

## ***Shaking Up Shakespeare Episode 5: Something Rotten: Shakespeare & Colonialism***

**Yvette Nolan:** If I'm making a *Hamlet* for this country, we currently agree to call Canada, it's probably about something rotten in the state of Denmark, right? Like who gets to be in power and who should rightfully be in power and what you do about it.

Like whether you can *actually* do something about it or whether you just like, lurk in the corners of the castle and complain about it. And what is justified in terms of setting things right? So I think maybe that's what the conversation can be in Canada about the play is like, who rules? And what, what kind of grace do we give them?

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Playwright, director, and dramaturge of Algonquin and Irish descent, Yvette Nolan, shares her theoretical version of *Hamlet* for contemporary Canada.

**Yvette Nolan:** I have always thought that we needed Fortinbras to come in to restore order at the end of the piece. But having just said what I said to you about *Hamlet* and being a question about who's the ruler, who gets to rule, and what kind of allowances do we make for them? Like how much do we acquiesce in order to have order?

I don't know that I would let Fortinbras back in at the end of the piece. So that's an interesting thing that I just discovered in this conversation with you Liam. Because *something is rotten in the state of Denmark*.

And I don't mean like according to what political party's in, I don't mean Trudeau, I don't mean Poilievre, I don't mean Harper. I mean the structure, the institution is in trouble, as we know, like the institution of democracy is in trouble as we know, and maybe that's the conversation we can be having with *Hamlet*. Like the institution of ruler in *Hamlet* is in trouble because dude got it by foul means.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Hello everyone, and welcome back to *Shaking Up Shakespeare*, the podcast where we acknowledge, investigate, and query Shakespeare's enduring presence on 21st century Canadian stages, taking a critical perspective on Shakespeare's work and influence. I'm Liam Lockhart-Rush, and I host this podcast alongside Dr. Marlis Schweitzer, and Hope Van Der Merwe.

This podcast was written and recorded in Tkaronto, the traditional territory of the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, and most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit. We would like to acknowledge the ways in which Shakespeare was used as a tool for colonialism and genocide, and encourage all listeners to continue to be critical of this enduring presence in so-called "Canada."

This episode will contain discussion and mentions of residential schools, colonialism, genocide, white supremacy, and racism. Listener discretion is advised.

This is the first of two episodes dedicated to unpacking and interrogating the relationship between Shakespeare and colonialism. This episode will examine Canada's past and current

use of Shakespeare as a tool for colonialism. The second episode we'll shift focus to highlighting several artists who stage and adapt Shakespeare in a way that subverts and challenges its cultural dominance and legacy.

Both of these episodes will contain excerpts from the (Re)Casting Shakespeare in Canada Symposium, which took place on April 30th and May 1st, 2023. This symposium was held at York University and was co-curated by Keira Loughran, Jamie Robinson, Dr. Marlis Schweitzer, Jeff Ho, Hope Van Der Merwe, and myself.

Though they will be discussed briefly in this episode, we will primarily be examining examples of adaptations of Shakespeare in the next episode, so stay tuned.

Throughout this podcast series, we have aimed to examine just how deep the roots of Shakespeare are in this country, especially concerning its role in Canadian educational institutions, and as the subject of beloved festivals like the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Bard on the Beach in British Columbia, and more.

However, in this episode, you will hear from many different voices and perspectives more specifically about the role Shakespeare played in helping to create a national identity founded on oppressive systems of white supremacy, colonialism, and patriarchy.

Given the nature of this episode's content, I would like to acknowledge my identity and positionality. I am a cis-male, white, settler theatre artist of Irish descent, and thus want to acknowledge the bias I bring to this conversation as someone who benefits from these white supremacist and patriarchal systems.

The artists in this episode will also discuss what it means to decolonize Shakespeare, and if that is even possible. Certain artists bring up problematic histories of "stunt casting," and producing Shakespeare with a lack of cultural sensitivity, and how to address these histories, as well as how to approach producing and creating work that acknowledges and deconstructs Shakespeare's colonial power.

Others we spoke to share their hesitancy for working with Shakespeare, a perspective which will be shared in greater detail in episode 10, titled "Shakespeare and Beyond."

The purpose of this episode is not to assert a proper way to produce or work with Shakespeare, as there is no such thing, as there is no such thing.

