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A KING OF INFINITE (CYBER)SPACE? The digital remapping of Shakespeare in light of The Globe's Emma Rice Controversy

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Abstract – Marjorie Garber has succinctly claimed that: "Every age creates its own Shakespeare" (2004, p.3). Garber counters the popular contention that Shakespeare's plays are "timeless" and moves toward an understanding of the works' enduring *timeliness*, in that they can be adapted in ways that already seem modern. More recently, Courtney Lehmann and Geoffrey Way have mapped how theatrical institutions have sought – and struggled – to negotiate the new digital environment. Their proposition is especially prescient in light of the recent controversy at the London Globe, when Emma Rice was formally asked to step down as artistic director because her practice of Shakespeare was deemed incongruous with Sam Wanamaker's founding vision in 1949. The Globe concluded that Rice's use of contemporary sound and lighting technology was not conducive to the unique theatre space they had created, and by implication positioned themselves as custodians of the essential Shakespeare. This paper situates the Rice controversy in the context of the Globe's negotiation of digital environments, and in particular the institution's construction of its online profile. Through a brief analysis of the Globe's online footprint, and reactions in the Shakespeare online community to Rice's departure, this paper identifies an apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the Globe's online commitment to broadening access, generating and sustaining audiences for Shakespeare and, on the other, the Globe's reactive treatment of Rice. Contemporary adaptations and popularised Shakespeares are ghosted by a more traditional interpretation of the Bard. This paper argues that this controversy is indicative of both a creeping conservatism within the Shakespeare multiverse and also an implicit gender bias within some productions. Furthermore, it considers to what extent the Globe's reaction to Rice signaled, despite Garber's argument, an *untimely* Shakespeare, one that risks being out of touch with its age.

Keywords: Shakespeare; adaptation; Twitter; performance; the Globe.

When I started working at the Globe, I came on too strong. I met the space with artistic frenzy, it was so exciting – the lights, the sounds. I don't think they imagined I'd leave. They thought I'd accept new guidelines, that I'd want the job more than my practice. My guess is they were shocked when I said: 'Absolutely not'… You've one path in life, which is your integrity, your vision, your soul.

It was never an option to stay.

(K. Kellaway, "I don't know how I got to be so controversial", Emma Rice Interview, *The Observer* 1 July 2018).

1. Introduction

Though the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts is yet to be assessed, nationwide lockdowns have forced theatres and arts venues to close indefinitely, and those without public subsidy are now facing insolvency. The Globe theatre on London's Southbank is one such venue that has recently found itself in precarious financial circumstances. In a letter to the Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden, Conservative MP Julian Knight stressed the theatre's urgent need for emergency funding:[1]

> Shakespeare's Globe is a world-renowned institution and not only part of our national identity, but a leading example of the major contribution the arts make to our economy. For this national treasure to succumb to Covid-19 would be a tragedy. (BBC News, 2020)

Without a doubt, the closure of the Globe, that functions as a popular theatre venue as well as an educational hub and tourist attraction would be a considerable loss. However, in post-Brexit Britain, the positioning of the theatre as intrinsic to national identity lends credence to Tom Cornford's assertion that the Globe "has always tended towards the superficially demotic while remaining usually fundamentally conservative" (Cornford 2016).[2]

The notion of claiming ownership over Shakespeare has been problematised in recent years, most prominently by the public controversy involving then Artistic Director, Emma Rice. Following her brief two-season term, Rice was asked to step down because her practice of Shakespeare was deemed incongruous with Sam Wanamaker's founding vision in 1949. Rice utilized artificial light and sound in productions, which – to an extent – could be deemed inappropriate by the board for a space designed to emulate early-modern performance practise. Rice's dismissal ignited immediate backlash online that simultaneously showcased the new and expanding landscape of the Shakespeare community and revived the difficult question that has echoed in the discipline for decades: Who is Shakespeare for?

In order to (re)produce Shakespeare, contemporary directors engage with the complex politics of adaptation. Performance tends to be viewed as the

[1] The Globe is a registered charity and while this may provide a certain creative freedom, Susan Bennett argues that the theatre has "developed in response to patterns of tourism rather than patterns of theatregoing" which alters the dynamic between audience and performer (2017, p. 499).

