Joubin, Alexa Alice. "#SuchStuff."

Peer review

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Early Modern Digital Review

Early Modern Digital Review is an online, open-access, and refereed journal publishing high-quality reviews of digital projects related to early modern society and culture. It is committed to productive evaluation of both established digital resources and recent tools and projects. Its publications are distributed online by the journal and its partners, including *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*.

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, creator; Michelle Terry, Farah Karim-Cooper, and Imogen Greenberg, hosts.
#SuchStuff.
London: Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. 2018–. Accessed 15 January 2023. shakespearesglobe.com/such-stuff-podcast.

Educational podcasts, "a digital packet of audio […] released at regular intervals and automatically downloaded to personal media devices,"[1] have gained momentum in recent years. Closure of live performance venues and widespread lockdowns as part of public hygiene measures during the global COVID-19 pandemic further increased interest in at-home consumption of digitally delivered content for entertainment and education.

In their free podcast series, now in its eighth season, hosts Michelle Terry, Farah Karim-Cooper, and Imogen Greenberg speak to various guests ranging from actors and directors to education practitioners and researchers. Asking questions about "programming [rationale], gender, race, social justice and their relationship to Shakespeare," the podcast series elucidates Shakespeare's "transformative impact on the world around us," as their mission statement indicates. Supported by the Globe Theatre's education department, the series and its engaging, thematic dialogues fall under what communication studies and education scholars have categorized as a "conversationalist chat show."[2]

The podcast's emphasis on performance is reflected in its title, *#SuchStuff*, which references Prospero's lines in *The Tempest*: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (act 4, scene 1). The phrase is commonly interpreted as a commentary on the ephemerality of the performing arts as well as the transient nature of our lives.

Launched in 2018 to coincide with the Globe's first Shakespeare and Race festival, the podcast initially targeted what might be thought of as the Globe's "fan group" through the boutique nature of its broadcast. Individuals who are passionate about the Globe's offerings include scholarly and general audiences committed to Shakespeare performance, and the podcast focuses thematically on social justice concerns in theatre making.

Now, eight seasons later, the series offers something for everyone in the general public. In the trailer for the podcast ("Trailer: Welcome to Such

1. Drew, "Educational Podcasts," 202.

2. Drew, "Educational Podcasts," 208.

Stuff"), Greenberg asks poignantly: "What happens when we hold the mirror of Shakespeare up to the world around us?" She invites listeners to explore the rationale behind the programming and offers behind-the-scenes insights from the rehearsal rooms and through dialogues with actors, producers, and directors. With a strong focus on social justice issues, the podcast seeks to decolonize knowledge and performance traditions of Shakespeare and ways of thinking about our changing world.

The podcast episodes are accessible not only in terms of their length, which are 30 minutes on average (except for season finales, which tend to be longer), but also in their multimodal methods of delivery. Buoyed by topic tags, each episode has a downloadable transcript and can be enjoyed on the Globe's intuitively designed website or through Apple Podcasts, Deezer, Google Podcasts, iHeart, RSS, Spotify, and Stitcher. Through the tags, listeners can easily navigate from episode to episode based on their interests. Moreover, inclusive and colloquial language makes the conversations suitable for students of Shakespeare and theatre, educators trying to diversify their curricula, and activists seeking to link the performing arts to social justice.

One drawback of the podcast is that its curated dialogues are not interactive in nature and lack the casual dynamics that make podcasts attractive. Speakers take turns in sharing their views with limited to no engagement with one another. After playing the podcast for one of my students, their feedback indicated that "the way in which the [episodes] were presented was not consistently interesting" and that, while listening on Spotify allows one to "listen and travel freely," they missed "the ability to confer with the transcript" for unfamiliar words and accents.[3]

From my educator's point of view, however, the flip side of the lack of spontaneity is in fact tightly curated subsections that enable fragmentary consumption in our era of "distracted attention."[4] Within each episode, listeners can fast forward to any point without feeling lost, which is a key advantage in design and delivery. The modularized segments make the episodes user-friendly for the classroom, as educators can play specific portions of an episode to stimulate discussion or integrate a relevant segment for out-of-class

3. Alexandra Fratto, University Honors Program research assistant, George Washington University, personal communication, 20 February 2023.

