



ORIGINAL PRONUNCIATION AND THE UNITED STATES

The Case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

by Paul Meier (2010, 2012)

INTRODUCTION

In 2004 *Romeo and Juliet* in OP—Original Pronunciation—was staged at the Shakespeare's Globe over a weekend, inaugurating what David Crystal would later define as “the OP movement” (Crystal 2013; 2014; 2016: xxxix). Although OP refers to “any period of phonological reconstruction in the history of a language,” it is mainly associated with the reconstructed pronunciation of Shakespeare's works (Crystal 2016: ix), whose plausible sounds stem from internal and external evidence (Crystal 2005). Among the characteristics of OP are rhoticity and different vowel and diphthong sounds conducive to rhymes or stylistic effects nonexistent today. For instance, in OP the word “loins”—to be found in *Romeo and Juliet*'s prologue—has the same pronunciation as “lines” due to the sharing of [əɪ], thereby originating a wordplay otherwise absent (Crystal 2005: 88).

The success of the performances at the Globe resulted in the staging of *Troilus and Cressida* in OP, which ran for an entire season in 2005 (Crystal 2016: xl). Although this spectacle was not fully appreciated (see Lahr 2005), the unenthusiastic reactions did not hinder the adoption of OP abroad: the latter travelled to countries such as the US and Sweden.¹ Eventually, Shakespeare's pronunciation² returned to England, where the Sam Wanamaker

Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1500-8155>

1. For a full list of the productions in OP see the section “Archive events and links” (Crystal, “Original Pronunciation”).

2. OP does not coincide with Shakespeare's personal pronunciation; rather, it is a reconstruction of the sounds attributable to his works. This does not mean that Shakespeare's own pronunciation—the pronunciation

Playhouse staged *Macbeth* and *Henry V* in 2014 and 2015 respectively (see Crystal 2015: 42); yet, in hindsight, those were the last landings of OP on the British stage.

If Shakespeare's reconstructed pronunciation no longer inhabits British theaters, it continues to be resorted to in the US. In 2007 director Alex Torra staged *As I Pronounced It To You: Shakespeare as it Originally Sounded* at the Playwright Tavern in New York (Crystal 2021: online): this would become the first of a series of productions mounted at festivals (e.g., extracts at Shakespeare in Clark Park in 2011), universities (e.g., *Hamlet* at the University of Nevada in 2011) and American theaters (e.g., Orlando Shakespeare Theater's *Twelfth Night* in 2018). The latest staging, *King Lear*, was performed at Baltimore Shakespeare Factory in 2021, an institution staging one play in OP a year since 2015.

Having determined the disuse of OP in the UK and its adoption in the US in broad lines, this paper proposes to consider the possible rationale behind the latter. Therefore, I will first outline the backdrop and hypothesis of my investigation and then move on to the discussion of the methodology and results of my pilot study concerning the staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2010) by professor, voice coach, and director Paul Meier and his subsequent radio production of the play (2012). The motivations behind both productions will be scrutinized by qualitatively analyzing interviews with the director and two actors, as well as promotional and non-promotional articles. It is worth emphasizing that, due to its limited scope, my research does not aim to provide any ultimate answer; rather, it offers an opportunity to start reflecting on a relatively unexplored phenomenon.

OP IN THE US: THAT IS THE QUESTION

As shown in the Introduction, while in Shakespeare's home country the playwright's reconstructed pronunciation seems to have fallen into disuse, the US still provides fertile ground for OP, where Baltimore Shakespeare Factory annually gives voice to Early Modern sounds. This raises the question of why the pro-

of the man—might have been radically different from Crystal's reconstruction since the underlying sound system, or phonology, was the same. For the sake of brevity, OP will sometimes be labelled "Shakespeare's pronunciation."

nunciation attracts directors and institutions on the other side of the Atlantic or, to put it differently, of what persuades theater practitioners to embrace the sounds of a past era and a country which—itself—does not appear to show any theatrical interest in them at the present stage. Investigating all the possible reasons for the American use of OP would prove impossible here due to limited time and resources, so my intention is to begin to look into the phenomenon through a pilot study, aimed at the identification of the rationale behind the theatrical production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2010) and the subsequent radio production (2012).³

Before giving way to the methodology and results of my research, I wish to introduce the premises on which the present study is based. In a promotional video of his staging, the director Paul Meier claims:

I wanted to do it here, in America, because, well, you think about the Mayflower folks. This [the Shakespearean pronunciation] would have been the accent that the first Americans spoke, and it sort of reconnects America to their linguistic roots. You know, we feel a little alien in America from Britain, you know that's where Shakespeare happened, but this reclaims Shakespeare for us (KU Theatre, 2010).

