

Abstracts, SAA 2020 Seminar. Evaluating Shakespeare Adaptations (Session I)

‘All for your delight, we are not here’:
Questioning the preeminent role of the traditional theatre critic
Gemma Kate Allred, Université de Neuchâtel

Whether through an immersive experience, diversity casting, celebrity casting or updating the text, it is very much of the Zeitgeist for Shakespeare on stage to be adapted for the modern audience. Add into the mix celebrity casting, and questions of authenticity and value are brought to the fore. Within British theatre, we have an established system to assess the worth or merit of a production. Reviewers, often male, upper middle class, and Oxbridge educated, write a few paragraphs for a broadsheet, award a star rating, and the production is rated. However, is this system still fit for purpose?

Notions that the audience attracted by these modern productions are simply incapable of understanding is endemic in the critical reviews, with critics placing themselves as an intellectual counterpoint to the uneducated masses. Increasingly, theatre companies make explicit a desire to attract new audiences to Shakespeare. However, in appealing to new audiences, the self-appointed educated elite are implicitly excluded. These established critics frequently don't get it – but when they are not the intended market for the production, why should they? It's not for them. In most things we accept when people's personal preferences differ, and we accept when someone likes something different – coffee or tea we ask – are you a dog person or a cat person? However, with theatre there is a tendency to insist that it is for everyone.

In assessing whether productions are ‘good’, we need a mechanism that takes account of the intended audience and considers the extent to which the needs of that particular target market are met. By reference to recent productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, my paper argues that it is time for an overhaul of the review process – and a reassessment of what we mean by a ‘good’ stage adaptation of Shakespeare.

Bad Art and Indecorous Persons
Emily Coyle, University of Illinois, Chicago

Of all of Shakespeare's plays, *Troilus and Cressida* is perhaps among the most canonically and aesthetically denigrated. Few critics have ever *really* seemed to like it. Dryden famously rewrote the play, calling Shakespeare's work “nothing but a confused piece of rubbish.” Coleridge was, apparently, also confused. Writing in 1833, he called the play by far Shakespeare's most “puzzling.” “I scarcely know what to say of it,” he admitted, in a rare moment of silence, which, as it happens, spanned nearly two hundred years—not only by him but others. There is absolutely no record in either British Commonwealth or the United States of anyone producing the play between 1733 and 1907. Eventually, of course, this moratorium would end. To this today, *Troilus and Cressida* had received a diminutive and yet passionate amount of attention. Still, old habits die hard. Even the most experimental theatre companies have stumbled in their productions of the work. Writing for *The New York Times*, for example, Ben Bentley called The

Wooster Group's "Cry, Trojans!" (2015) "a sluggish two and a half hours," and "to what purpose?" The production "only piles obscurity onto a play that has baffled and divided scholars, critics and audiences for centuries." Indeed, bafflement is maybe what makes the play so interesting aesthetically. But even then, the scholars that write about it can't help but fall back on strong-negative words. "The play comes to nothing" (Everett). It is "at every level a construct, a made thing, a deliberately badly made thing, in fact, a monstrosity—something that both demonstrates and admonishes" (Charnes). Others call it, "a bulimic play, one that evokes in its audience . . . a reaction akin to . . . nausea" (Hillman). *Troilus and Cressida*, in short, is no good.

Of course, anyone who has read Shakespeare's play knows that these descriptions of the work are entirely in keeping with its content, most frequently referred to as hollow and diseased. The play is a bad version of several acclaimed and already (by the time that Shakespeare was writing) canonical works: Homer's *Iliad*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and, to a certain extent, Boccaccio's *il Filostrato* (though there are others). What's more, all the characters seem to know this. They appear dissatisfied, dispirited, relatively mute and unable to act. They are to a large extent copies of idealized originals, and, in this way they, along with the play, they appear to stage their own theory of adaptation (or, in keeping with the terms of this seminar, BADapation) *avant la lettre*.

This is at least one of the claims my paper will explore. Along with its attention to media specificity, the paper's end goal is to think about *Troilus and Cressida* as a play that is self-consciously aware of its characters as distinctive theatrical forms—ones that are nevertheless tied to old mediums, to dead authors and traditions, and to idealizations of what constitutes good art and decorous persons. Reading, seeing, and producing *Troilus and Cressida*, I contend, has felt so nauseating for so many because it forces its audience to reflect on what they actually mean when they ask: "how good is it?"

Evaluating Shakespeare Adaptation as Analog Game: *Council of Verona*
Vernon Dickson, Florida International University

Studies of Shakespeare adaptation often assume stage or film interpretations, but recent years has shown a significant expanding to the scope of media used to adapt, use, or represent Shakespeare's works. Crash Games' *Council of Verona* (2013) offers a unique text for evaluating the adaptation of Shakespeare, in this case *Romeo and Juliet* reimagined as a 20-minute agenda-focused bluffing card game. Evaluating an analog (card or board) game complicates the frequent reliance on evaluation methods or approaches concerned with representation, fidelity, affective response, etc., adding the need to see the text as a game designed to engage players in quite different ways from how plays or films engage audience members. User agency becomes a critical aspect of evaluating an analog adaptation of a stage play.

Council of Verona offers the complete complement of characters and many core aspects of *Romeo and Juliet*, but it also functions as a game, in this case one designed to allow players to enact choices that significantly revise the play's narrative. While we must be careful not to turn to essentialist arguments about differences in media properties (as Leitch warns in "Twelve

Fallacies”), we also must note how a game’s properties shift our thinking about use and how we evaluate an adaptation. Fazel and Geddes assert the need to rethink the use of Shakespeare in *The Shakespeare User*, specifically as “push[ing] against the traditional scholarly notions of objectivity as the defining quality of value” (4). Evaluating *Council of Verona* helps us to see Shakespeare adaptation more clearly through a lens of use and purpose. Successful adaptation here is just as much about the aesthetics of presentation, the representation of characters, the reflection of core themes, as it is about embracing player agency and the experience of creative engagement with the game as medium. We must embrace evaluation that takes into account the choices and purposes of a given adaptation.

Evaluating Institutions: Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s Globe, and Folger Shakespeare Theatre
Leticia C. García (Letty)

This paper expands a line of inquiry I began to develop in last year’s SAA 2019 seminar on Shakespeare and Cultural Appropriation. In that paper, I argued that the majority of Shakespeare is endlessly transposable because of Shakespeare’s cultural value; however, the product that surfaces is one levied through unequal power dynamics imposed by institutions like the Folger Shakespeare Theatre and Shakespeare’s Globe - institutions that have the capacity to do good, but instead take the easy way out in hopes that no one notices. Perhaps they don’t know how to do their job effectively, or perhaps they simply don’t care? Perhaps they would like to “dodge the problem” as our seminar description cogently suggests. Both Shakespeare’s Globe and the Folger Shakespeare Theatre are resistant to any commentary that critiques frameworks that challenge their very existence. This paper, then, will consider the ways in which we need to hold these institutions to task as “standards of value” are unsurprisingly missing when evaluating and presenting Shakespeare on the stage. Drawing on recent performances at both the Globe and the Folger Shakespeare theatre, this paper will interrogate how we may do this evaluating effectively and whether or not it has a place in the reception of Shakespearean performance, or within the delicate framework of these institutions.

