

**Stephen O’Neill, ed. 2018. *Broadcast Your Shakespeare*  
(*Continuity and Change across Media*). London and  
New York: Bloomsbury**

Víctor Huertas Martín  
*UNED, Spain*

The field of Shakespearean adaptation moves onwards and upwards since it covers a wide range of instances of Shakespearean convergence of old and new media in both the current as well as the twentieth century. In this volume, leading Shakespearean scholars – Stephen O’Neill, Darlena Ciraulo, Robert Sawyer, Diana E. Henderson, David C. Moberly, Christy Desmet, Joseph Haughey, Kirk Hendershott-Kraetzer, Sarah Olive, Romano Mullin, Douglas M. Lanier, Anna Blackwell and Courtney Lehmann – examine various examples of mediatized Shakespearean phenomena. The co-existence of various forms of media produces rhizomatic intersections between Shakespeare’s texts and different forms of fiction that empower users and develop vernacular means of storytelling. These narrative forms manipulate and appropriate Shakespearean sources. The proliferation of traditional perspectives (i.e., the study of generic conventions to read serial appropriations of Shakespeare, and examples of ideological, materialist and feminist criticism), as well as more provocative and newer critical approaches (including a SWOT<sup>1</sup> study of the state of affairs at MIT Shakespeare) allows us to explore the impact of Shakespeare’s texts both in traditional media such as film, radio, the phonograph or TV serials and in comparatively recent types of media: Wikipedia, social networks, Tumblr, vlogs, or twitter. This collection of essays, engaging with these collisions between old and new media and their manifestations, present Shakespearean performance rhizomatically and as a series of participatory, dialogical and community-based exchanges through which authors and audiences exchange roles and share their ideas and views on performances and texts. Nevertheless, as the essays show, not all aspects of mediatized Shakespeare create utopian networks of participation. The book also points to the

---

<sup>1</sup> SWOT: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

examples of gender discrimination, ethnocentrism and conservatism present in some of these mediatized Shakespeares.

O'Neill's "Introduction" defines "broadcast" as the transmission "on a large scale as with radio and TV" (3) and, in this definition, he includes the production of media that foster participatory culture. The rhizomatic and non-hierarchical dissemination of Shakespeare's works across old and new media takes place within a media ecology which metaphorically extends the meaning of "broadcasting" to "sowing" or "scattering." Shakespearean texts are presented as handfuls of seeds cast through the air so that they germinate and grow into crops to be harvested. The authors compare sections of Shakespearean texts to seeds which are scattered across the field that the aforementioned ecology represents. According to this metaphor, these Shakespearean texts can be diluted, lost or mingled with different media objects. The broadcast metaphor is further extended to present media adaptations as forms of amplification of Shakespeare's works, therefore seen as "proliferation" and "surfeit" within the vast media landscape (6).

One major critical strand of the book is articulated around censorship, ethics and propaganda. Ciraulo's chapter on the Warner Brothers' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* focuses on the film's creation of an ostensibly harmless fantasy world as an interpellation mechanism for popular audiences. Yet, as Sawyer's essay on Orson Welles' broadcasts of *Julius Caesar* shows, this fantasy world was neither free from censorship nor from the moralistic agenda which defined the studios' programmatic impetuses. Sawyer's chapter describes how the radio—originally intended as a vehicle for government propaganda embraced by artists like John Houseman—became a means of subversion: Welles used the technical effects of the radio to denounce the fascist propaganda of the time.

The essays here emphasize the role of media in popularizing Shakespeare at schools. Haughey's chapter on the impact of the invention of the gramophone and the musical accompaniments, recorded speeches and, subsequently, recorded plays brought about by such inventions, describes the enhancing of American students' understanding of and interest in Shakespeare's work. This essay celebrates the manner in which, at a time when culture in the United States was experiencing diminishing interest in Shakespeare, the

gramophone offered the chance to re-ignite engagement with his works. Voices, musical pieces and the popular and prestige-based appeal of well-known speakers constituted, as the chapter explains, main attractors for teachers and popular audiences. Sawyer's essay on Welles tackles the artist's massive contribution to spread Shakespeare amongst members of the educational sector with his editions of the plays and his numerous educational initiatives, whether as a student, a scholar or as an artist.