4. Joubin, "Collaborative Rhizomatic Learning," 234.

assignments. And rather than having to follow an episode from its beginning to end, listeners—both students and educators—are easily able to take a sampling approach and listen to a subtopic within an episode that interests them the most.

In what follows, I present a quick snapshot of a few randomly selected episodes presented in chronological order. And to demonstrate broader patterns of reception, I also include my student's reactions to the episodes.

Season 5, episode 3 was released at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, two days before Shakespeare's birthday in April 2020, and, as the title suggests, focuses on "Love in Isolation." Director Peter Brook was in conversation remotely with Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe Michelle Terry, with Kathryn Hunter reciting select sonnets. The lower audio quality bears the mark of the dark days of the pandemic-induced lockdowns and helps us remember that this episode was not recorded with both speakers present in the same room. But Brook nonetheless demonstrates an unfailing optimism when he suggests that poetry helps us transcend "the mundane, […] the literal, the petty day to day." And this episode now gains fresh meaning as we listen to it in 2023 after Brook's passing; as my student was reminded, "even as the world pauses, love persists, and we will continue to grow."[5]

"How Do We Decolonise Shakespeare?" is the title and topic of season 6, episode 5, which is the final episode of the series on Shakespeare and Race. This episode features Farah Karim-Cooper and Michelle Terry, who co-curated the 2020 digital Shakespeare and Race festival, as well as practitioners, scholars, and even a student. Speakers suggest a number of strategies to decolonize Shakespearean performance, ranging from colour-conscious casting and making education accessible to dissolving "Shakespeare's high cultural identity" and highlighting the work of Black writers. The availability and increasing prevalence of digital space is also making room for everyone, quite literally. Space limitation for creativity, team work, and performance should no longer be an obstacle to improving diversity. While speakers' opinions and levels of optimism about the prospect of decolonizing Shakespeare vary, they all agree that it is important to acknowledge the power dynamics that have fed into Shakespeare's status today.

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5. Fratto, personal communication, 20 January 2023.

Season 7, episode 2 ("Fear, Conjuring and Catharsis in *Macbeth*") weaves theory and practice to explore the question of genre. It focuses on conjuring and catharsis in *Macbeth*, elaborating on the relationship between art and fear and how that connection contributes to the tragedy's long afterlife. The episode poses an intriguing question: Is *Macbeth* a ghost story, since it features a ghost and three witches? The dialogue goes on to cover the superstitions around *Macbeth*, including the tradition of not vocalizing the name Macbeth, which is an "instrument of darkness," inside a theatre. My student enjoyed this episode, writing that "as a student of Latin American literature, I think this episode's content permits an exploration of how the genre of horror has been used to delve into political issues throughout global literature."[6]

While some episodes may seem more monotonic, others draw listeners in with a dynamic opening statement by a guest speaker before the host takes over to formally welcome the listeners and lay out the key themes of the episode. In season 8, episode 3, "Making a Connection," for instance, Globe volunteer Jemima opens the podcast by reflecting, in a spontaneous tone, on what she missed the most during the pandemic-induced period of isolation: human connection. Music with levity fades in towards the end of her segment to cue Greenberg's formal opening, in which she states that "after a year of isolation, […] connection has been one of the vital things we've all been missing" and asks, "What are the connections that art spaces can bring, and how can that impact our mental health?"

Listeners and podcasters meeting in digital space may be "such stuff as dreams are made on," but the important topics of social justice covered by this series will not melt into thin air.

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Works Cited

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6. Fratto, personal communication, 1 February 2023.

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