

## Teaching All-Female and Non-Binary Shakespeare at the Performance

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Cross-gender and all-female cast productions have become a vibrant part of twenty-first century theater's animating of Shakespeare for modern audiences. For college teachers integrating the viewing of live performances into their classrooms, local productions featuring imaginative gender play through casting choices can often speak more immediately to students than traditional productions. As numerous scholars suggest, adapting course approaches to students' perspectives and providing what Jessica Walker calls "an accessible, inclusive, socially conscious, useful Shakespeare" are important aspects of teaching Shakespeare to all twenty-first century students and to marginalized students in particular (208).<sup>1</sup> And as the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies' "The Qualities of Mercy Project" demonstrates, regionally-specific classroom performance pedagogies can productively dismantle myths of Shakespearean universality, prioritize students' local knowledge and community concerns, and empower students to appropriate Shakespeare's work in the ways they need.<sup>2</sup> Performances that raise questions about identity through all-female, non-binary, and non-traditional casting can contribute to more culturally-responsive classrooms and help teachers better serve their female, femme-identified, non-binary, trans, and queer students, and students of color. This essay outlines my approach to teaching a recent upper-level literature course, "Early

Modern Drama on the Modern Stage,” that studied Shakespeare through the experimental work of two Seattle-area production companies—upstart crow collective and The Fern Shakespeare Company—using racially diverse all-female and non-binary casts. I explain the course’s two major collaborative projects, argue for the importance of intentionally framing such inclusively-cast productions, and describe the enlivened learning that emerges from students’ creative and analytical engagements with the local voices of modern Shakespearean performance, which can offer representations of their identities in live theater within their own communities.

## Course Design, Approach, and Assignments

The genesis of this course is twofold: my access to a unique teaching resource in a local all-female and non-binary production company committed to reimagining classical plays for a modern audience and the generative work of a 2018 Shakespeare Association of America seminar on “Teaching Shakespeare at the Performance.” Founded by my Seattle University colleague Rosa Joshi, Kate Wisniewski and Betsy Schwartz, upstart crow collective has produced all-female and non-binary cast plays in Seattle since 2006. In the past I have incorporated their live performances into my Shakespeare class in a supplemental rather than primary way, such as taking students to see their 2017 two-part adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays, *Bring Down the House*, after studying *2 Henry VI*. The transformative experience of teaching *Bring Down the House* in such a context motivated me to better prioritize upstart-crow’s all-female and non-binary productions.<sup>3</sup> I also wanted to more fully realize Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi’s student-centered and culturally-responsive approach to using performance and

discussing embodiment in the classroom. Thompson and Turchi advocate for classroom pedagogies, including performance-based approaches, that engage students' documented interests in an “*explicit exploration of identity*”—which they identify as an important “twenty-first century habit of learning” (*Teaching Shakespeare* 5) valued by students—through the use of “intentional frames” (*Teaching Shakespeare* 18) that foreground rather than gloss over discussions of difference. A Shakespeare class devoted to embodiment in local performance suggested an intentional frame where students might “grappl[e] productively with race, gender, ability, and sexuality” and see “notions of difference” as critical rather than tangential to the study of Shakespeare, but I was unsure how best to accomplish these goals within my English department's curricular needs (Thompson and Turchi, “Embodiment,” 730, 731).<sup>4</sup> The work of my fellow SAA seminar participants Niamh O'Leary and Jayme Yeo, whose essays are also featured in this roundtable, offered particularly useful models: Yeo's class on archiving the Nashville Shakespeare Festival's performances pointed me toward a public-facing framework featuring a local production company, while O'Leary's five-step in-class preparation process for studying Shakespeare at the live performance was invaluable to my assignment design.<sup>5</sup>

