

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

# Liberating Shakespeare

ADAPTATION AND EMPOWERMENT  
FOR YOUNG ADULT AUDIENCES

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SHAKESPEARE AND ADAPTATION

# Afterword

## Adaptation studies and interactive pedagogies

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The pandemic of Covid-19 has fuelled intersectional forms of hatred and fear that have coalesced around the idea of ‘outsiders’. Teaching and learning about adaptations of Shakespeare’s canonical plays can change this trend by promoting mutual understanding. In a time when the classroom is subject to racism and misogyny, and governed by content warnings, it is all the more important to use inclusive, and interactive, pedagogies to encourage students to build intellectual communities. This volume reveals the many ways in which Shakespeare offers audiences, teachers, and students new tools for addressing trauma and social justice. If Shakespeare’s plays seem to contain unredeemable, sexist, and racist views of the world, what is the role of ‘Shakespeare’, or early modern history, in the modern classroom? As the foregoing chapters have shown, many adaptations (particularly works aiming at young adults) speak to the prejudices both early modern and modern. We believe criticism of the Shakespearean canon through adaptation as a genre has the capacity for liberation and social reparation, which is why we, in this volume, treat Shakespeare’s plays as fundamentally performative narratives that sustain both past and contemporary conventions in adaptation, especially for young adults. As a cluster of complex texts that sustains both past practices and contemporary interpretive conventions, Shakespeare provides fertile ground for

training students to listen intently and compassionately to other individuals' voices. The inequities exposed by the pandemic – even as they are cause for grief and anxiety – can spur change for the better in education. We can achieve this through adaptation, one of the most powerful forms of cultural criticism.

Taking stock of the important questions raised by the chapters in the present volume, this chapter theorizes contextualized and interactive pedagogies that link historical texts to our contemporary contexts. Contextualization enables students to find their own voices. Interactivity nurtures student-initiated engagement. Education can be reparative when we practise 'radical listening': a set of proactive communication strategies to listen for the roots rather than only the 'plots' of stories. Students learn to listen for motives behind characters' actions in Shakespeare and in adaptations. Meanwhile, applying radical listening to curricular design, educators can rethink current practices, such as teaching with trigger warnings. Commonly practised in secondary and higher education in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, a trigger or content warning is a statement about potentially traumatizing themes in the reading, typically on the syllabus, to offer accommodation for disability, PTSD, neurodiversity, and different learning styles. It is important to teach with content warnings, but it is equally important to be cognizant of our assumptions about what could be 'triggering' and what we overlook in the first place. The following will begin with the theory of radical listening and proceed to pragmatic concerns in a tripartite approach to teaching, namely communal, contextualized, and interactive pedagogies that foster inquiry-driven learning and evidence-based argumentation.

## Radical listening

Adaptations, by virtue of their intertextuality, can help students develop radical listening skills. Adaptations invite multiple, sometimes conflicting, perspectives on what may appear to be the same stories. Radical listening is a set of proactive communication strategies to listen for the roots of stories. This strategy creates 'an equality between teller and listener that gives voice to the tale', as the founder of narrative medicine Rita Charon theorizes.<sup>1</sup> Instead of looking for the what in the plot of Shakespeare, students, using

this strategy, can examine the why in characters' motivation and behaviours. This communication strategy emphasizes the listener's understanding of the root cause of the speaker's trauma.

Radical listening also draws on the methodology of 'strategic presentism', a term coined by Lynn Fendler.<sup>2</sup> This method acknowledges the students' position in the present time in terms of their world views. It empowers readers to take ownership of the text by bringing history to bear on our contemporary issues and by comparing our contemporary concerns with those in the historical period. By thinking critically about the past in the present – such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement – students analyse Shakespeare with an eye towards changing the present.<sup>3</sup> In this way Shakespeare ceases to be a white canon with culturally predetermined meanings. This method foregrounds the connection between historical and contemporary ideologies and 'the ways the past is at work in the exigencies of the present'.<sup>4</sup> In particular, adaptations turn the past from what some students mistakenly regard as irrelevant knowledge into one of many complex texts in our exploration of present issues. The past is no longer sealed off in a vacuum.

Another benefit of encouraging radical listening, enhanced by strategic presentism, in the classroom is that this strategy decentres the traditional power structures that have excluded minoritized students, such as differently abled students and students of colour. Previously underprivileged students are now empowered to claim ownership of Shakespeare through presentist adaptations.

In pragmatic terms, radical listening fosters connections between seemingly isolated instances of artistic expression. The ability to recognize ambiguity in literature helps students to more productively analyse multiple, potentially conflicting, versions of what seems to be the same story. As students take into account the ambiguities and evolving circumstances that affect interpretations of the texts through adaptations, the singular, modern edition of Shakespeare's plays is no longer the only object of study. Instead, it is one of multiple nodes that are available for search and reassembly.

For example, through adaptations students can learn that directors filming *King Lear* must carve a path between theatrical elements ('language of drama') and discrete 'cinematic codes of communication'.<sup>5</sup> While readers' interpretations often hinge on their ability to sympathize with Lear,<sup>6</sup> applying the radical listening strategy to the study of adaptations reveals that the question of

redemption need not and should not be the sole focus of interpretive strategies. In studying the play, students often find Lear's decision to divide his kingdom in three enigmatic and haphazard. The scene of regal abdication is folkloric in origin, which is why most students would detect the atmosphere of a fairy tale. Lear's trajectory becomes more relatable if we interpret it in relation to Lear's mental illness. Performances of the division-of-the-kingdom scene reflect each director's interpretation of the causes of Lear's madness. Structurally, when the scene begins, there are other divisions paralleling Lear's announcement: Cordelia versus her elder sisters, and Edgar in opposition to Edmund. Lear asks his daughters to publicly confess their love for him and, by extension, their loyalty to the throne. This is a highly performative act, which makes the scene dramatic and memorable.