Rather, this collection of interview excerpts aims to showcase many perspectives from a diverse group of theatre makers and educators to contribute to the larger conversation around Shakespeare and colonialism in Canada.

We begin with responses to a question that we posed in all of our interviews, beginning with Yvette Nolan.

What role do you think Shakespeare plays in Canadian society?

**Yvette Nolan:** Well, I think we're always looking at Shakespeare. We're always looking at plays, but the Shakespeare ones are the ones that are sort of ubiquitous, right? To reflect our own experience, to see how our experience is mirrored by the stories that we know. And we use those stories to tell ourselves our own story, to make our own mythologies.

And so, You know, like [the] Stratford Festival, right? That whole thing about some guy going to some town and being like, I know what we need. We need Shakespeare tents here, and like, and Stratford's still there, still doing Shakespeare. And ironically, during the pandemic did Shakespeare in tents.

He's just got such a hold on human imagination, that of course we grapple with it, but we grapple with all big mythologies, right? We grapple with religions, we grapple with the Bible, we grapple with the Greeks still, right? 2000 years on.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Here is actor and educator Duncan Gibson-Lockhart giving his response.

**Duncan Gibson-Lockhart:** It's, it's deeply embedded in, kind of the Canadian mythos or quote unquote Canadian mythos.

It's interesting, I was reading an article earlier talking about how there's this rationalized psychosis of Canadians, because I mean, with the idea of “Canadian,” like the Crown and the “British Colonial Canadian.”

We have to rectify the fact that this is not our land. So all of our myths are coming from a different land. So like bringing over Shakespeare is the same thing. It's like these are English, obviously English playwright, that we brought over and kind of instilled within our Canadian culture.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Here Guna-Rappahannock actor, playwright, dramaturge, and artist-scholar Monique Mojica provides insight on Shakespeare's role in residential schools.

**Monique Mojica:** Well, you know, pageants and having people, having kids in, in residential school do Shakespeare was all part of that too. I mean, there were residential school bands and people who played in the quartets and oratory and Shakespeare and all those pageants. They were very much a part of the whole assimilation project. And there were a lot of people who learned musical instruments in the boarding school system, in the residential school system.

But the imposition and or superimposing of Western culture and artistry has always been a part of the genocidal project, right? And then we were displayed as the oddities.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Here is Ziyana Kotadia, a Masters of Philosophy student at Cambridge University, whose perspective is interspersed here with comments from Monique.

**Ziyana Kotadia:** It is steeped in colonialism, it is steeped in patriarchy.

**Monique Mojica:** It upholds white supremacy. It's a vehicle for white supremacy and for perpetuating the superiority of Anglo culture.

**Ziyana Kotadia:** But, there's the opportunity to subvert that if you understand that those are the default, experiences that underlie the way that Shakespeare is written.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Speaking on the “Grappling with Shakespeare's Colonial Legacy” round table alongside Joseph Jomo Pierre, Jeff Ho, and moderator Keira Loughran at the (Re)Casting Shakespeare in Canada Symposium, actor and playwright of Irish and French descent Kaitlyn Riordan discusses the research process behind co-writing the play *1939* with Jani Lauzon. This play premiered at the Stratford Festival in 2022.

While the bulk of her discussion of the play will come in the next episode, this excerpt provides crucial context to how Shakespeare was used in Residential Schools and how it has been used as propaganda by Canadian media.

**Kaitlyn Riordan:** We had the luck of working with an incredible research dramaturg, Professor Sorouja Moll. And she did her PhD in Media Studies in Canada in the 18th century.

And she talks about the Bard's cultural capital and how it advanced the rhetoric of nation building. And I kind of think about that as like how Shakespeare was used as marketing for the colonial vision of the world. What could be a better tool than Shakespeare? This guy writes incredible works.

He's got these great quotes, very quotable. We can pop them in here and there. And what I didn't realize, and thanks to Sorouja's research, was how widespread that was and how it was used everywhere as a way of locating culture within the “Terra Nullius” of Canada, which obviously it wasn't. So for example, the HBC ships were named, many of them named after Shakespearean characters.

Politicians were quoting Shakespeare all the time. The media was using Shakespeare. And I wanna dive into one specific example of a journalist named Nicholas Flood Davin, who wrote for *The Leader* I believe, in Winnipeg. And he was reporting on Louis Riel's trial.