In my course, we studied four plays in-depth: *Richard III* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, which allowed us to see two live, local performances, and *Julius Caesar* and *The Tempest*, which both have long, rich histories of all-female or cross-gender performances and productions by female directors Phyllida Lloyd and Julie Taymor available on film. I designed assignments typical of an upper-level English course, including short papers to strengthen close reading, as well as experimental projects to capitalize on our access to local theater, including an audience

guide and a collaborative theater review. Students began this scaffolded work with close analysis papers on passages from each play, assignments intended to deepen close reading skills, generate class discussion, and identify scholarly cruxes likely to be strongly interpreted through performance choices. Beginning with an interesting passage of their choice from the day's assigned reading, students first paraphrased and then analyzed the language of their selection with a focus, but not a thesis, in mind. The exploratory priorities of this assignment directed students to formulate questions and issues that remained playfully available for interpretation through performance. Class discussion of these passages directed our study of the play text, and generated an informal class list of moments that would require our careful attention during a performance. (For more on using scholarly cruxes as a starting point, see the roundtable essay by Elizabeth Charlebois.) Miriam Gilbert establishes the value of such "production-oriented writing assignments" as simple and three-fold: they "can increase the depth of students' close reading, can broaden students' awareness of interpretive choices, and can stimulate students' imagination" (316). I pursued similar goals with post-performance analyses that asked students to posit arguments about the production's interpretation of the play text and attend carefully to performance choices as evidence while focusing on those aspects of the production they found most compelling. These regular close analysis and performance analysis papers created the ground work for class discussions and the course's two large collaborative assignments, which I describe at length below.

My approach to using performance in the literature classroom relies on Jessica Winston's "situated interpretation," "in which performance is understood as an interpretation of a play that

is shaped in relation to the text, but which is also in conversation with traditions of reception in criticism and performance, as well as with contemporary social, artistic, and political concerns” (297).<sup>6</sup> This view of performance as an interpretation shaped, in part, by performance histories is particularly important for student work on all-female and non-binary productions, which often cite or push back against established performance traditions, both of Shakespeare in general and of individual plays, and which have their own histories of navigating dominant expectations. As James N. Loehlin notes, introducing students to the performance histories of particular plays offers opportunities “to see how the cultural context of a production enables or precludes certain meanings,” and “can show how profoundly these plays have been transformed through performance in changing historical moments” (636). In the case of cross-gender and all-female casting, the history of one striking performance choice employed across a number of productions created in different historical moments and for different cultural purposes can do equally resonant pedagogical work. Like Cassie M. Muira’s reception-based approach, studying historical as well as modern responses to women and non-binary people embodying Shakespeare can help students interrogate both “the concept of canonicity and the origin of bardolatry” (49) as well as “their own assumptions about Shakespeare within the larger educational, cultural, and arts institutions that have shaped them” (46). My low stakes written assignments thus approached all-female and non-binary performances as situated interpretations within both a history of reception and a contemporary political moment. They also scaffolded key components of two major outward facing projects, a collaborative performance review for a scholarly journal and an audience guide.

The collaborative performance review proposed a reach beyond the confines of the college classroom and an opportunity for students to create publishable work together. O’Leary, reviews editor of *Early Modern Culture*, invited me to submit student reviews of our two live productions, and I organized this project to culminate in work we could send to the journal. In our first week, we studied the journal website and read theater reviews—including a collaborative one written by Ohio State students and Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich—to discern generic conventions, find lively examples, and initiate a discussion of biases in our reception of plays. These examples normalized collaborative publication, gave students a concrete sense of the format for their final product, and created excitement. After writing individual performance analyses and discussing each production with the directors and actors, in the last three weeks students divided into two groups, one for each performance, and then again into subgroups of two writers each based on their interests. Four very structured in-class working days and specific task sheets provided a step-by-step process for revising their fourteen individual performance reviews into two collaborative reviews. Students commented on their peers’ individual analyses, decided upon a thematic concept for each collaboration, assigned writer pairings, and offered feedback for drafting before working in subgroups, and eventually, review groups. Our final exam period was devoted to proofreading and signing author contracts for *Early Modern Culture*, which became a moving and celebratory act for students—marked by picture-taking and texts to family and friends—that revealed their pride in writing for a scholarly public beyond the classroom.