[2] In response to the Emma Rice announcement, Sohrab Ahmari's article for *Prospect Magazine* articulates a quasi-religious devotion to Shakespeare, describing the Globe as the "temple" where one "commune[s] with the Bard" (2016).

most 'authentic' form of interpretation in the realm of Shakespearean scholarship. However, Margaret Jane Kidnie interrogates the distinction between text and performance to succinctly argue that adaptation is not a static concept, but rather an evolving one, "closely tied to how the work modifies over time and from one reception space to another" (2009, p. 5). Kidnie's work is particularly pertinent when one considers the range of new reception spaces enabled by the internet, that invite active users to contribute to and shape an expanding Shakespeare multiverse.[3] The traditional tendency to denigrate adaptation within the moralist framework of fidelity studies has been challenged by the ubiquity of new-media interpretations and in the realm of performance, by the phenomenon of post-modern theatre, characterized by a disregard for formality, utilization of pastiche and centralizing the audience.[4] The colourful assortment of politically engaged experimental performances in recent years paired with the expanding landscape of new-media adaptation has given rise to new theoretical approaches that counter the traditional source-oriented focus of the discipline and instead employ a goal-oriented theory that evaluates impact over textual reverence.[5]

Contemporary Shakespearean scholarship is a thriving, diverse field that promotes materialist, feminist, eco-critical, and biopolitical approaches to the texts. Despite the wave of new media Shakespeares and the new theoretical frameworks they have invited, criticism tends to veer back to the same questions. In other words, to borrow from Richard Burt, despite a range of "Shakespeare-eccentric" productions, criticism still tends to search for the elusive Shakespearean "centre" (2007, p.1-9). Case in point, in response to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's commitment to translate the plays into modern English, James Shapiro argued that "Shakespeare is about the intoxicating

[3] In its engagement with contemporary fan-generated technologies, this paper builds on Louise Geddes and Valerie M. Fazel's conception of the "multiverse" that understands Shakespeare "not as a singular body of work, but as a space where a process of inquiry and cultural memory – memories in the making, and those already made – is influenced and shaped by the technologies available to the reader" (2021).

[4] For an analysis of recent social media Shakespeare(s), see Erin Sullivan (2018) "Shakespeare, Social Media, and the Digital Public Sphere: *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming*".

[5] See for example *Ensaio. Hamlet.* (2004) directed by Enrique Diaz, a largely improvised performance that uses the central themes of Hamlet to explore the fallout of the election of Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva in Brazil; *Coriolan/us* (2012) directed by Mike Pearson for National Theatre Wales, blends Shakespeare and Brecht in a disused WWII hangar and globalizes the plot for the current '24-hour news' generation. In 1998, Barbara Hodgdon pointed out the critical desire or "penchant for judging performed Shakespeare in terms of textual fidelity" (1998, p. 1). More recently, what Julie Sanders terms "creative infidelity" serves as a more productive approach to adaptation: "It is usually at the very point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place", and signals that 'fidelity' theory is a thing of the past (2005, p. 24).

richness of the language" (Pollack-Pelzner 2015). Locating the value of Shakespeare exclusively in the vernacular positions adaptations as necessitating an irrevocable loss. The myopic perspective that bases a given performance's success solely upon its contribution to Shakespeare's cultural currency serves to negate other, more nuanced considerations. When Shakespeare is viewed as a site of negotiation for contemporary global conflict for example, the plays serve to highlight enduring tensions between high and low culture, conservatism and liberalism, and dominant and marginal voices.[6]

2. The Prelude to the Controversy

2.1. Contextualising the Globe

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre opened in 1997 with a commitment to "celebrate[ing] Shakespeare's transformative impact on the world by conducting a radical theatrical experiment" ("Policies and Terms" Shakespeare's Globe). While the word 'experiment' in theatre is most comfortably associated with avant-garde and a rejection of dominant production values, Douglas Lanier has questioned the elasticity of the term as it relates to the Globe's mission. Lanier maintains that the term "is designed to push the scholarly, educational mission of the Globe to the fore while keeping a safe distance from the suspect notion of actually recreating the past" (Lanier 2002, p. 162). Moreover, Susan Bennet identifies a paradox in the theatre's use of the word 'experimental', that on the one had "continues to provide a refresh for the Shakespeare brand; on the other, the productions we continue to identify under this well-worn rubric affirm assumptions and practises that are by now as familiar as the creative and critical Shakespeare of liberal humanism" (Bennett 2017, p. 25). Intended to replicate the early modern Shakespearean playhouse, the Globe has expressed a commitment to architectural and performance fidelity that implies their position as custodians of the *essential* Shakespeare.[7] Thus, the employment of the term 'experimental' might be read as an attempt to deflect critique.

