

# Shakespeare Seminar

*William Shakespeare*



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“Who’s in, who’s out”:  
Community and Diversity  
in Shakespeare

## *Shakespeare Seminar* 21 (2024)

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# INTRODUCTION

MARLENE DIRSCHAUER AND JONAS KELLERMANN

## **“Who’s in, who’s out”: Community and Diversity in Shakespeare**

“Who loses and who wins, who’s in, who’s out” (5.3.15) – these questions, which inspired the title of this *Shakespeare Seminar*, are uttered by King Lear shortly after his defeat by Edmund’s forces. Lear’s questions reverberate well beyond the tragedy about the abdicating monarch. Time and again, Shakespeare’s plays confront us with powerful struggles of inclusion and exclusion, the outcomes of which are not always determined by military victories and defeats: They are just as often influenced by factors that still shape our perceptions and experiences of diversity today, such as the colour of a person’s skin, the religion they practice, the disabilities of a person’s body, or quite simply whom a person loves and desires. Shakespeare’s works also show us how fragile a thing community can be. Even when characters proclaim themselves to be “an endless mine to one another” (2.2.79) as the titular *Two Noble Kinsmen* Palamon and Arcite do, Shakespeare does not hesitate to expose the deceptively frail nature of such kinships soon thereafter. So, we see that on Shakespeare’s stage, community and diversity are intimately but uneasily paired. “Difference”, as Goran Stanivukovic writes in *Queer Shakespeare* (2017), is “based on suppression, occlusion and semantic difference of allied vocabulary” (24).

This intimate yet uneasy pairing of diversity and community is the central concern of this edition of *Shakespeare Seminar*. Community in this sense not only refers to the many historical and “imagined” communities (Anderson) that feature in Shakespeare’s works. These communities also include the bonds between friends, lovers, family members or even whole nations; community further implies the various bonds that revolve around the Shakespearean canon today, whether these be creative, academic, or pedagogical. Whether in the class room or on stage, these Shakespearean bonds highlight the complex socio-political entanglements between community and diversity in the contemporary moment. Diversity can certainly foster community if we consider increasingly diverse representations of minorities in our current media, for instance. To a disenfranchised person, seeing yourself represented in the media may show you that you are not alone but in fact part of a larger community. And yet, we also live in a time in which conservative forces seek to hijack diversity in order to destroy the very fundament of communal existence. They often do so by erecting an allegedly insurmountable wall between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – whoever ‘us’ and ‘them’ may be. The articles in this seminar examine to what extent Shakespeare’s works and their diverse creative afterlives can help us overcome these walls both in Shakespeare’s own times and in ours.

Jifeng Huang's essay explores how colonialism produces disability in *The Tempest*. Taking into account the Edenic vision that propelled England’s voyagers to the New World, Huang argues that the telos of redemption scripted in the play and for the

geographical discoveries in the early modern period entails the subjection of alterity in a disabling mode. Drawing on insights from Indigenous studies and disability studies, his essay investigates the discursive and material respects in which New-World colonialism seeks and is dependent on the disablement of Indigeneity in the play.

Situated at the intersections of Queer, Black, and Shakespeare studies, Natalie Zwätz's paper analyses how James Ijames' Pulitzer Prize-winning adaptation *Fat Ham* employs the categories of Blackness and queerness to challenge normative ideas of adaptation, genre, and ultimately *Hamlet* itself. Drawing on theories of reproductive futurism, queer negativity, Afropessimism, and Freud's concept of the death drive, her article explores how reproductive cycles of revenge and violence can be overcome via the negative and pessimistic implications of queerness and Blackness. *Fat Ham*, Zwätz argues, thus uses categories of Otherness to transform Shakespeare's death-centred tragedy into a narrative of unexpected futurity.

## Works Cited

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