“Told by an Idiot” - Taylor Mac’s *Gary* and Queer Failure on Broadway
Louise Geddes, Adelphi University

In his 2019 play, *Gary: A Sequel to Titus Andronicus*, Taylor Mac takes *Titus Andronicus*’ camp sensibility and weaponizes it to interrogate the hope art can offer in the face of atrocity. Mac is known for theatrical excess and in *Gary*, he mobilizes a triumvirate of camp - *Titus Andronicus*, Nathan Lane, and the Broadway musical - to ask how one can cope when chaos permeates. If, as Mark Booth suggests, “camp is primarily a matter of self-presentation” (69), then the goal of *Gary* is to present spectacle as an ironic response to tragedy, much like the speech Marcus offers in response to the sight of Lavinia, and to seek out the value in the more “willfully irresponsible” (Booth 69) response that camp offers. Mac’s work often plays with Halberstam’s concept of the queer art of failure, and Mac himself has consistently self-defined as a fool, drawn directly from *King Lear* to identify with the outsider who speaks the truth. By recognizing the queerness inherent in such positioning, Mac’s more pointedly political understanding of camp manifests itself as a pile of bodies through which Gary creates art.

Gary picks up on Sontag's suggestion that *Titus Andronicus* is "almost camp, or could be played as camp" because it is art that is "too much" (59) and attempts to presents a musical theatre spectacle that Gary classifies as a 'fooling,' made up of a weird combination of naked dancing corpses, Broadway favorites Kristine Nielsen and Lane, and a baby in a shark costume. By courting failure through grotesquerie, *Gary* extends the hyperbole of *Titus Andronicus* beyond its Shakespearean limits. The juxtaposition between the painfully humane and ridiculous - the baby's not-quite-dead nurse has a tea party amid a pile of corpses and Janice, Gary's partner-in-cleaning, strives to protect the dignity of Lavinia's corpse while flushing farts out of the other bodies she cleans - underscores the presence of humanity amid all the carnage, both in Shakespeare's play and in Trump's America. *Gary*'s choice to position appropriative failure as a generative act, particularly as it facilitates parallels between Mac's spectacle and Shakespeare's, draws attention to the superficiality with which appropriated plays are often read, instead implicitly advocating for Christy Desmet's call that appropriation be a dialogic process. Curiously, both Broadway and Shakespeare audiences were resistant to the prospect of appropriating Titus' own mad laughter - the show was widely panned by the Shakespeare scholarly community and in spite of its star presence, closed early on Broadway.

"Shakespearishness in Prestige Television"
Miles Grier, Queens College, City University of New York

According to *Vulture*, an online magazine devoted to criticism written by omnivorous media consumers, showrunners and critics distinguish a "[prestige television](#)" show from unserious television by comparing it to the novel or to cinema. One might well add "Shakespearean" to the toolkit, a term that seems to gesture toward particular kinds of conflicts, as well as epic sweep. Any family squabble over an inheritance can be [King Lear](#). Any competition for political office can be *Macbeth*. Or, so it would seem, based on the press for television series such as [Empire](#), [Succession](#), and [House of Cards](#) (US).

In this paper, I want to try to identify precisely what distinguishes a show that is engaged with Shakespeare's plots, characters, and techniques from one that merely wants to share the cultural aura cast by his great tragedies. Consider it the difference between the Shakespearean and the Shakespearish. Is it possible for us to distinguish between the advertising campaigns and the technical elements of television in these two categories?

Although I do not think that Shakespearean necessarily connotes higher quality, I do want to identify the different formal techniques of the merely Shakespearish, a category I use to suggest that the Shakespearean elements are not aesthetic or metacritical but pertain instead to the characters involved in the primary conflict. Shakespearish is a way of pitching or puffing a project. Shakespearean is an ethos. I will proceed by drawing comparisons between the aforementioned trio of prestige television shows (and the discourse surrounding them) and what I consider a deeply Shakespearean series, the UK *House of Cards*.

This analysis has the potential to expand Thomas Leitch's "Twelve Fallacies of Adaptation Theory" in two ways. Leitch is primarily interested in challenging the idea that film fails to

capture the richness and detail of the novel. This frame requires some adjustment to account for Shakespeare who is often taught as if he were a supreme novelist but who also left us plays that meditate on the possibilities and limitations of that form. Second, Leitch does not account for the context that generates literary scholars' anti-cinematic prejudices. Can considering the rise of streaming networks, changes in national educational standards, and the precarious place of so-called old media help to explain the desire to claim a Shakespearean pedigree in the contemporary moment?

Wrestling with Shakespeare: How Two Adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* Find Value in the Classroom

Becky Hixon, University of Michigan

In her 2019 interview for NPR's *Code Switch*, Ayanna Thompson argues that certain Shakespeare plays "resist rehabilitation and appropriation" and should no longer be performed. They should, however, still be taught, but specifically in ways that allow students to "wrestle with" Shakespeare as opposed to just "submitting to" him as something universally good for us. It is unclear what Thompson means by "appropriation" here, as she then goes on to discuss only *productions* of three Shakespeare plays, but I argue that Shakespearean adaptations may offer students something that Thompson posits productions cannot. In particular, adaptations provide a distance from Shakespeare's playtexts (in their form and often their language) that gives students a much needed foothold from which to grapple with the problematic content of his plays, even when those adaptations "fail" to recuperate the texts as we may wish. I believe that adaptations, even so-called "bad" adaptations, therefore, contain pedagogical value exactly because they provide students with the leverage they need to frame, critique, respond to, and "wrestle with" a canonical author such as Shakespeare.

In this paper, I will demonstrate how two relatively recent adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew*—Gil Junger's 1999 film *10 Things I Hate About You* and Anne Tyler's 2016 novel *Vinegar Girl*—can be seen as specifically valuable within a classroom setting. While neither Barbara Hodgdon nor Diana Henderson saw *10 Things* as offering the kind of critique of patriarchal ideology feminist critics typically desire, and reviewers had mixed opinions as to whether *Vinegar Girl* hit the mark, both texts offer a new angle through which to consider the historical imbrication of gender and class represented in the play. Many contemporary popular culture adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* have two main goals: "saving" Katherine from her subordinate position in the play's narrative and "redeeming" her relationship with Petruchio, thus transforming it into a palatable liberal feminist or pop-feminist romance. This emphasis on gender may appear to eclipse the other major site of power struggle in the play: that of class. These two texts demonstrate, however, how class and gender continue to be entwined in contemporary culture. Therefore, while neither text may be the feminist rehabilitation of *Taming* that we desire, each allows students an important perspective on the play through a focus on the feminist politics of class.

Translation, Adaptation and Anuvad – Reframing the Question of Evaluation
Anandi Rao, UC Irvine

What is the basis for evaluating an adaptation, especially one that engages with or, or indeed translates, Shakespeare's plays? Is it inevitable to compare it to something called an "original"? The comparison with an original is one that often haunts translations too. In trying to think of what it means to reframe the question of evaluation this paper turns to the Sanskrit-derived Hindi word *anuvad*. In particular I am drawing on the Sanskrit-derived Hindi word for translation, "anuvad". While *anuvad* does connote the "carrying across" that Latinate words for translation imply, the "underlying metaphor" is "temporal – to say after, to repeat" (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p. 9, emphasis in original). *Anuvad*'s etymological roots in Sanskrit refer to a process of "saying after or again, repeating by way of explanation, explanatory repetition or reiteration with corroboration or illustration" (Monier-Williams, 1997 [1899], p. 38). The notion of an adaptation as an explanatory repetition is one that has stayed with me. How does reframing an adaptation as an *anuvad* help us attend to the question, "but is it any good?" This is the central question guiding this paper. To explore this question, I will look at *Noblemen* an Indian movie adaptation of *Merchant of Venice* and *Romil and Jugal* an Indian webseries adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, both of which engage with themes of queer desire. Both adaptations engage with the plays at several levels including the staging of the play within the adaptation, a nod perhaps to Shakespeare's numerous plays within the plays. What is the potential of explanatory repetition especially as it relates to imagining queer spaces and queer desire?

