

Seminar 10: Embodying Differences in Global Shakespearean Performance

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### Abstracts

**Amy L. Bolis: Black Masculinity Misunderstood: *Othello: The Remix* and It's Problematic Portrayal of Othello**

This paper will explore the complex relationship between race and masculinity in *Othello: The Remix*, a hip-hop version of *Othello* that premiered at the Globe to Globe Festival in 2012 as America's contribution and has since toured internationally to such prominent locations as Edinburgh, Sydney, Auckland, and Dubai. Although the production has garnered much critical acclaim for its use of hip-hop music to reinterpret *Othello*, I argue that multiple factors within the production coalesce to portray Othello as a hyper-masculine, dangerous, and superhuman character, thus reinforcing some of the most common stereotypes of African American males. In this adaptation, the figure of Desdemona is physically absent throughout the play. Instead of being portrayed by an actor on stage, she is represented by a disembodied voice that is prohibited the use of language and is only able to communicate by singing a series of decorative "oos" and "ahhs." I contend that this absence denies the audience exposure to some of Othello's more gentle qualities; qualities that are often brought out in him solely through his conversations and physical interactions with Desdemona in other versions of *Othello*. Her absence starkly highlights and reinforces the problematic image of the violent, sexually potent African American male by making a spectacle of Othello's body. Because Othello is the only visible presence on stage during many of their scenes together, he becomes the primary focus of these interactions, which only augments his physical aggression and verbal abuse towards Desdemona. Furthermore, *Othello: The Remix* is performed by an entirely male cast, but unlike some of the other company members, the actor playing Othello is not required to double as any of the lead female characters. Emilia and Bianca are both depicted as highly campy and comedic representations of women, helping to soften the masculine energy of the actors who embody them. Conversely, Othello's masculinity remains intact.

**Melissa Croteau: Women's Work and the Female Gaze in Claire McCarthy's *Ophelia* (2018)**

I will be looking at film director Claire McCarthy's recent work *Ophelia*, starring Daisy Ridley, using paradigms of feminist film theory including Laura Mulvey's famous early ideas about the male gaze and her later writing on the woman's film. This film comprises a number of female "voices" intertwined, including the author of the successful YA novel from which it is adapted, Lisa Klein; the writer of the screenplay, Semi Chellas; and the aforementioned director. In addition, the two central stars of the film, Daisy Ridley and Naomi Watts, bring strong feminist discourses into the fabric of the film via their star personae and previous parts. The film pervasively evokes notorious female archetypes, such as Eve and Diana, while its new focalization through Ophelia, inevitably associated with the Jedi-in-training Rey, leads the audience to question the meaning and consequences of these mythologies.

**Marinela Golemi: Cross-Gendering *Hamlet*: Gender Politics in Albanian Theatre**

This article focuses on the 2015 Albanian production of *Hamlet* directed by Enke Fezollari in the National Experimental Theater "Kujtim Spahivogli." As the first Albanian *Hamlet* performance to feature a female Hamlet, this production was deemed revolutionary. Although Fezollari did not intend the casting choice to draw attention to gender, the reception was dominated by gender politics. Veteran actress and former MP for Albania's socialist party, Luiza Xhuvani, was cast as the first ever female Hamlet in an Albanian production of the play. Xhuvani's performance complicated the actor/character divide as she embodied both Hamlet's and her own legendary identity. Through a comparative analysis of Fan Noli's politically motivated translation of *Hamlet* (1926), V.V. Batko's 1960 communist production, and Enke Fezollari's 2015 *Hamlet*, I argue that in the local Albanian

context, the female regendering of a globally recognized character, embodies gender difference via distinctly local and cultural memories. For instance, the patriarchal system of Albanian society arises primarily from the *Kanun*, a code of conduct that enforces patrilineal and patrilocal family structures. In the absence of a male figure, Northern Albanian women become sworn virgins, known as *Burrnesha*, by taking a celibacy oath, dressing as men, and assuming the patriarchal role of their household. As the Albanian *Hamlet*, *Xhuvani* also embodies a *Burrnesha* identity which renders the masculine values of *Hamlet* performative even within a heteronormative patriarchy. This essay explores cross-gender casting of *Hamlet* in Albanian theatre as an act of feminist activism that contributes to Albania's sociopolitical identity.