Is the division-of-the-kingdom scene ceremonial (a premeditated act of policy) or symbolic (a public test of loyalty)? Peter Brook's 1971 film does not treat the scene ceremonially, while other adaptations portray the scene as a solemn ritual without political weight, such as the *Kathakali King Lear*, which premiered in 1989 and toured internationally through 1999.<sup>7</sup> In Brook's film version, Cordelia's asides are cut, which diminishes the weight of a potentially revelatory moment as well as Cordelia's self-discovery. The scene sets a sinister and nihilistic tone for the entire narrative. The film dramatizes Lear's recognition that kingship is a metonymy and that he is but a human subject. To survive, he, like others, depends on sustenance. In contrast, Kalamandalam Padmanabhan Nair performed Lear in the ritualistic, Kathakali style, a genre that originated in temple ceremonies to portray 'non-worldly' characters drawn from the Indian epics. Co-produced by the French director-choreographer Annette Leday and Australian playwright David McRuvie, this adaptation treats the division of the kingdom and downfall of Lear as a cleansing ritual.

Some adaptations try to make Lear more sympathetic through comedic elements. Laurence Olivier's Lear in Michael Elliott's televised film (1983) laughs off Cordelia's initial response ('nothing, my lord')<sup>8</sup> and cajoles her, in a playful manner, to be more forthcoming. As a jolly 'fond old man' (4.7.60), this Lear returns to a childlike state due to his egotistical incredulity that Cordelia could be serious. Lear's line 'Mend your speech a little, / Lest you may mar your fortunes' (1.1.94–5) is spoken with doting

tenderness. Lear winks at Cordelia, making his favouritism clear. In most performances the line takes on a sinister undertone, as a stern warning.

Akira Kurosawa's Samurai film *Ran*<sup>9</sup> (1985) also features some elements of merriment in this scene. Warlord Hidetora decides to retire but retain his title of 'Great Lord'. Against the counsel he receives, Hidetora divides his kingdom among his three sons, Taro, Jiro, and Saburo, but asks them to remain united to defend the clan from invaders. Kurosawa frames the scene of division in the historical feudal lord Mōri Motonari's parable, with a twist. Known as 'the legend of the three arrows', the story depicts an ageing father who demonstrates the power of a united front to his three sons. To teach his sons a lesson in unity, Hidetora in the film gives each son an arrow and tells them to break it, an action which they accomplish with ease, similar to the events in the Mōri legend. Hidetora then gives each a bundle of arrows, which the two elder sons are unable to break. However, Saburo (the equivalent to Cordelia), ever the odd one out, breaks the bundle of arrows with his knee to burst the bubble of his ageing father's delusional plan. His act of defiance exposes that his father's childish fable is not suited for adults in a feudal world. It also highlights the irony in Hidetora's delusional and self-contradictory lecture that calls for both a division and unification of his 'kingdom'.

There are also numerous pop cultural references to Lear and ageing as an undignified process. In Christopher Nolan's film *The Dark Knight* (2008), Gotham City's district attorney Harvey Dent says, in a foreshadowing scene, that one either 'dies a hero' young or lives 'long enough to see yourself become a villain',<sup>10</sup> implying that longevity simply brings more opportunities to make mistakes that tarnish one's image. The association of a modern patriarch with a family business has been a popular trope in adaptations of *Lear*. In Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy (1972, 1974, 1990), mafia boss Vito Andolini Corleone holds court to grant favours and, like Lear, to divide up the family business. His two elder sons Sonny and Fredo end up betraying him by working with a rival gang. Similar to Jesse Armstrong's HBO series *Succession* (2018–present), the crisis of succession and the presence of three sons in *Godfather* parallel the story of *Lear*.

More recently, *King Lear* has been connected to the catchphrase 'OK boomer', which went viral after being used as a pejorative



retort in 2019 by Chlœe Swarbrick, a member of the New Zealand Parliament, in response to heckling from another member. Radical listening as a mode of thinking will enable students to connect Lear's most eccentric moments (the division-of-the-kingdom scene and the first scene at Goneril's castle) to the generational gap crystallized by the catchphrase. Similarly, analysing contemporary events, such as Brexit, alongside *King Lear* helps students take ownership of Shakespeare's narrative. After the UK's 23 June 2016 referendum to leave the European Union, directors have turned to *King Lear* as a 'Brexit play' – a play about division and dispossession, with the map as its central prop in the opening scene. In Richard Eyre's 2018 film, for example, Anthony Hopkins's exiled Lear finds himself an unaccommodated man in a refugee camp under pouring rain. The film alludes to the issue of migration and the refugee crisis in Europe. In the post-Brexit context, there is dramatic irony in Lear's decision to cut familial and political ties with Cordelia, only to see her return from France to save him from oblivion. Lear's exile and search for refuge, as Stephen O'Neill points out, highlights 'supranational connections' in contemporary UK and in the play.<sup>11</sup>

We will now apply this theory of radical listening to adaptation studies in the classroom in three particular areas of emphasis: communal, contextualized, and interactive pedagogies. Each type of assignment or class activity will benefit from analyses of various adaptations of Shakespeare.

## Communal writing assignments

In contrast to goal-oriented pedagogies, the presentist, collaborative learning strategies – enabled by radical listening – are student centred. In the classroom, students can work together to annotate play texts and adaptations. Based on these principles, I have designed assignments that give students substantive opportunities to own their narratives and write with a purpose. These assignments are meant for community building. This is an act that is particularly urgent and meaningful in the era of Covid-19, when students, more than ever, long to be connected to others, even under quarantine and in a remote learning environment. As Ariane M. Balizet points out in her chapter on teaching *Romeo and Juliet* during Covid-19, 'recognizing the force of trauma in students' lives' can 'support a

more meaningful engagement with early modern affect'.<sup>12</sup> We can develop students' visual and cultural literacy through innovative digital annotation tools that promote collaborative learning structured around analyses of both texts and films, *contextualized* discussions that connect premodern texts and modern theories, and *interactive* critical writing exercises that sustain student engagement. The digital annotation empowers students to collaborate with one another and contextualize course materials in the time we live in, which leads to a buy-in from more students from diverse backgrounds.

There are many analogue and digital tools to achieve this goal. I use the open-access tool Perusall.com, which incentivizes and supports the collaborative annotation of texts and video clips. Annotations are gathered under thematic clusters as distinct conversations, as Perusall calls them, for analysis. For each assigned text, the class would read, annotate, and comment on a shared document, engaging in close reading and a critical framework of literary interpretation. The interactive nature makes reading a more engaging, communal experience, because readers become members of a community.