**Figure 1. (L-R) Sarah Harlett and Suzanne Bouchard in *Richard III* presented by Seattle Shakespeare Company and upstart crow collective. Photo by HMMM Productions.**

## **The Audience Guide Project**

The audience guide project posits two sets of readers beyond the class: the theater company practitioners and their audience members. Students were asked to take an academic approach that would complement each company's production materials, requiring them to familiarize themselves with the company's web presence, advertising, and published interviews while also deepening students' knowledge of performance theory and theater history on the topic

of cross-gender, all-female, and non-binary casting. The project was broken up into seven different components to demonstrate students' competencies with text, performance, history, and theory: 1) an account of the production situated within the history of cross-gender and all-female performance of Shakespeare; 2) an account of the production situated within relevant performance theory; 3) an informative history of the company's formation, mission, past performances and future plans; 4) a summary of journalistic reviews from local sources that synthesized evaluative assessments of the production; 5) a character or scene study; 6) a practitioner interview; 7) a concluding reflection on the students' historicized interpretation of the performance.

While performance-based pedagogies are frequently charged with ahistoricity, Loehlin observes that these approaches more often produce students' "awareness of the plays as situated in history: conditioned by the original circumstances of their performance, but also remade according to changing cultural conditions" (635).<sup>7</sup> The audience guide project privileged students' personal engagement with the performances, but the intentional frames of its components sought to balance that attention with the local histories of production companies still fighting for recognition and the international histories of all-female production companies that lent context to the experiences of the practitioners we studied.<sup>8</sup> In their situated and informative histories, for example, students connected The Fern Shakespeare Company and upstart crow collective's divergent vocabularies of representation to those of more well-known all-female Shakespeare companies. Whereas upstart crow collective explicitly avows a feminist agenda, a commitment to all-female and non-binary casting, and a desire to reformulate claims about



which bodies count under the rubric of Shakespearean universality, The Fern Shakespeare Company takes an approach that most students saw as akin to the “female creative stakeholders” described by Kim Solga, who “frequently insist on their allegiance to the ‘universal humanity’ critical norm” as a protective measure (105). Students grappled with the cast’s self-assessment, which embraced the authenticity of original practices and the authority of Shakespearean intentionality, described their aims as truth-telling and identified their casting process as finding the right person. This rhetoric positioned the production’s feminist possibilities as naturally emerging from Shakespearean universals without directorial intervention or intention.<sup>9</sup>

Loehlin’s position that students’ “awareness of the historical contingency” of theatrical effects “works against any complacent belief in the universal, unchanging, and ultimately conservative nature of Shakespearean drama” anticipates my students’ responses to The Fern’s self-positioning: eager to hear a directorial vision that included socio-political intention and familiar already with upstart crew collective’s different approach, they were thoughtfully skeptical (636). Students wrote on how such a position potentially foreclosed discussion of the interpretive effects of their two non-binary lead actors by identifying their casting as completely “blind” to gender. But examining The Fern Shakespeare Company’s explanatory vocabularies alongside international histories of female directors and the reception of cross-gender casting made visible the pressures placed upon female directors, all-female companies, and female and non-binary casts challenging gender expectations in the theater. The survey and summary of journalistic reviews component of the audience guide project was similarly valuable, as they revealed the sometime punitive local responses and public assumptions about what constitutes

“appropriate” staging of Shakespeare. Examining the contrasting self-representations of two production companies alongside their complex historical roots in theatrical and educational institutions framed these productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Richard III* as situated interpretations that dealt specifically with questions of identity and brought “bardolatry itself as a critical object of inquiry” into our classroom (Muir 50). The audience guide project, more than I anticipated, underscored the importance of historicized interpretation of larger institutional practices and traditions as well as individual performances.



**Figure 2. (L-R) Sarah Harlett and Porscha Shaw in *Richard III* presented by Seattle Shakespeare Company and upstart crow collective. Photo by HMMM Productions.**

## **Pedagogical Payoffs**

Students' increased investments in learning emerged in this course from 1) their collaborative writing for public audiences, 2) their awareness of ethical responsibilities in writing about local theater companies, 3) their sense of the classroom as a place for important, ongoing, critical conversations that could be both politically and personally important, and 4) their valuation of their own contributions to these critical conversations about Shakespeare. Another

equally important outcome of our class discussions of gendered embodiment on stage was that they enabled—even demanded—corresponding discussions of racial embodiment.

