

Appropriations of American Sign Language in Modern Shakespeare Performance
Jill Marie Bradbury

*We learn and teach, we act and know, as spectators who link
what they have seen and told, done and dreamed.*
Jacques Ranciere, The Emancipated Spectator

Attention to the dynamic co-presence of actors and audience is one of distinctive traits of performance studies. Within Shakespeare performance studies, scholars have examined how audiences respond to performative representations of socio-cultural identities such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language use, and disability. Shakespeare appropriation studies also explores how the dynamic interactions of actors and audience give meaning to socio-cultural identities. Important lines of research include how primarily English-speaking audiences respond to performance in other languages; how other languages and cultures are appropriated by dominant performance institutions; and how audiences understand such representations of non-dominant cultures. This essay situates integrated American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken English Shakespeare productions within these intersections of performance and appropriation studies. In part because relatively few people are fluent in ASL, such productions have only been superficially discussed in both Shakespeare performance studies and Shakespeare appropriation studies. And they are typically assessed from the perspective of English-hearing audiences.¹ Scholars have not considered how such productions might generate different performative meanings and experiences for Deaf audience members.² In this article, I compare hearing

¹ For recent examples, see Cross (2013), McDonnell (2017), Shurgot (2012).

² It is a longstanding (though much debated) convention to use Deaf to refer to people who culturally identify with the community of ASL users, regardless of their audiograms, and deaf for people who tend to use spoken English and identify with the hearing world. I personally find this nomenclature reductive and exclusionary in its oppositional binaries. I prefer to adopt Paddy Ladd's concept of deafhood as "the struggle by each deaf child, deaf family and Deaf adult to explain to themselves and each other their own existence in the world" in ways that may or may not align with clearly identified communities, cultures, or language practices (3). Deafhood is

audience reviews of four recent North American productions of Shakespeare integrating ASL and spoken English with my own to illustrate significant differences in how Deaf and hearing audiences interact with performative representations of deafness and ASL. I consider how dramaturgical and directorial choices position Deaf and hearing audiences differently with respect to the presence of Deaf actors and ASL on stage and how these choices create relationships of inclusion and exclusion, often to the detriment of Deaf audiences. Drawing on Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin's framing of appropriation ethics as an obligation of care for the other, I argue that hearing directors who appropriate ASL to create Shakespeare performance have an ethical responsibility to be inclusive of deaf audiences. I close by offering practical suggestions for how hearing directors and theatre companies can achieve such inclusion.

thus a continuum of identity positions along auditory/linguistic/cultural spectrums. Throughout this article, I use Deaf to refer to theater artists who I know identify as such and to characters who are portrayed as part of a community of ASL users.

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One thing of which this past year's global pandemic should have made us all aware is that we are *all* handicapped, and we *all* have problems of access. The ubiquity, stealth, and high infectiousness of this disease has frequently driven us both into isolation and inequity and into new means of community, communication, and creation.

I have had an easy year of it from my position of privilege as a newly-retired faculty member with a spacious home and garden among caring community, with high connectivity, in a sane city and state. But over the course of the year I have both watched and to some extent participated in dogged, creative, and even heroic efforts to continue to read, teach, and perform Shakespeare which as a result have also insistently raised critical questions of why we do so.

In my paper for this seminar I will describe three such efforts and some of the accessibility and inclusivity issues that they raise:

- How my UB colleague and friend Theatre and Dance Professor Maria Horne taught both of her highly diverse undergraduate Shakespeare courses—in Shakespeare in performance and performing Shakespeare—synchronously on-line throughout the fall semester (I was continuously present and active in these courses as her back-up teacher), and some of the results;
- How our premier professional theatre company here in Buffalo, The Irish Classical Theatre, which frequently produces Shakespeare and with which I have collaborated as lecturer, has pivoted with the pandemic from a pioneering project with People Inc., our leading not-for-profit Human Services agency in the area, to fully remote filmed and deaf-accessible productions which will further broaden their outreach to schools and eldercare facilities;
- How Peace of the City, a long standing not-for-profit in intense trauma-based literacy tutoring for at-risk students here in the city, on whose Board I sit, has persisted in person-instruction throughout the summer and fall, including in its drama arm, "Shakespeare Comes to 716," which, as its name suggests, takes the adaptative performance by its youth of Shakespeare's plays as its core.