[6] More recently, 'presentist' approaches to the plays have served to demonstrate how Shakespeare presses us to explore themes that characterise and inform contemporary notions of power, politics, sexuality and race. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes' anthology *Presentist Shakespeares* (2007) maintains "[W]e need urgently to recognise the permanence of the present's role in all our dealings with the past. We cannot make contact with a past unshaped by our own concerns" (Grady, Hawkes 2007, p. 3).

[7] Countering the traditional faith in the timeless, universal, transcendent meanings of the plays, Alan Sinfield urged critics to reclaim Shakespeare from the limitations of conservative anglophone ideology: "It may be that we must see the continuous centring of Shakespeare as the cultural token which must be appropriated as itself tending to

Drawing on claims of historical accuracy to bolster its proximity to Shakespeare implies that he is somehow "theirs to give, that they hold the key with which to 'unlock' his works" (Olive 2015, p. 116). Striving for historical authenticity, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, is a dubious and deeply performative enterprise.[8] While the notion of reviving 'authentic' Shakespearean meaning via early modern performance practises has been read as inherently suspect, the architectural layout of the theatre draws out the dialogic aspects of each performance.[9] Audience engagement is a central tenet of the unique conditions the theatre has created. The Globe is a powerhouse in modern theatrical ecology and this paper does not attempt to de-legitimize it as a unique theatrical space and research facility, but rather to highlight how social media has magnified the contradiction between past and present at the heart of the Globe's ethos. The institution's recent attempts to negotiate the digital environment to expand their brand has led to the development of a progressive multi-platform profile that seeks to entice young, tech-savvy audience members but seems at odds with the Board's reactionary treatment of Rice.

2.2. Rice's Appointment as Artistic Director

In her previous position as artistic director of Kneehigh, a Cornwall based theatre company known for its experimental style, Rice was known to blend the classical with the contemporary. Her 2008 production of *Don John*, for example, recast the infamous libertine to late 1970s Britain and offered a sharp critique of Thatcherism. Rice carried this flair for mingling past and present into her role as Artistic Director at the Globe, most notably in her successful Bollywood-inspired production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, featuring an array of visual vocabularies inspired by pop culture, including Beyoncé's hit 'Single Ladies' on the soundtrack.

The heresy that resulted in Rice stepping down was the use of temporary lighting rigs and microphones, so-called 'modern technology' that has been utilized in performance spaces for centuries. In keeping with the dialogic potential of the space, Rice's introduction of amplified sound and lighting rigs might be read as an attempt to introduce "a more familiar commercial aesthetic to the Globe as means of framing an anti-elitist interaction with audiences" (Worthen 2020, p. 136). Kelly Jones has critiqued the notion that the playing

reproduce the existing order… in practise conservative institutions are bound to dominate the production of such a national symbol, and that for one cultural phenomenon to have so much authority must be a hindrance to radical innovation" (1994, p. 133)

[8] Shakespeare's Globe website maintains that the theatre is "inspired and informed by the unique historic playing conditions" ("Policies and Terms" Shakespeare's Globe).

[9] Paul Mezner has argued that the language associated with the Globe's "experiment" is "tantalizingly empirical" (2006, p. 225).

conditions of the Globe liberate modern audiences from the behavioural restrictions of darkened theatre spaces. Jones contends that "the idea of such 'liberation' is tangled up in fraudulent ideals, and… the audience of the Globe, herded like sheep, simply exchanges one set of rules, one kind of display, for another" (Jones, 2007 pp. 90-1). The offending production was a feminist version of *Cymbeline* reclaimed as *Imogen* set on a London council estate and blasting Skepta's 'Shutdown' track.[10] The high box office returns suggest that audiences did not feel alienated by Rice's lighting and sound experiment. Moreover, Pascale Aebischer has critiqued the tradition-oriented tendency to dismiss the use of technology in performance:

> Present-day performance technologies enable the re-activation, for twenty-first century audiences and in the context of their increasing everyday enmeshment in digital information technologies, of dynamic and fluid performer-spectator relationships that characterise the performance and spatial technologies of the early modern playhouse. (Aebischer 2020, p. 2)

Aebischer contends that for tech-savvy audiences, performance technologies might be used productively to adapt the fluid performer-spectator dynamic of the early modern stage that is so central to the Globe's "experiment".

