

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

SYMPOSIUM

DATE: 17 February 2016

TIME: 10am–4.30pm

LOCATION: Arts Lecture Room 5 (G.61), Arts Building, The University of Western Australia



WEDNESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY 2016

TIME	CHAIRS: PETER REYNOLDS (UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE) AND BOB WHITE (UWA)
SESSION 1	
10.00–11.00	<p>ROB CONKIE (La Trobe University, Nothing But Roaring Theatre Company)</p> <p>Round Table actors' discussion on thoughts and afterthoughts on performing <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> for the New Fortune Theatre at UWA.</p> <p>3D criticism</p> <p>Simon Russell Beale famously described acting as 'three dimensional criticism'. In this round-table discussion with the director and actors of <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>, the actors will respond to brief extracts from the history of criticism of the play. What do their unique actor knowledges – through study, rehearsal and performance – reveal about the play that perhaps conventional scholarship might have overlooked or elided? Will they confirm, challenge or confute the critics of the past? Towards the end of the session there will be a chance for the wider symposium audience to pose questions and comments.</p>
11.00 – 11.30	MORNING TEA
SESSION 2	
11.30–12.30	<p>ELIZABETH SCHAFER (Royal Holloway, University of London)</p> <p>Visual pleasure and <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> in performance</p> <p>Laura Mulvey's seminal theorisation of visual pleasure in film and the politics of the gaze are the foundations on which this discussion of <i>Merry Wives</i> in performance is constructed. Four very different productions will be considered: those directed by Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1902), Terry Hands (1968), Bill Alexander (1985) and Philip Breen (2012). As the geographies of theatre morphed the real location, Windsor, Berkshire, by means of set, costume and prop design, into worlds that were Henrician, Elizabethan, Tudorbethan and contemporary, these productions all offered visual pleasure by trading in nostalgia, nostaphilia and nostaphobia, and by filling up the stage with period specific detail. While this set heavy approach contrasts starkly with the bare boards aesthetic invited by an Elizabethan playhouse, these productions also raise questions about the theatrical tasks of – in Svetlana Boym's terms – spatialising time and temporalising space.</p>
SESSION 3	
12.30–13.30	<p>ALISON FINDLAY (Lancaster University)</p> <p>'To Give Our Hearts United Ceremony' (4.6.50): managing emotions in <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i></p> <p>This paper argues that ceremonies play a crucial role in managing the desires and passions of characters in the Windsor of the play. Ford's jealousy, Falstaff's lust and greed, and the culturally transgressive stolen marriage between Anne Page and Fenton are all managed by means of ceremonies, ranging from the micro-level of politeness to rites of passage and changes in the seasons. It is no accident that these ceremonies are largely controlled by the female characters. Fairly obviously, the effects of ceremony, culminating in the pageant of Herne's Oak and the betrothal of Anne and Fenton act as a form of social glue, serving to bind the community together and to reconcile the middling sort and the courtly world in Windsor. My paper argues that the re-enactment of these ceremonies on stage has a further cohesive effect on the participants, binding actors and spectators into the immediate community of the theatre and the imagined communities of town and nation. The paper will argue that live performance produces an affective power that makes the ceremonies move beyond their immediate fictional contexts.</p>
13.30 – 14.00	LUNCH

SESSION 4

14.00–15.00

HELEN OSTOVICH (McMaster University)

Laughter in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: performance as research for digital editing

This presentation focuses on laughter: Why do audiences laugh? Are laughing reactions internal to each laugher, or external in the situation we laugh at? When do we laugh? How do we laugh? Does the actor add the laugh, or is the wit or clowning embedded in the playwright's script, visually or verbally demanding laughter? What emotions provoke laughter, and can an actor change the kind of laughter that his role produces? To find answers to these questions, I will be exploring stage directions in *Merry Wives* Q1, with some comparison to the Folio version of the play, to show several reactions that occur simultaneously and cannot always be teased out as individual expressions of recognition or surprise causing laughter; rather they seem to be collisions of separate visually accessible interpretations or reactions which take longer to describe than to see. In an instant, these various simultaneous responses affect our perception (as audience) of situation, character, gender and place. This play is Shakespeare's first and only citizen comedy with a small-town-ness that prevents it from becoming full-blown city comedy (a satire on the urban world of tricksters and dupes), and that encourages a positive response to the new middle-class emerging into a world previously established by court and county. Our responses to the Fords and the Pages, the parson and the doctor, the housekeeper and the witch of Brainford, the servants and the laundresses, complicate our views of the outsiders and insiders who face off in Windsor during the play's action.