One of the many surprises that emerged from both outward-facing projects was the power of asking students to produce timely, written work for a public audience, an experience not unique to either the Shakespeare classroom or the subject of all-female and non-binary productions but instead manifested by our access to local theater and a national journal's readership. Nearly all of the students in this class had taken prior courses with me, and while all were strong students, their explicit acknowledgments of how different it felt for them to write for a scholarly audience outside of the classroom were still remarkable. Student evaluation comments prominently featured what they saw as the uniqueness of the opportunity to write together for *Early Modern Culture*. As one student wrote, "I felt as though the work I did had scholarly legitimacy to it." Student responses to this aspect of the course align with Thompson and Turchi's observations about advanced learners studying Shakespeare, who "need opportunities to make meaning together, combining their insights and pooling their understanding" in ways that bring their "struggle with complex texts" out of isolation (*Teaching Shakespeare* 4). While my assessment rubric for this project did not explicitly require students to address the centrality of identity to studying Shakespeare, as Thompson and Turchi recommend, the productions themselves did. The collaborative review of *Much Ado About Nothing* argued that the femme and non-binary bodies of the cast used expressions of grief rather than jealousy to cite masculinity in potentially redemptive ways, while the review of *Richard III* addressed the interpretive effects of the production's double-casting of a Black woman, Porscha Shaw, as both

Richmond and Lady Anne, as well as the surprising ways 3.7 underscored Richard's artifice through a conscious attentiveness to the female bodies of its actors.

Students also felt an ethical responsibility to the production companies they were learning and writing about, seeing these companies' performances as important, political work and seeing their own responses to these performances in the context of historical barriers to women and non-binary people and proprietary claims over who can perform Shakespeare. Through their work on the audience guides' interviews and discussions with cast and crew members, students became more conscious of the power of their own voices to tell stories of Shakespearean performance in a scholarly and historically-grounded way. While students rarely have qualms about sharpening their tools of critique upon Shakespeare's texts (nor should they), my class was concerned about the effects of their reviews and analyses on production companies comprised of individuals fighting for representation on the Shakespearean stage. Student reviewers had robust discussions about the ethics of their public writing, noting that The Fern Shakespeare Company's investments in claims to Shakespearean universality and original performance practices were in part the result of a wider policing of all-female and non-binary companies and a history of audience reception of productions perceived as "inauthentic" or "political." Aware of the performance as a situated interpretation of *Much Ado About Nothing* that seemed to skim over the play text's gender politics through strongly sympathetic male characters and to minimize the possibilities of its obvious intentionality in casting choices, most students offered these critiques only after explicitly addressing what they saw as their own ethical obligations to write about the

production in ways attentive to the histories of women and non-binary people performing Shakespeare within potentially hostile theatrical and institutional environments.

Another affordance of the class was a change in students' attitudes toward the critical conversation and their place within it. As a number of students noted in course evaluations and throughout class, they felt that they were doing important theoretical work on gender and performance, a realization that emerged primarily from a study of the language they needed to discuss the plays they were seeing and from the sense of urgency created by personal connections with the embodied figures they were attempting to write about. Students who sought explanatory vocabularies to describe upstart crow's casting practices relied most heavily on Terri Power's categories of "cross-dressed," "cross-gendered," and "trans-dressed" performances, which allowed them to account for both stage practice and audience effect, as this student does in her audience guide:

upstart crow collective's production of *Richard III* is best described . . . as a cross-gendered performance. In the production, the characters are portrayed as men, however the audience is not asked to suspend disbelief regarding the actresses' gender and gendered bodies. Indeed, the bodies of the actresses are called upon throughout the play to emphasize and heighten certain scenes. . . the actresses do not manipulate their voices or hide their forms, but rather perform masculinity as a trait that plays out on their own differently gendered bodies and identities. . . . upstart crow collective produces all-female Shakespeare to provide meaty, substantive roles to women. But as the history of all-female productions reveal, and as the women behind upstart crow collective

acknowledge themselves, creating these all-femme productions layers new (and political) meaning onto the play text. (8-9)

This student writer argues that upstart crow collective's production acknowledges, and directs, the effects of the actor's female or non-binary body; in a comparison to Lloyd's productions, she connects upstart crow collective's strategic practices and staged effects to their overt intentions to provide roles for women and non-binary people, and situates them alongside established all-female Shakespeare productions that make unapologetically political casting choices. While Power's categorizations became essential to our analyses, students were also motivated by a desire for even more precise descriptions of gender in performance, and located this work as an important area of scholarship to which they could contribute. One student noted on a course evaluation that their "favorite aspects of the class" were "being able to struggle together to define, redefine, or come up with words" and "working in rather uncharted territory which made it really hard to find the language for some of the things we were talking about."