According to the director, OP is not simply Shakespeare's pronunciation but also that of the "Mayflower folks," that is, the Pilgrim Fathers or "fathers of America" (Bryant 2020), who arrived in the New World in 1620 and allegedly laid the foundations of the United States. Therefore, reconstructed pronunciation enables Americans to explore their own "linguistic roots" and expunge the vestiges of Shakespeare's perceived alienness.

In all likelihood the pronunciation of the playwright and that of the Mayflower passengers were not identical, but a very strong resemblance is presumable.⁴ That said, Meier's words link OP

Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland

3. Barrett (2020) claims that Meier "has done a great deal to popularize OP in America, particularly through his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the University of Kansas."

4. Although the settlers and the playwright were contemporaries (Shakespeare died in 1616 and the Mayflower left in 1620), before travelling to the New World, some of the Mayflower passengers—the Separatists—had taken refuge in Holland for about 12 years (see Remini 2017: 33; Jones 2005: 32–33). Unfortunately, documents do not render it possible to establish whether

to a rhetoric of appropriation: Shakespeare, felt as non-domestic, is portrayed as American due to the linguistic or, more precisely, phonological association with the alleged founders of the nation. One might argue that, given the American centuries-long relationship with Shakespeare (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012) and the fascination with his language and works (Blank 2018), tying Meier's productions to appropriation might be equated with a hasty conclusion. Yet the relation between Shakespeare and the country during its days as a colony and as an independent state can provide a valid framework for my hypothesis.⁵

Contrary to expectations, early settlers like the Mayflower passengers were not responsible for the playwright's importation in the American territory. Although they might have had some familiarity with Shakespeare, early settlers essentially eschewed thespian practices and regarded theater practitioners as "undesirable distractions" due to their prioritization of "survival and a modicum of prosperity" and to religious and civil "objections" (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 9). It was only in 1696 that Shakespeare landed in America—in printed form—and then in the 18th century that the first stagings of his plays began taking place (15), with pro-

their language was affected by the Dutch residence (Dillard 1985: 52), but linguistic change, albeit minor, cannot be excluded due to the migrants' fear that their children were assimilating to local life (see History.com Editors, 2010-20) or even that they were losing their language (see Dillard 1985: 52). In addition, it should be borne in mind that the Mayflower passengers were not a monolithic group, but, as pointed out by Wakelin, the future settlers differed in terms of "age, education and social class"; hence, there would not have been a single variety spoken, in spite of reciprocal influence (1986: 30). Considering this and Shakespeare's idiosyncrasies, it can be argued that the playwright's pronunciation only resembled the language of the early colonists rather than being identical to it.

5. The days of the American nation first as a colonized land and then as an independent country evoke the specter of postcolonialism, problematic with regard to the US. If in 1999 Cartelli deemed it necessary to justify his inclusion of the US in the field of postcolonial studies, today the New World's postcoloniality might appear less anomalous (see Younger 2020). Though "postcolonial" and "colonizing" are not mutually exclusive terms (see Hulme qtd in Schueller, 2004: 163-164), the US's status remains complex, and "postcolonial" is still a hazardous concept when applied to the country, so it will not be used in this text.

fessional English companies contributing to the enhancement and modernization of the American stage (16).

One might assume that, after their independence, the colonies would ultimately reject Shakespeare as an emblem of the former mother country. On the contrary, Shapiro claims that the playwright “won over America in the early nineteenth century” (2020: 10) and ties the embracement of Shakespeare to the fact that “he spoke to what Americans cared about” (12). However, the playwright’s success might also be better understood in relation to the persistent economic and ideological reliance of the new-born country on the UK (Hopkins 2020: 2). Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that, after the revolution, the US was essentially appropriating the writer thanks to, among others, productions in the West, national burlesques, and black minstrelsy (Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 72–73, 94, 101). At some point in the second half of the 19th century, as William Cullen Bryant’s words reveal, the playwright was even considered both British and American: “we Americans may [...] claim an equal property in the great English poet with those who remained in the Old World” (qtd in Vaughan and Vaughan 2012: 62).