In the paradoxical statement released by the Globe's CEO, Neil Constable, the Board claimed that Rice's choice actually inhibited the ongoing "experiment" of the theatre.[11] The statement suggested that Rice's approach to stage production was inconsistent with the Globe's broader commitment to consolidate *their* version of Shakespeare. Constable acknowledged Rice's "mould-breaking work" that "brought [the] theatre new and diverse audiences, won huge creative and critical acclaim, and achieved exceptionally strong box office returns". However, Constable maintained that a commitment to exploring Shakespeare's working conditions should continue to be the "central tenet" of the Globe's mission, heavily implying that their institutional "experiment" is not artist driven. The Board's claim that the "sound and lighting technology" Rice introduced somehow diminishes the faithful reconstructive enterprise of a space already equipped with sprinklers, a gift shop and illuminated fire exit signage, inadvertently implies a purist desire to dictate practise.

[10] Rice's commitment to diversity includes both audiences and actors. For example, Matthew Dunster's *Imogen* brought together a wonderfully diverse ensemble which was served to address a segment of the population traditionally underrepresented in theatre audiences based on age, gender, race, ability, socio-economics etc. as well as extending representation and outreach.

[11] Excerpts from 'Press Release: Statement Regarding the Artistic Direction of *Shakespeare's Globe*' (2016) qtd. in Mark Shenton's "Emma Rice to Step Down from London's Shakespeare's Globe". *Playbill* (2016)

2.3. Measuring the Globe's online footprint

Yong Li Lan has astutely questioned the viability of conceptualising performance as an exclusively lived experience when online content ranging from promotional material to backstage rehearsal footage disperses the performance well beyond the theatre walls:

> [The] audience community (that defines it as a performance) is not "naturally" confined to its theatre audience, but artificially extended to everywhere else (and no specific place) as well, "globalized," as we call it? (Li Lan 2003, p. 48)

Central to the inconsistency of the Globe's status on modernizing Shakespeare is their negotiation of social media to create a professional, unified brand identity and to generate new audiences. Their utilization of a variety of social media platforms contradicts the Globe's seeming commitment to historical accuracy. Their celebration of multimedia outside the theatre and condemnation of multimedia inside the theatre has led Diana Henderson to reflect that the theatre represents "a clash of agendas" (2002, p. 119). The Globe's diverse online identity includes the Globe Playground: a colourful, interactive space with games and videos to encourage children to learn about Shakespeare. In a post-textbook era, embracing digital education is a viable, progressive form of encouraging young people to become theatre goers. However, the pull of neoliberal monetization has caused Geoffrey Way and Courtney Lehmann to aptly question whether young users are attracted to Shakespeare "because of new forms of agency posed by the democratization of knowledge or because of the more insidious seductions of cognitive capitalism" (2017, p. 64).

The Globe's website is interactive, stylish and appealing, with a user-friendly interface, drop-down menus and high-resolution video clips. However, the basket tab and playful Elizabethan encouragement to 'treat thyself' are stark reminders of the powerful corporate enterprise of the Globe that the early-modern architecture does little to disguise. The Globe's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts contribute to their active online aesthetic, promote their current program and function as repositories of witty theatrical commentary and *Game of Thrones* GIFs. Their dynamic presence on social media reveals a desire to stay relevant and appeal to tech-savvy theatre goers but it is incongruous with the theatre's rigid historicist agenda.

3. All the Web's a Stage: Reactions to the Controversy

Social media has utterly transformed the dynamic between performers and spectators.[12] Platforms like Twitter enable new kinds of performativity, wherein "members enact a type of social performance, where special practises established and reinforced by the user, and members of the network, signal their membership within the community" (Way 2011, p. 402). Crucially, Twitter disseminates performances into a new, networked collective populated by journalists, academics, audiences and fans. Erin Sullivan contends that the chief advantage of Twitter lies in its ability to "reframe our understanding of critical appraisal and audience authority" which encourages us to consider "theatre's relationship to society and the audience's role in such matters, especially as the fictional looks more like real" (2018, p. 65). While individual Tweets do not require reciprocity, the majority of commentators chose to 'tag' the Globe's Twitter page directly to notify them of their complaints. The Globe's Twitter page functions as a method of personalizing the brand, and thus maintains the illusion of accessibility, so it is perhaps unsurprising that commentators would attempt to indulge the dialogic impulse and create a conversation on the issue.