Our study of local performances ultimately illuminated the pedagogical value of transformative Shakespeare performances that invite discussions of identity and difference through conscious casting decisions. Upstart crow collective was unabashed about its political interventions: the gender equity in theater its all-female and non-binary, non-traditional casting enables, the reconsideration of gendered expectations it aims to produce in its audiences, and the political topicality its plays address. upstart crow actor Peggy Gannon claimed in a classroom visit that a theater company has responsibilities to its audiences because all casting choices have effects—because all bodies on stage mean something: "Any choice you make is going to be a

socio-political choice, even if it is not your goal first and foremost to do so . . . You are responsible for political ripples in the audience and community.” My students embraced this narrative of responsibility for the effects (including unintended ones) of casting choices that take up questions of identity, and it deepened their own attention to the vocabularies we used to discuss embodied representation as well as their engagement with the problems and possibilities of “blind” casting.

As a result of my scholarly priorities and my own positionality, the class as I designed it privileged discussions of gender over other categories of identity, an aspect that I am eager to change. But my students quickly saw that attention to gendered embodiment on stage required attention to all kinds of embodied representation, including and especially ability and race, and they pushed the course, and me, toward a more intersectional approach. upstart crow collective’s foregrounding of their racially-diverse casting and their articulation of a production’s responsibility for its socio-political choices within a community created a productive dialogue with our readings from Thompson’s collection *Colorblind Shakespeare*, which traces the contested definitions, histories, and effects of colorblind casting. Thompson notes that some approaches place “the onus of being ‘blind’ to race . . . completely on the audience” (6), while others contend that audiences cannot—and perhaps should not—always achieve such colorblindness, an “admission that socio-political and cultural-historical factors influence an audience’s viewing abilities” (7). Performances of racialized identities, according to Thompson, “should raise questions about the very nature of identity” . . . “not by claiming that race is insignificant, but rather by asking how significance is achieved and perceived” (Thompson 14).



As one student wrote in a course evaluation, Thompson’s scholarship and practitioner interviews were especially helpful “in pointing out the need for conversations on race in casting and the way that people need to be willing to have those conversations.” Confronted with two local models that mapped out “blind” and “conscious” approaches to both gender and race, students gravitated toward narratives that invited dialogue and acknowledged the significance of difference, and nearly every audience guide attempted to engage with racial as well as gendered embodiment on stage. Most students found upstart crow collective’s more racially-diverse cast, attentiveness to the effects of race on stage, and insistence upon engaging in difficult conversations about embodied identities not only hugely compelling, feminist theater but an instructive guide to crafting their own burgeoning scholarly identities.

Thompson and Turchi observe that an embodied approach to classroom performance “will keep Shakespeare relevant because critical engagements in performances provide not only cultural capital but also ownership” (“Embodiment” 736). An embodied approach to studying Shakespeare through regional live performance can similarly provide cultural capital and ownership of Shakespeare to students. I suggest we can find an additional, related affordance: a sense of responsibility to one’s Shakespeare community—comprised of the bodies, identities, and differences of its practitioners, companies, scholars, teachers, and students—that might strengthen our students’ investments in learning as well as the ethics of our own pedagogies.



**Figure 3. The cast of *Richard III* presented by Seattle Shakespeare Company and upstart crow collective. Photo by HMMM Productions.**

## **Limitations and Possibilities**

The class I have described was largely possible because of my access to multiple local theater companies devoted to creating thoughtful all-female and nonbinary Shakespeare, a unique resource unavailable to many teachers pre COVID-19 pandemic, and to nearly everyone during the pandemic itself. The entire concept of teaching Shakespeare “at” the performance has been radically, and productively, challenged since I taught this course. While in many ways

typical modes of teaching through live theater have contracted during 2020-2021—and the devastating effects of the global pandemic on the livelihoods of theater practitioners cannot be forgotten—in other ways access to innovative theater has expanded, through the inventive use of streaming live performance, audio plays, and other online content. I briefly gesture to what I hope are workable suggestions for modifying course content and assignments for those who do not have the kinds of resources I used in my course, and I point to a few intriguing possibilities that have emerged from the new pandemic context. Some of these modifications and possibilities emphasize attention to cross-gender or all-female and nonbinary casting, while others are more focused on creating public-facing student work or more broadly defined questions of identity and embodiment.