The essays also offer insightful commentaries on developing media-based genres that display different storytelling conventions. Desmet's chapter demonstrates that "Emo *Hamlets*" have become normative in contemporary representations and interpretations of the Prince of Denmark in digital media. This phenomenon invites regarding Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) as a source for subsequent *Hamlet* productions which, as this film does, engage media obsolescence. Likewise, these "Emo *Hamlets*" portray the sulky protagonist in contrast with the eloquent Renaissance character in mainstream readings of the play. Emos are figures of popular culture who have been downgraded by guardians of high culture. Desmet casts light upon the potential interpretive possibilities presented by Emo *Hamlets*. Olive's analysis of the episode "Generation of Vipers" in the crime series *Inspector Lewis* compares Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and Patrick Harbinson's script. She contends that *Troilus and Cressida* is transformed to fit the tragic expectations of crime drama: the heroine dies a victimized woman despite her feminist stance. Lanier's chapter, "Vlogging the Bard" explores the storytelling devices in serialized adaptations of Shakespearean plays. In his view, the participatory modes of performance in these media resort to forms of immersion that elude the cause-effect patterns of storytelling: diaristic manifestations, multiplicities of viewpoints, questions and answers, soliloquies, spontaneous scenes capturing the reality of the moment, etc. Vlogging, thus, offers the audience a form of non-linear production reading likely to reconceive, amplify, re-motivate and recast the plays in an innovative manner. Hendershott-Kraetzer's essay describes the deviant portrayals of Juliet to be found in Tumblr, where the treatment of the heroine can reject the romance narrative in Shakespeare's original.

The celebratory tones of the book are accompanied by denunciations of the aspects which undermine the democratizing effects of digital technologies. Apart from Olive's denunciation of the episode's conservative approach to gender politics, Mullin's chapter on the Twitter group @HollowCrownFans describes how the lines between production and consumption blur in social networks since users interact with each other and modify Shakespearean plays and source texts, blending old and new media. People wanting to share their views on the series *The Hollow Crown* (2012) and *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* (2016) find a communal space. Unfortunately, most interventions are made by white, Anglo-Saxon participants, which can rightfully lead us to interrogate the wide-reaching claims of democratization that these open platforms often make to attract users and participants. Blackwell's chapter, "Somewhere in the world [...]. Someone misquoted Shakespeare. I can sense it," on the public construction of Tom Hiddlestone's star persona as both an appealing figure of popular mainstream culture and as an educated classically trained Shakespearean, clarifies why heritage productions like *The Hollow Crown* attract less diverse audiences. As Blackwell suggests, while Hiddlestone's online reaffirmation of his cultural authority is often humorous and informal, his Etonian education, his Englishness, his masculinized pose and his presence in multiple digital platforms nevertheless configure the actor's body as a signifier of Shakespearean authority, which reminds audiences that the popularization and safe-keeping of the Bard's cachet should be entrusted to those with the adequate qualifications. Henderson carries out her provocative SWOT analysis of the situation at MIT Shakespeare. The open access MIT archives have given students and researchers the chance to study Shakespearean performances across the globe. Nevertheless, as Henderson's essay shows, some countries' performances are under-represented. Though Henderson's tone is optimistic, her analysis clarifies that the system is experiencing difficulties to be financially and functionally sustainable. Moberly's chapter on Wikipedia reveals that, while the online encyclopaedia attracts a wide range of academic and non-academic contributors, most of them are male. Additionally, most contributions tackle male-oriented topics. Female participants are largely absent, likely to stop participating and sometimes even bullied. In her "Afterword," Lehmann denounces the neoliberal discourse of "openness" produced by private sponsors

financing the arts to wash-up their corruption and their scandals. The essay is, nevertheless, completed with examples of performance intended as resistance to such duplicities.

This collection is a necessary read for scholars interested in Shakespearean adaptation. Digital platforms like Twitter, Tumblr, Wikipedia and forms of storytelling such as vlogging, together with older forms of media – film, TV, radio, records – offer vast territories of exploration. The book organizes these types of media, both old and new, and provides approaches for such explorations in what otherwise might seem an unfamiliar and entangled maze. In line with the objects of study presented throughout the book, the contributors make use of innovative and more traditional methods of analysis illustrating the continuities between emergent and established forms of Shakespearean performance and scholarship.

---

*How to cite this review:*

Huertas Martín, Víctor. Review of Stephen O'Neill, ed. *Broadcast Your Shakespeare (Continuity and Change across Media)* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018). *SEDERI* 28 (2018): 155–59.

*Author's contact:* [vmhuertas@invi.uned.es](mailto:vmhuertas@invi.uned.es)

*Postal address:* Facultad de Filología – UNED – Paseo Senda del Rey, 7 – 28040 Madrid – Spain