**Mohammadreza Hassanzadeh Javanian: 'This gentleman told somewhat of my tale': *Measure for Measure* Reconstructed in Iran's Political and Sexual Contexts**

The popularity of William Shakespeare's plays among young Iranian theatre directors has surged in the last decade. Many of these directors find in the plays of Shakespeare a unique opportunity not only to reflect on but also to challenge Iran's patriarchal traditions and structures of political power. In 2017, Molavi Theatre Hall in Tehran hosted *Eye for Eye*, the first Iranian adaptation of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. Although the adaptation, directed by Arash Taherkhani, preserved the main plot of its original text, it was placed in a recognizably familiar context for its Iranian spectators. The present study investigates how Taherkhani's theatre practice can address and encourage the evolution of social attitudes toward issues of political and sexual morality. One specific aspect of my theoretical approach is the critical move called presentism that has been explored in the work of Terence Hawkes, Hugh Grady, and Evelyn Gajowski. Through this underlying presentist approach, the research demonstrates how the constructed meaning in *Eye for Eye* dovetails with an emerging attitude in Iranian theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare's plays to address contemporary political issues (political corruption, hypocrisy of political leaders, etc.) and gender and sexuality issues (gender discrimination, gender performativity, etc.). A central preoccupation of the analysis is the adapted play's stage design and scenography.

**Natalia Khomenko: The Unstageable Caliban: The Tempest in the Soviet Union**

The *Tempest* has been conspicuously absent from the studies focusing on the Soviet productions of Shakespeare, and with good reason. After an experimental production directed by Theodore Komisarjevsky and Valery Bebutov in 1919, *The Tempest* had no major or even notable stage treatments until the 1990s. This conspicuous absence, however, does not mean that Soviet directors and critics considered the play unimportant. On the contrary, *The Tempest* was seen as Shakespeare's last – and perhaps most decisive – examination of class, colonialism, and the future of his society. Part of the reluctance to stage *The Tempest* stemmed from the difficulties with parsing Shakespeare's precise message in the play and, consequently, with staging the figure of Caliban. As an oppressed and enslaved character, Caliban was the natural point of identification for the Soviet theatre. However, the long-standing reading of Prospero as Shakespeare's mouthpiece, and as a character symbolizing human power over the world, dictated that Caliban be staged as a flawed and antagonistic figure. The two approaches produced an ethical dilemma that could not be satisfactorily resolved on Soviet stages, demanding a wholesale glorification of Caliban's class difference and, simultaneously, a celebration of Prospero-cum-Shakespeare's wisdom and benevolence. Despite repeated discussions by prominent directors, no productions resulted.

This paper will analyze Soviet conversations about *The Tempest* with a particular focus on the problem of Caliban's presence in the world of the play. Beginning with the first post-revolutionary decade, my exploration will culminate with Grigori Kozintsev's notes, made shortly before his death, for a sci-fi film adaptation of *The Tempest*.

### **Varsha Panjwani: The Politics of Embodying Shakespeare's Silences: Celia as a Case-Study**

According to British actors, Fiona Shaw and Juliet Stevenson, who played Celia and Rosalind in the 1985 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *As You Like It*, the 'major challenge' for the actress playing Celia is 'Celia's silence' in the second half of the play. This often results in Celia being overshadowed by Rosalind in most productions and production histories of the play. Shakespeare scholarship also pays scant regard to Celia, perhaps because she has fewer lines and is therefore relatively 'absent' on the page. However, when Nadia Nadarajah played Celia in the 2018 production at Shakespeare's Globe, she used her experience and identity as a British-Asian deaf actor to give new meaning to Celia's "silence". Based on personal interviews, experience of watching the production, and performance reviews, this paper discusses how Nadarajah as Celia helped to shape the narrative of the Rosalind and Celia relationship across intersectional lines and caused Celia to be read in interesting and enriching ways which challenged normative interpretations of the role. More broadly, the paper seeks to instigate a thorough investigation of the way in which diverse actors' embodiment of Shakespeare's silences politicises questions of Shakespeare ownership and interpretation in Shakespeare performance and criticism.

### **Kevin Quarmby: Regendering *King Lear's* Body Politic in the Zoomosphere**

Despite a growing global awareness of the distinction between gender identity and the more fluid spectrum of gender expression, the embodiment of difference, in a Shakespearean context, still bears the uncomfortable weight of all-male historical precedent. Any passing knowledge of early modern performance techniques seemingly empowers twenty-first century audiences and commentators to voice surprise when embodiment presents itself other than in moment-of-concept cisgendered and/or racially conventionalized terms. With such embodied conservatism in mind, this essay explores the implications of a US-based production of *King Lear*, conceived and presented during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns. Rehearsed and performed as a live theatrical summer season event, though mediated and broadcast online through Zoom and YouTube, the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival's *King Lear* consciously foregrounded its regendering of certain key character roles, while also demanding that its audience consider racial difference in its actors not merely as a liberal-motivated aesthetic choice, but as a radically politicized social statement. Differentiating between its older *King Lear* characters, whose actors were all cast as white, and its younger principal roles, all acted by people of color, the SF Shakes *King Lear* demonstrated a deliberateness in political embodied intent. Based on interviews with the play's director, Elizabeth Carter, herself a self-identifying queer woman of color, the essay explores how this production's core values suggest an invigorated status for Shakespeare in North American culture as a tool for, in her words, "moving the needle forward" on the nation's ethical re-envisioning of embodied difference.