American Reaction to Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V*
Jonah Kent Richards, SUNY Albany

Commissioned by the British government as a propaganda film for the public during the Second World War, Laurence Olivier's 1944 *The Chronicle History of King Henry Fifth with his battell at Agincourt in France* is considered by scholars and critics to be the first commercially and critically successful Shakespeare film. The film made its biggest impact during its 1946 release in the United States. My paper argues that the American response to the film can serve as a model for contemporary Shakespeare adaptation scholars.

The film garnered rave reviews from some of the country's most prominent film critics like Bosley Crowther and James Agee. In the cover article "Masterpiece" for the April 8th 1946 issue of *Time* magazine, Agee argues that Olivier contributes both to the art of Shakespeare and cinema. Agee observes how Olivier boldly cuts, rearranges, and interpolates scenes from Shakespeare's original play into his new film adaptation. Agee praises the way Olivier coordinates his camerawork to the performances of his actors. In addition, Agee argues that the film speaks to the past and the present. Agee judges the film as "a major achievement" that merges Shakespeare's poetry with all the potential of the new cinematic medium.

The film's popular success attracted the attention of a new generation of a new generation of Shakespeare scholars. The release of the film coincided with the expansion of the American academy from an influx of students and scholars from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Scholars like James E. Phillips and Robert Hamilton Ball published articles on the film in newly founded west coast based academic periodicals on film and other forms of media studies. In his 1946 article "Adapted from a Play by W. Shakespeare" for *The Hollywood Quarterly*, Phillips explores the film's appeal to American audiences. He argues that much of the film's success can be credited to Olivier's reinterpretation of the King Henry character. In his 1947 article "If We

Shadows Have Offended” for *The Pacific Spectator*, Ball states that success of Olivier’s *Henry V* was forcing scholars to rethink their long held perception that Shakespeare’s works are unsuitable material for adaptation into film. My paper illustrates that American critics and scholars have already tackled the critical issues facing adaptation studies that we are discussing in this seminar.

Evaluating Dark Ladies
Katherine Scheil, University of Minnesota

My paper for our seminar will derive from my book in progress on the afterlife of the Dark Lady, the fictional figure originating in Shakespeare’s sonnets who has taken on a life of her own over the last century or so. Through imaginary Dark Ladies, dozens of authors have constructed fantasy women to address Shakespeare’s perceived sexual and creative needs, and to respond to desires for a more multi-racial and sexually liberated love interest. I am interested in how to evaluate these adaptations, so to speak, since the Dark Lady of course isn’t an actual text or source per se, but rather, is a suggested character in the Sonnets, who may or may not be linked to an actual historical person. My paper will likely take the form of several case studies of Dark Ladies, in order to explore possible analytical frameworks for this material. For example, in the cluster of seven post-millennial Dark Lady novels written by women and geared to a female reading audience, writers and readers “talk back” to Shakespeare not by remaking his literary texts, but by refashioning his life to cast him in the role of an appealing, charismatic, but often disappointing man, in opposition to a Dark Lady of some sort, at times a version of Aemilia Lanyer, and other times a completely fictional woman. In another example, Dark Ladies proliferate in online communities of readers and writers, through fanfiction that is frankly often difficult to slog through for a variety of reasons.

I am interested in exploring how to talk (or not to) about these texts in terms of their value, and in relation to their intended audience (rarely academics). Two questions that I hope to address are how academics can suspend or rework questions of value for adaptations that are geared to (and satisfy) audiences of nonacademics; and how to talk about these works in the first place, as adaptations, or as some other category of work in response to the entity of “Shakespeare.” On the one hand, Dark Lady texts are adaptations of a Shakespearian character, and on another, they are adaptations of Shakespeare’s biographical story, filling in perceived gaps with either historical or fictional women (or both).

“Against the Use of Nature”:
Shakespeare, Oldroyd’s *Lady Macbeth* (2016), and the Limits of Adaptation
Gregory Semenza, University of Connecticut

Even the title of William Oldroyd’s taut thriller, *Lady Macbeth*, invites audiences to approach the film intertextually. For a small number of viewers familiar with Nikolai Leskov’s 1865 novella *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, from which the film draws its main inspiration, Shakespeare’s more well-known character already will have receded, slightly, into a position of secondary importance. For the majority of viewers, however, a more direct relationship will be assumed: is

Oldroyd's film an *adaptation* of the 1606 play? Is it an *appropriation* of the famous character? Although such semantic questions about an artwork's relationship to previous texts can seem largely academic, in the case of Oldroyd's film they might reasonably be said to be inevitable and, therefore, potentially central to the work's meaning. The elliptical title activates an unusually self-conscious and analogically-minded audience.

Adaptation scholars, I would argue, have not quite figured out what to do with such cases, especially when it comes to classifying them—since the line between what we call adaptations and what we call appropriations remains somewhat blurry. Julie Sanders has usefully defined the appropriation as a type of text that “affect[s] a more decisive journey away from the informing source” than does the typical adaptation. Other scholars including Linda Hutcheon have described adaptations as “inherently, ‘palimpsestuous’ works,” using the concept of the palimpsest, that is, to indicate the ways in which source texts not only fade further into the background as newer texts are written over them, but also the ways in which the different overlapping textual layers begin together to suggest new meanings that no single textual layer could possibly communicate.

As useful as such metaphors can be, they are nonetheless metaphors; we still struggle to define exactly what is an adaptation, what is an appropriation, and rather than moving closer towards pinning these definitions down, we continue to expand them until the words themselves threaten to lose all shape and meaning; indeed, Sarah Cardwell has recently argued that “adaptation studies has mutated from an under-acknowledged, narrowly focused field of study into an all-embracing perspective which eagerly consumes all intertexts in its path—and which, by doing so, may be sowing the seeds of its own destruction.” Her solution is to *restrict* the definition of adaptation to “a special instance of consciously intended and temporally specific intermediality.” Cardwell's essay represents a key moment within adaptation studies when someone feels compelled to say “enough is enough” and call for limits on our ever-expanding definitions of adaptation. How are we to respond?

In this essay I'll work through what I think is at stake in such seemingly “academic” debates and questions. According to which criteria would *Lady Macbeth* constitute an *adaptation*—let alone a *good* adaptation—of Shakespeare? And what do we gain, if anything, by approaching a text like this *as an adaptation* specifically?