SESSION 5

15.00–16.00

Philippa Kelly (Resident Dramaturg, The California State Theater)

Adventures in dramaturgy: women and woovers

In recent weeks, with the dramaturgy for Shakespeare's newly-'discovered' playtext, *Margaret of Anjou*, sitting side-by-side in my mind with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I've been thinking about ways in which these two plays invoke wooing as forms of voyage or adventure: from the tempest that Mistress Ford decries for having landed the whale Falstaff here on Windsor's city beach, to the 'voyage' made toward Page's wife; to Suffolk's instruction to himself to think of Margaret's virtues, 'repeat[ing] their semblance often on the seas'; and the seas that Queen Margaret describes on her voyage toward her wedding in England. Marriage and voyaging have literal as well as metaphorical connotations for Shakespeare's regal audience, and I'll speculate on this as a frame for Shakespeare's early plays, both in terms of expansion and contraction.

SESSION 6

16.00–16.30

Bob White (ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, Europe 1100–1800/UWA)

Afterlives

The Merry Wives of Windsor has inspired a surprisingly large corpus of music, most famously the operatic versions, Verdi and Boito's *Falstaff* and Vaughan Williams' *Sir John in Love*. But since I've written on this topic and have little to add, I'll talk here about the filmography. There are about half a dozen of these versions (some made for tv, one a 'live recording') but only two which are conceived as movies, accessible, and which seem to matter critically, and they raise different questions. Orson Welles's *Chimes at Midnight* was criticised because splicing four plays together ignores the integrity of different text-worlds in which Falstaff is defined by the distinctive narrative shapes, historiographical contexts, and the thematic concerns of each. But could Welles have inadvertently (or advertently) in fact remained true to an overall 'Shakespearean' conception of 'character' as always multiple, many-sided, situational and lacking in stable 'identity'? Is this not one of the underlying assumptions behind theatre itself, where one person plays many parts? Meanwhile, the BBC version of the play claims to be 'faithful' to the text yet is universally panned as dull, whereas the play is (as I'm sure we'll see in the New Fortune) nothing if not sprightly and dynamic. What does the film lack that the play has? Conversely (perversely) can even a tedious but textually 'complete' performance illuminate the play's distinctive qualities? And what does it all say about the nature of film as a medium, contrasting with live performance? I aim to raise questions and probably won't answer any of them.

SPEAKERS

Alison Findlay

ALISON FINDLAY is Professor of Renaissance Drama and Director of the Shakespeare Programme in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. She is the author of *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (1994), *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (1999), *Women in Shakespeare* (2010) and *Much Ado About Nothing: A Guide to the Text and the Play in Performance* (2011). She co-edited *Twelfth Night: A Critical Reader* (2014) and is now co-editing *Shakespeare and Greece*, both for Arden.

Alison also enjoys practiced-based research and teaching. She co-directed a project on early women's drama, producing a series of performances and a co-authored book *Women and Dramatic Production 1550–1700* (2000). She went on to write a specialised study of site-specific production, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (2006) and is now dramaturg to the all-female Rose Company

Theatre <http://www.rosecompanytheatre.com/>. She is currently working on an edition of Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*, co-edited with Philip Sidney and Michael G. Brennan and is editing a special issue of the *Sidney Journal*, following the 2014 conference *Dramatizing Penshurst: Site, Scripts, Sidneys*.