Yet, despite the integration of Shakespeare into the American culture signaled by festivals, clubs and numerous cultural initiatives (see Vaughan and Vaughan 2012), the influence of the former mother country never vanished completely. For instance, in 1979 British television films relating to Shakespeare’s works started supplanting American ones (175). It can even be argued that to this very day the playwright continues to retain and be filtered through his Englishness, at least in matters of language. In fact, according to Paterson, American actors often adopt a version of English “which embraces some of the sounds of English RP while still retaining many national characteristics” (2020: 111). The expression “[f]airly common” (Paterson 2020: 111), used with reference to this mixed pronunciation, begs the question of how much—precisely—RP or its traces are widespread in Shakespearean stagings in the US.

In light of this, the country’s long relation with Shakespeare—originating in the colonial days but growing after Independence—still seems affected by the author’s Englishness, and Meier’s words

could be interpreted as an attempt to further appropriate Shakespeare by claiming his Americanness, particularly in terms of pronunciation. Crystal suggests a link between the appeal of OP on Americans, and the greater resemblance of the pronunciation to American English (rather than to RP) “in several respects” (2018: 72). Yet one cannot help but wonder whether the similarities between the two pronunciations do not only flatter the ear but also speak to a desire for independence from the playwright’s perceived Englishness and, ultimately, to a search for greater closeness to Shakespeare—a further appropriation of the writer, so to speak. As will be seen, this will be the main point of reference for the discussion of my research.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM (2010, 2012)

1. Methodology

To conduct my study, I carried out interviews with the director Paul Meier, and two cast members, Matthew Gieschen, playing Theseus, and Margaret Hanzlick-Burton, interpreting Mustardseed. In addition to being a voice and speech specialist, Meier worked as a professor at the University of Kansas (Meier 2018: 109–110), where, with David Crystal’s linguistic advice, he staged *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2010), involving the then students Gieschen and Hanzlick-Burton.

In the case of Meier, an oral semi-structured interview was scheduled. For the performers, structured interviews were preferred out of convenience. A qualitative analysis of the answers provided by the director and the actors has been performed, complemented by a secondary examination of promotional and non-promotional articles aimed at better apprehending and contextualizing the words of Meier and the performers.

About the interviews, the questions mainly revolved around the genesis of the staging and the radio production, the relation between Shakespeare and the US, the use of OP and its resemblance to American English. The aim was to retrieve the reasons behind the two productions, and to shed light on the value of the association between Shakespeare’s pronunciation and that of the first colonists. Expected was a rhetoric of appropriation, echoing Meier’s words in the promotional video of the staging (Sec. 1).

2. Results

For the sake of clarity, I have grouped the results into three categories: a) Theatrical production, b) Radio production, and c) Linguistic issues.

a) Theatrical production (2010)

The theatrical production (Meier 2013) was put on at the University of Kansas in 2010 and advised by the OP expert David Crystal. The staging was “extremely well received,” highly successful (Meier 2011: 217, 220), and its value recognized even beyond the University of Kansas.⁶

The data at my disposal stress the role of Meier’s appreciation of the playwright and of vernacular languages in his decision to stage a production in OP. In fact, the director claims: “my two passions, Shakespeare and dialect, sort of collided when I opened that little book of Shakespeare’s pronunciation by David [*Pronouncing Shakespeare*] and I thought: ‘ohh, I’ve got to go down this road’” (Meier 2021).⁷ Yet, apart from personal interests, some qualities of Shakespeare’s reconstructed pronunciation have contributed to Meier’s decision to mount a production in OP;⁸ the director insists on “speed” and “vernacular swiftness.”⁹

Interestingly, another quality or implication of the pronunciation—the retrieval of rhymes—is highlighted when the voice coach recounts the selection of the play: “MEIER: [...] I said, ‘Well, let’s do a Shakespeare play in OP together. Which one should we choose?’. And he [Crystal] said, without a shadow of a doubt, ‘It’s gotta be *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* because of all the rhy-

6. See Targeted New Service, 2011.

7. Meier’s words echo Meier 2018: 112.

8. “[...] people often cite the recovery of lost rhymes. And that’s certainly attractive too. To be able to hear it [Shakespeare’s theatrical output] with those rhymes falling as expected, but then there’s also the speed and vernacular swiftness” (Meier 2021).