I joined this seminar to learn, and my contribution is tentative and very preliminary. I know some of you and your work, and look forward to listening and learning more.

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Title: "I am all the daughters of my father's house, And all the brothers too": Genderqueer Potentiality in *Twelfth Night*

In this paper I will look at *genderqueer potentiality* as present and potentially embodied in the contemporary reading and performance of early modern drama. In his seminal 2009 *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz theorizes *potentiality* as pointing towards an already ontologically present queer utopia: potentiality does not occur in an always deferred futurity; rather, it is already present in the queer here and now, even if it only exists at the edges of our vision. In this paper I will develop this concept further into a discussion of how the reading and performance of certain early modern plays enacts an already present genderqueer space: for example, early modern "crossdressing" as it is performed in contemporary productions of *As You Like It* or *Twelfth Night* are indicative of the already existing ontological space available for gender-fluid becoming. I will argue (quoting Muñoz along that way) that a radical utopian performative "always in the horizon" is alive during select genderqueer transitional moments which occur during the embodied performance of "crossdressing" plays such as *Gallathea*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Roaring Girl*. In order to circumscribe the limits as well as the possibilities of representing genderqueer potentiality on stage and page, I will look at several contemporary productions, including the 2017 National Theatre production (Simon Godwin) of *Twelfth Night*, a gender-fluid production in which Malvolia (Tamsin Greig) shares a euphoric coming out with the audience, and the Edward's Boys 2018 production (Perry Mills) of *When Paul's Boys Met Edward's Boys*, a mash up of scenes from several early modern plays enacted by sexually ambiguous "crossdressing" young adult actors, who thereby stage and embody an ontologically genderqueer present.

Teaching Shakespeare in the College of Applied Science and Technology Environment

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Abstract: This paper examines the teaching of Shakespeare in an applied science and technology environment with modern texts in order to facilitate conversations around diversity and inclusion in the classroom, the college, and the community. This paper argues that Shakespeare can be a vehicle for promoting diversity and inclusion and the community valuing aspects of the humanities in a utility focused world. Pairing Shakespeare with Japanese horror, the grotesque, and digital games in one class provided a platform for examining misogyny in literature, film, and in the theoretical construction of technologically informed ontologies. In this class, for example, students examined the feminist representation of the female revenge figure in J-horror. They found that the characters in *Ringu* represent the same troublesome portrayal of female agency as Shakespeare's Tamora and they found this was also true of many manga and anime with which they were familiar. Building their newfound understanding into a conference presentation that included a digital game adaptation allowed them to participate with other students in a statewide conference. Similarly, this semester, the college has started a book club around the book *Station Eleven* in the hopes of better facilitating understandings of diversity and inclusion at a college among faculty, staff, and students which has recently experienced problems in this area. This paper will also document the way in which it is the allusions to Shakespeare's *King Lear* (which a student is adapting into a digital "escape room") that provides the most fundamental lessons about inclusion and the place of culture in our future.

“Inclusiveness at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival” abstract

Michael P. Jensen, Contributing Editor, *Shakespeare Newsletter*

The goal of my larger project is to interrogate the 12-year Artistic Directorship of Bill Rauch at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival that ended at the end of July 2019. The quality of the productions during this tenure are mixed, at best, and certainly represent a comedown from the quality of his predecessor, Libby Appel. This paper looks at the effect of Rauch’s political correctness, which eventually informed everything from play selection, casting, and backstage and administrative hires. The context is set by going back to the Festival’s first hire of an actor of color in 1962 and its often-spotty inclusiveness thereafter. A theme throughout is Stephen Booth’s observation that “the past is guilty of being the past,” for when seen from our perspective it was not enough that previous Artistic Directors took small steps to make the company more inclusive even though they did so with calculation as to what would be accepted by the Board of Directors and audiences. Rauch’s attempt to right all wrongs at once was at the cost of the quality of the work and the morale of the company, making the present guilty of being the present in the eyes of many. Selected productions directed by Rauch and by some of his hires examine ways that inclusiveness led to some disappointing Shakespeare and other productions, but ultimately the paper concludes where it must: the Oregon Shakespeare Festival produced some bad theatre under Bill Rauch but ultimately it is more important to build an enfranchised world.