Philippa Kelly

PHILIPPA KELLY'S work has been supported by many foundations and organisations, including the Fulbright, Rockefeller and Walter and Eliza Hall Foundations – and, most recently, she was jointly awarded a 2014/15 Bly Award for Innovation in Dramaturgy from the Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of America. She has published 12 books, the closest to her heart being *The King and I* (Arden Press, 2010). *The King and I* is a meditation on Australian identity through the lens of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The book has been celebrated for its poignant and humorous exploration of Australian life, and for its illumination of various contemporary social attitudes toward

those on the fringes of society. Besides her work as Resident Dramaturg for the California Shakespeare Theater, Dr Kelly is also Resident Dramaturg for the Napa Shakespeare Festival and production dramaturg for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

Helen Ostovich

HELEN OSTOVICH is Professor Emerita of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, founding editor of the journal *Early Theatre*, and general editor of *The Revels Plays* and the digital series *Queen's Men Editions*. She is Series Editor of the Ashgate Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama, now published by Routledge. As a play-editor, she prepared *The Magnetic Lady for The Cambridge Works of Ben Jonson* (2012); *The Late Lancashire Witches and A Jovial Crew for Richard Brome Online* (2009); and (with Holger Syme and Andrew Griffin) a volume of essays, *Locating the Queen's Men, 1583–1603* (2009). She has prepared *The Ball* for *The Complete Works of James Shirley* (OUP) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for *Norton Shakespeare 3*. Her most recent essay collections include *The Chester Cycle in Context, 1555–1575*, with Jessica Dell and David Klausner (Ashgate 2012); *The Alchemist: A Critical Reader*, with Erin Julain, for *Arden Early Modern Drama* (2013); and *Performance as Research in Early Modern English Theatre: The Three Ladies of London in Context* (McMaster University, 2015) <http://threeladiesoflondon.mcmaster.ca/>. Her current new projects include an edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for *Internet Shakespeare Editions*, *The Dutch Courtesan* for the *Marston Complete Works*, and Heywood and Brome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* and Brome's *A Jovial Crew* for Oxford University Press's four-volume set of Brome's complete works, based on the digital *Richard Brome Online* <http://www.hrlonline.ac.uk/brome/> (Sheffield: HRI online, 2009).

Peter Reynolds

PETER REYNOLDS was an International Partner Investigator with CHE from 2011–2015 at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom, and is now a Senior Honorary Research Fellow at CHE (UWA). Reynolds is a Shakespearean scholar with a particular interest in Shakespeare in contemporary performance and practical workshop based approaches to teaching Shakespeare in schools and higher education. Between 2001 and 2006 he was the creative director of the English National Theatre's double BAFTA award winning performance website *Stagework* (stagework.org.uk). He is currently exploring some of the early modern plays originally written for

performance by boys/young adults, and in 2012 at the ANZ Shakespeare Association conference he directed a production of Ben Jonson's *Epicene, or The Silent Woman*, using a group of young actors (boys aged 10–17) drawn from three schools in the Perth region. He has written about how his cast negotiated the problematic emotional and political landscape of Jonson's play and how the audience responded to it. In 2014 he returned to Perth to direct Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* with a group of school age boys from Guildford Grammar School.

Elizabeth Schafer

ELIZABETH SCHAFFER is Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research focuses around two main areas: Shakespeare in production and Australian drama and theatre. Her publications include *MsDirecting Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* and performance histories of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*. Her *Lilian Baylis: A Biography* was short listed for the Theatre Book Prize 2006 and she particularly enjoyed researching Baylis's close family relationship with the famous Forrest family of Western Australia (Baylis's aunt was Sir John Forrest's sister-in-law). She edited *The City Wit* for the pioneering *Richard Brome Online* (2010) and is editing the *Northern Lass* for the Oxford University Press edition. She was general editor of the online journal *Australian Studies* 2011–2016 (<http://www.nla.gov.au/ojs/index.php/australian-studies>). In 2009 she took her employer to the Employment Tribunal over equal pay and won. In 2013 she ran 'The Mariam Project' to mark 400 hundred years since the publication of Elizabeth Cary's pioneering play *The Tragedy of Mariam*. She is currently writing a performance history of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for Manchester University Press's Shakespeare in Performance series.

Robert White

ROBERT WHITE is Winthrop Professor of English at The University of Western Australia, Chief Investigator for the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions, and Leader of the Centre's Meanings Program. His book on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare Series remains the only single-author critical monograph devoted to the play. He has published widely on many other plays by Shakespeare, as well as Literature and Natural Law, Natural Rights, and Pacifism. He has published *John Keats: A Literary Life*, and most recently *Avant-Garde Hamlet: Text, Stage, Screen* (Fairleigh Dickinson Press). Forthcoming in 2016 is *Shakespeare and the Cinema of Love* (Manchester University Press).

EMOTIONS
MAKE
HISTORY