Nothing Much To Do With Shakespeare
Jessica Slights, Acadia University

This paper will propose that we look to Halberstam's notion of low theory and to the teen-centered webseries *Nothing Much To Do* as we think about methods for evaluating Shakespeare adaptations. Low theory draws on eccentric archives of “silly” texts, encourages unruly movement among such binary constructs as low culture/high culture, public understanding/academic knowledge, and activism/scholarship, and finds counterhegemonic force in failure. *NMTD*—a transmedia adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* that sets the action at a New Zealand highschool and includes 80 vlog episodes as well as hundreds of posts and comments from multiple social media accounts—is an undisciplined “failure” that responds to and remakes Shakespeare's comedy for contemporary online audiences by placing teenage girls at its center. But, of course, *NMTD* only fails according to some wearingly familiar measures of adaptation success—fidelity to the source text, anteriority, aesthetic polish, popularity gauged by

box office returns. I will argue that it is precisely this production's resistance to such limiting scales of value that enables *NMTD* to succeed as a thoughtful response to *Much Ado* as well as an engaging work in its own right. *NMTD*'s successful failures—along with those of other Badaptations of Shakespeare—point the way to a more productive model for defining and valuing adaptations that emphasizes their capacity to critique their source texts even as they engage new audiences in thinking through contemporary variations of ideas explored in those source texts.

Thomas Leitch is surely right that adaptation studies should shake the assumption that making a determination about “whether a given film is any good [is] a preliminary, a precondition, or a substitute for asking how it works” (162). Nevertheless, establishing the scholarly and pedagogical value of the texts we want to write about and to teach is an important step in ensuring that the study of adaptations ceases to be understood as a “marginal enterprise” (20) within Shakespeare studies. My essay will try to articulate one possible account of this value and I very much look forward to talking about others when we meet in Denver.

“That’s Not the Way to Spell Shakespeare”:
A Matter of Life and Death (1946) and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1935)
Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., Penn State University

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s film *A Matter of Life and Death* (or *AMOLAD*, 1946) features a scene in which American military personnel under the direction of an English vicar rehearse an exchange from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. At one point the vicar critiques a young American private’s performance by suggesting that “Bottom’s not a gangster.” As Ian Christie and others have noted, this is an obvious allusion to James Cagney’s role as Bottom in Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle’s movie version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1935). It is an allusion, moreover, that raises the question of value, insofar as it gestures to the relative merits not only of British and American performances of Shakespeare but also of British and American cinematic productions. A film that is centrally concerned with the future of Anglo-American relations, *AMOLAD* lays claim to Shakespeare to argue for the merits and unique capacities of “quality” British cinema (and, of course, of Powell and Pressburger themselves).

In this paper, I will approach the issue of value in three major ways. First, I will consider how and to what ends *AMOLAD* arrogates value to itself by way of Shakespeare. Second, I will ask of its appropriation of *Dream* not “Is it any good?,” but “How is it used to explore the question of value as posed both in the film itself and in its relation to Reinhardt and Dieterle’s *Dream*?” That is to say, I will consider how *AMOLAD* frames the intertextual relationship between itself and the 1935 *Dream* as one of value. Third, I will contextualize this framing in terms of the post-war moment of *AMOLAD*’s production and reception.

This essay, which I intend to expand for a book-in-progress on Shakespeare and British World War Two film, will touch upon some ideas that I first took up in an article entitled “‘More Than Cool Reason Ever Comprehends’: Shakespeare, Imagination and Distributed Auteurism in *A Matter of Life and Death*,” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 34 (2016): 373-389.

Abstracts, SAA 2020 Seminar, “Evaluating Shakespeare Adaptation” (session 2)

Peter Berek, Visiting Scholar, Amherst College

In the 1590s Shakespeare makes the history genre so much his own that subsequent histories can't escape being seen in relationship to his. Although the early 17th century history plays about which I'm writing are not, strictly speaking, “adaptations” of Shakespeare on the model of Tate's *Lear* or *My Own Private Idaho*, they nonetheless raise the issue Doug Lanier specifies: how should we evaluate them? Or, as I propose to ask, “what are they good for?”

My interest in these belated history plays arises from a desire better to understand the emergence of a reading public in the first half of the 17th century—an incipient Habermassian “public sphere,” with “public” redefined by Michael Warner as involving “the reflexive circulation of discourse.” Publics are sites of dialogue, dialogue that can take the form of plays explicitly engaging their predecessors. In the Shakespeare histories, characters such as Falstaff and Pistol engage in an implicit form of public-making by their allusive dialogue with precursor plays (most of which are histories or pseudo-histories such as *Cambyses*). *Sir John Oldcastle* (1600) rebukes the *Henry IV* plays (Falstaff was originally named Oldcastle) by celebrating Oldcastle as a Protestant martyr. “Citizen histories” such as *When You See Me, You Know Me* and *If you Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (both 1605) broadly echo the low-life characters of Shakespeare's histories, but are less specifically allusive to precursor texts. They imply that merchants and laborers are the true supporters of monarchs who share their values of good fellowship. Complexities of politics are supplanted by mockery of aristocratic, but not royal, pretension. Aimed at popular audiences, plays such as these display political fantasy, not political conflict. Like *Oldcastle* vigorously Protestant, all they offer about Catholicism is condemnation, not consideration. They are good for affirming the established religion and the status of the London citizens who attended the public theaters where they were performed.

An abstract is not the place to list or describe the dozen or so histories I may mention in my paper. (It's worth mentioning that many of these “adaptations” show far more interest in women than do the Shakespeare histories from which they derive.) Their vogue is almost over by 1610 or so. In the late 1620s John Ford writes the last pre-Restoration history, *Perkin Warbeck* (printed 1634). It portrays citizen-tradesmen as aspiring to power, but the portrayal is mocking. *Perkin Warbeck's* metatheatricality and echoes of the *Henriad* gives its audience an opportunity to debate about the performative aspects of kingship. But *Perkin* simplifies the issues Shakespeare raises. Perkin is, like Richard II, a histrionic performer, while Henry VII, like Bolingbroke, is a shrewd politician. But unlike Richard, Perkin is an impostor. Shakespeare's plays contrasts Richard's excess with the astuteness of Bolingbroke and Hal. Ford's simplification makes *Perkin* less challenging, and less engaged in public-making than the *Henriad*. Politically shrewd as *Perkin Warbeck* is, the play is best at reassuring rather than questioning received authority.

What Matters When You're Adapting Shakespeare for Survival?

Katherine Steele Brokaw, University of California, Merced & Shakespeare in Yosemite

This paper will talk about how to evaluate adaptations that can be classified as Applied Shakespeare, that is, productions that use Shakespeare to address a particular social problem.¹ Specifically, I will be talking about the feedback methods we use for Shakespeare in Yosemite, a festival co-founded by Paul Prescott (University of Warwick) and myself in 2017 that presents free Shakespeare the weekend of Shakespeare's Birthday and Earth Day in Yosemite National Park (CA).

Our shows are site-specific and collaborative, and aim to highlight issues related to public land (ab)use, over-consumption, ecological catastrophe, and the need for collective action on the climate emergency. We see Shakespearean texts as a renewable cultural resource that can be adapted into works of theatre that urge action on ecological issues. That is, while many of the Earth's resources will never come back after being extracted and exhausted, Shakespeare's plays are not diminished when plundered to energize a new work of art: quite the opposite, as creative adaptation of these plays has generally ensured their survival better than conservative preservation.

Thus when we ask ourselves about our productions: "is this adaptation any good?," such a question leads us to think about our priorities, which are different than they might be for e.g. a professional theatre critic. Is "good" what we are aiming for, or is it "effective"? And is it good, or effective, for whom? For other Shakespeare fans? For academics for whom a sophisticated interpretation of the show incorporating knowledge of play, past productions, and a well-informed grip on world events is available? Or for the audience of Park visitors the production for whom the production actually plays?