I should note he was arguing against freeing Riel even before the trial had happened, or any evidence had been presented. And Riel was imprisoned for being accused of murdering Thomas Scott. And I wanna just quote this from an article: “Can an excuse be found in his speeches, which show that if at liberty he would again seek to play the same game? Or is there an excuse to be found in the ghost of the murdered Scott, rising from his bloody repose and pointing to his wounds and crying, ‘Remember me?’” So, you know, I think you all recognize, “Remember me” act one, scene five, Hamlet's, ghost.

So what Davin is doing in that moment is casting Thomas Scott as Hamlet's murdered father. He's casting Louis Riel as the villain, Claudius, and he's casting the readers, us, Canada, reading as the avenging Hamlet, or I could also say a jury of his peers, as the avenging Hamlet. So he's using that archetype to already condemn a man before a trial has even begun.

Four years later, John A. McDonald sent Davin down to the United States to do a report, which eventually was published, called the “Davin Report” to study the industrial school system in the United States. Which became the model for the residential school system in Canada very shortly afterwards. So there's a line there that I find really fascinating that speaks to a colonial worldview, that had really, really serious implications for language, for culture, for the Indigenous people of this land.

At residential schools, there was no universal curriculum the way that Shakespeare is now in our curriculum. But we did find evidence that in specific curriculums of specific schools, Shakespeare was taught.

And we also got to hear from survivors, who some were taught Shakespeare. Um, some were very bored by it and some were very inspired by it. The ones that we had the privilege of speaking to. We don't really know how Shakespeare was used in that context. Of course, it would've depended on the teacher as always, but we do know that this, these, in this institution, the institution of residential school was grounded in white supremacy.

So that already defined something really important about how Shakespeare was used. Probably used also to teach literacy and held up as an example of platonic culture to aspire to, you know, on land that he never set foot on, where rich and varied cultures existed for thousands of years before those plays arrived here.

Professor Farah Karim Cooper, who was mentioned earlier, who works at the Globe Theater, talks about him as an icon of white excellence.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Festivals like the Stratford Festival, arguably the biggest current Shakespeare institution in Canada, are a big part of why Shakespeare continues to be upheld and celebrated in the way that it does.

Two-Spirit Turtle Mountain Michif theatre artist Cole Alvis speaks on the historical practice of naming settler towns after colonial symbols and people and the consequences of favoring these institutions over others.

**Cole Alvis:** Where to begin? Well, so I grew up in Duchess, Alberta, a couple hours east of Mohkinstsis, just the other side of Siksika Nation and the town is called Duchess because it's on what's called the Royal Line. So this railroad that connected these various settler towns all have names like Countess, Rosemary, Patricia, Gem, these kind of romantic notions of Eurocentric royalty, some actual names, and then other items of colonialism.

And that is a similar reason why the city of Stratford has that name. Part of the colonial project is importing Eurocentric ideas and asserting them as the center of the conversation. And so the rail line was ripped out of Duchess when I still lived there growing up. Because the industry changed, the grain that was being extracted there was no longer running off that particular line. And so they took out the rail and tore down the grain elevator that had the name Duchess written on it. It's sort of a prairie thing to see the name of the town on the grain elevator. But if the grain elevator's not active, it's derelict and dangerous, so they have to remove them. This is related to Stratford in that whatever industry was happening when Stratford as a settler town in Ontario was settling.

When it left, which is quite a common thing for rural Canada, someone got the idea that since it's called Stratford, let's start a theatre festival based on William Shakespeare. And I guess that feels poignant to be naming the way in which colonialism is operating through words and people who are the heroes that we return to.

And so I think there's something particularly cozy for settlers about Shakespeare because it affirms a Eurocentric ancestry that white supremacy culture prefers to keep at the centre of the conversation.

And so, if the question is "How do I think Shakespeare has been used as a tool of colonialism?" I suppose it continues to be used when we take a look at the funding disparities within just how well-resourced the Stratford Festival of Canada, as well as the George Bernard Shaw Festival at Niagara on the Lake. These powerhouse institutions pull a significant amount of funding.

And yet are intentionally favouring these Eurocentric White men. And so I'm naming that in relation to Native Earth Performing Arts or Kaha:wi Dance Theatre or Full Circle First Nations Performance out west. Some of these institutions that have been around for 30 plus years, no near the same level of funding as, um, as either of these festivals.

