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Shakespeare in Social Media

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rachel bird, brendan leonard, and sam dow

shakespeare in social media

An exploration of the relation between Shakespeare’s works and social media in the cultural imaginary, divided into three categories: live performance, digital performance, and non-performative interpretations



Such Tweet Sorrow

TWEETS2,998

FOLLOWERS1.96M

FAVORITES13

Follow

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

Joined May 2009

Tweets

Tweets & replies

Photos & videos

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

Such Tweet Sorrow was a collaboration between the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Mudlark Production Company that brought the story of Romeo and Juliet to a previously unexploited platform: Twitter.

12

143

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

Over a period of 5 weeks, from April 10, 2010 until May 12, 2010, six professional actors improvised tweets around a prepared story grid that roughly followed the plot structure of Romeo and Juliet, but set squarely in the twenty-first century.

24

72

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

The production featured actors who created character twitter profiles and cultivated online presences on platforms such as Xbox Live and YouTube, all in the identities of their characters.

69

41

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

The Character's

Julietcap16

View profile +

Follow

LaurencePolar

View profile +

Follow

Tybalt Capulet

View profile +

Follow

Jess Capulet

View profile +

Follow

Mercutio

View profile +

Follow

Romeo

View profile +

Follow

Does anyone else think I should get a party or... Any sort of celebration for this b'day? It Is my 16th after all? Anyone agree?

about 6 hours ago via TweetDeck

Reply

Retweet

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

Although this interpretation of Shakespeare may seem unconventional, *Such Tweet Sorrow* is merely a continuation of the combined attempts of actors, directors, and scholars to continue embracing the ostensibly eternal relevance of Shakespeare's plays to modern conceptions of love, youth, and the transition from obstruction to connectedness.

144

235

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

Although *Such Tweet Sorrow* is conducted in entirely modern english, complete with text abbreviations and emoticons, the lack of Elizabethan prose does not detract from the performance's status as "true" Shakespeare. Rather, the transposing of Shakespeare's characters and conflicts onto an undeniably modern platform helps to winnow out the essence of the story that our current "cultural imaginary" gravitates towards today (Cartelli 25). Every "performance of an artwork... reframes prior versions of that work in new environments, periods and material, and for new purposes," all of which are dependent on the "prevailing set of fantasies, values, desires, and assumptions" which distinguish each cultural era (25-26).

28

94

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

In *Such Tweet Sorrow*, aspects of modern life such as teenage disillusionment and our persistent connectedness through technology are explored through the lens of *Romeo and Juliet*. Although the general structure of the plot remains the same, the presentation on Twitter – a platform associated with adolescents and designed to facilitate witty soundbites but no lengthy discussion – demonstrates the disconnect between the older and younger generation of Montagues and Capulets that Shakespeare shows through dialogue. The presence of the actors blogging on Wordpress or playing *Call of Duty* and chatting on *Xbox Live* helps convey the ideas about communication and separation that are explored in Shakespeare's text. The impact that the digital "stage" has in shaping this performance also serves to re-center Shakespeare's text more completely around these particular themes. Although technology links people today in an endless stream of texts, IMs and emails, miscommunication is easy when the only way to indicate inflection or tone is through a smiley face. Similarly, the climactic error in Romeo and Juliet occurs because of an accidental lapse in communication. The parallels between modern issues and Shakespearean ones, interpreted through the lens of social media, our "digital stage," make *Such Tweet Sorrow* captivating, relevant, and accessible.

117

93

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

Social media is a compelling modern phenomenon, in that – like acting – it relies on personas and images we create to represent ourselves. John Zajac, artistic director of an Oregon-based Shakespeare theater company, says that "social media makes actors of us all... People construct narratives, how they want the group to see them, and then reality peeps through the narrative... We experience a story and get involved emotionally—like in theater" (Levitt). *Such Tweet Sorrow* explores this parallel by using the digital space as a stage for interactive performance. Each of the actors uses their online avatars to convey their character's unique perceptions of the conflicts in the Romeo and Juliet story. Because the tropes in this story – star-crossed lovers, rebellious teenagers, family feuds – are familiar to modern audiences, the cast can delve deeper than mere plot into the themes of the play that resonate with viewers (and Tweeters!) today.

83

46

Digital Performance

@rachel_suchtweetsorrow

While the Bard could have never imagined his works being performed in the ways they are today the problems his characters confront are versatile and multi-faceted enough to be adapted into countless "cultural imaginari[es], ensuring that actors will be reinterpreting and recycling his stories on modern "stages" for years to come (Cartelli 25).

129

128

Digital Performance

@shakespearerox

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194

175

Live Performance

Edit Profile

News Feed

Messages

Events

Update Status

Add Photos/Video

Create Photo Album

What's on your mind?

Post

Live Performance



EMURSIVE Presents Punchdrunk's
SLEEP NO MORE
A LEGENDARY HOTEL
SHAKESPEARE'S FALLEN HERO.
A FILM NOIR SHADOW OF SUSPENSE.

Like · Comment · Share

16 people like this.

Live Performance

Sleep No More is a site-specific, immersive theatrical experience at the McKittrick Hotel in New York City created by the British theater company Punchdrunk in collaboration with Emursive. Abandoning the text, the piece reimagines Shakespeare's Macbeth playing out in an abandoned 1930s hotel. Audience members adorn a mask, enter the hotel, and are free to independently roam the three floors for up to four hours, never sure when characters will suddenly emerge. The design, which consists of intricate set dressing, costumes, lighting, and constant music, draws from Alfred Hitchcock films, the photography of Diane Arbus, and Disney's The Haunted Mansion theme park ride as influences. Performers tell the story entirely through dance and their physicality.

