – are you a Communist?]. In an era where capitalist India still sells colonial tea and is under increasing pressure to protect indigenous cultures from Kerala's hill tribes to the Sentinelese, *Lear's* Biblical transgressions and transformations remain resonant.

Taarini Mookherjee
Columbia University

**"Thou bear'st a woman's face":
 Contemporary Indian Adaptations of Shakespeare by Women**

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
Geoffrey Way, Washburn University

An immense mound of trash barely visible through Delhi's smog-filled air; the colourful, crowded and cacophonous environment of a small-town mela or fairground; and the uniquely lonely and communal experience of a trans-Atlantic flight. These are the vignettes that open three of the most recent Indian adaptations of Shakespeare, firmly locating them in the here and now of a country caught between the competing demands of tradition and modernity, the repercussions of holding onto the local or expanding to include the global. This essay centres around a comparative analysis of these three adaptations: *The Hungry*, a 2017 low-budget film adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*, *Arshinagar* (Town of Mirrors), a 2015 Bengali musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, and *We That Are Young*, a 2017 novel that adapts *King Lear*, adaptations that are united by a shared concern with representing and critiquing the Indian nation.

The Hungry sets the tussle for power at the core of *Titus Andronicus* in the upper echelons of Indian society, and the events of the film largely take place at a palatial farmhouse on the outskirts of Delhi. While the actions, emotions, and concerns of these characters seem at a stark remove from the rest of the country, represented by the silent crowds who serve them, the towering mounds of trash that mark the boundary between Delhi and this exclusive domain of the rich reminds us that their actions have an unmistakable impact on the social fabric of the nation.

Arshinagar, on the other hand, privileges place over character, the mythical town Arshinagar over the protagonists Rono and Julie. Arshinagar is an unspecified location that is at once nowhere and everywhere, not real but at the same time not unknown. The puppeteer narrator, Reshma Bai, informs her fairground audience at the outset: "Koi bhi thakte pare, Bangal, Bihar, MP, Orissa" ("It could be anywhere, West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa"), underscoring the equivalence between Arshinagar and today's India. The film thus slips between concentric circles of geographic boundedness—the stage, the town, the neighborhood, the region, the country, and the universal or the abstract—its shifting registers making apparent the simultaneous universality and particularity of its narrative.

We That Are Young, like *The Hungry*, sets its story within the machinations and politics of one of India's premier business families. The novel is a blistering portrait of the young Indian nation told from the perspective of the younger generation—Jivan (Edmund), Gargi (Goneril), Radha (Regan), Jeet (Edgar), and Sita (Cordelia)—occasionally interspersed with the incoherent ramblings of the aging patriarch Devraj (Lear). Devraj's self-made business is seen as almost coterminous with India's growth as an economic power and the novel picks up at the changing of the guard for both the business and the nation—a shift from the nation to the transnational or global, from the traditional to the modern.

What also unites these three adaptations is that these projects were all undertaken by women: *The Hungry* is director Bornila Chatterjee's second feature film, *We That Are Young* is Preti Taneja's debut novel, while *Arshinagar* is only one example of veteran filmmaker Aparna Sen's continuing exploration of Shakespeare. In all three adaptations, the image of the corrupt nation and its failures is mapped onto social values that revolve around the desires and duties

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation, Part One
Vanessa Corredera, Andrews University
Geoffrey Way, Washburn University

determined by the family patriarch, begging the question: what are the political affordances of Shakespeare for contemporary postcolonial and feminist adaptations? Why do these artists turn to Shakespeare to critique and interrogate the contemporary Indian nation?

Shormishtha Panja
University of Delhi

**Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation:
 The Case of Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* and Aparna Sen's *Arshinagar***

Shakespeare is increasingly marketed as a global brand through performance, cinema, cultural festivals and academic events such as the SAA and the WSC. What Dennis Kennedy calls the eternal “malleability” of his works facilitates the adaptation of his works in many disparate cultural formations and locations. I should like to posit instead of the term “global,” tainted as it is by notions of hegemonic homogeneity, a term like “intercultural” which diminishes hierarchisation, recognizes indigenous traditions and gives agency to the non-western culture that adapts Shakespeare. While Kennedy is averse to the term “intercultural” versus global vis a vis Shakespeare performance, as intercultural performance deliberately includes material “that is not fully within the cultural competence of the attending audience” (Bulman 442,) I see the deliberate stepping out of one’s comfort zone that intercultural Shakespeare necessitates an enabling counterpoint to the easy assimilation of all things Shakespeare under the umbrella terms of global and universal. The partial incomprehension that every intercultural performance entails no matter what be the audience/viewer location, makes the appreciation of cultural difference inevitable and the serious work of comprehension a tribute to the indigenous culture that refashions Shakespeare.

The layers of differentiation, hybridity and localization that non-western adaptations of Shakespeare foreground find expression in two recent Indian films, Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Haider* (2014) (based on *Hamlet*) and Aparna Sen’s Bengali *Arshinagar* (*City of Mirrors*,) (based on *Romeo and Juliet*) (2015). The first, mostly in the national language Hindi, deploys Shakespeare or one could say uses Shakespeare as an alibi to criticize the Indian army’s atrocities in Kashmir in the 1990s (and thus interestingly runs counter to the 2012 British Cultural Olympiad’s attempts to make Shakespeare a strong, uniting national presence in England). The second, a regional language musical, draws on specific local musical and poetic traditions even while foregrounding contemporary societal ills: corruption in business and politics and communal disharmony. With their clear critique of nationalism, their immersion in local cultural traditions, their use of narrative techniques that do not have even a pan-Indian, let alone global, currency, these cultural appropriations critique the easy assumption of a global Shakespeare.