And so to bring that back to colonialism, what are the ways in which within the arts we can see how white supremacy culture is privileging certain stories over others.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Chinese-Canadian theatre artist Jeff Ho provides his view on the many different perspectives of Shakespeare and how his work has been used.

**Jeff Ho:** But I do see Shakespeare in two different ways, I would say, or multiple ways: as a cultural monolith in that it's something that we still hold up as the bastion of dramatic literature or something of the sword. It's something to be studied, something to really emulate after the amount of adaptations that we see or inspirations of in modern stories and modern storytelling is just embedded, like the comparisons and the language.

It's just in every show, it seems like every other line, not every other line, but there's always at least some sort of drawing from Shakespeare. Either a direct quotation or some sort of reference. It's just everywhere. It's just such a part of our English Canadian storytelling. So I see it as a bit of a cultural monolith for just that, seeing those influences everywhere.

And then I also see it as a tool of oppression. I see it as a way that has continued to be used to justify erasure or absences within the theatre community that I feel a lot of IBPOC communities talk more directly on. And then I also see it as truly a wonderful tool for learning, and poetry, and music.

The role of it is great art as well, also. It's just such beautiful language. Yeah. It's so many things.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Back to Yvette Nolan who offers her personal connection with Shakespeare's plays.

**Yvette Nolan:** I am a Shakespeare nerd, which is a little awkward for a half-breed.

A little awkward for an Indigenous person because very often, you know, people from that community of mine are like, why Shakespeare? Like, why bother? Like the, you know, the great colonizer.

And it's true, you know, he is the great colonizer. His language, you know, "Shakespeare out in front and the rest of you lot strung out behind," as someone says in some Stoppard play.

But my mother and I watched the Stratford production of *Julius Caesar* that was broadcast on the *CBC* when I was a toddler. And my mother, who had been in residential schools, who was, you know, she spoke Algonquin, French and English, and was an autodidact to a certain extent. So she always was learning.

And so we learned together. And so *Julius Caesar* was my first Shakespeare. And it's like, you know, they who have power over the language have power. The way you put the words together, that gives you power. When I was a child I used to learn poems for my father's birthday, Father's Day, things like that, and recite them.

So you know, there's the seeds of me wanting to be in theatre. My mother made me learn poems to speak to my father, which I have still in me so many of those poems, but it's - again, Stoppard: If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little. Like words are powerful.

They're so powerful, which we see today in cancel culture and identity politics. Like we see how words are weaponized against each other, and so I guess that's part of my love of language. And of course Shakespeare being the great, you know, the one that everybody aspires to, like when you write a bad play, they're like, "Well, it ain't Shakespeare."

And it's like, yeah, nothing is. Only Shakespeare is Shakespeare.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Duncan Gibson-Lockhart and Monique Mojica bring up one of the most highly debated claims in Shakespeare studies.

**Duncan Gibson-Lockhart:** It's interesting cause we always talk about universalisms and objectivism when talking about Shakespeare, but we're not really looking at what the objective stance is, or what the universal stance of these are.

And it's really actually from a colonial perspective or a western perspective, it's not encompassing of everyone.

**Monique Mojica:** And they're built on a colonial framework and a colonial foundation and a colonial, that's a European story narrative. I mean, this whole thing about Shakespeare, being universal, I think is a big fat lie. It's not universal. It's specific to a culture, a time, a place, and a history. You know? And there's nothing - I mean, I don't believe in universality.

I think that universality is something that white folks say that means, it makes them feel warm and fuzzy and say, “Oh, see, look, they're just like us.”

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** In an essay written for the literary magazine *The Paris Review*, author Michael LaPointe cites both Ben Jonson and Samuel Johnson as early examples of claims to Shakespeare’s universality. This claim arguably dates back to 1623, when Ben Jonson published his “Eulogy” for Shakespeare and the *First Folio* of Shakespeare's works, where Johnson wrote “He was not of an age but for all time.” LaPointe includes Samuel Johnson's claims from his 1765 edition of Shakespeare's works in which he specifically claims their universality, saying this of Shakespeare's works: “They are the genuine progeny of common humanity such as the world will always supply and observation we'll always find.”

