

SAA 2021

Seminar 16: Global Shakespeare, Performance as Research, and the Labor of Decolonization  
(Susan Bennett and Kim Solga)

## PARTICIPANT ABSTRACTS

### 1. Anna Stegh Camati

“CULTURAL ANTHROPOPHAGY AND DECOLONIZATION IN *ENSAIO.HAMLET*,  
BY CIA. DOS ATORES”

Most Brazilian theatre ensembles working on a collaborative basis tend to subordinate the Shakespearean universe to local issues and values. This tendency of fusing the local and the global can be traced back to the contribution of Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropófago” [“Anthropophagic Manifesto”], first published in the *Revista de Antropofagia* in 1928, in which he advocates legitimacy to the process of devouring foreign cultural legacies in order to regurgitate them in new shape and hue to express Brazilian realities.

José Celso Martinez Corrêa, known as Zé Celso (actor, theatre director and political activist), was one of the first *avant-garde* artists to rely on the concept of anthropophagy. He revolutionized and decolonized Brazilian theater when, in 1967, he appropriated Oswald de Andrade’s anthropophagic agenda for staging *O rei da vela* (*The Candle King*) at the Oficina Theatre, a revolutionary play-text written by Andrade in 1937, which continued to be relevant concerning the Brazilian cultural and political tensions in the 1960s. In 1993, he presented a cannibalized version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, retitled *Ham-let* at the newly rebuilt Teatro Oficina.

In this paper, I intend to rely on cultural anthropophagy as methodology to explore *Ensaio. Hamlet* [*Rehearsal. Hamlet*] (2004), a collective experiment by Cia. dos Atores, directed by Enrique Diaz. The theatre ensemble tore Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1604-1605) to pieces to expose contemporary issues emerging after the election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the first candidate the Workers’ Party (PT) elected for president in Brazil. Specific topics from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, such as power, misconduct, incest, fratricide and madness were cannibalized and used as material to create new scenes pregnant with contemporary signifiers. The production toured in Brazil and abroad, mainly in New York, Paris, Bogotá and Barcelona and, in 2006, it successfully participated in a festival of Brazilian Theatre in Germany.

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## 2. Rachel Chung

“Framing *The Tempest*: Decolonising the All-Women Production”

From 2012 to 2014, director Phyllida Lloyd partnered with Clean Break to devise and produce a trilogy of Shakespeare plays set in a women’s prison. The productions originated from a series of workshops done by Lloyd and trilogy star Harriet Walter, who went on to play Henry IV (*Henry IV*), Brutus (*Julius Caesar*), and Prospero (*The Tempest*). Walter details the process in her book, *Brutus and Other Heroines*. Walter’s memoir provides detailed documentation of the Clean Break process, which I plan to investigate through a performance-as-research lens. In particular, I plan to focus on *The Tempest*, the final production in the Donmar trilogy. Like each of the preceding productions, the play begins with an ‘out-of-character’ speech from one of the inmates (played by professional actors). The inmates’ stories breathe life into Lloyd’s interpretation, and *The Tempest* in particular highlights the struggles faced by inmates in British prisons.

I would like to interrogate whether this series, which highlights prison injustice mostly in its peripheries, does enough to be considered a piece of social commentary as well as entertainment. Is a high-profile production by an all-women cast directed and created by primarily white, cis, Western women truly revolutionary, or does the presentation of Black and brown inmates by a white director simply reinforce the relegation of colonised bodies to the realm of the objectified? I hope to apply the lessons from the Donmar Trilogy to a more inclusive, grassroots-focused framework for recreating and rewriting Shakespeare’s plays.