Social media affords the Globe the opportunity to curate and maintain an alternative self-generated narrative that promotes their cultural status, beyond that traditionally established by critics. Stephen O'Neill has articulated the beneficial interaction between theatrical institutions like the Globe and social media as means to promote institutional status: "Social media has become a way for these cultural institutions not only to engage with audiences… but also to construct and disseminate their own cultural value, and indeed Shakespeare's too" (2014, p. 37). It would be remiss to ignore the benefits of the global reach of social media in democratizing Shakespeare and the establishment of virtual Shakespeare community that counters traditional notion of theatre going as an exclusively upper or upper middle-class activity.

While the Board's decision to dismiss Emma Rice garnered some support, the overwhelming response to the controversy on Twitter was one of support for Rice. Many commentators expressed that sound and light alteration made for a feeble excuse to dismiss Rice and her creative vision entirely. Tweets like: "Shakespeare's 11th tragedy. Emma Rice victim of The Globe's dedication to shouting at tourists in the rain. I'm proud to be #TeamEmma" call attention to the Globe's position as custodians of Shakespeare (@harryblakemusic). Other users satirised the seeming hypocrisy of the Board's dual commitment to historically accurate theatre conditions and heritage tourism: "The Globe may be getting rid of 'light and sound' but thank

[12] Gordon McMullan has explored the ways in which the Globe audience perform their role as spectators as much as the players on the stage (McMullan 2008 p.232).

GOD they're keeping the authentic and historically accurate Shakespeare giftshop" (@josklos). These responses highlight the unattainability of the Globe's mission for re-created authenticity, particularly in the centre of contemporary, urbanized, multi-cultural London. The Globe's championing of historical accuracy over artistic innovation seems, to borrow from Lyn Gardner, more akin to a museum than a theatre (Gardner 2016).

3.1. "#NotYourGlobe": Gender and Class Criticism

Shakespeare tends to operate as a meta-language for socio-political issues that transcend the plays themselves.[13] Some commentators dismissed the Board's rather fragile justification for Rice's departure and pointed to a more harmful issue at the heart of the controversy: "The insulting thing is that @The_Globe is blaming Emma Rice's departure on 'lighting & sound' use. She was too much of a visionary for them" (@westendproducer). Some speculated that the actual reason behind the Board's decision was Rice's commitment to gender parity at the Globe.[14] Beyond Twitter, costume designer Joan O'Clery's lengthy post entitled, "The Globe – it's a feminist issue" garnered support on the *Waking the Feminists* Facebook page. The movement utilized social media to showcase the need for more women in theatre positions to promote inclusive gender politics. The parallel between Rice's premature departure and the Irish *Waking the Feminists* initiative underscores the prevalence of gender disparity in theatre outside the UK and highlights the power of social media and written testimony to generate change. The gender gap in UK theatre has attracted considerable attention in recent years because despite the high number of female theatre goers, writers and directors remain predominantly male.[15]

[13] As an interesting case in point, Stephen O'Neill has recently argued that *King Lear* "is Shakespeare's Brexit play" maintaining that Shakespeare can be understood "as itself a discourse through which cultural ideas, both real and imaginary, about Brexit and the EU are negotiated" (2019, p. 120). More recently, James Shapiro has argued that *Coriolanus* – "a tragedy steeped in allusions to "contagion", "plague," and "the dead carcasses of unburied men… presaged the Trump administration's response to the Coronavirus pandemic" (Shapiro 2020)

[14] Gender-blind casting continues to generate criticism and speaks to an enduring desire to preserve Shakespeare's status as a powerful cultural artefact. Playwright Ronald Harwood was recently quoted saying that casting women in traditionally male roles is "astonishingly stupid" and "an insult to the playwright" (Snow 2016a). See also Dominic Cavendish's article for *The Telegraph* entitled "The Thought Police's rush for gender equality on stage risks the death of the great male actor" (2017). More recent developments strongly suggest that the issue cannot be ignored. Namely, Rice was replaced by another female artistic director; Michelle Terry and the Royal Shakespeare Company announced its 50/50 equality aim in 2018: https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/diversity-data-report

[15] From: Purple Seven *Gender in Theatre* pamphlet, 2015. See also "Women in theatre: how the '2:1 problem' breaks down" ("The Guardian DataBlog") and Lanre Bakare's article "Sexism and gender divide ingrained in UK Theatre, study claims" (2020).