These claims have been debated more and more recently, as previously mentioned by Monique Mojica. Other scholars like Mohegan writer, actor, director, and educator Madeline Sayet, have pointedly critiqued claims of Shakespeare's universality. In her essay “Interrogating the Shakespeare System” posted on *HowlRound Theatre Commons*, Sayet questions the idea of “bardolatry,” asking:

**Marlis Schweitzer:** “Is Shakespeare a god? If not, why is “bardolatry” a word? And why is the Shakespeare missionary complex still a real one? Whenever I hear people preach about the universalism of Shakespeare the way missionaries once wielded the Bible, I think to myself, this is dangerous. And yet it goes unquestioned, even though not everyone interprets his work the same way - and not everyone even likes it.

If any other writer were treated as a deity it would not be tolerated, but something about Shakespeare’s role in the colonization of America has made him the exception.”

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** This is not the only time Sayet has taken issue with universalism and Shakespeare. In her 2021 solo play, *Where We Belong*, published in 2022 by Methuen Drama, Sayet interrogates her relationship with Shakespeare and contends with the claims of his universality. For more about Sayet and her play, please see our show notes.

Here is artist and scholar Nassim Abu Sarari, who was most recently a member of the IBPOC Critic Lab, A group of emerging IBPOC critics led by Jose Solís and Karen Fricker supported by *Intermission Magazine* and the Stratford Festival. Nassim provides his perspective on Shakespeare's legacy and points towards adaptation as being the best way to produce Shakespeare.

**Nassim Abu Sarari:** You know, it's, I think it's fascinating that one man's writing, becomes so widespread across national borders.

And how those writings defines or plays a role in people's sense of national and cultural as well as linguistic heritage, right? And, I do not think that this is what it should be only limited to. On the contrary, I think Shakespeare and Shakespearean writing should be constantly questioned and challenged and not taken -



Or not be celebrated, constantly praised and celebrated, but treated as a recorded piece of history from which we can learn how to better ourselves as a society. Right? If we're talking about Canada, because Shakespeare poses some very, real questions about our natures as our nature as humans, our instincts, our fears, our emotions.

There's something so relevant to this day about Shakespeare. But to what extent I think Shakespeare should play a role in Canadian society? I think adaptations are doing it more often than classical renditions of Shakespeare, that they try to reimagine - make contemporary, some of Shakespeare's plays or writings to contemporary audiences. To us, right? To queer folks, to folks of colour, you know, to folks in general, who are part of the 2020s, right?

Which are very intricate and interesting years to be alive. That certainly is the rule that Shakespeare should play. I mean, and I keep kind of repeating the same thing, but I think, again, Shakespeare is important, but important to an extent that we should not only praise it, we should critique it. We should change it if needed. Yes, I say change it if needed.

This might be like, no, you don't change a piece of literature. Well, you do, you adapt it, not change it in a sense that it loses its meaning or it loses completely its intentions, because the intentions will still remain there. But, it recontextualizes, some of the, the topics or some of the social issues that Shakespeare is presenting in his work.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Here is Ziyana Kotadia again to look at the systems in which Shakespeare thrives.

**Ziyana Kotadia:** So I definitely do think that Shakespeare's work has perpetuated a colonial narrative, particularly by the way it's taken up in Western culture as kind of like an emblem of excellence. It really does have an effect on how we value different works of literature and different works of art. So for sure I think it's had an impact.

But I do also think that there's a lot of power - as much as the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, people have to live in that house. People are actively moving through the systems that we've designed, systems that are designed to exclude them and to marginalize them and to orient power towards the people who've built the systems.

But they are the systems we move through. And so I do think that it's important to do work on the master's house at the same time that we're coming up with alternatives to living in that house. And I think a way that we can do work on the master's house is by taking up those colonial tools. And if we think about Shakespeare's work as a colonial tool, and we reorient it to give voice to communities and experiences that have historically been relegated to the margins.

That's a really powerful thing. So I think that it's important to perform Shakespeare intentionally and critically for that reason.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Métis multidisciplinary artist Jani Lauzon speaks to how she discovered her personal relationship to Shakespeare through asking the question “how do I find myself?”

**Jani Lauzon:** Well, what I realized was that in order for me to find a relationship with Shakespeare, I had to develop a place for myself within it. So, one of the classes I went to, there was a young woman who had just come back from the Globe Theater in the UK.