The annotation tool, paired with a dynamic digital play text, provides pedagogical advantages over reading a print text as an isolated activity. A typical, codex-book modern print edition would fixate ambiguous textual variants by making editorial choices and by glossing particular words in the text. For example, we worked with the modernized version of the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (ISE) *King Lear*. The ISE's dynamic digital text shows textual variants when readers mouse over a word.

Research shows that Perusall and similar computer-mediated scholarly communication platforms enhance the quality of collaboration and promote effective learning interactions between students.<sup>13</sup> Writing and circulating rationale for editorial and interpretive choices led to increased awareness of one's own decision-making process, known as 'meta-cognition' in educational psychology.<sup>14</sup>

*The Tempest* works equally well with this method. Using Perusall, I established a social space where students learned from each other through the creation and circulation of free-form responses to cultural texts. In self-selected groups, some students explored historical meanings of 'cannibal', while others launched



a comparative analysis of racialized representations of Caliban in Julie Taymor's film and Greg Doran's stage versions of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The course material was thereby transformed into a museum with many rooms. When completing assignments, students wandered into and explored different rooms depending on their interests. There were multiple activation points for knowledge economies. Learning was nonlinear in nature. As a result, students' experiences in class were enriched by their differentiated, individualized, and yet connected explorations.

Another example is an assignment that reveals the context-dependent meanings of a pivotal line. Students analysed the political meanings and affective labour behind Hamlet's line 'A little more than kin, a little less than kind' (F.1.2.63) during Claudius's announcement of his marriage to Gertrude. The meaning of this line depends upon performative contexts. The communal annotation tool enables the class to see it from multiple perspectives. If played as an aside, as Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet mutters under his breath next to a wall of mirrors, without Claudius hearing him, in his 1996 film, in response to Claudius's greeting him as a son, Hamlet's comments could deepen a division within the court. If addressed to Claudius, these lines could publicly challenge Claudius's authority by disrupting the king's orchestrated familial harmony, as is the case in Michelle Terry's gender-bending production at the London Globe in 2018. The king has to decide whether to respond in kind or ignore the insult, as his courtiers are watching. If addressed to his mother, Gertrude, Hamlet could be opposing her remarriage after his father dies, gesturing towards a moral high road. If addressed to the spectators, the prince could be insinuating that his uncle's marriage with his mother has overstepped the boundary of brotherly kinship. Students' writing thus connects them to other racialized communities, times, and places. With collaborative close reading, students claim the language, in recognition of the speech act, rather than just the character in the sense of whether a character is relatable.

## Contextualized pedagogy

Contextualization is important in community building. We recently engaged with questions related to the 2021 U.S. Presidential

Inauguration, such as: Why does National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman read Shakespeare's sonnets for inspiration? What do the sonnets represent? In this framework, the past enables us to rethink the present. As we discover deep connections among seemingly distinct interpretations, early modern texts are no longer what some students assume to be an object of obscure knowledge that is sealed off from our present moment of globalization.

Teaching Shakespeare through adaptations draws attention to dramatic ambiguities and choices that directors must make. In dramaturgical terms, it helps students discover 'how the same speech can be used to perform . . . radically divergent speech acts'.<sup>15</sup> Instead of taking a secondary role by responding to assignment prompts, students examine the evidence as a group, annotate the text and video clips, and ask and share questions that will, at a later stage, converge into thesis statements. Students no longer encounter Shakespeare as a curated, editorialized, pre-processed narrative but as a network of interpretive possibilities. To demonstrate how close-reading adaptations shed new light on dramatic ambiguities, let us return briefly to *King Lear* as a case study. Lear's test of love becomes a trick question in the modern corporate context. The question tests audiences as much as the characters involved. For example, in his 1998 film, Richard Eyre set the scene around a table in a boardroom. Ian Holm's Lear announces the division of his kingdom as a corporate decision in sombre tone without emotional attachment. Another adaptation that sets this scene in a corporate setting is Eric de Vroedt's Dutch production *Koningin Lear*<sup>16</sup> (2015). Betty, the female CEO of Lear Inc., suffers from dementia. She proceeds to divide her shares among her three sons in a family and business meeting in the boardroom atop a skyscraper. While the modern boardroom is a popular choice for staging this scene, some adaptations have opted for a political allegory. Hundreds of balloons in *Lér Konungur* (directed by Benedict Andrews, National Theatre of Iceland in Reykjavik, 2010) call to mind American political conventions, with characters milling around in conservative contemporary business attire on a bare stage. Set in our contemporary period, the production critiques neoliberal, free-market capitalism driven by corporate interests. Analysing these adaptations in a comparative context enables students to see beyond the superficial, fairy-tale-like plotline and explore the motives behind each character's action.

Beyond comparing, side by side, video clips of performances of the same scene from various adaptations, I also asked students to combine textual annotations with a cluster of relevant images they selected from the Folger Library's LUNA, an open-access digital image collection.

In Othello's final speech before his suicide, he alludes, in the 1623 First Folio, to the 'base Iudean', a person of Jewish faith or Judas Iscariot in the Bible, and, in the 1622 First Quarto, to a 'base Indian', Indians of the New World, who 'threw a pearle away / Richer then all his Tribe'.<sup>17</sup> With dynamic toggle view in the *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, a reader of the digital edition could see simultaneously all the variants in a crux that are now open for comparative analysis. The biblical allusion would signal Othello's failed conversion to Christianity, Iago's betrayal as well as Othello's lost soul. The reference to the New World would support interpretations of Othello's internalized status as a 'savage'. Historical engravings and paintings of Othello in the final scene in Folger's LUNA reflected varying assumptions about the choice of word and the weight of the freighted words.

Students can bring their own contexts to bear on the adaptation in an inquiry-driven learning environment. One way to excavate the different layers of meanings within the play and in performances is to compare different stage and film versions from different parts of the world. I encourage my students to translate a key passage in a canonical English text into other languages (and to report back in English) to diversify the class's interpretive approaches (2015). Students may be studying a foreign language, or they may speak a language other than English at home. Students are thus able to bring into the classroom new voices and new ways of seeing the world.