The Globe's commitment to historical accuracy transcends the architecture and impacts the performance culture, evidenced by Mark Rylance's pioneering of 'original practice' performances during his tenure from 1995-2005. Rylance's well documented anti-Stratfordian position seems at odds with his championing of the Globe and highlights a double standard in the acceptability of Rylance and Rice questioning the eminence of Shakespeare's authorship. Rylance's recreation of Elizabethan performance practice that necessitates period costumes and all-male casts, perhaps unsurprisingly, incited criticism. Jeremy Lopez argued that Rylance's desire to establish "a theatrical practice that is based on highly dubious, manifestly problematic notions of authenticity and the uses of history" had less to do with historical preservation and more to do with the marketing value of tourism and student audiences (2008, p. 302). Despite this, however, Rylance was praised for his all-male productions of *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III* in 2012; his successor Dominic Dromgoole extended the Globe's stage during his tenure in an attempt to overcome some of the architectural limitations of the space, leading Tom Cornford to argue that, "rather than directing the actors, he… directed the building" (2010, p. 322).[16] The Rice controversy powerfully underscores the enduring conflict between individuals working on the craft and the institutional powers that govern them. The double standard in acceptability for 'alternative' productions was highlighted by several commentators on Twitter: "Men seen as 'innovative' to be encouraged, women seen as 'risky' to be closely watched #EmmaRice #WakingTheFeminists @lianbell @The_Globe" (@SarahDurcan). Indeed, the adaptive drive was already in motion at the Globe long before Rice took up the role of Artistic Director.

The enduring gender gap in theatre serves to maintain Shakespeare's patriarchal lineage. Writing on the gendered politics of ownership in the realm of theatrical performance, Kim Solga considers the reasoning behind Katie Mitchell's reluctance to direct Shakespeare:

> Shakespeare's 'owners' have long been, and remain today, primarily the powerful male actors, artistic directors, and mainstream theatre reviewers who function as arbiters of 'good' acting, directing, and interpretation of Shakespeare in Britain's public sphere. (2017, p. 106)

The Rice controversy certainly lends credence to this claim, as it demonstrates the harsh consequences for women who assert artistic authority or challenge the invisible but entrenched set of rules that dictate interpretations of

[16] See Michael Billington's piece in *The Guardian* that explores the tension between populist and traditional performances. Billington praises Dromgoole's tenure and expresses trepidation about Rice's influence: "Now that Dromgoole and his co-directors have largely got the balance between active engagement and silent appreciation right, it would be a pity if it were to be upset" (2015).

Shakespeare. Shortly prior to the Board's announcement, Rice spoke out against loaded criticisms she received during her tenure at the Globe. In an article for *The Stage*, Rice said that frequent references to her as "naughty" by men in the industry made her "blood boil" (Hutchenson 2016). Critics have since pointed out the disproportionate criticism Rice received as a woman director and the subsequent outpouring of diversity criticism would suggest that Virginia Woolf's foreboding metaphor about Shakespeare's silenced sister, was more prescient than expected. [17]

As well as emphasizing an enduring gender disparity, the Rice controversy accented an uncomfortable class issue in British theatre: "#EmmaRice is an inspiration for many and championed change, diversity and accessibility. @The_Globe board decision flies in the face of this" (@okorie_chukwu). Despite their contemporary, sleek online aesthetic, the Globe was frequently positioned by Twitter users as directly oppositional to Rice's progressive agenda. The specific issue of ownership was addressed by hashtags such as: "The exit of #EmmaRice from @The_Globe is indicative of why so many ppl feel Theatre isn't accessible for them #NotYourGlobe #EveryonesGlobe" (@NotTooTame). This particular Tweet was posted with an accompanying image from Kenneth Loach's 1969 film *Kes*, depicting protagonist Billy Casper holding two fingers up to the camera as a cinematic icon of working-class British culture. Every director of the Globe, including Rice, has attempted to combat the classism of theatre by committing to keep £5 tickets in circulation, but her dismissal underscores the fact that inaccessibility is not only a financial issue.[18]

Reflecting on her successful production of *Imogen*, Rice explained: "Diverse to its bones, this production was all about access; access to Shakespeare, access for women, access for disabled actors and access for the audience" (Rice 2018). Following her admission that she struggled to understand some aspects of Shakespeare, Rice was criticized by Richard Morrison in *The Times* for the "perversity, incongruity and disrespect" of her artistic approach, and castigated for not knowing – and, moreover, not *enjoying* – Shakespeare enough (Morrison 2016). It appears that the wealth of contemporary adaptations has not entirely destabilized the notion of Shakespeare as emblematic of certain upper-class, academic British values.