### **Jose Saiz: Fitting like a Glove: Some Reflections on Translating *King Richard III* for New Audiences**

In a thought-provoking play entitled «*Richard III n'aura pas lieu ou Scènes de la Vie de Meyerhold*», by the Romanian-French playwright Matéi Vişniec (1956), we are invited to reflect more deeply on our own idea of Shakespeare's *King Richard III* when a character affirms that the famed Russian actor and director has doubts for considering this character as a "*personnage positive*" when preparing a new staging for revolutionary audiences. Something similar happens with the play entitled «*Sueños y visiones del Rey Ricardo III: la noche que precedió a la infausta batalla de Bosworth*» by Jose Sanchis Sinisterra (1940), a Spanish playwright that *rewrites* the Shakespearean text from "*the poetics of dreams*" to invite new audiences to approach Classical authors. The questions that have to be asked here are therefore: Which text(s) do they use for rewriting *King Richard III*? Do they follow the Quarto/Folio tradition(s), an eclectic proposal or other theatrical productions? Do they use any specific translation in their texts? If so, which one(s)? Do they use Shakespeare because this historical play fits like a glove for testing if the "Great Mechanism" of drama works with contemporary audiences? Do they use a "glove" for showing Richard's deformity? Are they, as remarked by Stephen Orgel, victimizing this villain in the smear campaign started by Thomas More, Edward Hall and

Shakespeare himself? Are contemporaries audiences more interested in stories, actions, plots or characters? Do they consider *King Richard III* as a translation of a translation? In this proposal, and considering that these texts are going to become part of a huge Shakespearean *docuverse*, we want to compare the ethics of these productions as well as some textual and theatrical elements in relation to *King Richard III* as a previous stage for starting our own bilingual translation of this historical play for a contemporary audience. Obviously, we invite all participants in this seminar to help us with these reflections.

**Lisa Starks: Levinas, Canadian Shakespeares, and Fandom in *Slings & Arrows***

My SAA seminar paper will be a portion of a chapter for my monograph-in-progress, *Shakespeare, Levinas, and Adaptation*. In the full chapter, I use Emmanuel Levinas's radical ethics to revisit the now cult-classic *Slings & Arrows* (2003-2006). Levinas's philosophy brings fresh perspectives to the show's Shakespearean appropriations—its spectral loops with historical and contemporary contexts, interactions with internal and external audiences, and commentaries on Canadian Shakespeares. The series, as well as the "Shakespeares" it adapts, makes ethical connections to various communities—those of its original air time and also those of its later run on Acorn TV channel, which has revived internet fandom inspired by the show. Seen in terms of Levinas's philosophy, the show's appropriations of Shakespeare, local culture, and Canadian theatre—which some critics have viewed disparagingly—may instead be seen as the use of Shakespeare to offer profound and meaningful interrelationships between the past and present, local and extended fan communities. This discussion employs Levinas's theory to rethink Shakespearean performance theory and the ethics of *Slings & Arrows* fandom. I haven't decided yet which section I'll carve out for our seminar--most likely the one on performance and internet fan communities.

**Dorothy Vanderford: Gender, Race, and Identity in a 2018 Production of *The Duchess of Malfi***

This paper explores a 2018 production of *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612) at The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK, directed by Maria Aberg and starring Joan Iyiola as the Duchess. Aberg's adaptation examines how characters are constructed at the intersection of gender and race, and it uses casting, staging, scoring, and playtext revisioning to suggest that identity is unstable and temporal. This metaphor-driven production is important to a discussion about how canonical difference is established—or silenced—because in a time of widely available digital Shakespearean content, this female-directed production that casts a black actor in the lead role and employs troubling gendered and racialized emblems is commercially unavailable to those who were not in the audience in 2018. Although a rough recording of this *Duchess* performance is available on request to scholars visiting the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust library, this limited accessibility quietly removes from public discussion an alternate representation of this early modern dramatic text. The idea that the establishment of identity is the purview of characters expands to include the play's genre (page/stage/digital), the circumstances of its creation, the bodies comprising its cast, and its global availability to viewers who may want to see early modern drama that resonates with their present world.

