

SAA Seminar 60: Young Adult Shakespeare
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Abstracts

Jane Wanninger
Bard College at Simon's Rock

#Shakespeare: Vlogging *Much Ado*

YouTube has emerged in recent years as a dominant online forum for young people—a 2018 Pew Research Study reported that 85% of teenagers use the platform. In addition to serving as a massive repository of modern video, YouTube has also helped engender new modes of storytelling through the form of the vlog, a participatory visual narrative form that reflects the synthesis of media archive and social media site that YouTube has become. “Nothing Much To Do,” a 2014 YouTube-based web series adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* produced by The Candle Wasters, a group of New Zealand students dedicated to producing “fierce, funny, feminist web series.” “Nothing Much To Do” adapts the plot of Shakespeare’s play through vlogs spread across three interlinked channels, one offering Beatrice’s perspective, another offering Benedick’s, and a third dedicated to “The Watch,” offering more omniscient content. The project also extends across platforms, with, for instance, a Twitter account for Beatrice and an Instagram for Hero. The action of the play is transposed to a New Zealand high school, and the adaptation explores the thematic resonance of Shakespeare’s plot, with its exploration of friendship, desire, and the policing of female sexuality, in a teenage setting. Amidst the proliferation of Shakespearean adaptations aimed at young adult audiences in recent years, “Nothing Much To Do” represents a particularly successful example of efforts to bring Shakespeare into a new, interactive, teen-driven medium. This paper will explore the representational and narrative strategies of “Nothing Much To Do,” exploring the ways in which the production experiments with temporality and perspective as it aims to synthesize a thoroughly Shakespearean plot with modern teenage aesthetics. Further, I will examine the ways in which the vlog’s narrative strategies—and in particular the ways in which it allows female characters to control the frame—allow for a modern re-visioning of the sexual mores of the play that resonate with the ideals of a contemporary feminism.

Laura B. Turchi
University of Houston

Companion Texts for *Romeo and Juliet*: Pre-Service Teacher Choices and Rationales in Imagining What 9th Grade Students Need and Want to Read
School districts across the Houston area are working to put in place student-centered reading/writing workshop models in middle- and high-school English Language Arts classrooms. There are many versions of, and dimensions to, these models: fundamentally, instructional design is expected to reduce the amount of time teachers spend explaining texts, and to increase the meaningful reading and writing that

adolescents do. These classrooms are increasingly expected to prioritize literacy over literature. In this paper I discuss one key part of the R/W workshop model: the deployment of “companion texts” to accompany core, often canonical, texts. I consider the work of a group of pre-service teachers, my students in an English department’s “methods” course entitled “English Teaching in Secondary Schools.” These undergraduates presented Book Talks (a common R/W workshop strategy) on texts they selected as companions to *Romeo and Juliet*. Utilizing self-study methodology to inform my teacher education practice, I examine the potential roles of *companion* texts in the teaching of Shakespeare plays. I analyze how pre-service teachers responded to the assignment, noting the themes they identified, articulating their understanding of the play and their pedagogical thinking. Spoiler alert: dramatic irony may be a useful (and state-tested) literary term, but concern about “wrecking the ending” was rampant.

Charlotte Speilman
York University

Shakespeare in a Broken Home—Experiencing and Witnessing Domestic Violence in YA Shakespeare

Violence does not always come from the outside world—it can be personal and from in the home. From *King Lear* to *Othello*, Shakespeare’s stories are not without their own experiences of domestic violence. And we sadly know that domestic abuse is a reality for many children and youth. YA Shakespeare is also no stranger to domestic violence and uses the literary structures of Shakespeare, or the canonical weight of his stories, to explore experiences of domestic violence. In Justina Ireland’s *Dread Nation*, a large volume of Shakespeare’s complete works is all that protects our heroine from the fists of her abusive father. In Ashley Little’s *Anatomy of a Girl Gang*, it is in the Shakespeare section of the public library that the girls leave all of their hopes of escaping the domestic abuse that has been their reality. And yet domestic violence in YA Shakespeare is not only happening around the canonical texts. Sometimes our characters must live through their own adaptations of Shakespeare’s tales. Our heroine in Latifa Salom’s *The Cake House* must live her own Hamlet story in order to face the ghost of her father, pulling together the memories of the loving father with the reality of the abuse he had inflicted on her mother. Likewise, in Malorie Blackman’s *Chasing the Stars*, the two loving main characters must face the breakdown and abuse of their own relationship in the futuristic retelling of *Othello*. Sometimes tragic and sometimes hopeful, these YA Shakespeare works do not shy away from the reality of domestic abuse in our contemporary moment—striving instead to give voice to these experiences and, through Shakespeare, move forward.

