

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare the Documentary
Mark Thornton Burnett, Queen's University

**'Romeo and Juliet in Kigali:
 Shakespeare and Post-Genocide Reconciliation'**

Georgina Lucas, The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham

In 1999, five years after the end of the genocidal conflict that saw approximately one million Tutsi murdered by their Hutu neighbours, the Rwandan Policy for National Unity and Reconciliation sought to 'promote the spirit of Rwandan identity and put national interests first instead of favours based on ethnicity, blood relations, gender, religions, region of origin, etc'. This controversial prohibition of racial and ethnic politics has since been codified in Rwandan law. It is in this context that Ben Proudfoot's award-winning documentary, *Rwanda and Juliet*, chronicles Andrew Garrod's production of Shakespeare's play for Youth Bridge Global, a company that previously mounted a multi-ethnic production of *Twelfth Night* in post-conflict Balkan states. This paper will explore the means through which both production and documentary negotiate ideas of race and reconciliation and the politics of Shakespeare in this intercultural exchange.

**'A World Elsewhere:
 Documentary Representations of Social Shakespeare'**

Susanne Greenhalgh, University of Roehampton

Documentaries about the use of Shakespeare in Applied Theatre publicize and endorse the work of practitioners to scholars as well as the general public, and have influenced the growth of academic interest in what this paper terms Social Shakespeare: practices in which Shakespeare and social work interact with each other to bring about change. However, in the quest for touching and uplifting individual stories, such media treatments risk ignoring the actual values and strategies governing the work in favour of narratives that normalize social differences through emphasis on the transformative power of Shakespearean theatre, viewed as a sanctified space. Documentaries about three different constituencies – prisoners (*Shakespeare Behind Bars*), young people with learning disabilities (*Growing Up Down's*), and combat veterans (two BBC radio features) – are examined to determine how far they locate the need for change in society rather than in the individual.

'The White Christian Shakespeare Complex'

Todd Barnes, Ramapo College of New Jersey

In his *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno writes, 'In the end, glorification of splendid underdogs is nothing other than the glorification of the splendid system that makes them so.' I aim to illustrate how such glorifications of marginalized communities often participate in what Teju Cole has more recently called the 'White Christian Savior Complex,' a complex wherein privileged and often well-meaning donors uplift vulnerable communities while disavowing their complicity in the production of such vulnerability. How and when do Shakespearean pedagogical performance practices become involved in or complicit with such a complex? I examine the uneven institutionalization of this complex in the US Shakespeare industry, focusing on the 'Shakespeare in American Communities' program (2003-present), a private-public partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts, Boeing, the US

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Department of Defense, PBS, and state-run public schools. I study two NEA-sponsored documentary films—*The Hobart Shakespearians* (2005) and *Why Shakespeare?* (2005)—both of which address and depict working-class youth who are ‘redeemed’ by, and indebted to, a Shakespearean paternity delivered to them through market-based performance pedagogies. These films depict a pedagogy that drains emotional labor from students while interpellating them, and us, into the ideological drama of what I call the ‘White Christian Shakespeare Complex.’

‘A Proto-Introduction to the Shakespeare Radio Documentary’

Michael P. Jensen, Co-General Editor, Recreational Shakespeare

When is a non-fiction Shakespeare radio broadcast a documentary, when is it something else, and how can we distinguish documentaries from this other non-fiction programming? Categories such as lectures, educational programmes, panel discussions, and documentaries seem hermetic, but the actual programmes are more varied than these taxonomies recognize. Certainty can be elusive. It is, I believe, impossible to write a comprehensive introduction to Shakespeare radio documentaries. The best we can do is take a ‘proto’ approach, which begins by looking at an older show that is an example of the categorizing problem. When we understand why the taxonomies are problematic, we may survey some different categories of Shakespeare non-fiction radio programmes in order to understand the vast assortment of programming that has been broadcast. We may even find a documentary or three.

**‘On the Necessity of Anthropology in the study of
 Transcultural Shakespeare Documentary’**

Madiha Hannachi, Université de Montréal

In my paper, I study Michael Roes’s 2002 *Someone is Sleeping in my Pain: an East-West Macbeth*. Michael Roes, a German anthropologist, accompanies a New-York based director, Andrea Smith, to perform and film what he calls ‘a cultural encounter’ around Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* in Dhafeer, a village in Yemen. I focus particularly on the intersections between anthropology, as a heuristic to know a culture, and the documentary, as a genre and a medium to represent that culture. Anthropological examination of the reception and/or non-reception of *Macbeth* in Dhafeer allows us to dissect the discourse of encounter and mis-encounter between a Western adapter and a local community. It also elucidates received myths about Shakespeare’s global reach, on the one hand, and about an Arab world incessantly under the spotlight. I argue that cultural anthropology thrusts critics of transcultural Shakespeare adaptations to undertake additional effort to fathom cultures beyond the predominantly Western nexus of thought. It also allows us to see in depth the intricacies of language, gender, class, and race from multiple perspectives that destabilize essentialization and fixed identities.

