

***Coriolanus*, Adaptation, and the Imaginative Dimensions of Power**

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*Coriolanus* has long been considered one of Shakespeare's most overtly political plays, a tragedy born from the collision between the fickleness of the masses and the destructive pride of the elites, as embodied in its title character. And yet its long and contentious adaptation history bespeaks a certain level of ambiguity towards, and discomfort with, its attempted confrontation with the fundamental difficulties of republican forms of government. It was first adapted by Nahum Tate in the 1680s as *The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth*, and then by John Dennis in 1720 as *The Invader of His Country* (with the opposing sympathies both titles imply); a 1933 French production provoked riots by both fascists and communists, who each saw the production as sympathetic to the opposite side; Brecht partially completed a Marxist retelling in the 1950s; and the 2011 movie adaptation by Ralph Fiennes deliberately evokes unflattering parallels between Coriolanus and the architects of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Throughout the past few centuries, *Coriolanus* has been repeatedly and consistently seen as relevant to the current political moment, even as the nature of that moment -- and indeed the political sympathies read into the play -- have changed dramatically. Nevertheless, the one preoccupation to which all adaptations return, and around which Shakespeare's original text revolves, is the question of how audiences can be either drawn to, or discouraged from, sympathy and identification with an authoritarian figure like the character of Caius Martius Coriolanus; and how other political figures may benefit from such manipulations of sympathy. This paper will explore how the play, and selected adaptations, approach this question of authoritarian sympathies.

**"In what sense [do] they understand the word 'people'?:  
 Republican Theory and Shakespeare's Heterogeneous Populations"**

**Emelye Keyser**  
**University of Virginia**

In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's ideological republicans are no populists, but this is to be expected of characters in an early modern text. At the turn of the seventeenth century even anti-monarchists were still (disappointingly) elitist. And yet when Brutus stands up before the crowd of rioting plebeians to explain his hand in Caesar's murder, I argue that the gap between classical republican rhetoric and its material political aims must have been apparent to theatre-goers. Brutus ends his oration and introduces the next speaker to the crowd with the following lines: "Here comes his [Caesar's] body, mourned by Mark Antony, who, though he had no hand in his death, shall receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the commonwealth, as which of you shall not?" (III.ii.41-44). The rhetorical question contains an oblique promise, the implication that Caesar's demise will confer upon the plebeians some access to power that had hitherto been denied them. It is a recognisably republican sentiment: a tyrant's death redistributes authority back into the hands of the common people, from whence it originated.

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But it is a question Brutus expects no one to answer, and a sentiment he knows will never become foundational sediment in the construction of his future Rome. In other words, Brutus—like other early modern republicans—employs a language of populism to frame his republicanism that he is not prepared to uphold. And here and elsewhere in the play, *Julius Caesar* draws attention to the gap between promises and politics, “the people” as a rhetorical device and the people as bodies onstage.

**Populist Performativity: *Julius Caesar* and Its Publics, 2017**

**Hana Worthen**  
**Barnard College, Columbia University**

Examining the 2017 controversy surrounding the New York Public Theatre’s production of *Julius Caesar* at the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, this paper triangulates the stage appearance of “a distinctly Trumpian Caesar,” its right-wing characterization as Shakespeare’s “bastardization,” and the director Oskar Eustis’s “democratic” rhetoric, countering the alleged “political assassination [of President Trump] onstage” as merely making “fun of our president.” In their different ways, each of these gestures is significant to the ideological legacy of the theatre’s testing of humanism, as each circumscribes questions of the proper relation between Shakespeare-as-performance and Shakespeare-as-text, between theatrical performance and political performance, and between left- and right-wing populism in contemporary post-democracy. Taking each as a distinctive *populist reflex* to neoliberal conditions, what all these perspectives nonetheless share, I argue, is the withdrawal of Shakespeare-as-performance as a legitimate vehicle for politically consequential speech.

