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Graham, Kenneth, and Alysia Kolentsis, eds. Shakespeare On Stage and Off

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[See table of contents](#)

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Looking at humanists in their world, Grafton shows once more that despite the ongoing challenges to the humanities, he is a worthy successor to those he writes about and an exemplar for those of us fortunate enough to know him or to read him.

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Graham, Kenneth, and Alysia Kolentsis, eds.

Shakespeare On Stage and Off.

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019. Pp. xv, 288 + 32 b/w ill. ISBN 978-0-7735-5925-7 (paperback) \$37.95.

In their introduction to this remarkable collection, editors Kenneth Graham and Alysia Kolentsis state their belief that the selected essays demonstrate how Shakespeare's plays enhance present-day culture, even as the experience of a Shakespeare performance allows twenty-first-century audiences the opportunity to ponder events within that culture. They further contend that the three divisions of the book allow us to probe inescapable dichotomies of human society, such as unity and diversity, tradition and experiment, and performance and identity, among others. The idea for this collection transpired from the first and second Shakespeare Conferences held in Stratford, Ontario in 2015 and 2017. As they demonstrate "the variety and vitality of Shakespeare's interaction with contemporary life and culture" (3), the essays attempt to answer the query: "Shakespeare 401: What's Next?" The essays discuss live global stage productions, live theatre broadcasts, films and television shows, and several written modes, including close readings, personal reflections, and careful analysis of staging practices. In the space that follows, I will offer further explanations of the ideas in each division of the book and will discuss several essays more thoroughly.

Because the five essays in section 1, "Playing with Shakespeare," move from discussions of words on the page to actions on the stage, the authors engage with verbal and performative language analysis. In addition, theatrical interpretations involve assessments of decisions about casting, including, but

not limited to, cross-gendered and colourblind (and colour-conscious), as well as inventive uses of ethnicity, nationality, education level, and religion. Several authors present new approaches to writing about Shakespeare in performance by suggesting that audiences are not merely observers or receivers but can be conceived as equal architects of meaning.

In her essay “Shakespeare, Spectators, and the Meaning of Race on Stage,” Lauren Eriks Cline asks how we know if an audience is seeing colour: the impossibility of answering that question is foregrounded in her discussion of audiences’ reaction to Ira Aldridge’s performances of Othello and Shylock in the nineteenth century. She notes that contemporary spectators expressed their (generally) negative reactions to Aldridge, an African-American actor playing the two Outsiders, but the “browning-up” of actors playing Cleopatra and Caliban engendered little or no comment. She then discusses two recent productions of *Julius Caesar* (Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, 2012, and Public Theatre, NYC, 2017) that became controversial because various media outlets suggested that the productions staged the assassinations of sitting American presidents. She concludes that reviews of these two productions did not merely record what observers believed they had seen, but rather aimed to intervene in those representations, affecting future viewers’ experiences.

In “Working with Shakespeare,” four scholars further posit consumers of Shakespeare as co-inventors of meaning, stretching beyond theatrical productions into society itself. Essayists in this section test the notion that personal knowledge is a viable resource in Shakespearean interpretation.

One salient example of the expansion of interpretive tools is the appropriation of culinary art (the “food movement”) to interpret Shakespeare’s misanthropic chef Timon. In his essay, “Rooting for Shakespeare,” David B. Goldstein recounts the experience of guests at a dinner party during which they create meaning as they create the meal suggested in Shakespeare’s play. The essay concludes that analyzing how food is used in *Timon* opens up that text for readers’ consumption.

In “Lessons from a Street Fighter: Reconsidering *Romeo and Juliet*,” Russell J. Bodi theorizes that familiarization with the principles of martial arts allows a contemporary understanding of the fight scenes in that play. Through a series of interviews with Bobby, the above-mentioned street fighter, Bodi tests dialogue and actions of the street fighters in Shakespeare’s play against the countercultural wisdom of that lifelong learner. Bodi argues that military

game formulas apply to all Shakespearean situations where self-interests and community interests are at stake. Thus, for insights into Shakespeare's brawlers, stage and film directors as well as choreographers and even literary scholars can learn from the theoretical outlook of a street fighter whose view of combat scenes will offer greater authenticity to their interpretations.

Finally, the last section of the book, "Living with Shakespeare," offers nine essays that attend to the altered meanings that emerge when his works are repeatedly reshaped and changed by twenty-first-century modes of consumption.

Essays by Peter Holland, R. W. Jones, and Halley O'Malley entertain such disparate topics as filming Shakespeare—and filming live broadcasts—as well as issues in adapting Shakespeare in the age of camera phones. Brandon Christopher examines the "problem" of Shakespeare as it manifests in the diverse television and film treatments of *Star Trek*. Amrita Sen's essay entertains questions in the Indian Shakespeare trilogy (*Maqbool*, *Omkara*, and *Haider*), while Lisa Stark applies Queer Theory to Shakespeare biopics *Will Shakespeare* (1978) and *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), and to more recent efforts: *Will* (2017) and *Upstart Crow* (2016–). Gina Hausknect's essay on reading and teaching Shakespeare's plays by attending to the editorial square-bracketed stage directions is among the very best essays on Shakespearean pedagogy; her accounting of student success occasioned by this reading strategy may inspire its immediate addition to the professorial toolbox. An appreciation for how Shakespeare is experienced multimodally is brilliantly depicted in Jacob Claflin's essay on *Sleep No More* which accomplishes its homage to *Macbeth* exclusively using images.

The essays in this collection are brief (ten to thirteen pages each), allowing an interested reader to taste lightly and savour later. Encountering these essays makes one wish that they had attended the two conferences; having failed that, I hope I have enticed readers of this review to experience their retrospective charms.

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