Much of the student learning and writing about women-led theater, cross-gender casting, and contemporary all-female and non-binary productions I discuss can occur through the use of films or filmed productions, which offer their own benefits: students can watch and re-watch them on demand around their own schedules, and they often cost less than live performance. Two later articles in this roundtable, by Kirwan and Winston, provide helpful introductions to the genres of live broadcast—and live recorded—theatrical performances. Here I focus on resources specific to productions that are all-female or cast cross-gender. While my course centered on two local live performances, a vital component was our study of Lloyd's now widely available all-female 2012-2016 Shakespeare Trilogy (*Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV* and *The Tempest*) on film.<sup>10</sup> Another much discussed cross-gendered production, Michelle Terry's 2018 *Hamlet*, is also available through Globe Player. These high-profile UK productions have sparked valuable

scholarship on cross-gendered casting and reviews that document both positive and pernicious responses to all-female Shakespeare. Such resources, which help students situate plays within complex performance histories, were a crucial element of my audience guide assignment. Some of the payoffs of the outward facing collaborative theater review might be achieved by a collaborative film or filmed live performance review posted on a public classroom blog or drafted with submission to an undergraduate research journal in mind. While these filmed examples cannot orient students toward specific theatrical communities as local live performance can, they do invite discussions of identity and difference and can be taught alongside other film versions such as Julie Taymor's *The Tempest* (featuring a female Prospera), Paul Quinn and Harry Lennix's *H4*, or the long performance tradition of female stage Hamlets.

Many theater companies released additional filmed content on streaming platforms or produced new online performances to navigate the closures of in-person shows during the pandemic. The Public Theater's 2020 Free Shakespeare on the Radio serialized audio broadcast of *Richard II* offers an accessible and exciting teaching resource for courses engaging with Shakespeare, performance, and identity. Divided into four episodes, the audio production directed by Saheem Ali features a predominately BIPOC ensemble cast and a female Bolingbroke. The episodes are usefully framed by dialogue with scholars Thompson and James Shapiro, and an accompanying Public Theater podcast, "Decolonizing Shakespeare," situates the production within conversations about spectator responses, the meaning of race in performance, contemporary national events, and the future of theater and Shakespeare with Thompson and Ali. I assigned this radio play in a 2021 Shakespeare course; students loved the production's

compelling, clear performances, useful plot recaps, and situating by critics, and they reported that they found *Richard II* the *easiest* of the quarter's plays because they linked their reading to the audio episodes. The color conscious and cross-gender casting of the production, as well as the fresh audio format, opened up valuable class discussions about vocal embodiment and performance that convinced me of its central value to a course focused on gender, race, and Shakespeare performance. Broadcasts such as Ali's *Richard II* would work well as subjects for an audience guide assignment, and our now ubiquitous use of Zoom might enable student interviews and interactions with non-local cast and crew members.

A second new resource is Robert Myles' *The Show Must Go Online*, described as the "first, best, and most prolific creator of made-for-digital Shakespeare in response to the pandemic," devoted to "making Shakespeare for everyone, for free, forever." Produced rapidly over Zoom—each show is mounted in a single week—TSMGO makes all their productions available on YouTube and has begun to produce the work of other early modern dramatists, filling a need for accessible performances of early modern plays beyond Shakespeare's. Committed to "gender balanced casting and proactive inclusion of underrepresented groups," these inventive, sharp productions also feature excellent introductions by leading scholars and brief intermission interviews that provide valuable frameworks for students. The robust audience chat of "Digital Groundlings" captured along with the recorded performance, which "replicate[s] the Elizabethan theatre experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," might offer students tasked with an audience guide project unique ways to think about audience response to cross-gender casting (*The Show Must Go Online*).