[17] See Paul Gallagher's article entitled "Shakespearean Black and Ethnic minority actors 'still only getting minor roles" (2016) and Barbara Vitello's article entitled "Oak Brook theatre defends same-sex couple, interracial casting in Shakespeare play" (2017).

[18] Speaking to Gordon Cox for *Variety,* Rice said "You can go in for £5. But there are still barriers, because many people find Shakespeare hard to understand, and think that it's not for them. So I do want to extend a hand even more. I want people to understand that it's accessible, that they will see a diverse company of actors onstage like you would on a London bus, and a variety of different styles of work" (2016)

Rice responded to Morrison's criticism by pointing out that: "There are gatekeepers of theatre in this country. I have never fitted in, so I see them clearly. Most of the gatekeepers went to Oxbridge and read classics and have similar taste in theatre." (Kellaway 2018). Her comments hint at how the controversy fits rather (un)comfortably within the broader global narrative of conservative politics trumping progressive politics.[19]

3.2. "The Brexit of Theatre"

The Globe's desire to revert to an idealized prior condition creates an uncomfortable connection between their decision on Rice and Britain's decision to leave the European Union. Both signal a return to a nostalgic version of Great Britannia, with Shakespeare as its most famous representative.[20] The dismissal of Emma Rice is indicative of a creeping conservatism within the Shakespeare multiverse and inspired many commentators to call out the political charge at the center of the controversy: "The Globe not supporting Emma Rice is the Brexit of theatre. Regressive, backwards-looking, and profoundly sad" (@derekbond). Gideon Lester astutely highlights this in his argument that the theatre, "like post-Brexit Britain, has vaulted backwards into an uncertain future" and argues that the mingling of personal and public narratives highlighted by the Board's announcement "seem[s] Shakespearean" (Lester 2016).

Immediately following the Globe's announcement about Rice, a parody account with the handle "AuthenticGlobe2018" appeared on Twitter and promoted the hashtag #MakeShakespeareGreatAgain, evoking the antagonistic political slogan of then presidential candidate, Donald Trump. The page posted a series of sarcastic quips about the theatre's paradoxical attitude to technological innovation: "#Globe2018 we will be closing our Twitter accounts and promoting our shows by carrier pigeon #MakeShakespeareGreatAgain" (@RealGlobe2018). @RealGlobe2018 provided a satirical critique of the ways in which Shakespeare's cultural authority is deployed to support conservative politics. Graham Holderness and Carol Banks have pointed out that the problem with the Globe is that the theatre is committed to "sustaining and promoting 'British Culture' as if it were an unchallenged, unified authority, clinging to the outmoded values of faded

[19] This could be linked to another British institution, the National Theatre, and how the critics denounced Rufus Norris's production of *Macbeth* (2018). Similar to the criticism Rice received, many critics focused on Norris' apparent lack of understanding of the play and corresponding disregard for Shakespeare's language. Their discourse says little about what the production aimed to do and a lot about what it *should* do as a subsidised theatre.

[20] Indicative of this, contentious political figure Boris Johnson, the current British Prime Minister, was set to publish a biography on Shakespeare entitled *Shakespeare: The Riddle of Genius* in 2020.

British imperialism" (1997, p. 24). It is precisely because Shakespeare has for so long operated as a meta-language for historical processes, for ideologies and politics that new and fresh perspectives on Shakespeare are not only useful but crucial to a society with a thriving artistic core.

Detractors of the institution such as Matt Trueman have suggested that the Board's objection masks something deeper, namely "a battle over taste, and who Shakespeare is for" and signals, despite Garber's argument, an *untimely* Shakespeare, one that risks being out of touch with its age (Trueman 2016). The Rice controversy created tension between the Globe and the RSC, whose statement on the matter maintained that the premature dismissal of Rice's "energetic and thrilling new approach" was "a great shame" (Snow 2016b). In 2017, the RSC produced an Intel-enhanced version of *The Tempest* that utilized digital innovation and more firmly positioned themselves against the Globe's dubious 'authentic' ethos. Widespread theatre closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have encouraged new and creative ways to engage with digital and hybrid productions that renegotiate notions of interactivity and access. The virtual subgenre that has emerged from the darkness of the pandemic has raised important questions about the impact of the "digital turn" on the relocation and democratization of theatre *and* Shakespeare.