**Nora Williams: Isabella's Veil: (Un)dressing in *Measure for Measure***

Working Abstract: I begin this paper with a tangential but relevant model of practise: Breach Theatre's *It's True, It's True, It's True*, which dramatises the 1612 trial of Agostino Tassi for the rape of artist Artemesia Gentileschi. Breach Theatre's interpretation makes use of surviving court transcripts as well as Gentileschi's paintings to devise a semi-surreal interpretation of the trial and its effect on her life. The actor playing Gentileschi removes her clothes in order to re-enact one of her paintings and then, in a stunning intervention, re-dresses herself as she relates the details of Tassi's assault to the court. This rupture of the expected structure puts control of the narrative—verbally and physically—into the survivor's hands. She reclaims her body through the act of dressing. I turn, then, to put *It's True*...in conversation with the plethora of Isabellas whose veils are removed in

productions of *Measure for Measure*—either by themselves, or by others in the cast. Whereas dressing in *It's True* is framed as an act of empowerment and reclaiming, what the removal of Isabella's veil might signify shifts based on who does the removing, when, and in what manner. I want to suggest, however, that the removal of her veil in production is always a means of solving a dramaturgical problem: when Isabella is veiled, we have a clear, visible marker of her religious devotion. When the Duke proposes marriage to her in Act 5, the problem of that devotion becomes evident: if she stays in the Order of St. Claire and takes her vows, she cannot accept him. This undressing, then, however it occurs, is relevant to my larger arguments about the fundamental misogyny of Shakespearean dramaturgies: it suggests to us that Isabella's embodiment as a celibate member of a religious order is fundamentally at odds with the ending of the play, and therefore the most visible symbol of her devotion to that order—the veil—must be removed. This issue also has obvious resonances in the post-9/11 West, where various narratives about women's bodies and their bodily autonomy interact with Islamophobic and xenophobic cultural narratives.

### **Donna Woodford-Gormley: Consuming Shakespeare/ Embodying *Othello***

Cultural anthropophagy, or literary cannibalism, is a useful theory for approaching global Shakespeares. One culture consumes a Shakespearean text, digests it and embodies it in a new form that incorporates both other and self. This process can be beneficial both for the culture ingesting the meal and drawing nutrients from it, and for the text or culture that is ingested, and thereby lives on in a new form. This paper will explore the use of cultural anthropophagy as a means of understanding and interpreting Cuban Shakespeare appropriations. I will specifically explore two Cuban adaptations of *Othello*, which consume the same Shakespeare play yet embody race and racial tensions in different ways. Tomas Gonzalez's *El camino del medio* alters the racial identities of the main characters, making Ote (*Othello*) a white man, while Yago is black and Desdi (*Desdemona*) is Mulatta. The plays explore the racism that Gonzalez himself experienced in Cuba prior to the revolution and during a period of particularly harsh censorship known as the *quinquenio gris*, while also probing the tensions between the Cubans who stayed in Cuba and those who left. Nelson Dorr's *Othello*, in contrast, places much less emphasis on race, but has the character of Emilia embodied by two actresses, one afro-cuban and the other white, who played Emilia on alternate nights. Though both playwrights consume the same text, the ways in which they incorporate or embody the characters changes their interpretation of the text significantly.

### **Emily Yates: *Pericles* on the 21st Century Stage: Embodied Difference and the Depiction of Mediterranean Peoples and Locations**

In preparation for a performance of *Pericles* at the American Shakespeare Center, director Jim Warren sent the following note to his actors: "In an attempt to differentiate the many locations in the play, some productions turn the characters in the various locations into cartoons. We're not going to do that." Warren's assertion speaks to the possibilities but also challenges of performing *Pericles*: the play's investment in travel offers the audience visions of multiple cities/locations and cross-cultural encounters, but the ancient setting, quick pace, and epic-like form can too easily lend to people and locations being caricatured. Still, *Pericles* is unique in that it is an early modern play that does not explicitly emphasize power differentials in a colonialist or orientalist way; none of the locations are European, the protagonist is from Tyre (modern-day Lebanon), and Shakespeare's dramaturgy invites the audience to sympathize with but also criticize *Pericles*'s actions. This paper, then, seeks to address the following questions by looking at productions of *Pericles* in the twenty-first century: What are the complications with staging and depicting travels between multiple nations? In what ways does the play and its productions offer the opportunity to diversify the stage? What are the productive possibilities of *Pericles* in performance? Using recent productions of the play like the RSC 2006 performance as case studies, I explore how *Pericles* operates as a site to explore the concept of embodied difference as it relates to race, gender, disability, and other identity categories.