**Art for All**

**Carrie Colton, Jacksonville State University**  
**Emily Duncan, Calhoun Country Chamber Foundation**

The origin of "The Shakespeare Project" focused on removing all barriers and making art accessible to everyone. Shakespeare's works, especially performances of Shakespeare although written for the common man, are seen as elevated art, and yet, these pieces, which were meant to be performed and seen, are required reading in schools. Not every school has the funding or access to live theater, and it is more rare for their students to attend live performances of professional Shakespeare. Our endeavors focused on providing performances that would aid in student comprehension and be free of charge to everyone. With tenth grade students as our target audience, we abridged the text to an one hour and thirty minute performance. To hold their attention, the design was set in ambiguity, favoring an apocalypse and complete with zombies and fight choreography. To humanize and modernize the characters created so long ago, actors were hired based on talent in delivering and conveying the true text, regardless of gender, which brought a female Brutus, Antony, Cinna the Conspirator, Cinna the Poet, Octavius, and Lucius. The cast assembled was diverse and truly represented the audiences for which they performed. In this submission, we examine the

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reception to this staging and other stagings of Shakespeare's works that retain this idea of William as "the people's playwright."

**Reblogging the Bard: Shakespeare on Tumblr**

**Melissa Johnston**  
**University of Minnesota**

Between the Twitter threads, Facebook fake news, and Instagram influencers that dominate our society's perception of social media, Tumblr stands apart and in contrast. June L. Power, in her article, "Tumblr", describes the platform as "blogging-meets-Facebook/Twitter...a mishmash of thematic blogs revolving around every topic imaginable". This paper explores how users of the social media platform Tumblr represent Shakespeare within their personalized blogs on the site. Tumblr is a highly accessible and user-friendly social medium. As such, many scholars, students, adaptors, directors, designers, and other individuals have active Tumblr accounts and engage with each other in various ways on the subject of Shakespeare, warranting scholarly attention toward this community. Tumblr is also regarded by many users as the most liberal and politically correct social media platform, adding an extra layer of politicization to the activity conducted around Shakespeare on the site. Examining Shakespeare's presence on Tumblr sheds light on how this social medium contributes to the continuous shaping of his work, educationally, theatrically, and creatively, for current and future generations.

**Fake News and Fantastical Lies: *Othello* and Populist Politics  
in the General Education Classroom**

**Kelly Neil**  
**Spartanburg Methodist College**

How might we use contemporary politics and Shakespeare to engage students in general education literature classrooms? That question guides my investigation into *Othello* and its representation of the urgency with which its leaders exploit and question "the news." Populist leaders today maintain a conflicted relationship with the news media, as seen recently with reality-tv-star-turned-President Donald Trump's attempts to limit the press's access to his administration. Such anxiety regarding who controls the personal and political stories available for public consumption emerges in *Othello*. Like populist leaders who use the media to reach "the people" at the same time as they warn of its dangers, characters in the play struggle over control of narratives that report, for instance, Othello's military experiences, the war with the Turks, and Othello's suicide. I investigate the relationship between the producers and the consumers of stories, asking how notions of "the elite" and "the people" become muddled in the process. Ultimately, I want to consider how this way of approaching *Othello* might be of use in the general education classroom. Such a space brings its own conflicted narrative; the notion of a general education curriculum in the United States has been represented at times as a training ground for the common people to enter elite society while at

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other times as a site of resistance through which the oppressed contest elitism. The stories that *Othello*'s characters tell, exploit, and challenge offer useful ways to encourage students to think about how their own life stories are created and shared in a tumultuous political time and space.

**#MeTooing Shakespeare**

**Kevin A Quarmby**  
**The College of St. Scholastica**

London's Donmar Warehouse theatre has long earned its reputation as an innovative production house, intent on developing its audience of ardent followers. Tickets for Donmar plays invariably sell out many weeks before their opening nights, a factor that promotes the image of an elite theatrical venture. Such guaranteed income permits the venue to experiment with its repertorial output in occasionally radical ways. It seems unsurprising, therefore, that, in October 2018, Donmar produced a re-envisioned *Measure for Measure* that wore its #MeTooing political commentary openly on its sleeve.