And the first thing that she said was: “So you can't do Shakespeare unless you look at it through a colonial lens.” And so I left, I left the class. But again, I used that as an opportunity. I used that as a clue to go, oh, wait a minute. My body's telling me that I don't wanna do that.

So what do I wanna do then? And how do I find myself? How do I find a place for myself within this text that people are telling me that I can't do unless I do it through a colonial lens? So that sparked a real long, well, I'm still trying to figure that out. But the other thing at the time was because I was running the Centre for Indigenous Theatre, which is a conservatory program for people of Indigenous ancestry.

And I was trying to figure out how to engage the Indigenous students, and help them to fall in love with Shakespeare the way that I had. And I understand their challenge with it. But I had been reading an interview with Peter Brook.

I think it's called *Between Two Worlds*. It's a book of interviews, I think it was the University of Texas. Interviews, and panels and things that he had been on, down at the university. And they were talking about multiculturalism and he was asked, you know, what he does with his multicultural casts, and he said, “I ask them to bring their living culture to the work.”

And that really, really is the thing that I've been using and exploring. I mean, I'm not suggesting that I have the ultimate answer for that, but I better understood how I could put myself centre into Shakespeare's work by doing that.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Métis/Cree actor, playwright, and member of the creative leadership at Shakespeare in the Ruff, PJ Prudat speaks about the implications of Shakespeare's language and the complications of upholding his stories over others.

**PJ Prudat:** Oh, I guess I feel like it's a bit complicated. I mean, I have, in some ways I think I have very mixed feelings about it because it is the English language and so, you know, for me, I think my grandparents all spoke many different languages, or at least English was not the first.

And so I think about all the people whose first language is also not English. And so the complicatedness of having, you know, this English text that like originated so many words and all of that, it's so upheld, you know, in such a massive form I keep thinking of Jeff Ho's *Cockroach* and how they broke down Shakespeare at the end and it was fascinating and really well performed and by Karl Ang.

And it was just like, but there was something about that conflict of, is Shakespeare the end all? And really know, you know, that the most moving part, I think about that particular piece that Jeff wrote was about how, you know, the poets that are a thousand years old, these beautiful Chinese writers that have been there from like, so much longer.

There's so much that we don't know. And so I have this conflicting way of looking at that. Also, you know, as an Indigenous person, as a Métis/Cree person, there's so many stories that don't, that we don't always get to share, get to, to unravel in a larger societal way. And so, I look at that, but I also think there is still something that we connect to in these stories.

So there's this, there's a thing about the language, you know, where I think about, you know, being an actor and getting it right and, you know, this thing that we're taught also of, of, are you a good actor if you can do classical text? And there's something as a Métis/Cree person too, where you go, oh, how does, how do I fit into that?

If I do, if I am or not able to speak this language, what does that say about me?

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** In many of our conversations we discussed critical questions around the implications of making certain decisions when putting on a play including casting and the decision to produce Shakespeare in the first place. My co-host Hope will start this section off with a question.

**Hope Van Der Merwe:** Do you think that we should still be performing or like putting on, I guess, Shakespeare's works and if so, do you think that there is any way to decolonize it?

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** Here's Cole Alvis with her response

**Cole Alvis:** I think this question makes me think of Yvette Nolan, who's an Algonquin playwright and director. She was running Native Earth Performing Arts when I first started working with that organization, Indigenous theatre company in Toronto. She asks the question around the classics, which is not just Shakespeare, but when - what is the work involved to dull the sharp edges of the problematic stories and humour, and misogyny often, and racism.

What is the labour that's involved in making these problematic narratives, less harmful, versus commissioning new work. And so I think certainly as the leader of Native Earth at the time, wanting to see more Indigenous stories that are led by Indigenous artists on these lands, then and now continues to be a significant need to counteract just how much Shakespeare that's going on in parks all across the land every summer.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** For a deeper look into the culture and history of Shakespeare and parks please check out episode 3 in this series. Back to Yvette Nolan.