Laurie Osborne
Colby College

Nothing/Something: YA *Much Ado* Novels in the World of Digital Shaming and Virtual Outcasts

Something or nothing? Noting or Oblivious? On or off? The questions at the core of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* align serendipitously with strategies that YA novelists use to adapt the comedy's characters and multiple slander narratives. The prolific publication record of *Much Ado* novels — twelve in the last decade — suggests that Shakespeare's comedy offers YA novelists a near irresistible blend of romantic manipulation, sexual shaming, bullying, and outsider status. On the surface, the stakes of Don John's illegitimacy and Hero's shaming could not differ more from the limited consequences of birth status and reputations built (and destroyed) via social media in current Western societies. However, the widespread access to personal information through internet circulation enables new explorations of how false report and image manipulation can rework public identities, particularly among adolescents.

While the outsider figure of Don John evolves in interesting ways in these novels, my paper concentrates on Hero and the new sites for slander. The technologies of sexual shaming and false report surface in the YA *Much Ado* novels as early as 2008. The specific deployment of social media and texting/sexting changes, but the digital slander has deleterious effects that surprisingly consistent across platforms as across time periods: posting doctored pictures on MySpace in Gehrman's 2008 *Triple Shot Betty* still resonates with current practices even if the format lacks the immediate technological allusions in Lily Anderson's 2016 *The Only Thing Worse than You is Me*. In fact, evolving digital manipulations of reputation/identity enable increasingly complex explorations of the ways social media and instant communications both benefit and harm adolescent relationships and identities. Ultimately, given how significant eavesdropping, false reports, and staged representations of betrayal AND attraction are in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, the play proves both valuable for adaptation and cautionary in its details, serving as an important site for working through current reputation building and surveillance.

Sara Morrison
William Jewell College

“I will not be a frozen example, a statued monument”:

Shakespearean Self-Actualization in *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*

In an April 2018 interview with the CBC, in response to the question, “What drove you to write a novel about a young woman's struggle in the aftermath of sexual assault?” E.K. Johnston, author of 2016 YA novel, *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*, said, “I wrote it in direct response to MP Stephen Woodworth's bill to re-criminalize abortion.” Furious at Woodworth's attempt in 2012 to convince members of Parliament to review the law that stipulates when a baby becomes a human being and also at the same time serendipitously interested in reimagining *The Winter's Tale* for a YA audience, Johnston said in the same interview that “when the Shakespeare and the fury collided, I knew I had a book.” Fury at the thought of a political system's institutionalized appropriation of women's rights, a systemic violence against women rooted in the female body, led Johnston to Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. Johnston's Hermione Winters, away at Camp Manitouwabing, a cheerleading camp, before her senior year in high school, is drugged and raped. Later discovering she is pregnant, Hermione determinedly has an abortion, supported by many, including her best friend Polly. Like Leontes, Leo, Hermione's boyfriend, turns on her, insinuating strongly that she had “asked for it.” This paper

examines the ways in which Johnston turns to Shakespeare to explore teen sexual violence and its aftermath; the friendship and alliance between Hermione and Polly; and the ways in which Johnston reimagines Bohemia, the natural world where Hermione Winters is raped and left submerged in the water, which erodes any DNA traces and also where she finally identifies her attacker.

Jesus Montaña
Hope College

Romeo and Juliet contra los Rangers

Overall Project

My project (currently titled, *Latinx Shakespeare: Being and Doing Latinx in Young Adult Appropriations of Shakespeare*) explores the ways Latinx writers of young adult literature artfully appropriate Shakespeare. This project signals how various contemporary Latinx young adult novels utilize Shakespeare as a locus for staking their claims to the literary and cultural power of Shakespeare while simultaneously signaling, in their divergence from the informing texts, their intention to willfully open new terrains. Central to this study, therefore, is a close examination of the ways the un/making of Shakespeare offers Latinx writers and artists a lacuna wherein to imagine possible new versions of self, new forms of social identities, and new ways of doing and being that emerge at the intersections of the Global South and el Norte.

Critical Approach

My critical approaches draw from Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts of *conocimiento* and the Coyolxauhqui imperative and from "mestizo" (Latinx and Latin American) theories of literary and artistic adaptation. In this, my work incorporates Cultural Anthropophagy as a methodology for examining the processes by which the Global South adapts and appropriates Shakespeare.

Seminar Project

My project for this session is to look at *Shame the Stars* (2016) by Guadalupe Garcia McCall. *Shame the Stars* reimagines *Romeo and Juliet* in Texas during the Mexican Revolution and tells the little-known history of murders and lynching of Mexican Americans by the Texas Rangers. In this, the novel serves as a counter-story that critiques the suppression of Texas history particularly involving violence toward Latinx people and promotes social justice via a Romeo and Juliet who seek peace and justice both in the temporal setting of the novel and, of course, in the echoes we find in present-day violence against people of color.