Another type of adaptive assignment involves students' own adaptations of a play. My students have also 'translated' Shakespeare's plays into other media in their own adaptations. Students would examine popular culture examples of a particular theme before moving on to analysing a scene in Shakespeare. Showing popular culture examples first can help students enter into the discussion more freely and openly, without the stress of responding appropriately to the Shakespeare text. When they then view the Shakespeare examples, they can see that many of the same decisions, options, and demands exist for these productions as for

the others. After the viewings, students could then engage in an active discussion about both, making connections between them and their readings of Shakespeare. Following this discussion, they could engage in an activity through which they apply what they have learned by creating their own version of a scene they viewed. In this activity, students would have to decide what actors, set, staging, or filming choices they would use and why. They would also need to consider how their choices would affect their entire imagined production and how it would be received by audiences.

By examining a large number of adaptations as common objects of study, students make links among what was previously regarded as distinct and siloed instances of Shakespearean criticism. Our current, active, communal user-centric culture, which prioritizes user participation,<sup>18</sup> is supplanting the more passive and siloed reader-centric experience that dominated the previous centuries, which in turn replaced the oral culture of Shakespeare's age. Performance-oriented understanding of Shakespeare can enhance the collaborative reading of textual variants in multilingual contexts. By creating knowledge collaboratively, students and educators lay claim to the ethics and ownership of that knowledge.

## Interactive pedagogies

The core of communal and contextualized pedagogy is interactivity. The malleability of digital video puts play texts and performances to work in an interactive environment. Online performance video archives can encourage user curation and interaction with other forms of cultural records. In practice, this redistributes the power of collecting, rearranging and archiving cultural records away from a centralized authority to the hands of users. Despite the challenge of maintaining net neutrality and equal access, generally speaking, in a decentralized model of networked culture, the users have more direct engagement with narratives and multi-modal representations of events.

My interactive pedagogy reflects the need for racialized globalization to be understood within hybrid cultural and digital spaces. My students and I build a community with shared purposes. Team projects encourage students' ethical responsibility to each other as they grow from recipients of knowledge transfer to co-

creators of knowledge. While it is only feasible to teach in-depth by assigning one or two films of *Lear* in a given class, students can expand their horizon by close reading competing performative interpretations of a few pivotal scenes.

Interactivity prompts students to take on the role of an active participant and independent researcher. For example, teaching *Lear* entails teaching each culture's and generation's reaction to the challenging ethical burden within and beyond the play's actions. An inclusive and interactive exercise is collective translation. Teaching Shakespeare through translated versions draws attention to aspects of the plays that have been dormant. Having students translate a key passage into a language of their choice, and report back in English, empowers multilingual students. It turns international students into an asset rather than liability, and it diversifies the class's interpretive approaches. When Cordelia replies 'nothing, my lord' to Lear's impossible question 'what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters?' (1.1.85–7), what does she mean? That she has nothing (new) to say to her father? That she cannot win a game that is rigged and therefore nothing she says would matter? In collaboratively translating, in small groups, the simple word 'nothing' which is often glossed over, and in analysing the same scene in multiple adaptations, my students were able to bring into the classroom new voices and new ways of seeing the world, including those of their own and those of others. All too often heritage speakers or international students are seen as a liability, but their linguistic and cultural repertoire should be tapped as collective resources. We asked such questions as: Does Cordelia's hanging enhance the tragic pathos surrounding her journey, or does it help to highlight the senseless male suffering? The biggest payoff of teaching *Lear* through video analysis is a rhizomatic, productive engagement with performative variants. Viewing a clip of Cordelia's silent protest from Peter Brook's existentialist 1971 film of *King Lear* and a clip of Lear's reaction from Grigori Kozintsev's *Korol Lir* (1971) enables an inherently comparative approach to scene analysis. Viewing performances in this productively distracted fashion helps to resist the tyranny of the few canonized adaptations and their privileged interpretations. Consuming performances through arbitrary as well as curated pathways sheds new light on performances that do not tend to be discussed side by side.

## Conclusion: Intersectional pedagogies

The new normal in education exposes inequities that were previously veiled by on-campus life and resources. Since the true diversity of our lives resides in individualized, embodied experiences, we can make education intersectional by interrogating any paradigm that flattens out the diversity inherent in unfamiliar communities against stereotypes or national profiles. Adaptations can counter the misconception that Shakespeare is only meaningful when performed in white accents. Students write intelligently about films from the Global South to diversify the English curriculum.

In conclusion, interactive pedagogies – enhanced by adaptation studies – recognize the gap between diversity as a statistical notion used to exonerate an institution of discrimination and diversity as a reservoir of meaningful, embodied experiences. Cooperative learning fosters students' ethical responsibilities while drawing attention to the uneven terrain of collaboration in the creation of arts and literature. In this way we hope to liberate Shakespeare from centuries of bardolatrous expectations and show that his works belong to all of us.

## Notes

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# CONTENTS

*List of figures* xi

*Notes on contributors* xii

*Acknowledgements* xvi

Introduction: Taking Young Adult Shakespeare seriously *Jennifer Flaherty and Deborah Uman* 1

## SECTION I Trauma and survival 15

- 1 Teaching *Romeo and Juliet* in plague time:  
A trauma-informed approach *Ariane Balizet* 17
- 2 Nothing/Something: YA *Much Ado* novels  
in the world of digital shaming and virtual  
outcasts *Laurie E. Osborne* 34
- 3 ‘I will not be a frozen example, a statued  
monument’: Self-actualization after trauma in  
*Pandosto, The Winter’s Tale*, and *Exit, Pursued  
by a Bear* *Sara Morrison* 49
- 4 Exposing hate: Violence of racialized slurs  
in Young Adult adaptations of Shakespeare  
*Charlotte Spielman* 64
- 5 When Romeo and Juliet fought the Texas Rangers:  
Race, justice, and appropriation in *Shame the Stars*  
by Guadalupe García McCall *Jesus Montaña* 78

- 6 The pattern of trauma in YA adaptations of Shakespeare *M. Tyler Sasser* 92

SECTION II Empowerment and education 107

- 7 *Ophelia*: A new hope *Natalie Loper* 109
- 8 ‘You should be women’: The figure of the witch in Young Adult adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* *Melissa Johnson* 123
- 9 Adaptation and intersectionality in Aoibheann Sweeney’s *Among Other Things, I’ve Taken Up Smoking* *Lawrence Manley* 137
- 10 ‘Hello, people of the internet!’: *Nothing Much to Do* and the young adult creators and communities of vlog-Shakespeare *Jane Wanninger* 152
- 11 Emotion, empathy, and the internet: Transforming Shakespeare for contemporary teens *Jules Pigott* 167
- 12 Promoting companion texts for reading Shakespeare plays: Future teachers, Young Adult literature, and connecting adolescents to *Romeo and Juliet* *Laura Turchi* 174