**Yvette Nolan:** But there is stunt casting, right? Like when you cast an Indigenous person as the merchant.

As Shylock, what are you saying? Like what are you saying when in the early days there was a lot of stunt casting. Like Caliban was always whatever the colonized, the marginalized actor, Caliban was Indigenous or Black or whatever the colony was. Fairies, you know, for a long time, that's where Indigenous folks got cast, as the fairies. because there's something "magical" about Indigenous folks that still exist, right? That's kind of stunt casting. So everything, you know, everything makes a difference to the show that you're, that you're saying. What's important, I think, is what conversation you're in with your audience. What do you think you're saying? How is your audience receiving it and how does it contribute to whatever moment we are in?

**Cole Alvis:** I am thinking about what Yvette was saying about this labour of saving, salvaging, dulling the edges of, I guess I'm questioning the question when it comes to why does Shakespeare have to be at the centre?

When we know that Shakespeare didn't write all those plays like that there's, many of them are references to other works. And so I say that only to identify where in time are we freezing history and calling it pure or the authentic version?

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** In this section Ziyana Kotadia and actor, director, theatre artist, and Professor of Theatre and Performance at York University Keira Loughran, discuss the impact of Shakespeare's cultural legacy and offer ways of creating and producing work that complicates this legacy and contributes to decolonizing the canon.

**Ziyana Kotadia:** Canadian society often upholds the cultural cornerstones of English experiences as some sort of emblem to aspire to often. So I think that it's had an effect on the way that Canadian artists and Canadian writers produce work, because a lot of people aspire - I mean, I don't know anyone who wouldn't aspire to the level of legacy that Shakespeare has access to. If you are someone who wants to be remembered as an artist or as a writer. So I think that it has an effect on the way that we produce work for sure.

But I also think that in a Canadian context where differently than the US, I think, we're becoming increasingly aware of in a sort of mainstream context, the way that colonial powers have taken and taken and taken from Indigenous communities and have essentially just perpetuated an ongoing genocide. And so in the context of that conversation, I think that those colonial emblems that have kind of been held up as standards to aspire to are coming under increased scrutiny.

So I think Shakespeare and those who perform Shakespeare and teach Shakespeare, are going to have to increasingly justify why it's valuable to do that in a society where we're kind of becoming more critical of those colonial legacies and the works of art that represent colonialism.

**Keira Loughran:** I'd say it's actually more like what story are we telling and are we telling a story that isn't about, that isn't about colonization, cause that's not what the plays were written as, I don't think. But you do need to be clear about what story are you telling, and in the grappling with those decisions, you have to learn and listen of like, how are these stories colonized?

And so that's the ongoing dialogue that I'm trying to engage with. The other one that I have done with the similar intention artistically is *Titus Andronicus* for Dream in High Park. Which again, what story are we telling and how can we tell it? Who should be involved in the telling of that story, in order for it not to be a colonizing story, or a colonizing experience, or an attempt to colonize that experience, if that makes sense.

**Ziyana Kotadia:** There are opportunities in Shakespeare's work for people who have lived experiences that Shakespeare couldn't imagine, to then take those lived experiences and use Shakespeare's work to illuminate why the way that it was thought out originally, or the way it was written originally is problematic.

**Keira Loughran:** I think the question "why do Shakespeare?" is a very relevant one to Canada because of our colonial relationship to Britain.

But, I don't believe in hard rules around it. I don't like, I think we need to keep having these kinds of discussions where artists, a growing diverse group of artists, get to grapple with these questions. You know, as I've had the privilege of doing, in hopes of creating art that does speak to a contemporary audience, that does speak to contemporary Canadians, and hopefully, in the process of doing that, decolonize the canon in that way.

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** The next episode will delve deeper into some significant recent examples of Shakespeare adaptations that are actively working to decolonize the canon, namely work by Yvette Nolan and Cathy Kennedy McKinnon, Renelta Arluk, Jeff Ho, Joseph Jomo Pierre, Erin Shields, and Kaitlyn Riordan.

To end our conversation today, here are Jani Lauzon and Yvette discussing Shakespeare the artist vs. the system, why they choose to engage with his plays, and theorizing on future Shakespeare's.

**Jani Lauzon:** I think this conversation around Shakespeare is an interesting one and an important one. But my challenge to everyone is: blame the system, not the artist. I understand that colonial thinking in the world of, the world of assumption of superiority, is what I call it, has been so deeply and devastatingly harmful. But Shakespeare as the artist is not the one to blame. Blame the system. Don't blame Shakespeare. Don't blame the artist. Don't blame the playwright. Blame the system in which he lived and created and worked.