Melissa Johnson
University of Minnesota

The Figure of the Witch in YA adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

Examination and theorizing on witches occupies a significant portion of the scholarly conversation around Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's witches represent everything from instigators of evil, to omniscient prophetesses, to the mythological three fates. Female witches in the early modern period, as women who defied prescribed gendered social and cultural roles, were entities to be feared and punished. Authors who adapt *Macbeth* for young adult readers, however, view them as figures of female empowerment, characterizing them as intelligent and capable heroines. This shift in representation surely connects to the surge in powerful witch characters in pop culture, from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Willow and *Harry Potter*'s Hermione Granger, to the witches of the CW network's *Charmed* or Netflix's *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, as well as to the evolution of feminism and feminist theory in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In this paper I will explore the various readings of Shakespeare's witches and compare them with characters from two YA adaptations of *Macbeth*, Lisa Klein's *Lady Macbeth's Daughter* and Rebecca Reisert's *The Third Witch*. The heroines of these novels each take on the role of one of Shakespeare's "weird sisters", using this role to their advantage rather than their detriment in the outcome of their respective stories. I argue that this portrayal of witches in YA adaptations of *Macbeth* both corresponds to the evolving conversation around the figure of the witch in current popular culture, and encourages a more feminist reading of these characters in Shakespeare's work.

Lawrence Manley
Yale University

Young Adult Fiction?: Aoibhean Sweeney's *Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking*

In the game of chess played between Miranda and Ferdinand at the end of *The Tempest*, the chessboard and its movable pieces aptly characterize the unusual degree to which this play's cast, and the encounters among them, create multiple possibilities of sympathy, identification, and interaction. Interpretations and adaptations of *The Tempest* have demonstrated that it can be framed not just as Prospero's play but as Caliban's, Miranda's, Ferdinand's, Ariel's or (as in Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*) Alonso's, Sebastian's, and even Antonio's.

Narrated from the first-person perspective of Miranda Donnal, who has been raised on an island off the coast of Maine by her widowed and reclusive father, a translator of Ovid, Aoibheann Sweeney's *Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking* (2007) is a coming of age novel that draws on *The Tempest* to frame a young woman's exploration of her emerging sexuality and of the mysteries of her mother's disappearance, her

parents' past, and her father's troubled isolation. At the heart of these explorations are discoveries about same-sex love, her father's and her own.

Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking has not been explicitly marketed or reviewed as Young Adult Fiction. The novel is among other things a remarkably sophisticated literary adaptation in which Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with its treatment of changing bodies, becomes a powerful metaphor both for the novel's sexual themes and for Sweeney's process of adaptation by way of *contaminatio*, the mingling of classic influences. At the same time, though, Sweeney has said that in this novel she has written the book she would have liked to read as her younger self, and some of my own students, encountering the novel in a course on adaptations of *The Tempest*, have said they would have liked to have read it before coming to college.

I hope discussion of the novel will introduce to our session (as I imagine others will also do) the problems of defining the category of Young Adult Fiction. Is it a marketing category? A pedagogical or developmental category? A "crossover" category in multiple senses, including its participation in such canonical high-literary categories as the *bildungsroman* and Shakespeare adaptation, its appeal to a wide range of literacies, and its appropriateness for inter-generational conversations. As a way of helping with these questions, I may touch on brief comparison with *Miranda and Caliban* (2017), a recent work by the popular fantasy-fiction author Jacqueline Carey that has explicitly been marketed and reviewed toward young adults, and Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Fun Home* (2007), with which Sweeney's novel has some close affinities.

Natalie Loper
The University of Alabama

Lisa Klein's 21st-Century Shakespearean Heroines

When Shakespeare films in the 1990s such as Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* and Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* began marketing directly toward teenagers, some Shakespeareans cried foul. They complained that these films dumbed down Shakespeare, or their updating of Shakespeare did not go far enough in adapting to late 20th century ideals of gender equality and other forms of social progressivism. A more complex look at these films emerged as adaptation/appropriation studies became more mainstream within our field, and indeed much work can still be done on 90s teen films. (In fact, I had the pleasure of revising *O*, a 1999 teen film update of *Othello*, for last year's SAA.) This year, I'd like to look at something more recent: the young adult novels of Lisa Klein: *Love Disguised* (2013) imagines Shakespeare's early "lost years" when he was trying to establish himself as a playwright in London; *Lady Macbeth's Daughter* (2009) focuses on the lost biological daughter of the Macbeths, who was raised to believe one of the witches was her mother; and *Ophelia* (2008) creates a new life for one of Shakespeare's most famous characters. The latter was recently made into a film starring Daisy Ridley, who became famous for playing Rey, the tough young woman who becomes a Jedi in the latest Star Wars trilogy. My essay argues that these books (and, I hope, the film, which became available for order this month) are deliberately feminist in their approach to Shakespeare. Focusing on young women and the older women who

mentor them, these texts do not shy away from the tough conditions women face. But they also allow for possibility and hope, which is a refreshing perspective that encourages young women to persevere in the face of hardship.