Afterword: Adaptation studies and interactive pedagogies *Alexa Alice Joubin* 187

*Selected bibliography* 201

*Index* 208

# Introduction

## Taking Young Adult Shakespeare seriously

*Jennifer Flaherty and  
Deborah Uman*

When we first began to advertise our seminar on ‘Young Adult Shakespeare’ for the 2020 meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA), the reaction that we got most often from colleagues was ‘What a fun topic!’ It was a valid response – YA Shakespeare is an engaging subject for scholars and young audiences. Students in our Shakespeare classes often express surprise and delight that they ‘get’ to write papers about *10 Things I Hate about You* (1999), *Gnomeo & Juliet* (2011), *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), or Taylor Swift’s ‘Love Story’ (2008). In the *Shakespeare and the Teenage Girl* course at Georgia College, the assigned coursework includes reading YA novels such as Cat Winters’s *The Steep and Thorny Way* (2016) and watching YouTube series that reimagine Shakespeare’s plays as first-person video diaries narrated by the young characters themselves. Students enjoy Shakespeare-inspired video games, including *Elsinore* (2018), which features Ophelia as the playable main character who seeks to rewrite the tragedy of *Hamlet*. Even students who initially see Shakespeare’s plays as boring or difficult often find his work more appealing after they experience YA adaptations of the texts (Figure I.1).





FIGURE I.1 Cover art for *Elsinore*. *Elsinore*, produced by Golden Glitch (2018).

The widespread appropriation of Shakespeare's plots, characters, and language into YA media is not an indictment of Shakespeare as inaccessible. It is an illustration of how adaptable and accessible his plays are for contemporary youth audiences. In the past thirty years, the number of screen Shakespeare adaptations targeting adolescent audiences has grown significantly, branching out from the teen films of the 1990s and early 2000s that Richard Burt identified as teen 'Shakesploitation'<sup>1</sup> and Robert L. York dubbed 'Teen Shakespirit'<sup>2</sup> to include video games, music videos, vlogs, fan fiction, and other new media. In the same time frame, YA authors have published more than two hundred YA novels based on Shakespeare's plays,<sup>3</sup> matching the pace of the expanding market for teen fiction, which 'has exploded into a global economic powerhouse as young adult texts continue to grow in sales'.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare has also been used to speak to young people on stage, starting with plays such as *Shakespeare's R&J* (1999), by Joe Calarco, and continuing today with the current Broadway and West End productions of *£ Juliet* (2019). As a sequel/revision of *Romeo and Juliet*, the jukebox musical features a diverse cast of young people singing pop anthems made famous by stars such as Britney Spears and Katy Perry. Content creators – who range from large-scale studios and bestselling authors to start-up production companies and emerging writers – connect Shakespeare

with contemporary experiences, using humour and accessibility to appeal to the young target audience. The enthusiasm generated by YA Shakespeare can be an inspiring motivator in high school and college classrooms, particularly in a time when student and teacher morale is low. That is the power of a fun topic.

We would argue, however, that fun is not synonymous with inconsequential or frivolous. Contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare for young people address the darker and more uncomfortable aspects of adolescence, drawing on a practice dating back to the nineteenth century, when Mary Cowden Clarke published *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1854). Cowden Clarke's novellas incorporated serious topics, such as sexual assault, suicide, poverty, and injustice, into stories of Shakespeare's female characters during their imagined childhoods. As Laurie Osborne notes, Clarke's text 'offered Victorian girls a cautionary education about masculine sexual predation', while also enacting a 'subversive pre-feminist exploration of female autonomy'.<sup>5</sup> The 1994 publication of Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* established the practice of using Shakespeare's characters as blueprints for examining and contextualizing the challenges faced by contemporary youth, particularly young women, when Pipher compared her young female patients who were suffering from depression and anxiety to Ophelia.<sup>6</sup> Fictional adaptations of Shakespeare aimed at young people echoed this process, connecting the experiences of Shakespeare's characters with the challenges and exhilarations of the contemporary teenage experience.<sup>7</sup> Like today's young people, characters in YA Shakespeare adaptations face oppression and trauma, and some of them manage to defy cultural limitations in ways that Shakespeare's characters could not. Some of these reworkings use the creative dissonance of adaptation to reference gaps or silences in their Shakespearean sources, giving new voices to marginalized characters. Others place recognizable Shakespearean plotlines, characters, or quotations within new contexts, weaving their perceived cultural authority into the diverse stories of young people, past and present. These works use Shakespeare to address some of the most pressing questions in contemporary culture, exploring themes of violence, media, race relations, gender dynamics, and intersectionality.

Because our seminar for the SAA was scheduled for April 2020, our conversation about addressing contemporary issues through

YA Shakespeare was held virtually due to the cancellation of the in-person SAA conference. Since then, the world has experienced challenges we could not have imagined when we began this project. Under the restrictions and uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, students and teachers are struggling. After months, even years, of learning in isolation and interacting under the threat of contagion, young people are experiencing anxiety and depression in record numbers. Returning to in-person education has also renewed the threat of violence in our schools; the week before we submitted our final draft of this volume, a shooter killed nineteen children and two teachers in an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. The growing social unrest and political polarization in the United States has also led to legal disputes over the inclusion of books dealing with race and sexual orientation and identity in libraries, classrooms, and curricula. When Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements amplified serious conversations about racism and misogyny, parental groups and state governments countered with censorship of lesson plans that might make (some) students feel uncomfortable. Among the heated debate about secondary school texts and curricula, we do not currently hear calls to eliminate Shakespeare. Our seminar conversation about how Shakespeare can be used to address trauma for young adult audiences takes on new significance in this changing social climate. While we started out with the goal of sharing ideas to make Shakespeare more engaging to young people, we are now additionally motivated by the urgent need from teachers to develop tools to discuss our histories and realities with their students in ways that are attentive to students' and teachers' precarious positions.