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‘Cardenio: An Undocumented Immigrant in Red State America’

Terri Bourus, Florida State University

In 2012 I directed, in Indianapolis, an experimental production of Gary Taylor's experimental reconstruction/adaptation of the lost Fletcher-Shakespeare play *Cardenio* (a Jacobean play inspired by the 1612 translation of *Don Quixote*), later subsequently adapted by Theobald as *Double Falsehood* (1727). Our production inspired a television documentary, *Shakespeare Lost, Shakespeare Found*, by our local PBS station (WFYI), subsequently broadcast in 65 North American media markets: <https://www.aptonline.org/offer/SHAKESPEARE-LOST-SHAKESPEARE-FOUND>

The theatre production was also ‘documented’ in *The Creation and Re-creation of Cardenio: Performing Shakespeare, Transforming Cervantes* (Palgrave, 2013), which for a month was Palgrave's best-selling academic book.

I won't attempt to resolve disputes about the attribution issues surrounding *Cardenio*. Instead, I am interested in the class rift separating the elite cultural canonicity of Shakespeare, Cervantes, and PBS, from uncanonical Trump-loving Indiana, which no one considers an important locale for theater or Shakespeare. The rift between Shakespeare and ordinary white Hoosiers is as great as the rift between Cervantes and the large Latinx community in west Indianapolis, or the rift between this Indianapolis documentary and the RSC adaptation of *Cardenio*, or the rift between Cervantes and the African American actors I cast to play his two most famous characters.

**‘Who Shot Romeo? And How Can We Stop the Bleeding?:
 Shakespeare for Social Justice in Urban America’**

Eric L. De Barros, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago

In Jason Zeldes's *Romeo is Bleeding*, a 2015 documentary film about an urban adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, the two questions of my primary title are the governing, largely unspoken ones driving the narrative. Trapped within and traumatized by the drug- and gang-related gun violence plaguing Richmond, CA and by extension urban America, Donté Clark, the lead playwright and teacher-mentor of a group of Richmond youth, comes to see in *Romeo and Juliet* the possibility of a re-creative, expressive way out. Indeed, as both the play-adaptation and film represent, Clark and his student-collaborators attempt to inspire life-saving change by using Shakespeare to showcase the verbal and performative dexterity of their culturally specific spoken word poetry. What concerns me, however, is how that dexterity, as represented in the play-adaptation and highlighted in the film, might be functioning to mystify—that is, ironically render unspoken and/or invisible—the oppressive ideologies and institutional structures that Clark ostensibly seeks to challenge and escape. This paper will focus on those ideologies and structures in an attempt to explain how and why the play-adaptation and film struggle and ultimately fail to answer their own governing questions.

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'Nothing is Truer than the Truthiness of Truth'

Jim Casey, Arcadia University

Cheryl Eagan-Donovan, the writer and director of Controversy Films' *Nothing Is Truer than Truth*, has generously provided me with an advance copy of the film before its official release date of February 12, 2019. The feature-length documentary—based on Mark Anderson's book *Shakespeare by Another Name*—suggests that Edward de Vere was the true author of Shakespeare's plays. As evidence, the film discusses the Earl of Oxford's year-and-a-half spent in Venice and Europe and his well-known "bisexuality" (the reason for the pseudonym Shakespeare, according to the film). Although not quite as loose with the facts as Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous* (2011), *Nothing Is Truer than Truth* is nonetheless selective in the 'truth' it chooses to present. As a documentary, the film represents itself as an objective, impartial reporter of facts, but the facts that are relevant to Oxfordians are not the same facts provided by those who believe William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon wrote the plays we associate with 'Shakespeare.' For this essay, I am interested not only in the 'truth' offered by this particular documentary but also in the facts ignored or excluded by the film; I will explore the differing types of evidence provided by the two camps and address the representation of 'proof' in a time when climate change is denied by members of my government and Rudy Giuliani, representing the President of the United States, claims that facts are 'in the eye of the beholder' and 'Truth isn't truth.'

"Knowledge and Power"

Adele F. Seeff, University of Maryland

If, according to Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann, 'students read through the protocols that re-enforce Shakespeare's transcendent "author function"', our task in our classrooms is to help students evaluate their assumptions in their desire to acquire 'knowledge' about this prolific playwright and his robust afterlife. Documentaries provide an excellent point of access to these assumptions. What kind of archive, then, do Shakespeare documentaries represent? In this paper, I investigate the narratives and arguments which convey the 'truths' that Derrida claims declare themselves 'in a structure of fiction.' I shall also raise questions about the seductive pleasure we derive from the inevitable distortions of mimesis. What kind of knowledge is the knowledge that documentaries provide? To what use do we, our students, and others, put that knowledge when what we know and how we come to believe in what we know, are matters of responsibility and conscience? Amongst this generically mixed modes of filmmaking, I have selected as examples several episodes from *Shakespeare Uncovered* (2013); *Let's Talk Shakespeare* (1997, 2011); *William Shakespeare* (1995, 2009) and *Culture: English Takes Center Stage* (2006), in which 'an African actor interprets and contextualizes *Othello* through his own tribal experiences.'

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Respondents:

Susanne Greenhalgh (University of Roehampton), Douglas M. Lanier (University of New Hampshire), Laurie E. Osborne (Colby College), Ramona Wray (Queen's University Belfast)