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### 3. Elisabeth Dutton

“*U Venas No Adonisi*: Venus and Adonis in Cape Town”

Exemplary of ‘the creolization, indigenization, localization and Africanization of Shakespeare’ (Sandra Young) is *U Venas No Adonisi*, the dramatic adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* by the Cape Town company, Isango. Isango productions tell their stories with a distinctively South African aesthetic, especially in their music and dance, and in multilingual scripts that combine many different South African languages. This paper will explore the processes by which the company adapted Shakespeare’s English poem, itself an adaptation -- and huge expansion of -- lines from Ovid’s Latin *Metamorphoses*. In early modern England, translation was a valid and valorised act of artistic appropriation, not just an aid to understanding for those unacquainted with the languages of the original. Isango scripts allow each actor to perform a character in their own first language, as well as exploiting the theatrical potential of switching between languages: such code-switching, a common feature of multilingual nations like South Africa, can be used theatrically to signal changes in the power balance between characters, or shifts of register or mood, or can be used to build rapport between a character and the audience. This paper will discuss *U Venas No Adonisi* as a linguistic translation, but also as a re-contextualisation through distinctively South African music and dance and reference to social customs such as marriage rituals.

Increasingly known internationally, Isango in its home country has challenged the monopoly of theatre in South Africa by white performers working for largely white audiences, and paradoxically has done this by staging, with black township choirs, medieval English plays and the works of Shakespeare and Mozart. Isango thus challenges assumptions about ‘high art’, assumptions that Shakespeare and Mozart should only be lent to the townships to confirm the superiority of European culture; that they should not be owned and performed by the townships to world acclaim. Because of their reinvention of classic plays and operas in a South African context, Isango has been seen as an aggressive instigator in the overall drive to decolonise the performing arts -- which is why, early in its history, it roused such criticism from the established South African theatre world. It has done this, paradoxically, under the Artistic Directorship of Englishman Mark Dornford-May.

#### Bibliography

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#### 4. Gina Bloom

"Decolonizing Shakespeare in South African High Schools through Digitally-Mediated Student Performance"

South Africa has been called the "most unequal country on the planet" and these inequalities are strikingly evident in the secondary school system, where—as is true in so many former British colonies—Shakespeare continues to hold an outsized position of authority. Chris Thurman has suggested that the decolonization of Shakespeare in South Africa has thus far failed at the secondary school level in part because performance, which has so successfully helped to decolonize Shakespeare in universities, is far less often used to teach Shakespeare in high schools. Like Thurman, we argue that digital performance tools can remedy this problem, but whereas Thurman and others have focused primarily on improving high school students' access to film and video performances of Shakespeare productions, we are interested in the benefits of engaging students physically in performance work. We argue that it is not performance in general but the labor of embodied student performance in particular that is necessary for decolonizing Shakespeare in schools. We hope to generate evidence for this argument through "Blood Will Have Blood," a collaboration between the paper's authors: a university professor in California and a high school educator/ teaching artist in South Africa. Together we have developed a curriculum for teaching Shakespeare to South African high school students through Bloom's mixed reality Shakespeare performance game, *Play the Knave*.

"Blood will have Blood" engages students in digitally-mediated Shakespeare performance to tackle one of the major symptoms of inequality in South Africa: violence. Over the past several decades, as South Africa has worked to address social injustice in a post-Apartheid era, the country has been plagued by violence, including domestic, racial, gang-related, self-inflicted, political, and accidental. It so happens that among the set works in the English Home Language curriculum are four Shakespeare plays that touch directly on these forms of violence: *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. In this paper, we discuss some of the lesson plans we developed for high school study of these plays, demonstrating how digitally-mediated performance of Shakespeare can address the psychological and emotional impact of violence on South African youth.

#### Suggested Readings

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## 5. Sawyer Kemp

"Trans/National PAR"

In this seminar, I want to challenge my own scholarship on transgender representation and inclusivity in Shakespeare performance to think more capaciously about transnational and indigenous forms of gender. In the past, I have argued that transgender and gender nonconforming bodies have been excluded from the stage despite the surging popularity of rhetorics of "gender-bending" and "genderqueer" characters in advertising and paratextual materials. As a result, the "transgender" Shakespeare character has been flattened, whitened, and distanced from the (often difficult) material realities facing trans and gender-nonconforming people today.