In the summer of 2022, we led an institute entitled 'Transforming Shakespeare's Tragedies: Adaptation, Education, and Diversity' for the National Endowment for the Humanities. Twenty-four high school and middle school English language arts (ELA) and theatre teachers came to Utah to study adaptations of *Hamlet* and *Othello* and to explore ways to enliven their classrooms with a variety of contemporary materials and comparative strategies. After more than two years of teaching through Covid-19, our participants were understandably exhausted. They were apprehensive about the growing challenges to teacher autonomy. Yet each one of these teachers embraced the study of Shakespeare and adaptation with renewed energy, curiosity, and compassion. They were generous in

sharing their own expertise and experiences with us and with each other. For nearly three weeks, they kept to a rigorous schedule of classes with us and our visiting faculty (many of whom were also contributors in this volume), as well as workshops and performances at the Utah Shakespeare Festival, and they met every challenge with enthusiasm. Their excitement about introducing these adaptations to their students confirms our belief that Shakespeare can make a compelling contribution to high school and middle school curricula, particularly in connection with adaptation. Our institute, like this volume, explores how Shakespeare's plays can be transformed to address contemporary topics that matter to teachers and young people living through this challenging cultural moment.

By imbuing contemporary topics with the canonical authority of Shakespeare, YA Shakespeare adaptations are uniquely positioned to strike a balance between demands for innovation and tradition in high school curricula. In *Teaching Shakespeare with a Purpose*, Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi make a case for teachers to 'recognize the value in continuing to explore and challenge the relevance of Shakespeare's works' by arguing that 'without a twenty-first-century approach, Shakespeare in schools really will cease to matter – it will be a dead subject like Latin – and will be replaced by texts that are "relevant" and easily accessible, like *The Hunger Games*'.<sup>8</sup> Victor Malo-Juvera, Paula Greathouse, and Brooke Eisenbach acknowledge the currency of YA literature, but note that even 'some educators feel that young adult literature is inferior in quality when compared to canonical texts', despite the fact that the standards of preparation for two major accreditation agencies 'require that teacher candidates be knowledgeable with young adult literature'.<sup>9</sup> This collection grew out of our desire to promote engaging ways to teach Shakespeare in high school, ways that spark students' imaginations and speak to their lived experiences. YA Shakespeare can tackle challenging issues for audiences of young people, using the canonical power and 'the comfortable distance of the Shakespearean source text . . . to address contemporary social concerns'.<sup>10</sup> At a time when banned book lists are growing in size and number, young adult adaptations of Shakespeare can be a way to teach close reading and comparison with a source (common objectives and requirements in secondary and higher education) while also engaging students in challenging conversations that encourage critical thinking.

In the context of this project, it matters a great deal to understand the relationship of the adapted work to the original because of the cultural imperative to teach Shakespeare throughout the educational landscape. Before publishing her oft-cited *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon points out that ‘when we adapt, we create using all the tools that creators have always used’, and she challenges the ‘postromantic valuing of the originary’ by asking whether or not it matters whether a piece of art is new or adapted.<sup>11</sup> Douglas Lanier expands on Hutcheon’s point, challenging the emphasis on the relationship of adaptation to original and offering the botanic metaphor of the rhizome as a theoretical model that facilitates the ‘study of the vast web of adaptations, allusion and (re)productions that comprises the ever-changing cultural phenomenon we call “Shakespeare”’ and situates authority ‘not in the Shakespearean text at all, but in the accrued power of Shakespearean adaptation’.<sup>12</sup> Lanier’s rhizomatic model provides ways for teachers, scholars, and students to reconsider notions of authority and ownership.

The wide range of adaptations addressed in this volume use Shakespeare’s plays as a jumping-off point by including familiar plots, frequent allusions, or even direct quotations. These texts are not ‘faithful’ retellings of Shakespeare; as Douglas Lanier notes in *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Adaptation*, ‘strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a faithful adaptation. . . . To be faithful to some element of the original is not to duplicate it in its entirety, but rather to strike a relation of similarity to some quality of the source that the adaptation identifies as essentially or distinctively Shakespearean’.<sup>13</sup> In their efforts to understand the relationship between adaptation and appropriation, Christy Desmet and Sujata Iyengar note that both practices can be viewed both as forms of theft and acts of self-assertion. Without arguing for adherence to one term or another, Desmet and Iyengar suggest exploring ‘the oscillation between these concepts as attitudes toward artistic production, consumption, and social regulation’.<sup>14</sup> Desmet has pointed to the ‘personal urgency’ that drives creators of Shakespearean adaptations and appropriations for whom such work can be seen as ‘acts of survival’.<sup>15</sup> While Desmet and Iyengar focus on the creative acts of adaptation and appropriation, the interest of this collection is primarily on the impact for the readers and audiences of adaptive content. Instead of thinking about adaptation as theft, we argue that placing the works of Shakespeare

in contemporary and diverse settings makes clear that some version of Shakespeare already belongs to everyone.

*Liberating Shakespeare* demonstrates the value of adapting Shakespeare for young adults, focusing on adaptations that seek to engage young audiences by depicting examples of oppression, trauma, and resistance. By examining adaptations that deal with urgently relevant issues for young people who are struggling today, we assert that Young Adult Shakespeare can create crucial connections. Chapters in this collection consider whether such representations empower young adult audiences and how these works can be used as companion texts within educational settings. As the authors of *Shakespeare and Young Adult Literature* note, Shakespeare can achieve a symbiotic relationship with YA media and culture, 'allowing teachers to combine some of the best the Bard has to offer while at the same time increasing the relevance and engagement for their teen readers, and in many cases, for themselves'.<sup>16</sup> We argue that YA Shakespeare should be taken seriously as art that speaks to the complexities of a broken world, offering glimmers of hope for an uncertain future.