The Globe's significant online presence, including its playful utilization of social media, strongly suggest that the theatre does not want to be viewed as "the ultimate expression of… establishment-friendly bardolatory" (Pettitt 2001, p. 37). The question of Shakespeare's universality has been challenged within the discipline for decades, particularly by various "offshoots" in contemporary scholarship that have complicated the traditional notion of Shakespeare as harbinger of universal truths about the human condition (Cohn 1976). Platforms like Twitter have the potential to "lay… the groundwork for a new theatrical avant-garde that is less centralized, less elite, and less invested than their predecessors" (Muse 2012, p. 53). The proliferation of social media has destabilized traditional hierarchies of knowledge by affording virtually anyone with Internet access the ability to voice (or Tweet) an opinion.

4. Conclusion: Shifting Shakespeare's Cultural Legacy

The Emma Rice controversy highlights the problem of determining the value of Shakespeare, or indeed, defining the kind of Shakespeare that is valued. The Globe espouses a certain kind of rigid authority on Shakespeare that the Rice controversy exposed. Perhaps the Globe is not the place to radicalize productions of Shakespeare but the theatre's carefully curated online identity should reflect its historicist ethos. As it stands, Gordon McMullan has pointed out, the institution "draws on both early modern and postmodern practice in uneven, serendipitous and frequently uncomfortable ways" (2008, p. 233). If

the fidelity rhetoric that underpins the Globe's architecture is extended into performances, the institution risks becoming a silo of Shakespeare elitism.

Social media has created new modes of spectatorship and constitutes a productive space to challenge and contest claims of custodianship. Twitter endows agency by enabling passive spectators to become active contributors and fosters a sense of community via 'hash-tag' and 'retweet' features. Social media, for all its flaws, has the power to decentre institutional authority, or indeed, Shakespearean authority. Consequentially, as Yong Li Lan rightly points out, platforms like Twitter "can be seen to expand the territory of a production, rather than de-territorialize it" (2003, p. 52).

Expanding on Rice's comments quoted in the epigraph of this paper regarding her 'choice' to step down, Kim Solga observes:

> For Rice… walking away from Shakespeare was perhaps the only choice, when that so-called choice was either to walk away or to 'respect' his work and legacy on stage – with no respect for a difference in perspective or approach forthcoming, in return, from those ultimately in charge. (Solga 2017, p. 118)

Crucially, the social media landscape afforded Rice the opportunity to stand by her artistic vision and practice, in doing so, underscore the power of written testimony in a climate of speaking out. In a statement addressed to her successor, Rice acknowledged the class and gender issues accentuated by the Globe's decision. Rice admitted that she learned "not to say that [she] sometimes finds Shakespeare hard to understand" and that she would never again "allow [herself] to be excluded from the rooms where decisions are made" (Rice 2017). The appointment of Olivier-award winning actor Michelle Terry as Rice's successor suggests a more prudent approach to the Globe's mission, one in which, McMullan succinctly reminds us, "perception matters as much as practice" (2008, p. 230). Significantly, Terry's appointment countered some of the gendered criticism brought to the fore by Rice's dismissal. Speaking at the new season announcement, Terry stated: "Emma Rice was the best thing that ever happened to the Globe because it has forced an organisation to go through a most healthy form of protest" (Snow 2018). A form of protest, I might add, that has been enabled and enhanced by social media.

The 2018 "Women & Power" festival at the Globe sought to address – and perhaps redress – some questions raised during the controversy including: "Is there a place for feminism in classical theatre?" and "What challenges does a director's gender present?" On the potential future of Shakespeare in performance, Kathryn Schwartz offers a productive direction. Highlighting the value of unintelligibility in the aggregate we call "Shakespeare", Schwartz argues that it should be recognized less as an institution and more as "a constellation of scepticisms, improvisations, ambiguities, and fugitive propositions" (2016, p. 18). Evaluating the dynamic ways in which

Shakespeare can be expanded by and through technology dismantles the traditional idea of Shakespeare as the synecdoche for academic privilege or Britishness. One might argue that Schwartz' "fugitive inquiry" was the approach Emma Rice attempted to put into action at the Globe. To borrow from Horatio, while Rice's "wonderous strange" productions that sought to increase access and unsettle certain purist assumptions about Shakespeare in performance were not ultimately "give[n] welcome" by the institution, the significant support she garnered online encouraged a period of self-reflection within the Shakespeare community (1.5.163-4). While the controversy does suggest a negative turn in the direction of Shakespearean adaptation, the backlash reveals an anti-purist desire to see more "fugitive" productions that utilize contemporary technologies to "expand the territory" of Shakespeare (Li Lan 2003, p. 52).

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