We tend to think that the way the production affects its actual audience members—many of whom have never seen live Shakespeare before—is the most important consideration when we evaluate the effectiveness of our adaptations. So how do we measure the fitness of each year's adaptation for this target audience? As I will describe in this paper, for the past three years, we have largely depended on in-person surveys filled out directly after the show. I will discuss what we have found from these surveys, and raise some further questions about how we might proceed in the future.

"Interpersonal Whatchamacallit"²: Too-Tame Shrews, Toothless Tamers, and Watered-down
Vinegar
Regina Buccola, Roosevelt University

To date, all of the novels in the Hogarth Shakespeare series of adaptations of individual plays into novels have been modernizations of their sources. "These books don't feel like medicine or vitamins" Isabella Biedenharn exulted in *Entertainment Weekly*, strongly implying that the dramatic works on which they are based do (online). *The Taming of the Shrew* is typically received today as particularly strong medicine, with productions of the play frequently leaning

¹ See for example <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/edacs/departments/shakespeare/events/2018/shakespeare-symposium.aspx> and the forthcoming Spring 2020 issue of *Critical Survey* on Applied Shakespeare.

² The quoted phrase appears in Tyler's version of Kate's Act 5 "submission" speech (232).

on the Christopher Sly framing material to contextualize and contain the shrew-taming plot, confining it to a museum piece of play-within-a-play farce.³

Anne Tyler's adaptation of *Shrew* for the Hogarth Shakespeare series, *Vinegar Girl*, eschews the Christopher Sly frame, but elects to retain the domestic comedy genre of the original play.

However, the only effective way to render *Shrew*'s narrative acceptable as a comedy for a 21st-century readership is to completely alter its unpalatable narrative of domestic violence. Much like the BBC Shakespeare Re-Told adaptation of *Shrew*, Tyler's novel concludes with a time-skipping epilogue of domestic and connubial bliss, complete with consummation-confirming offspring, which Elysa Gardner found "the perfect cherry for this well-made trifle" (*USA Today* online).

Gardner's reference to Tyler's novel as "well made" establishes an analogue she may not have intended. Shakespeare's *Shrew* – with its stereotyped characters, multiple disguises, and neat plot resolutions – could be construed as a well-made play *avant la lettre*. However, even within the confines of *Shrew*'s romantic plots and stock characters, Shakespeare manages to grapple with a variety of class and gender issues that go unexplored in *Vinegar Girl*.

Tyler's adaptation of the play refuses to confront these ongoing social concerns, giving us instead a Kate who might marry for less than ideal reasons, but whose relationship blossoms into an idyllic partnership, complete with an award-garnering career and an adorably precocious child. Tyler's Kate is a Super Woman, rather than a Mega Bitch, and curiously does more to promulgate the hierarchical narrative of patriarchal subservience that concludes the original *Shrew* than the play itself does in contemporary performances, which use the frame to work harder to challenge that retrograde marital dynamic.

"From old Shakespear's honour'd dust": Adaptations and the Name-of-the-Shakespeare
Jim Casey, Arcadia University

In the spirit of the seminar's focus, this essay will attempt to develop some kind of paradigm by which we might evaluate the quality and success of individual Shakespearean adaptations; I recognize how quixotic this may be, with aesthetic evaluations ultimately coming down to individual taste, but I would like to try to present some evaluative tool that is a bit more formal than simply "knowing it when we see it." With that in mind, I think the first step toward developing some kind of aesthetic evaluation of Shakespearean adaptation is to acknowledge that different adaptations work in very different ways—they accomplish different things and they intersect with "Shakespeare" from quite different directions. What makes an adaptation "good," then, seems to depend on the type of adaptation and the requirements of that generic category. I am just now beginning to think this through, so I don't know if I will have a list of categories by SAA, but one category I know I want to address involves those works that directly call out their Shakespearean hypotext (usually in the title). I have been thinking about these kinds of

³ See, for example, Barbara Hodgdon, "Performance and Critical Histories," *The Taming of the Shrew*, the Arden Shakespeare (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016): 71-131 and Marea Mitchell, "Performing Textual Politics in *The Taming of the Shrew*," in *The Taming of the Shrew: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Dymrna Callaghan (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009): 237-247.

adaptations for some time because they resist the theoretical framing of both our seminar leaders' "Shakespearean Rhizomatics" and Fredric Jameson's "pastiche."

In all other cases, I find Doug's Shakespearean Rhizomatics useful and compelling, especially in the way the concept decentralizes and de-privileges the Shakespearean hypotext and allows us to see "how 'Shakespeare' becomes ever-other-than-itself precisely through the varied particularities of its manifestations, which proliferate according to no preordained teleology." But rhizomes insist on "anti-genealogy," and these descendant texts all emphasize their own literary lineage. In their original explanation of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other" and quote R my Chauvin to explain how rhizomes comprise "the *aparallel evolution* of two beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other." Lanier emphasizes this point and insists that these "elements in relation remain distinct—[Deleuze and Guattari] reject the notion of a synthesis or symbiosis—yet through their relationship they move independently in the direction of each other." The problem with this for me in relation to Shakespearean adaptation is that such a formulation erases specific trajectories of creative generation and denies the linear and directional relationship that the adaptations themselves declare. Descendant adaptations and the Shakespearean plays from which they derive do not have "absolutely nothing to do with each other" but instead clearly interact in some way. Unlike Lanier's Shakespearean Rhizome or Jameson's pastiche, these adaptations depend on direct reference and allusion—almost in a kind of anti-pastiche (rather than experiencing the past and the hypotext "metonymically," these texts announce their association with the earlier text). At the same time, the descendant adaptations are often so far separated from the early modern original that they have become unrecognizable. Nonetheless, the *idea* of "Shakespeare" is always-already clearly delineated in the public consciousness, even if this Shakespeare is disconnected from any actual reality. As I've pointed out elsewhere, this "Fakespeare" is like Umberto Eco's "Absolute Fake," or Jean Baudrillard's hyperreal simulacrum, or Jacques Derrida's spectrogenic ghost, in that it has supplanted the "real" Shakespeare and has become more real than the real.

As a focus-text, I plan to examine John Dryden and William Davenant's *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island* and the "epistemic dialogue" (to use David Cowart's term) that emerges between that text and Shakespeare's. In particular, I'm interested in the way *The Enchanted Island* simultaneously embraces and rejects the Other of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. As Jacques Lacan notes, "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other [. . .] in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire of recognition." Within his overall symbolic order, Lacan's Name-of-the-Father functions as a governing law that establishes boundaries yet still sustains the structures of desire in the very midst of prohibition. If we co-opt this concept into the "Name-of-the-Shakespeare," then I think you will understand how I view this double recognition as integral to the Shakespeare-descendant dialectic, in which the successful adaptation declares both *le nom* (the name) and *le non* (the no) of Shakespeare.