In PAR environments working with all-transgender casts in the United States, I have found some of the most salient and interesting outcomes are (1) the repeated note from actors that they feel more safe engaging a full range of embodied techniques when surrounded by other trans and gender-nonconforming actors and practitioners, and (2) the diversity of opinions about gender expression even *within* the trans community, which allows for more nuanced understandings and interpretations of character work.

Thinking globally, one obviously cannot simply substitute regional and indigenous categories of gender-nonconforming identities for the "transgender" or "androgynous," yet when these global categories interact with the matrices of gender facilitated by Shakespeare's plays, they are often re-translated through western language and gender identities. When Jatinder Verma directed *Macbeth* in 2015 with three hijras playing witches, for instance, this identity was variously glossed in advertising and press as "Indian drag queens," "transgenders" (sic) and "transsexuals." In this paper, I try to articulate what might be lost in these translations, but further, what might be gained from a performance as research methodology that invites greater agency and collaboration with gender nonconforming practitioners, one that

encourages more capacious categories of body and gender in Shakespeare roles other than the ones we already think of as “trans” or “genderqueer.”

### **Tentative Texts:**

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### **6. Lisa M. Barksdale-Shaw**

“‘I must have your land’: Navigating the Making of Justice in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*”

This paper submits that while *King Lear*’s map initially charts a way to divide the legacy of land to each of his daughters, the document emerges as the site that unwittingly exposes the fractured state of inheritance law, multiple maniacal motives, and fragile testators, but eventually charts a new path toward social justice. This vision for the legacy of land in the play serves as a useful tool as I examine *Lear*’s map, inheritance, and land. Within this study of property, I find the perilous state of women’s rights to land in Kenya relevant to this critique of social justice, where indigenous women feel like “prisoners” limited by what they can do with the land (HRW 2020), endure evictions, arrests, and jail in the battle for land, and ultimately fear disinheritance, where “tribal rules dictated that they were not entitled to any of their father’s land” (Reuters, 2019). Entitlement to one’s father’s land also speaks to the gendered subplots between the struggle for land among *Lear*’s daughters and the sons of Gloucester, one born into a recognized birth right and the other not. While director James Whyte in his 1999 production of *King Lear* in South Africa offered what he calls a “morality lesson” for white South Africans on apartheid (Collins and Whyte 1999), how might the performance of this play in the Swahili translation speak to the issues of justice that Kenya now confronts? This analysis considers how “the strong lance of justice” (4.6.161) functions across the breadth of the early modern play as a commentary on the contemporary struggles of Kenyan women continue to unfold.

### **7. Erin Julian**

“Unlabelling Gender: what can PAR teach us about working with early modern archival data?”

The Engendering the Stage project's current incarnation is an archival project that seeks to locate evidence of women's participation in early modern England's performance landscape. Acknowledging that the binary of male and female are themselves inherently the productions of late-17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century colonial epistemological systems, however, the project is concerned to adopt an intersectional exploration of gender that does not exclude performers and performances of gender that do not confirm to this binary, and which accounts for early modern England's notoriously unstable models of gender. In our current phase of gathering and organising data from both digital and physical collections, we have been confronted with the violence of labels, which often fail to encompass non-conforming gender expressions – thus erasing them from archives and the histories we write from archival records – or which do so in ways that are racist, transphobic, and ableist.

This paper thinks about what Performance as Research (PAR) can offer towards the development of decolonised archival and historiographical practice. Frequently occurring in laboratory and workshop conditions, PAR retains a provisional quality that allows for knowledge to be created and undone, performed and re-performed. Reflecting on Engendering the Stage's previous PAR workshops, laboratories, and seminars, this paper imagines what a PAR-informed methodology for cataloguing and working with early modern archival data might look like.

### Bibliography

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