Jeffrey Kahan
University of La Verne

"Doth mother know you weareth her drapes?": Shakespearean Mirth in *The Mighty Thor*

This article considers the relationship between Shakespeare's second tetralogy and Stan Lee's comic book, *The Mighty Thor*. Lee has stated that he borrowed liberally from Shakespeare in crafting Thor's speech patterns. Moreover, Thor's sidekick, Volstagg, a fat, cowardly knight, is obviously modeled on Shakespeare's Falstaff. More than simply borrowing from Shakespeare, Lee suggests a variety of answers to puzzles that have stumped many Shakespeareans. Additionally, the article explores "The Tragedy of Loki," a Shakespearean playlet in the movie *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) and the recent reconfiguration of Volstagg in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). Rather than using Shakespeare as a form of legitimation, there is a growing sense that, when filming spandexed and caped heroes, Shakespearean dialogue is at best a distraction and a worst an embarrassment.

Ariane M. Balizet
Texas Christian University

"Practicing for Boys": Shakespeare and Queer Girlhoods in Léa Pool's *Lost and Delirious*

This essay examines Léa Pool's 2001 film *Lost and Delirious* in terms of its appropriation of comic and tragic Shakespearean motifs, which frame and, ultimately, erase the queer girlhoods of its three protagonists. Told through the eyes of Mary ("Mouse") Bedford, the film depicts a romantic, sexual, and deeply emotional relationship between her two boarding school roommates, Paulie and Tori. Perhaps most properly understood as an "indie" contribution to the teen Shakespeare cinematic boom at the turn of the 21st century, *Lost and Delirious* illustrates the key characteristics of both comic and tragic adaptations. Like comic adaptations *10 Things I Hate About*

You and She's the Man, the film's appropriation of *Twelfth Night* allows for a moment of possibility in which two characters' seemingly impossible desire is reintegrated into a heteroromantic social order, validated by the older generation's conservative values. Yet the film simultaneously valorizes suicide as a measure of virtue for Shakespearean heroines, as the spurned Paulie regularly articulates her desperation for Tori's love with the words of Juliet, Cleopatra, and Lady Macbeth. In the film, queer desire appears sustainable only in the view Mary takes when she witnesses intimate moments between her roommates: they were "practicing for boys," she thinks.

Lost and Delirious depicts how and why girls and young people of marginalized genders might turn to Shakespeare to articulate their desires, ultimately reinforcing the notion that, to survive Shakespeare, young people must capitulate with comic norms or face a tragic outcome. More recently, Shakespearean YA novels like Suzanne Selfors' *Saving Juliet* and webseries like *The Outtakes' Rome and Juliet* offer radically different models of appropriation that blend comic and tragic narratives to represent and celebrate more diverse approaches to sexual and gender identity. My aim, then, is to locate a place for *Lost and Delirious* within the larger context of Shakespeare for Young Adults in the past few decades.

Shannon McHugh
University of Massachusetts, Boston

RPG Shakespeare:
The Possibilities of Youth-Led Literacies in *Sleep No More* and Beyond

This paper explores the modes of young-adult reading that are mobilized in *Sleep No More*, the immersive-theater adaptation of *Macbeth* currently in its ninth year of production. The thrill of crossing a threshold into a fictional universe—as audience members do when they step into the “McKittrick Hotel”—was a familiar pleasure for early modern readers. Harry Berger theorized the phenomenon using the terminology of the “second world,” examining such spaces as Dante’s hell, More’s island, and Shakespeare’s green world. *Sleep No More* thus draws on an early modern practice. But the more vivid connection for the average visitor is surely the second world of children’s literature: Alice’s Wonderland, Dorothy’s Oz, the Pevensies’ Narnia. The spectacle is informed by even more recent young-adult traditions, with its employment of video gaming’s ethos of immersion and player choice, as well as fan fiction’s democratization of the creative experience, its invitation of a participatory response. The immersive theater experience has the potential to produce serendipitous new engagements with the Shakespearean source: for example, the audience member making choices about how to move through the production space literally *embodies* such central themes from *Macbeth* as the conflict of fate versus free will. However, the same emphasis on individual experience that gives the guest control over his or her own experience also grants an unregulated degree of interpretive power over Shakespeare’s text. How exactly do these encounters unfold? What are their risks and rewards? What does this unusual hermeneutic agency mean for the future of popular and communal engagements with Shakespeare? Where the knowledge-making of the Renaissance second worlds meets

the interactivity of contemporary young-adult literacy in *Sleep No More*—this is the participatory collaboration I want to explore.