The chapters in the collection are arranged in two sections. The first focuses on trauma as represented in Shakespeare's plays, various adaptations, and students' lives. While many of Shakespeare's plays revel in tragedy, the chapters in this section turn towards themes of survival, often emphasized in modern adaptations. Speaking directly to our unprecedented moment, Ariane Balizet's chapter examines the challenges and opportunities of teaching *Romeo and Juliet*, a play that takes place during a plague, during the Covid-19 pandemic. With great sensitivity to the trauma faced by her students in their educational and personal lives and with attentiveness to the unexpected benefits of virtual and online instruction, Balizet considers the important role that trauma-informed pedagogy can play in acknowledging students' experiences and empowering students to engage with literature in meaningful ways.<sup>17</sup>

The next two chapters, by Laurie Osborne and Sara Morrison, direct our attention to the gender-based violence of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*, examining how much has changed and how much remains the same across centuries, genres, and modalities. Osborne explores the plethora of adaptations of *Much Ado* in YA fiction – at least fourteen versions since 2006 – and remarks on the damaging power of digital forms



of surveillance and misinformation detailed in these novels. After considering how Shakespeare himself adapted Robert Greene's *Pandosto* (1588), Morrison centres on E. K. Johnston's *Exit, Pursued by a Bear* (2016) and its hopeful view of the support women can receive in the face of unspeakable violence.

Turning to concerns of race and national identity, Charlotte Speilman and Jesus Montaña focus on adaptations of Shakespeare's most-taught tragedies, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Speilman compares YA novelizations of each of those plays, addressing the use of racialized language and the ways in which each text can be traumatic for young readers of colour, even if the adaptations are designed to reveal and condemn racist behaviours and policies. Montaña reads Guadalupe García McCall's reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet*, set in Texas during the Mexican Revolution, as a 'counter-story' that challenges white supremacist notions of history and offers a rare platform for young Latinx readers to see themselves and their histories reflected.

Completing Section I, M. Tyler Sasser offers a wide-ranging discussion of numerous adaptations of a variety of plays, identifying a pattern in which a young protagonist experiences a traumatic event and, through engagement with Shakespeare, overcomes that trauma to achieve a happy, comedic ending. Sasser's analysis is cautionary, and he warns that such bardolatry can be harmful to young readers who seek solace in Shakespeare rather than in the hands of mental health professionals. With this advice in mind, we centre the second section on the ways that YA Shakespeare adaptations can empower young people as consumers, creators, scholars, and teachers.

Natalie Loper, Melissa Johnson, and Lawrence Manley return to questions of gender, now focusing on the potential for female empowerment and agency in adaptations. Comparing Lisa Klein's novel *Ophelia* (2006) to Claire McCarthy's film adaptation (2018), Loper sees the first as offering models for women who help each other overcome trauma and the latter as missing an opportunity and preventing its female characters from forging alliances and collectively challenging their limitations. Johnson concentrates on the representation of witches in novelizations of *Macbeth* and argues that these works participate in a feminist reclamation of witches that can, in turn, offer a message of empowerment for young women. In his analysis of Aoibheann Sweeney's *Among Other Things, I've Taken Up Smoking* (2017), a loose adaptation of *The Tempest*,

Lawrence Manley attends to the novel's interest in questions of gender, sexuality, and race as central to its treatment of identity formation among young people. Manley links this intersectional approach to a model of 'queer pedagogy' that can help young adult readers rethink their ideas of normalcy and understand identity as dynamic and relational.

The affordances provided by the internet and social media, particularly web series and vlogs, are examined in chapters by Jane Wanninger and web series creator Jules Pigott. In discussing the 2014 YouTube series, *Nothing Much to Do*, created by a group of four young women calling themselves The Candle Wasters, Wanninger learns from her students and from The Candle Wasters themselves; she argues that this multi-modal and interactive model not only provides new opportunities to engage with traditional texts but also helps decentre traditional notions of understanding and literary interpretation. Inspired by the work of other young adult content creators, including The Candle Wasters, film and media student Pigott began developing web series adaptations of Shakespeare when she was still in high school with the creation of *Like, as It Is* and then *Twelfth Grade (or Whatever)* (2016). In her chapter, Pigott looks back on the ways her series used Shakespeare's comedies to reflect the emotional roller coasters of adolescence and explore contemporary questions of gender identity, anxiety, and societal pressure that young people face in their daily lives.

As a professor who regularly interacts with pre-service ELA teachers, Laura Turchi also engages directly with the young people for whom YA adaptations are designed. In her chapter, Turchi details her experience with an assignment for education students requiring them to create a 'book talk' on a YA novel that could serve as a companion text when teaching *Romeo and Juliet* and could connect to the potential high school students' lives. While acknowledging some of the challenges and shortcomings in her students' work, Turchi is optimistic that these future teachers want to be a force for good in their future students' lives and that there is room for the works of Shakespeare in their endeavours.

We conclude the collection with an afterword that comes full circle to where the book begins, focusing on pedagogies that are responsive to the traumas of our current moment and work towards social justice by promoting mutual understanding. In this concluding chapter, Alexa Alice Joubin details a variety of what she

calls interactive pedagogies, such as radical listening and communal writings assignments, offering specific examples of activities and demonstrating how Shakespeare and adaptations provide ‘fertile ground for training students to listen intently and compassionately’ and for us all to contribute to a model of reparative education. Joubin’s emphasis on listening to the experiences and perspectives of others highlights an important tension that runs throughout this collection. Many of the chapters point to the value of YA adaptations because students can relate to the characters and their experiences.

Like relevance, relatability can be an uncomfortable measure for Shakespeare’s plays. In her 2014 *New Yorker* article on ‘The Scourge of Relatability’,<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Mead argues that ‘the notion of relatability implies that the work in question serves like a selfie: a flattering confirmation of an individual’s solipsism. To appreciate “King Lear” – or even “The Catcher in the Rye” or “The Fault in Our Stars” – only to the extent that the work functions as one’s mirror would make for a hopelessly reductive experience’.<sup>19</sup> In her plenary address for the 2018 Shakespeare Association of America, Marjorie Garber quotes Mead’s article, challenging the general trend to ‘sex [Shakespeare] up and dumb it down’ and calling the practice ‘the deplorable relatable’.<sup>20</sup> Garber uses several examples relating to YA Shakespeare while speaking more broadly about producing, teaching, adapting, or reading Shakespeare today, and her words are reminiscent of other arguments against adaptations made for young audiences.<sup>21</sup> Gregory M. Colòn Semenza examines the assumptions behind this criticism of teen Shakespeare films in his analysis of animated Shakespeare:

A common argument in the subfield of Shakespeare film scholarship is that so-called ‘teenpics’ exploit the shallow sensibility and economic viability of their primary audience through a process of ‘dumbing down’ Shakespearean playtexts . . . the assumption seems to be that because the films inevitably subtract words/action present in the plays, they also remove much of the complexity that more words and action are intuited to represent.<sup>22</sup>

Similar arguments about quality persist about any medium or genre where young people are the target audience, and we are far from

the first to challenge such criticism and say that YA Shakespeare is worthy of study.<sup>23</sup> We would add to this conversation that the very things that make YA Shakespeare compelling in the classroom can also lead to adaptations being dismissed as oversimplified Shakespeare or disparaged as pandering to self-centred audiences who only want to see themselves reflected back at them.

