

SAA 2015: Shakespeare and Advertising Seminar

Abstracts

Melissa D. Aaron (California Polytechnic State University, USA), ‘Marketing Authenticity—Using “Real” Shakespeare to sell Shakespeare’

“The Daily Prophet exists to sell itself, you silly girl.” Rita Skeeter, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*

When is Shakespeare—or, to be precise, the promise of an “authentic experience” of Shakespeare—used to sell Shakespeare? Part of a larger study on the economics of original practice and the selection of repertory as part of the business strategy of Shakespeare companies, this paper will examine the ways in which the promise of “real” or “authentic” Shakespeare is used to sell twenty-first century productions. Which elements of original practice are used—casting, costuming, properties, or venue—in order to draw in audiences? To which audiences is such a campaign designed to appeal? Are the elements used for marketing the most or least expensive in original practice, and is the cost of these elements offset by the marketing strategy? Productions examined will include the Renaissance season(s) of the American Shakespeare Center, the productions of the new Sam Wanamaker Theater at the Globe in London, and the recent touring production of the Globe Theatre’s *Twelfth Night*.

David J. Baker (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA), “‘We are sure that they are true’: Ballads and Early Modern Advertising’

Early modern English ballads were self-advertising merchandise, and they were phenomenally successful. But, although ballads were well known, and even to the most upscale of customers, they brought little respectability to their medium, and especially among upscale customers. On the contrary, the antipathy of the high-born and the high-minded for ballads was notorious. In this paper, I briefly consider this paradox of early modern advertising. Why did these songs, which sold so well, and which saturated popular (and even elite) culture, elicit such contempt? The problem with ballads, I suggest, was that they were *too successful*, both as merchandise and advertising. As the former, they adumbrated disquieting new market realities. And, as the latter, they elicited—or at least could elicit—responses that refined sensibilities found hard to accommodate. I illustrate this response from Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* and Sir William Cornwallis’ *Essays*; both describe encounters with ballad singers in the streets.

Susan Bennett (University of Calgary, Canada), ‘Sponsored by Shakespeare?’

There has long been evidence of promotional uses of the Bard that connect explicitly to places and cultural institutions involved in the production of his works. Obvious examples include the ubiquitous gift shop and the increasingly diverse array of “souvenir” and other product purchases that advertise both the playwright and the theatre company and often the geographical location where the performance takes place. This is a mode that becomes an immersive experience of place in the case of Stratford-upon-Avon.

I hope in this paper to come at evidence of Shakespeare and advertising from a somewhat different angle – to think about instrumental uses of the Shakespeare brand for those corporate sponsors who underwrite particular performances or exhibitions. My core case study will be BP’s involvement with the World Shakespeare Festival, held as part of London’s 2012 Cultural Olympiad, to consider how the Shakespeare brand “sponsors” (or, more bluntly put, “greenwashes”) the UK’s national oil company and to what effect(s).

Clara Calvo (Universidad de Murcia), ‘Shakespeare and Edwardian advertising’

Advertising in the Edwardian period makes use of abundant quotations from the plays and poems. In this paper, I will discuss how the strategies of appropriation behind these quotations vary, as some quotations clearly mention the plays they belong to, and occasionally the characters associated with the words quoted, while others are decontextualised and silently attributed to “Shakespeare”. Whereas Victorian advertising seems to have favoured the explicit reference to plays and characters, during the first decade of the twentieth-century, there seems to be a trend towards the use of the “silent quotation”. This paper also argues that the ubiquity of Shakesperean quotations in Edwardian advertising is replicated in contemporary greeting cards and coronation souvenirs and probably paved the way for the appropriation of the plays and poems in patriotic postcards, recruiting posters and war propaganda during the Great War.

Kate Harvey (National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland), ‘Shakespeare, Lamb, and Children’s Publishing’

This paper examines the ways in which Mary and Charles Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) has been repackaged and reissued to new generations of children over the last 200 years. Whether they are marketed as study guides or stepping-stones to the ‘real’ texts, or simply as entertaining stories for children, the names ‘Shakespeare’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘Lamb’ are regularly used as markers of literary and cultural legitimacy. Perry Nodelman observes that ‘in terms of success in production, what children actually want to read or do end up reading is of less significance than what adult teachers, librarians, and parents will be willing to purchase for them to read’,¹ and adaptations for children of canonical literature are overwhelmingly marketed to adults, rather than children, on the basis of cultural capital. By examining what has been added to the *Tales* in the form of prefatory material, epilogues, footnotes, illustrations, and cover artwork, this paper will assess the strategies successive generations of authors and publishers have used to sell the *Tales* to the adults who act as gatekeepers to children’s reading.

Graham Holderness (University of Hertfordshire, UK), ‘Blood and Denim’

In 2006 celebrated art photographer David La Chapelle directed a 10-minute dramatic and music video advertisement for clothes retailer H&M, to promote a line of denim jeans. The film, titled *Romeo and Juliet*, was a truncated version of Shakespeare’s play, stylistically assimilated to Baz Luhrmann’s adaptation, and more directly to *West Side Story*. The advert appeared on H&M’s website, and was shown in some cinemas in Canada and the USA, before being withdrawn in the face of complaints that it glamorised gang violence to sell clothes. My paper will use this text as a basis for exploring the interconnections between fashion, art photography, film and music in examples of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* adapted for the purposes of advertising.