Chuck Conaway, University of Southern Indiana

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon reminds us that 'adaptation' is a term that describes both a product and a process (8-9 and 18-22). Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe argue that,

insofar as the term describes a product, “every copy, edition, display, publication, exhibit, recording, or performance of an artwork is fundamentally an *adaptation*, in that it reframes prior versions of that work in new environments, periods, and material, and for new purposes” (28). As a process, they conclude, adaptation “is the very mechanism by which culture transmits its classic works: unmaking and remaking them, renegotiating their meaning in specific reception contexts” (28). Perhaps belaboring the obvious, then, insofar as Shakespeare adaptations reframe, unmake, remake, or renegotiate prior versions of or meanings in their sources, Shakespeare adaptations involve both some kind of fidelity to and difference from their Shakespearean source.

Oftentimes, it is precisely the tension between fidelity and difference that engages our attention as scholars of adaptation: what does it mean, for example, when a play is reset in medieval Japan, or when a male character is not simply played by an actress but changed to a female character? Such questions frequently serve as the launching point for fascinating explorations of Shakespeare adaptations. But I am interested in the value of other kinds of differences in adaptations of Shakespeare. On the one hand, a Shakespeare adaptation is both similar to and different from its Shakespearean source, and the play of meaning between those similarities and differences has an impact on our sense of the Shakespearean aggregate or rhizome. On the other hand, however, most adaptations—especially those that are only tangentially interested in Shakespeare or those that only allude to him or borrow a plot element or a character from a play—engage in adaptational plays of fidelity and difference with other texts, non-Shakespearean texts.

As Shakespeare scholars who are appropriately attentive to an adaptation’s engagement with and impact on the ever-changing Shakespearean rhizome, we might sometimes overlook, or may not give justice to, an adaptation’s significant concerns or engagements with non-Shakespearean texts. What value is there in thinking about the ways in which adaptations of Shakespeare are invested in other sources and concerns? And how might those other interests complicate our focus on the text’s relation to Shakespeare? I hope to explore these ideas as they are relevant to Abby Genie’s *The Lightkeepers*, a 2016 novel that plays with our tendency to focus on what is related to Shakespeare before radically shifting our perspective to a non-Shakespearean framework that encourages a completely different reading.

‘Why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy?’
Stefania Crowther

The title of this paper is the question posed by Charles Lamb in his famous attack on Nahum Tate’s *History of King Lear* - a candidate for the prize for the most critically maligned adaptation of Shakespeare ever - which has been offending the Bardolatrous with its happy ending since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lamb could not fathom the notion that ‘the living martyrdom that Lear has gone through,’ could be followed by Lear simply being able ‘to live and be happy’. ‘If he could sustain the world’s burden after’ such an ordeal, Lamb wants to know, ‘why all this pudder and preparation?’ Critical opinion followed suit thereafter, the tragic ending has been restored in a new adaptation in 1823 and Tate’s version became a laughing stock.

But it was not always so. The happy ending had been retained in all professional productions of the play from 1681 to 1823. Francis Brooke saw David Garrick's adaptation of play in 1756, and as she watched the audience's response to the play, her faith in the emotional health of her society was restored:

I had the satisfaction of finding we were accompanied in our tears by almost the whole house; the young people especially showed such becoming sensibility, as gives me hopes virtue has a stronger party in the rising generation, than those of my age in general are inclined to allow.

As Bardolatry releases its stranglehold on literary and dramatic criticism, space is created for a reassessment of Tate's choices. This paper examines Tate's and Garrick's adaptations of *Lear* in the context of other Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and the 2015 production by The Hidden Room. Far from tormenting its audience with unnecessary sympathy, might Tate's *History of King Lear* once have been, and still possibly be ... *good*?

Transforming *The Tempest* in Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*
Anne Gossage, Eastern Kentucky University

When I first read Margaret Atwood's 2016 novel *Hagseed: The Tempest Retold*, I immediately concluded that it was not only a good novel in its own right, but also a "true" adaptation of *The Tempest*. I'm still trying to put my finger on why, but I think it has something to do with the complex way it reimagines the characters and action of the original, while also calling attention to itself as an adaptation. Perhaps any really good adaptation should feel like an extension of the play but also be aware of itself as a contribution to a community of possible Shakespeare interpretations.

Hagseed adapts *The Tempest* by transforming it into a modern revenge tale about the director of a major Shakespeare theater losing his way, and then finding himself again. My students and I got a great deal of pleasure last semester from recognizing one major idea from *The Tempest* after another in the novel, each creatively and often humorously interwoven into the story. Another level of complexity that Atwood provides spoke more to me: the novel draws on and sends up traditions of Shakespeare acting, scholarship, and performance. My paper will explore and contextualize how Atwood comments on Shakespeare festivals, directors who go over the top with gimmicky staging, post-colonial literary criticism, prison performance, amateur Shakespeare, fantasy and science fiction versions of *The Tempest*, the use of modern songs and tunes in performance, the Disney-fication of Shakespeare, and the politics of arts funding.

The central character of the novel is a Prospero-like figure, who thinks he is the only one who can produce true visions of Shakespeare on stage, and who treats his actors like slaves. By the end of the novel, he has learned to collaborate with his prisoner-actors, and they have learned to both support his creative vision and to make Shakespeare their own. Like the play itself, the novel is about the transforming power of shared imagination.

Choose Your Own Adventure:
Curating Adaptation for a Twenty-First Century Shakespeare Syllabus
Ronan Hatfull, The University of Warwick

Academics employed in the business of educating students about Shakespeare's cultural afterlife hold a significant responsibility when introducing them to the ever-increasing wealth of adaptations available across a multitude of media. As figures of intellectual authority, we inevitably shape and effect the relative value which pupils attach to particular adaptations and periods in which Shakespeare experienced a surge in mainstream popularity.

In 'Remaking Shakespeare', a module which I currently teach at the University of Warwick, I empower students by inviting them to design their own syllabus for the second term of the academic year. This begins with the process of choosing one to two plays which forms the basis for the curriculum, followed by a pitch meeting in which a number of possible adaptations are proposed and, finally, the selection of secondary reading which will support the work of their student-led session.

By analysing specific choices made by my current group of students, I will investigate why, on the one hand, certain adaptations, such as Baz Lurhman's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), continue to be viewed as canonical examples of popular Shakespeare, despite the students having not been born at their time of release. Is the secondary education system partially responsible for this and, if so, why are these texts selected as suitable examples of Shakespeare's accessibility?

On the other hand, students have also made a number of intriguing choices to study work in which the presence of Shakespeare might be termed only 'atmospheric', including two films which will be studied as *Hamlet* adaptations: Chan-wook Park's Hitchcockian horrorthriller *Stoker* (2013) and Ryan Coogler's Marvel superhero movie *Black Panther* (2017). Beyond the resonance of the dead father/lost child dynamic in each film, how and why are these students stretching the boundaries of adaptational definition and, by doing so, are they implicitly imbuing those 'adaptations' with value by association with Shakespeare?

A third category has emerged from the developing syllabus; texts that were either poorly received or which have already proved provocative amongst the students. For instance, Rufus Norris's 2018 critically-maligned production of *Macbeth* at the National Theatre was selected as an example of a what might be termed a 'badaptation', while the cult comedy film *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996) found favour due to its combination of schlocky violence and significant deviation from the Shakespearean source material. What leads students to attach negative value to particular productions and adaptations, which forces influence this impression, and why are they drawn to study these as examples of remaking Shakespeare?

Finally, by using first-hand student observations and reflections, I hope to develop an understanding of the value system to which they ascribe these different forms of Shakespearean adaptation and, viewing the syllabus as a collective whole, what this suggests about the choices made by academics when curating a syllabus which pulls the focus away from Shakespeare's plays onto the work which he directly, indirectly or atmospherically inspired.