**Yvette Nolan:** I think it's up to every individual artist or audience member to figure out what they want, how much Shakespeare they want in their lives. You know, my colleagues who are like, why Shakespeare? Like why are you bothering?

I'm like, I just am. You don't have to do it. You don't have to see it. You don't have to engage with it. For me, it's something I'm curious about. It's something that I can keep going to as a well of knowledge and talent and power. That doesn't mean it's good, it's just a tool, right? But I, you know, I'm like a lot of people, there's a lot of Shakespeares that I don't wanna see anymore.

I'm like, I don't think you can do *Shrew* well, I don't think it can be done anymore. And I understand, I've read the theorists who talk about what Shakespeare was actually doing with it, and I'm like, yeah, but in the society in which we live, nobody takes it as anything but misogyny.

So there's, you know, I don't wanna see it again. I think *Merchant* is tough as well. How do you justify that?

**Jani Lauzon:** I don't think it's a racist play. I think it's a play that investigates racism and I personally believe that a lot of his plays are that, I mean, the words that he gave to Shylock were incredibly beautiful.

And a playwright who can only understand what it means to say those words, would write those words. But he truly lived in a system that had perceptions and I think that he struggled with those and there is aspects of those in his place, but I would say blame the world in which he lived and not the artist himself.

**Yvette Nolan:** It's not like we're trying to rehabilitate Shakespeare. It's like we're trying to figure out those questions about, you know, antisemitism and about greed and about misogyny, that's why we do those plays, I think.

You know, I just don't, I don't know. You don't have to. If you don't like it, don't do it. If you don't wanna engage with Shakespeare, don't engage with Shakespeare. You don't have to.

I think, you know, I'm all for new Shakespeares. Who is the writer who is writing now, who is going to be remembered 400 years from now? Who is the writer, right? And we don't know, cause you can't know in this, in the time that you're in. Shakespeare certainly didn't know in the time that he was in that he was going to be Shakespeare. So, which is why of course someone's always trying to debunk him.

So who are the Shakespeares now? Like is it Stoppard, is it Suzan-Lori Parks? August Wilson? Who are the, who are those writers?

**Liam Lockhart-Rush:** The people we spoke with in this episode offered so much insight into the dark and complicated history between Shakespeare and colonialism in Canada, and illuminated how this history informs our current moment in time. Many of these artists and educators have been working in theatre for decades, and have created and produced some of the most exciting work in Canadian theatre.

There was so much material from these wonderful individuals that we will be continuing to hear from some of them in the next episode, where we will be delving into a few specific adaptations of Shakespeare.

You will hear from Yvette Nolan, Jani Lauzon, as well as Kaitlyn Riordan, Erin Shields, Reneltta Arluk, Joseph Jomo Pierre, and Jeff Ho. So stay tuned.

*Shaking up Shakespeare!*

**Marlis Schweitzer:** This podcast is part of resetting the stage, a five year project that seeks to situate debates about theatrical representation and the politics of casting in Canada within a broad historical context, advancing dialogue with directors, playwrights, actors, educators, students, and other creators who are actively transforming professional Canadian theatre and university level theatre training.

For more information on other aspects of the project, please visit [castingcanadiantheatre.ca](http://castingcanadiantheatre.ca). Interviews for this podcast were conducted by Marlis Schweitzer, Jeff Ho, Liam Lockhart-Rush and Hope Van Der Merwe. All episodes written and edited by Marlis, Liam, and Hope with dramaturgical input from Jeff. Sound Mixing and levels by Maddie Batista. ASL Translation by Dawn Jani Birley. Original Music by Faith Andrew. Special thanks to Charles Ketchabaw and Will Innes at FIXT POINT for support with training, development, audio equipment, and software.

*Shaking up Shakespeare* benefits from the following support: a connections grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, an Exchange grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, funding from the York Research Chair and the York Research Support Grant.

Many thanks to the wonderful people we've interviewed for sharing their important insights and perspectives. We could not have done this without you. Special thanks to our early collaborator Why Not Theatre. And at York University, Thanks to Dean Sarah Bay-Cheng, Mary Pecchia, Amy Mitchell, and many colleagues, students and friends.

Thanks for listening to *Shaking Up Shakespeare*.