Melissa Johnson

Shakespeare Association of America 2021

Seminar 18: Inclusive Shakespeare

Abstract-Using Shakespeare to Teach High School Students About Mental Illness

Current rates of mental illness among American teenagers are alarming. Studies within the last decade indicate that 10-20% of adolescents will develop an emotional or mental disorder and these numbers appear to be rising¹. These statistics underscore a need to include discussion of mental illness in high school curriculums, breaking the stigma that surrounds the topic and providing students with the resources to understand their own experiences with mental illness and seek help when necessary. Shakespeare can be an unexpected but useful tool in such a curriculum. Through adaptive novels such as Julia Drake's *The Last True Poets of the Sea* and Jennifer Dugan's *Verona Comics*, students can see explicit representation of teenage characters experiencing mental illness and use these versions of the characters and stories to make connections to their Shakespearean source texts and other works by the famous playwright. Such straightforward depiction of the effects of mental illness on teenage characters as presented by Drake and Dugan's adaptations has the potential to unlock new levels of recognition and discourse, helping students understand Shakespeare's plays and simultaneously feel seen and understood themselves. This paper explores pedagogical approaches to teaching mental illness through Shakespeare and Shakespeare through the lens of mental illness, using adaptive young adult (YA) novels and other resources to meaningfully include this issue in the broader conversation about Shakespeare taking place in high school English classrooms.

Applied and Inclusive Shakespeare Abstract

Dr Rowan Mackenzie

Applied theatre is a broad term which spans a raft of community and marginalised drama practices and which has attracted increased interest over recent years. Within the realms of Shakespeare scholars and practitioners, the number and variety of examples of using the Bard as a basis for this work continues to grow exponentially on an international basis. However, to a large extent both practitioner and academic interest in the topic tends to operate in a siloed way, focusing on individual projects or types of marginalised communities. My own research aims to transcend these silos; focusing on common trends which exist between marginalised communities to develop a narrative which allows interdisciplinary development of best practices. My research as practice with people who have been incarcerated, people with mental health issues, people with learning disabilities and people who have experienced homelessness is underpinned by trauma-informed methodologies, which are becoming increasingly widespread across pedagogical, carceral and therapeutic practices. This conference paper is unable to do justice to this rich and complex field but aims to provide an insight into the field to provoke further dialogue around the ways in which Shakespeare can offer the opportunity for those marginalised to develop emotional resilience, enhanced communication skills and a sense of appropriation of the cultural capital which is inherent to his work.

Inclusive Shakespeare, First-Generation College Students, and Literary Studies

Mardy Philippian

Lewis University

While my title may indicate a ‘vaulting ambition,” this paper (an excerpt of a larger one that I’m at work on at the moment) seeks to tie together several strands of thought in an effort to make Shakespeare more accessible in the college and university classroom to first-generation college and university students. I offer three inter-influencing lines of investigation. The first, focusing on first-generation college students, is concerned with matching students’ skills in reading literary texts to classroom strategies and assignments that scaffold-up over a semester and four-year curriculum. The second questions the relationship between the predominance of Marxist theories of history and related textual objects in the discipline of literary studies on the one hand, a longstanding strategy for disenchanting aesthetic experience in service of politicizing the reading experience, and the groaning effects this may be having upon incoming university students who are drawn to reading and writing about literature because of earlier emotionally and psychologically positive interactions with texts. And third, focusing on Shakespearean tragedy, I posit a synergy between philosophical approaches to Shakespeare’s dramatic genres and students’ habits of thought and interest in self-understanding. These are lofty goals and difficult threads to wind together into a cohesive analysis, discussion, and argument but I offer a portion, an iteration, of my developing longer paper in what follows here.