Like · Comment · Share

97 people like this.

Live Performance



Like · Comment · Share

111 people like this.

Railroad Ghost

On the right is one of the many rooms to explore in the McKittrick Hotel

20 mins · Like

Write a comment...

Live Performance

Running since 2011 and frequently sold out, Sleep No More is supported by its fans who share stories and secrets about the experience on social media. Many Tumblr pages are dedicated toward connecting fans with resources, which include over a dozen blogs. Fans are encouraged to keep their masks and take pictures around the world. There are over 30,000 photos on Instagram that use #sleepnomore. The production is considered a site-specific experience in the McKittrick Hotel, but the masks, which serve as the official logo, are an essential design element in the world of the piece, meaning that when they appear on Instagram, Sleep No More, and by extension Shakespeare's Macbeth, is digitally influencing the cultural imaginary. The mask-wearing audience members are ghosts haunting the hotel as the story of Macbeth plays out during the live experience, but these ghostly masks can

Like · Comment · Share

93 people like this.

Live Performance



Like · Comment · Share

34 people like this.

Live Performance

Als, Hilton. "Shadow And Act." The New Yorker. Conde Nast, 2 May 2011. Web. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/02/shadow-and-act>.
"Sleep No More NYC." Facebook. Web. <https://www.facebook.com/TheMcKittrickHotel/?ref=ts>.
"Sleep No More." Sleep No More. Web. <http://sleepnomorenyc.com/#share>.

Like · Comment · Share

14 people like this.

Aa

Text

Photo

Quote

Link

hi!

Chat

Audio

Video

non-performative-shakespeare

Shakespeare enters the cultural imagination of the digital generations in part through non-performative interpretations of Shakespeare that are ubiquitous on the Internet. Setting Shakespeare's iconic characters in a familiar setting bridges the divide between Shakespeare's time and our own, offering the reader a new lens through which to see the plays. In her introduction to "Wither Shakespop?", Elizabeth Adele states that such contemporary re-contextualizings of Shakespeare can "highlight the central themes of a Shakespearean text, while making deliberate connections with an audience's own cultural experience"(9). Non-performance screen Shakespeare relies on the audience's familiarity with only those fragments of Shakespeare that have been imprinted into the cultural imaginary. But re-contextualizing raises problems of its own: to what extent can plays be updated without sacrificing authenticity for modernity? Christopher Shamburg suggests "the merging of popular culture and creative dramatics through the medium of modern technology creates opportunities [...] to interpret and experience the varied humor, coincidence, and irony prevalent in Shakespeare" (76). When Shakespeare's characters retain the high dramatics of their original play, stripped of context, the artificiality of their canonical voices and choices is underlined. And yet when they're updated too much they risk becoming unrecognizable, divorced from the signifiers marking them in the cultural imaginary as "Shakespeare". Further complicating this balance of authenticity and modernity is the negotiation of Shakespearean values, including what seem to modern sensibilities to be unacceptable racial and gender politics. It is not unusual for non-performance screen Shakespeare to address these issues head on. Other works take the opposite approach, stripping away everything problematic and leaving only sterilized, decontextualized fragments.

34 notes

non-performative-shakespeare

literarystarbucks

ROMEO
Romeo goes up to the counter and orders a white chocolate mocha. As he's waiting for it, the barista sets down a hazelnut macchiato for someone else. Romeo is struck by the realization that this is the perfect drink for him, and takes it, forgetting that he and everyone in his family is allergic to nuts.

819 notes

non-performative-shakespeare

shakespeareisrad



Alas, poor Yorick. You were glam as fuck.

16,784 notes

non-performative-shakespeare

The most notable effect of non-performative Shakespeare interpretations is the role they play in reducing the plays to a few well-known synecdoches: fragments intended to stand for the whole of a character, or even a play. This reliance on signifiers actively distills Shakespeare's plays into their most iconic and recognizable parts, discarding everything extraneous or unacceptable, leaving only the most identifiable odds and ends to be popularized through humor. More obscure characters do crop up, Easter Eggs for audience members familiar with the original plays, but in general each character is intended to be recognizable to the masses. As endless adaptations re-examine his stories from countless viewpoints, the preservation of certain iconic 'Shakespeare' markers becomes necessary in order to maintain a claim to the origin.
Shakespeare's greatest contribution to the cultural imaginary is the influence his works have had on the Western sense of the dramatic. His characters, quotes, motifs, words, and plots litter the world of fiction, existing in every form of media, coded into our language and the stories we tell. Not everyone has read or seen the original play, but almost everyone understands the references. Non-performative Shakespeare relies on this familiarity with Shakespeare signifiers. What Abele refers to in discussing Hamlet as "the familiar relationship American culture has with the 'shreds and patches' of this complex tragedy, its strong identification with a collection of cultural signifiers, often independent of any real understanding of the play as a unified text"(1)" demonstrates how deeply entrenched certain fragments have become in Western cultural imagination. Certain iconic images, characters, and plots are irrefutably "Shakespeare", making up the backbone of the Western sense of the dramatic even when divorced of context, and non-performance screen Shakespeare further reduces and enshrines these elements in the cultural imaginary as they reproduce and represent what is memorable, acceptable, and familiar.

134 notes

non-performative-shakespeare

benedick4lyfe

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW (in 3 Panels)


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www.goodticklebrain.com

845 notes

non-performative-shakespeare

benedick4lyfe



Maidens Who Don't Float
Product/Service

Like Follow Message

Timeline About Photos Likes Videos

found ophelia's fb page!

219 notes

non-performative-shakespeare

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12 notes