My Own Private Shakespeare:
Gamification, Remediation, and other Subjective Pleasures of Performance
D.J. Hopkins, San Diego State University

The meaning-making apparatus of Shakespeare performance is always at a remove from the signifying practices of written dramatic text. The scholarly discourse addressing the relationship between text and performance has become a sub-field in its own right. This discourse is particularly heated in Shakespeare Studies, where the fault lines between the disciplines of Literature and Theatre / Performance Studies are most evident. Adaptations of Shakespearean source material complicate and exaggerate this fractious debate.

“My Own Private Shakespeare” seeks to explore the text and performance problematic through consideration of two Shakespearean adaptations. Michael Almereyda’s film adaptation of *Hamlet* (2000) has become a near-canonical point of reference among scholars of Shakespeare film and performance. However, my experience communicating the values of this film to scholars outside the field and to students in the classroom continually surfaces resistance. Is this a case study in disciplinary bias? An opportunity for “teachable moments,” both for colleagues and students? Or is it just a bad movie mistakenly celebrated by Gen X Shakespeareans? Barbara Hodgdon’s foundational research on this film would seem to counter the last of these rhetorical questions, but the problem of reception remains.

The other case study concerns an even more radical appropriation of Shakespeare: *Sleep No More*, an immersive theatre adaptation of *Macbeth*. Contrary to the reception of Almereyda’s *Hamlet*, *Sleep No More* has proven popular with a general audience; and my students immediately fall for SNM, even though most of them will never see it. Critical acceptance, however, has been slower to develop. After publishing one article (Worthen 2012) and a performance review (Hopkins 2012), a leading theatre journal announced an unofficial ban on *Sleep No More* submissions at a professional conference. And in *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley expresses the sentiment of many scholars and amateurs alike regarding this and other appropriations: “this is not the place to look for insights into Shakespeare” (2011), as if that were the unambiguous *raison d’être* for all Shakespeare performance.

A comparison of these two dissimilar adaptations and the resistance that each encounters will extend critical perspectives on Shakespearean adaptation, enhance consideration of Shakespeare performance (including its relationship with texts), and perhaps even provide “insights into Shakespeare” more generally.

Hamlet in Nutshell
Cynthia Lewis, Davidson College

Taking the title of the seminar at face value, I want to explore why a particular adaptation of a Shakespeare play is “any good.” What elements of McEwan’s *Nutshell* succeed and even stand out? How does McEwan comment on *Hamlet* while also contriving an original work of art in parallel with its source?

Although one reviewer maintains that *Nutshell* “doesn’t particularly illuminate *Hamlet*,” my own reading of McEwan encounters the delight of recognizing provocative allusions to Shakespeare’s play at countless turns. My knowledge of *Hamlet* not only puts me in conversation with *Nutshell*, but I repeatedly sense that the novelist understands the play better than most literary critics—or at least that he has the play’s core, rather than arcane or marginal concerns, in his sights.

Some reviewers have taken McEwan to task for being too clever by half—for example, *The Guardian*’s Tim Adams, who writes, “As with all novels based on self-consciously clever conceits, the danger is always self-consciously clever conceit.” Yet the very temptation to indulge in excessive wittiness is linked to a verbal skill that can engage with both *Hamlet* and his creator. Michiko Kakutani asserts that “McEwan’s narrative gifts of precision, authority and control, plus a new, Tom Stoppard-like delight in the sly gymnastics that words can perform” render the book “a small tour de force” and yield much of its reading pleasure. Many reviewers note that McEwan ventriloquizes through his precocious fetus, a tendency that bothers some more than others. The most bothered of these I’ve found, *The Telegraph*’s Orlando Bird, complains that “too often the baby’s voice [is] drowned out by its creator.” In response, I want to ask whether a merging of the fetus’s voice with the author’s may also prove a strength.

In my wild dream, I’d like to add Edward St. Aubyn’s recent adaptation of *King Lear* to this study. *Dunbar* is stunning for some of the reasons *Nutshell* excels and yet reserves its own particular merits; the two works combined would elaborate more fully on what makes an adaptation succeed. My challenge is that, having a sieve for a memory, I’ll have to reread both books before I start writing. Whether I can work them both in remains to be seen. If I can, I’ll retitle the paper, but keep the proposed focus.

Lauren Liebe, Texas A&M University

“A Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpolishd; yet so dazzling in their Disorder:” this is how Nahum Tate introduces his Shakespearean source text in his adaptation of *King Lear*. His sentiment is echoed time and again throughout the Restoration, with dramatists reworking Shakespeare’s plays to modernize the language and simplify its use of metaphor, to balance plots that were seen as defying the classical unities, or to update them to address contemporary sociopolitical concerns. However, later critical consensus has often switched these definitions: Shakespeare is the completed, perfect product, while the adaptations are the incomplete—and often unpromising—heap. For many, a happy-ending *King Lear* or an operatic *Tempest* are among the worst things one can do to Shakespeare.

My essay focuses on the two earliest adaptations of Shakespeare: William Davenant’s *The Law Against Lovers* (adapting *Measure for Measure* and adding the Beatrice/Benedick subplot from *Much Ado About Nothing*) and *The Rivals* (adapting *Two Noble Kinsmen*). While neither play seems to have been particularly popular even in its own time, both are useful for examining how Restoration dramatists and audiences understood their relationship to both their literary past and their political present. In this sense, I read adaptation as its own form of literary criticism—one

which repositions and comments on what the source text can offer to the present moment, regardless of the adaptation's fidelity or even its own aesthetic merits. Both *The Law Against Lovers* and *The Rivals* rework Shakespeare's (and Fletcher's) material for deliberately political purposes, ostensibly producing "old" (and thus innocent) plays which, through substantial cutting and reshaping, ultimately reinforce the concepts of nobility and mercy that were so central to the renegotiation of the restored monarchy's power. This paper argues that Davenant's earliest forays into Shakespearean adaptation are both critical of Shakespeare—seeking to overcome and build off of the past—and indebted to a legacy of English national drama that became central to constructing Restoration drama and politics alike. This allows us to reconsider the stakes of early Restoration adaptations not as necessitated by licensing restrictions or cultural tastes, but as deliberate cultural constructions in the service of a new political order.

Unrestrained Loose Companions
Cary Mazer, University of Pennsylvania

My subject is a genre of adaptation, the Shakespeare "companion play," i.e. plays that are engaged in a dialogue with a Shakespeare play, often designed to be performed in the same or adjacent seasons, sometimes cross-cast with the same set of actors in the same or the equivalent roles. Some companion plays shift the central action from one character or set of characters to another; others fill in missing details or plot points; some depict Shakespeare at the time the play was written or first performed; some depict actors—historical or contemporary, real or fictional—rehearsing the play; and others take a play's thematic elements or iconic moments to tell a different story altogether.

The question before the seminar is: how does one assess the value of an adaptation? With regard to the specific genre of Shakespeare companion play, I propose that we use the methodology articulated in Ric Knowles's *Reading the Material Theatre*: that we bypass the question of quality and examine instead the material conditions under which the plays do their cultural work. How, for example, does the play serve the stated mission of the theatre? Does the play serve the theatre's "brand?" What are the financial or managerial advantages of presenting companion play alongside the Shakespearean original in the same season (publicity, ticket sales, production elements, etc.) and what challenges does this pose (rehearsal time, salary and fee structures, etc.)?