A Neglected “Inclusive” Production of Shakespeare:
Tarell Alvin McCraney’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, 2013 – 2014

James M. Sutton

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Abstract for SAA 2021 Inclusive Shakespeare Seminar (18)

In the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014, acclaimed playwright, screenplay author and director Tarell Alvin McCraney adapted and directed a remarkable production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Starring Joaquina Kalukango (Cleopatra), Jonathan Cake (Antony) and Chukwudi Iwuji (Enobarbus), this mixed-race and transatlantic production opened at the Swan Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company in November 2013; it then transferred to Miami, Florida, where it ran at the Colony Theatre, on Miami Beach, in January and early February, 2014; and from Miami, it transferred to New York’s Public Theatre, where it was performed from late February – late March, 2014. McCraney’s production was much abridged (or “radically edited” in the words of dramaturg and Yale colleague Catherine Sheehy), and set in pre-Revolutionary Haiti. Cleopatra and her party were thus transformed into Haitians on the cusp of fighting for their independence; Antony and his fellow Romans were Napoleonic soldiers fighting to maintain control over their colony. This late eighteenth-century Caribbean setting was suggested through costumes, stage sets, blocking, dance, and musical score, and even dramaturgical choices; but the text, if much abridged, was Shakespeare’s play.

The production, although reasonably well-reviewed in the London, Miami and New York press, has been almost entirely neglected. McCraney himself has said little about it, and scholars have concentrated much more on his other plays and films. For example, in the recently

published collection, *Tarell Alvin McCraney: Theater, Performance and Collaboration* (Northwestern UP, 2020), contributors heed much attention to plays and musicals such as *The Brother/Sister* trilogy, *Wig Out!*, *Choir Boy*, and *The Breach* and films such as *Moonlight*. This production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as other Shakespearean work that emerged from his 2008 – 2010 stint as the RSC / Warwick International Playwright in Residence, notably a 2010 Young People’s *Hamlet* (also radically abridged), are referenced periodically but never receive full and sustained treatment in this important volume. Oddly, this neglect even seems to pervade the archives of the RSC, where the 2017 production of the play, directed by Iqbal Khan with Josette Simon and Antony Byrne in the title roles, is typically offered up as the “first” RSC performance with a black Cleopatra.

In my essay for our SAA seminar on “Inclusive Shakespeare,” I propose to explore this McCraney production and its fascinating history further, proposing that it represents an early example of what “inclusivity” in performance might entail. McCraney was born and educated in Miami, and he and several scholars, such as Donnette Francis, argue that Miami is always what he is writing about, always thinking about, always depicting, even if refracted in the Louisiana bayou (*Brother/Sister Plays*). I will argue that the mixed-race casting and Haitian setting of his production are also reflective of Miami, and that this performance was literally most at “home” during its Miami run, not in Stratford-upon-Avon or New York. Its neglect in both McCraney criticism and Shakespeare studies, I will suggest, signal the challenges prevalent, in 2013/2014 and still today, to realizing and promoting what we might hope to accomplish through a practice of “inclusive Shakespeare.”

2021 SAA SEMINAR: INCLUSIVE SHAKESPEARE - ABSTRACT

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Ricardo II: Bilingual Shakespeare in Merced, California

This paper explores the inclusive Applied Shakespeare work of the participants and production team of Merced Shakespearefest's *Ricardo II*. Amidst the most significant global health crisis in more than a century, the doors of the traditional theatre closed. Nevertheless, Merced Shakespearefest, a community-based Shakespeare performance organization, pushed forward with plans to produce bilingual theatre. Adapted from the stage to a twelve-part web-series, *Ricardo II* premiered on YouTube in September 2020 as a manifestation of art created for, by, and of the local community. Merced is a city of 80,000 in central California that is 52 percent Latinx, with 46 percent of the population speaking a language other than English. In order to actualize an inclusive production that reflected Merced, my fellow co-directors, Ángel Núñez and Maria Nguyen-Cruz, and I sought to provide access to the work of Shakespeare and the communal arts for Merced's Spanish-speaking community. Through an autoethnographic case study, I discuss our mission of inclusivity and how participants in this project took ownership of the text of *Richard II* with the creation of a collaborative and equally divided Spanish/English script. Participants utilized code-switching between Shakespeare's English text and the Spanish translation, reflecting daily life for the bilingual individuals in the cast. During our production, the steady layering of political, health, economic, and social crises fuelled a profound need for hope amongst members of the cast. With a sense of collective responsibility and resiliency present throughout the process, many of these same participants stated how *Ricardo II* served as a tangible outlet for that hope. Hence, I will further explore how and why this production has inspired these bilingual artists to advocate for future opportunities for inclusive community-based arts activities.