Directed by Josie Rourke and presented with schizophrenic duality, the production consisted of a speedy first-half romp through Shakespeare's highly edited original play, followed by a modern-day modern-dress second half in which the actors playing Isabella and Angelo reversed narrative roles (with Angelo pleading with Isabella to save his brother's life), while maintaining their normative cisgender identities.

Mixed reviews for Rourke's *Measure for Measure* were accompanied by online commentaries that offer fascinating insights into Shakespeare's populist appeal in the twenty-first century. One such offering, which accused Rourke of "leaving the Donmar as she entered it by putting agenda before the play"—"it's lucky for her that the Donmar still attracts such good actors to rise above her forced agenda"—was greeted by the equally scathing, "Jesus, you alt-right people are sad."

If, as this essay argues, plays like *Measure for Measure* continue to be appropriated for politically-apposite social ends by an elite intelligentsia intent on exploring contemporary politics through a 400-year-old cultural construct, and if Western societies remain polarized between sectors dismissive of politically-correct evangelizing and those intent on holding society to account for its ills, Shakespeare's perceived status as a potential "people's playwright" might irrevocably become tainted with the divisiveness of civil conflict.

Unfortunately, "monetarily-elite-versus-popular" consumption now seems replaced by an "intellectually-elite-versus-popular" force-feeding that does little to endear Shakespeare to a growing population of disaffected, self-identifiedly disenfranchised consumers. With Shakespearean plays continuing to develop as liberal-minded social-commentary weapons of choice, we risk alienating half our respective nations' populations, while denying them the experience of Shakespeare as a unifying, edifying dramatic construct. Are we fearful of

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populist Shakespeare because it might not conform to our social justice expectations? Do anti-populist Shakespeares that promote social commentary and introspective analysis truly reflect society in its entirety, or some culturally Utopic image constructed by academy-inspired (and educated) creatives that threatens further to divide our nations?

**The First Thing We Do ... The American Shakespeare Center's (ASC's)  
 2016 Productions of *Henry IV, Part 2* and *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson*.**

**Kimberly West**  
**Cumberland School of Law**

The ASC's 2016 Spring/Fall season paired 2H6 with *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* (BBAJ) in repertory. Of course, it was an election year. A tumultuous election year. An election advertised as a populist uprising. I am interested in how the echoes of the two seemingly very dissimilar plays reverberated with, and perhaps informed, one another. Did the pairing work with original practices staging and audience interaction? Did the obvious populist parallels between the two have more depth than a mere recognition of a similarity? Are there truths here? As a lawyer, I also want to explore the famous "kill all the lawyers" quote in the context of both plays and current events. Hopefully, this exploration will yield lessons learned from an analysis of the conversation between the two productions.

**Agrarian Labor and Comic Form: Shakespeare's Populist Poetics of Work**

**Michelle M. Dowd**  
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Much of the critical tradition on Shakespeare (at least until the past few decades) has tended to associate him with the elite rather than the populist or the everyday. One corollary to this, I argue, is that Shakespeare's status and value as a canonical author has been based on his distance from the quotidian world of work. Indeed, scholarship on Shakespeare has often assumed his ambivalence to labor, in part because his plays do not display an overt preoccupation with work through dramatic mimesis (e.g. scenes in which characters perform work onstage). However, if we expand our analytical focus beyond direct representation, we can trace a distinct poetics of labor in Shakespeare's plays. I hope to provide a new perspective on the ongoing debate about Shakespeare's populism vis-à-vis his attention to work by arguing that poetics and labor are mutually constitutive in Shakespeare's drama in ways that have largely gone unexplored—and that are more "populist" in tenor than many have assumed. For my seminar paper, I will likely focus on how agricultural labor inflects comedic temporality and form in plays such as *The Tempest* and *Love's Labor's Lost*. Everyday forms of labor thus influence Shakespeare's comic structure in ways that suggest a vital interconnection between Shakespearean materiality and aesthetics—two subjects that are often interpreted in terms of an elite/populist divide.