My test case is the annual "Shakespeare's New Contemporaries" competition at the American Shakespeare Center, where there are both synergies and contradictions between the company's principal mission (early modern staging practices, which SNC submissions must employ) and the goal of generating new dramatic writing. How does the literary manager (who comes from the new-play-development sector of the industry) interact with theatre's management? And what challenges does the competition pose for the working playwright, obliged to write a play that uses 10 to 13 actors which, win or lose, must then find a home in the mainstream industry, where casts rarely exceed five actors? (Full disclosure: seven of my ten plays are Shakespeare companion plays; one play was a finalist in the inaugural SNC competition, and another was a semi-finalist in the third season.)

Shakespeare in Gibberish: *Hamlet the Clown Prince*
Taarini Mookherjee, Columbia University

Rajat Kapoor's *Hamlet the Clown Prince* has been a mainstay of the Indian English theatre circuit's repertoire for over a decade. Begun as an experiment melding Shakespeare, clowns, and gibberish, the success of this production went on to pave the way for three other experimental contemporary engagements with Shakespeare—*I Don't Like It As You Like It*; *Nothing Like Lear* and *What's Done Is Done*. Drawing on a shared cultural history and vocabulary from Charlie Chaplin to *The Lion King*, from commedia dell'arte to Samuel Beckett, *Hamlet the Clown Prince* is designed to appeal to the highly educated metropolitan audiences while simultaneously mocking them for an intellectual attachment to Shakespeare. While improvisation is at the core of this approach to Shakespeare, by far the most remarkable and disconcerting element of the production is its use of gibberish, alongside a combination of English, various European languages and a smattering of the vernacular of the particular performance context. This paper will focus specifically on the production's use of gibberish, both as performative mode and as adaptive process.

Gibberish is a term usually associated with incomprehensibility, to speak gibberish is to speak nonsense, both literally and metaphorically. Gibberish, in a less pedestrian sense, is that which belongs to no language, that which is an arbitrary invention. In this sense, gibberish dissolves the link between language and geography—it belongs nowhere and thus, the flip side is that it remains universally unintelligible, something that is apparent in the production's capacity to travel. Over the past ten years, this play has toured the metropolitan centres of India—Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai—and travelled abroad—South Africa, Indonesia, Singapore, and the UK to name a few. However, gibberish is also utilized as a pejorative evaluative term for language; unintelligibility is the term we apply to what we cannot understand, to what is strange and foreign to us. Framing this paper is the question of what gibberish offers in this production except a gesture towards opacity, or rather, the appearance of opacity? More broadly, how might we evaluate and analyze an adaptation or self-proclaimed “interpretation” of *Hamlet* that is premised on breaking down “difficult” Shakespeare into nonsense?

Using Shakespeare's Life: Marchette Chute's *Shakespeare of London* (1949)
Elizabeth Rivlin, Clemson University

This paper takes up the issue of evaluating adaptation via the biography *Shakespeare of London*, by the prolific American writer Marchette Chute. Although this book is largely forgotten today, it once had a sizeable footprint, due to its selection as the April 1950 book of the month by the Book-of-the-Month-Club (BOMC). I operate on the premise that a biography can be considered a form of adaptation, insofar as a biography adapts a life, or more precisely, adapts an assemblage of materials that purport to represent and contextualize that life, in Shakespeare's case as refracted and remediated through centuries of transmission. What Chute aimed to produce was “a picture of Shakespeare as a human being,” which she claimed could make a vivid impression on readers without usurping their interpretation.

The emphasis that Chute puts on readers is important, for a biography should make us consider what—or who—a life is being adapted *for*. To focus on that question is to follow the lead of Valerie Fazel and Louise Geddes in *The Shakespeare User*, where they argue that “To call a Shakespearean a user is to assert a claim about reader agency that pushes against the traditional scholarly notions of objectivity as the defining quality of value. Instead, use assumes the right of access to Shakespeare on the behalf of the consumer.” My paper similarly argues that in writing *Shakespeare of London*, Marchette Chute construes her readers as consumers who have purchased in her biography a certain access to Shakespeare. In other words, she conceives of her readership as having *uses* for Shakespeare.

The paper delves into the multilayered use value of *Shakespeare of London*, specifically for the large middle-class readership that subscribed to the BOMC. First, simply owning the biography was valuable, giving entrée to the cultural and social privilege attached to Shakespearean books in mid-twentieth-century America. Second, because Chute disguises the mediating function of her authorship, she allows readers to feel that they are actually “reading Shakespeare.” Readers gained a sense of interpretive mastery over the Shakespearean canon as embodied in his biography. Finally, Chute fashions Shakespeare’s life into an example that her readers could imitate: in her telling, Shakespeare was a middle-class boy who by dint of his hard work, professionalism, and business savvy rose to the heights of creativity and fame. Thus, Shakespeare’s life served as an instruction manual of sorts for aspirational readers. These forms of value can be recovered through careful attention to the historical and cultural contexts for the reception of Chute’s biography.

Shakespeare: What is it good for?

Donna Woodford-Gormley, New Mexico Highlands University

As I considered what I would write on for this seminar, I mentally perused the various Shakespeare adaptations I have explored in researching adaptations of Shakespeare in Cuba. Given the topic of “evaluating Shakespeare,” I imagined asking the question, “Is it any good?” about different Cuban Shakespeare adaptations. In some cases, the answer to that question, at least if it was posed to anyone other than a Shakespeare scholar interested in Cuban Shakespeares, would be, “No, not really.” In other cases I felt confident that even a non-specialist audience would appreciate the aesthetic or artistic value of the piece. I considered whether, in order to write about evaluating Shakespeare adaptations, I needed to write about a “bad” adaptation, or conversely, whether I had to choose something that could be argued to be “good.” However, when I found myself considering a “badaptation,” I would immediately question how bad it really was. Wasn’t the fact that it was speaking back to the source, carrying a political or social message, or exemplifying the theatrical movement of a particular time period of some value, even if the play were not aesthetically pleasing? And if I picked a “good” adaptation, was it still good if it was not doing any of the above? And even if I could choose an adaptation that was clearly “good,” how much would there be to say about a play that was good, but not necessarily good for anything?

I have decided, therefore, to explore four different Cuban Shakespeare adaptations, that have received very different evaluations, and that require different methods of evaluation since they

are all good for different things. *Romeo y Julieta en Luyanó* is closer to propaganda than to Shakespeare, yet it also illustrates an important theatrical movement in Cuba; *Otra Tempestad* was written and performed by one of Cuba's leading theatre companies, and received rave reviews in Cuba, but mixed, and rather confused reviews in London, where audiences wondered about the "hijacking" of Shakespeare for political purposes; *Piel de Violetas* is a one woman show that tells the story of *Hamlet* from Ophelia's point of view, and it succeeds giving Ophelia a voice, but brings little that is uniquely Cuban to the conversation; and Seth Panitch's Cuban-American collaborations have worked to bridge cultural divides between the two countries, but have perhaps been more successful at their cross-cultural collaboration than at providing new understanding of Shakespeare. Each of these works, I suspect, needs to be evaluated in a different way, and I hope that by exploring these evaluations I can come to a clearer understanding of how to evaluate adaptations, and how to decide not only if they are any good, but also what each is good for.