In the publication based on her plenary, Garber argues that Shakespeare's 'plays are full of diverse characters, each with his or her own language and style. It's not even all about Hamlet, much less all about you'.<sup>24</sup> As a solution, she suggests the Brechtian concept of alienation, with its emphasis on 'defamiliarization or estrangement' as a way for teachers and readers to reclaim and relish the 'unfamiliar' in Shakespeare.<sup>25</sup> Garber's emphasis on the importance of reading Shakespeare with a sense of the strange and unusual is valuable. While we can hope that the argument that adapting Shakespeare for young audiences equates to 'dumbing him down' has lost its dismissive potency, the point about the need to read for a range of voices and experiences is well taken, particularly in the current polarized political climate. Efforts to include diverse voices in our classrooms are based on the belief in the inherent value of learning about cultures and experiences that reflect our own *and* those that are significantly different. Teaching Shakespeare's plays alongside adaptations allows us to offer both approaches to our students simultaneously. As the chapters in this collection show, situating the work of Shakespeare with and against the responses of other creators and of our students provides us with powerful tools to explore the foreign and strange and to understand the immediate and familiar. In this way we hope to liberate Shakespeare from centuries of bardolatrous expectations and show that his works belong to all of us.

## Notes

- 1 Richard Burt, 'Afterword: Te(e)n Things I Hate about Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late 1990s, or Not-So-Fast Times at Shakespeare High', in *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Culture*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 205.
- 2 Robert L. York, "'Smells Like Teen Shakespirit" Or, the Shakespearean Films of Julia Stiles', in *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, ed. Jennifer

- Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., and Robert L. York (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
- 3 Laurie Osborne, 'Reviving Cowden Clarke: Rewriting Shakespeare's Heroines in Young Adult Fiction', in *Shakespearean Echoes*, ed. Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 21.
  - 4 Victor Malo-Juvera, Paula Greathouse, and Brooke Eisenbach, *Shakespeare and Young Adult Literature* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), vii.
  - 5 Osborne, 'Reviving Cowden Clarke', 22.
  - 6 For the updated edition, see Mary Pipher and Sara Pipher Gilliam, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019).
  - 7 See Ariane M. Balizet, *Shakespeare and Girls' Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., and Robert L. York, *Shakespeare and Youth Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Sarah Projansky, *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination and Celebrity Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2020), among others.
  - 8 Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), 7.
  - 9 Malo-Juvera, Greathouse, and Eisenbach, *Shakespeare and Young Adult Literature*, viii.
  - 10 Jennifer Flaherty, 'Reviving Ophelia: Reaching Adolescent Girls through Shakespeare's Doomed Heroine', *Borrowers and Lenders: A Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 9, no. 1 (1 May 2014): n.p.
  - 11 Linda Hutcheon, 'On the Art of Adaptation', *Daedalus* 133, iss. 2 (Spring 2003): 108–111.
  - 12 Douglas Lanier, 'Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value', in *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, ed. Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 29. *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Adaptation*.
  - 13 Douglas Lanier, 'Shakespeare and Adaptation Theory: Unfinished Business', in *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Adaptation*, ed. Diana E. Henderson and Stephen O'Neill (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2022), 50.
  - 14 Christy Desmet and Sujata Iyengar, 'Adaptation, Appropriation, or What you Will', *Shakespeare* 11, no. 1 (2015): 19.

- 15 Christy Desmet, 'Introduction', *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, ed. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (London: Routledge, 1999), 15.
- 16 Malo-Juvera, Greathouse and Eisenbach, *Shakespeare and Young Adult Literature*, ix.
- 17 For another take on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Shakespeare studies, see the volume *Lockdown Shakespeare*, in this series.
- 18 The year 2014 was also the publication year of Deanne Williams's special issue on 'Girls and Girlhood in Adaptations of Shakespeare' for *Borrowers and Lenders*. When Jennifer Flaherty received the final edit suggestions on her essay 'Reviving Ophelia', one reviewer suggested that she remove the word 'relatable' as a descriptor for the heroines in the YA Shakespeare novels because of Mead's article denouncing relatability.
- 19 Rebecca Mead, 'The Scourge of "Relatability"', *The New Yorker*, 1 August 2014.
- 20 We were both in attendance at Garber's talk, and we are grateful to Gregory Watkins for the quotations, which are taken from specific references to her speech in his 2022 workshop reflection. Gregory Watkins, 'Speaking the Speech: Cultivating a Space Somewhere Between Literature and Performance in the General Education Classroom', *Shakespeare and General Education Workshop, Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of American* (2022): 3.
- 21 See Burt, 'Afterword' and York, "'Smells Like Teen Shakespirit'", among others.
- 22 Gregory M. Colòn Semenza, 'Teens, Shakespeare, and the Dumbing Down Cliché: The Case of "The Animated Tales"', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 37–68.
- 23 See Balizet, *Shakespeare and Girls' Studies* and Erica Hateley, *Shakespeare in Children's Literature: Gender and Cultural Capital* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), among others.
- 24 Marjorie Garber, 'Relatable', *Raritan* 38, no. 4 (Spring 2019): 125.
- 25 Ibid., 126.



## SHAKESPEARE AND ADAPTATION

*Shakespeare and Adaptation* provides in-depth discussions of a dynamic field and showcases the ways in which, with each act of adaptation, a new Shakespeare is generated. The series addresses the phenomenon of Shakespeare and adaptation in all its guises and explores how Shakespeare continues as a reference-point in a generically diverse body of representations and forms, including fiction, film, drama, theatre, performance and mass media. Including sole authored books as well as edited collections, the series embraces a mix of methodologies and espouses a global perspective that brings into conversation adaptations from different nations, languages and cultures.

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