Excellent all-female and nonbinary Shakespeare productions have become available to broader audiences through streaming live performance, but those that stream on demand for limited time spans—the Women’s Theatre Festival’s 2021 all-female cast *Othello* produced by an all-Black, all-femme creative team is one example—are not yet fully obtainable as repeatable teaching resources. But the existence of company-owned recordings of these live performances for streaming suggest future possibilities for scholars—and perhaps students—studying the usually ephemeral work of smaller theater companies. And the problems of accessibility raised to the forefront by the pandemic can be a catalyst for productive change. As theaters shift back to in-person production and we reflect on the value of newly available theatrical innovations and online teaching tools, teachers interested in the resources of local live theater will also have a bounty of new methods and modes for bringing the all-female and nonbinary Shakespeare performance to all our students.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Walker, 206-208 and Sheila T. Cavanagh, 195-197 as well as Thompson and Turchi's *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose*, especially "Embodiment: What is it (not)?" and their 2017 version, "Embodiment and the Classroom Performance." *Early Modern Culture*'s ten essays in "First-Generation Shakespeare" similarly advocate empowering, student-centered approaches. See, in particular, Cassie M. Miura's reception-based approach. Katherine Gillen and Lisa Jennings offer guidelines for crafting antiracist Shakespeare pedagogy that include privileging students' cultural knowledge and allowing exploration of their identities alongside addressing the legacies of colonialism and white supremacy that inform Shakespeare's works, our discipline, and our academic institutions ("Decolonizing Shakespeare?").

<sup>2</sup>See "The Qualities of Mercy Project: Dispatches," which documents six classroom experiences of performing scenes from *The Merchant of Venice* "filtered through the lenses of [their] own communities" (Way).

<sup>3</sup>I have published elsewhere about this experience teaching *Bring Down the House* in a 2017 Shakespeare course; see Meyer, "Bringing Down the Bard's House: Pedagogy, Representation, and the All-Female Cast."

<sup>4</sup>Loehlin also argues that a performance approach can provide a "laboratory where the implications of gender, race, sexuality, and social empowerment—and their inheritance in the traditions of received 'Shakespeare'—can become visible, and discussible" (636). Thompson and Turchi's work presses teachers to remember that such discussions are not laboratory work undertaken in isolation but are part of students' lived experiences.

<sup>5</sup> See O’Leary’s and Yeo’s essays in this roundtable.

<sup>6</sup> Winston identifies situated interpretation as a midpoint on a continuum that prioritizes “textual interpretation” on one end and “the contingencies of performance” at the other (297). See also G.B. Shand’s description of play texts as “sites of constant and normal negotiation between textualized obligation and multiple legitimate performative options” (245) in the context of using performance to teach close reading, and Barbara Hodgdon, 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson and Turchi similarly argue that a classroom’s intentional frames can enable embodied performances’ “strategic deployment of history” (“Embodiment” 733). Stephen Buhler notes that the “larger cultural attitudes that help shape how texts and performances are produced and received can become clearer and more meaningful to students” (231) through the “highly flexible resource” (220) of stage history, belying the “ahistoricity thought to be inherent in performance theory” (231).

<sup>8</sup> Assigned readings featuring case studies included Elizabeth Klett’s *Cross-Gender Shakespeare* and James Bulman’s *Shakespeare Re-dressed*. Melissa D. Aaron’s study of all-female Shakespeare companies and Kim Solga’s examination of women directors were also valuable, as was Terri Power’s chapter on female players and all-female companies and case study of Lloyd’s Donmar Warehouse *Julius Caesar* in her indispensable *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice*.

<sup>9</sup> Solga, among other scholars, identifies Lloyd as a successful director who overtly owns both Shakespearean and feminist labels, in contrast to others who place “a radical vision on stage but refused to stake their (obvious) claim to ownership,” choosing instead to disavow the gender politics of their work (114-15). Students in my class watched two of Lloyd’s Shakespeare



Trilogy plays and read Harriet Walter's *Brutus and Other Heroines*, additions that proved fruitful for situating local productions within larger transnational precedents.

<sup>10</sup>Lloyd's *Julius Caesar* is available through PBS Great Performances with a Passport subscription, while all three productions are available with an institutional subscription to DigitalTheatre+ or Drama Online, and can be purchased individually or as a boxed set on DVD.

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