Jennifer Holl (Rhode Island College, USA), ‘Name-Dropping on the Early Modern Stage’

This paper explores the recurrent early modern metatheatrical trope of name-dropping—that is, the direct references to actors’ offstage names and identities—as a form of advertising. Though critics frequently speculate that Shakespeare may have indirectly referenced famous actors in his dramas—such as a supposed jab at Kempe in Hamlet’s instruction to the players—Shakespeare’s peers did so with much more audacity. In Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, Cokes demands to know of Littlewit (presumably played by Nathan Field), which of his puppets is the most talented, or rather, “Your best actor? Your Field?” (5.3.100). In Cooke’s *Greene’s Tu Quoque*, Thomas Greene, in the role of Bubble, notes that “Greene’s an ass,” before admitting that he is told he looks a great deal like him. Though such instances have been explored in their self-referential capacities, this paper posits that such metatheatric strategies performed complex advertorial functions as well, raising the visibility of the actors referenced, enticing playgoers to

¹ Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 4-5.

seek out referents to be in on the in-joke, and alerting audiences to the broader cultural lives of players, including their availability and salability in other plays and in a larger network of theatrically inspired media.

Courtney Lehmann (University of the Pacific), 'Buying in or selling out? Lois Weber's *The Merchant of Venice*'

In 1915, Lois Weber became the first woman elected to membership in the Motion Pictures Directors Association and the highest paid director—male or female—at Universal. Even more significant is the fact that one year earlier, Weber directed the first feature-length Shakespearean comedy, *The Merchant of Venice* (1914), a film that marked the beginning of her “propaganda period” (1914-1917). Described on the one hand as the “Wonder Girl Who Revolutionized the Infant Art of the Photoplay” and, on the other, as a wife who “raises her own vegetables” and “does her own cooking,” Lois Weber never attempted to resolve the mixed messages evinced by her contradictory existence as a powerful Hollywood director and disenfranchised female citizen. Although *The Los Angeles Herald* was quick to point out that Weber “never marched in a suffragist parade,” her films championed birth control and a minimum wage for women years before the passage of the 19th Amendment. How was Weber able to fly under the political radar while opening films with headlines of her own that read “Men are only boys grown tall?” And why did she turn to Shakespeare before launching into a series of “message films” or “social problem films” about class and gender exploitation, capital punishment, addiction, and anti-Semitism? This paper explores the ways in which Weber’s propaganda films engaged the most pressing issues of early 20th-century America by subscribing to a filmmaking ethos driven by moral ambiguities. In fact, I want to suggest that the elusiveness of ‘the message’ in Weber’s social problem films is precisely what made them possible, and that at the root of this mode of engagement are “tactics”—in De Certeau’s sense of the term—that correspond to the performance of “sly civility.”

Jami Rogers (University of Warwick, UK), 'Shakespeare, advertising and BAME performers (w.t.)'

The business of performing Shakespeare is an amalgam of competing priorities: artistic and the funding for the theatrical product. "Bums on seats" are a priority which requires a press department and advertising to achieve the goal of a house full enough to meet its financial targets. The advertising tactics of theatre companies employing black and ethnic minority (BAME) performers in Shakespeare will be under scrutiny in this paper. Productions potentially to be included are: the 1984 casting of a black actor to play Othello at the Young Vic Theatre (the first black Othello on a London stage in 20 years), the RSC's casting of the first black actor (David Oyelowo) to play a king in Shakespeare's history plays and Josette Simon's appearances in Shakespearean roles, from Rosaline in 1984 to Kate at the Leicester Playhouse in the 1990s. This paper seeks to investigate the link between promotion, advertising and the employment of ethnic minority actors in Shakespeare. Does the impact of press coverage of seminal events lead to complacency in casting? How has press interest changed over time? Does advertising have an effect on casting practices?

Catherine Thomas (College of Charleston, USA), 'Seven Ages Advertising in 19th Century Product Booklets'

My essay will examine two examples of nineteenth century marketing booklets that employ Jacques’ “seven ages of man” speech from 2.7 of *As You Like It*. The first, an 1881 advertisement for Dobbins’ Electric Soap, illustrates differently aged characters using the soap to improve their personal hygiene and the cleanliness of their homes. The second, an 1877 (?) advertisement for Johann Hoff Malt Extract, provides an “up to date” rendition of the “seven ages” speech, accompanied by comparative images showing how use of the extract can improve one’s appearance and fortitude over the course of a lifetime. I encountered both of these booklets while doing archival research at the Folger Shakespeare library.

In particular, I am interested in analyzing the ways Jacques' speech is modified and appropriated to fit the marketing messages of these two companies and implicitly comment on contemporary social (and potentially political) values. I also will investigate the history and impact of the "generic" framework of the advertising booklet, especially as it applies to these two samples. While it's clear Shakespeare's iconic value as a "national poet" of England is being capitalized upon to sell merchandise, the specific ways the booklets engage the language and context of this speech in *As You Like It* begs more attention.