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**“I think the king is but a man as I am”: Populism and popular politics in *Henry V***

**John C. Higgins**  
**Case Western Reserve University**

My essay will explore the distinction that Shakespeare makes between populist rhetoric and the off-stage political beliefs of the lower sorts in *King Henry V*. King Henry makes numerous proto-populist references to himself and his rule over the course of the play, including describing his entire army has “noble luster” in their eyes, referring to his army as a “band of brothers,” and “warriors for the working day,” and also saying that “the king is but a man.” All of these references rhetorically work to fashion a single identity for the army that he takes to France, and make up a central part of Henry’s strategy to motivate his troops for the battles at Harfleur and Agincourt. Several elements of these speeches, however, suggest that Henry’s populism should be described as what theorists like Ben Stanley, Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser call “ideologically thin.” Henry’s references to his troops as a single group of people depend upon other more fully fleshed out ideologies – most ironically a set of elitist assumptions – and do not have much content on their own. More importantly, the king’s argument with John Bates and Michael Williams reveals that his populist claims differ significantly from the beliefs of common soldiers, whom Shakespeare suggests view their interests as distinct from those of the king, and who seem to perform obedience in a somewhat disingenuous fashion so as to appease the commands of the king and their commanders. In *Henry V*, then, Shakespeare distinguishes thin populist rhetoric from the more complex and pragmatic political beliefs and actions of the common people.

**“Working men: Populism and *populares* in *Much Ado About Nothing*”**

**Tracey Sedinger**  
**University of Northern Colorado**

Populism may be said to have two distinct histories. The first derives from its role as modern democracy’s “other” or underside, a perversion or welcome corrective (depending on the theorist’s own political interests). The second is a longer history, one associated less with modern democracy than with republican Rome, which Shakespeare would have known from his reading of Sir Thomas North’s 1579 translation of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* (the lives of the Gracchi and Julius Caesar, for example). For both histories, populism emerges as a political force in response to the increasingly antagonistic social divisions between elites and the “people.” Where they differ is in attitudes towards the significance and/or necessity of that social division. For example, as Jacques Rancière has argued in *Hatred of Democracy*, the existence of any elite, whether aristocratic or meritocratic, may be said to be anti-democratic (an argument repeated in a different form in Thomas Frank’s *Listen, Liberal: Or, Whatever Happened to the Party of the People*, and Chris Hayes’ *Twilight of the Elites: America After Meritocracy*). For adherents of republican Rome (ranging from Livy to Cicero to such quasi-republicans as Sir Thomas Smith and Sir Philip Sidney), Romulus’s division of his people into patrician and plebeian was not in itself unjust, despite subsequent examples of patrician

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abuses (such as that which inspired Webster's *Appius and Virginia*). And via Cicero's influence, this faith in a meritocratic but limited elite would become part of Elizabethan England's humanist educational program, including that on offer at Stratford's grammar school.

In this context I will locate Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. That Shakespeare's aristocratic elites tend to speak in verse, his commoners in prose (e.g., the 1597 *I Henry IV*), remains an influential cliché. This distinction thus aligns linguistic form with affective impact with aesthetic value with social hierarchy – a set of equivalencies defining what Rancière has called the representational regime, in which theatrical legitimation results from edification. By 1598, however, Shakespeare was in the process of deconstructing this regime, as both *Julius Caesar* and *Much Ado* reveal. This essay will map the increasingly complex relations between linguistic form and social class in the latter, specifically with an eye to the role that the Watch plays in Messina. Shakespeare's most explicitly "poetic" discourse is associated with the idealizing misrecognition of a Claudio; his most knowingly witty discourse – largely prosaic – associated with the merry warfare between Beatrice and Benedick. And his Watch, especially Dogberry? They speak a language that peculiarly mirrors that of Shakespeare's more experienced lovers: one that is prosaic; not, apparently, self-consciously witty; yet dominated by the poetic function. At one level, their speech, perhaps, may reinstate a distinction between elites who are in control of their discourse, versus commoners who are not. But Dogberry and his men see what Claudio and his enabler, Don Pedro, cannot see: that Don John is a villain who has slandered a sweet lady. Being an ass might blind one to one's own ridiculousness, but it does not, in this instance, blind one to the villainies of others.