9. MEIER: “[...] you shave 10,15, 20 minutes off of a production just by doing it in OP because of all those weak forms,” MEIER: “But you know, you drop down to that vernacular very r-flavoured sound with all those weak forms,” RUSSO: “[...] how would you just describe OP yourself?” MEIER: “Yeah, it is vernacular, it’s more swiftly spoken, it’s more casual [...]” (Meier 2021).

mes” (Meier 2021).¹⁰ What emerges is that Crystal’s involvement determined the Shakespearean work that would be staged, making the specific recovery of rhymes come into the picture.

An additional retrieved element—“word play” (KU News Release 2010; Science 2010)¹¹—is mentioned in the interview when discussing OP in general: “it [OP] has distinct side benefits of restoring the lost rhymes, restoring the wordplay, the puns. Speeding the production” (Meier 2021). However, any mention of wordplays or puns regarding the specific production is absent, which might be attributed to their scarcity—Crystal finds only three occurrences (Meier 2011: 219–220)—but also to Crystal’s rather than Meier’s prioritization of them (see Meier 2011: 212).¹²

Conversely, Meier’s association between the Mayflower passengers’ speech and Shakespeare’s pronunciation is not absent from the director’s answers in the interview, not even before targeted questions are posed. The voice coach was actually the one to bring up the topic:

[...] I suppose that the way we sold it to our audiences was that they would be hearing English spoken as it would have been by the first American settlers from Europe and then [...] giving American audiences back the Shakespeare they think was English. But no, Shakespeare was almost American in those terms. (Meier 2021)

Meier uses the verb “sold” and, in so doing, suggests the commercial value of the connection between the early colonists’ speech—now generic “first American settlers”—and OP. Also worth noticing is the use of the plural personal pronoun “we,” which might reflect a communal decision rather than an individual one. Lastly, in spite of any intervening factors, Meier’s claim that “Shakespeare was almost American in those terms” might be read as the attribution of an American value to OP and as pointing to appropriation.

10. This echoes an interview in which Crystal highlights the restoration of “rhyming couplets” (Meier 2011: 211).

11. “Meier said audiences will hear word play and rhymes that ‘haven’t worked for several hundred years (love/prove, eyes/qualities, etc.) magically restored, as Bottom, Puck and company wind the language clock back to 1595.” (KU News Release 2010; Science 2010).

12. As for the qualities of OP, Meier (2021) also hints at the impact on actors but without going into any detail.

Yet this attribution does not correspond to a priority in the use of Shakespeare's reconstructed pronunciation:

MEIER: [...] I wouldn't say it was the principal reason, I think it has its own merits in its own way, regardless of the audience and regardless of the audience's own accent, but it was certainly one of the selling points when we were trying to get perhaps reluctant audiences to come. It was one of the publicity points that we emphasized and it proved true: it was the most well attended Shakespeare production I've ever done. We had to extend it as I recall because it was sold out. So, it's a good way to sell the concept to a perhaps nervous audience. (Meier 2021)

Not only does the director recognize that the connection between the two pronunciations was not "the principal reason" for the staging but he also renders explicit its derivation from a commercial strategy: he defines the connection between OP and the settlers' pronunciation as "one of the selling points" and "one of the publicity points" of the production, and the several occurrences of the verb "sell" ("sold out" and "to sell the concept") seem to lexically underline the marketing operation behind the association. Worth considering is again the use of "we," which can be seen as confirming the collective determination of the American value of OP. As Meier's nationality is originally British (Meier 2018), the highlighting of the American significance on the part of, say, the marketing team would not come as a complete surprise.

So far, the closeness between the Pilgrim Fathers' and Shakespeare's pronunciation as presented by the director appears as a marginal reason—if an authentic one—in the staging, and, going further, it does not match the postulated rhetoric of appropriation. In fact, the actors do not make any reference to the link between OP and the speech of the Mayflower passengers, or, although they recognize the special nature of the pronunciation, they do not connect it with their American roots. Furthermore, Meier himself seems to oppose the very idea of appropriating the playwright, since, in addition to stressing the use of American English in performances, he emphasizes Shakespeare's integration into the US by claiming that "every one of the 50 states has at least one major Shakespeare festival" (Meier 2021).

Yet, if one takes into account the marketing strategy pointed to by the coach, it allows for some reflections concerning audiences

*Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland*

and appropriation. The performers do not confirm the publicity operation, but this can both be linked to the study's absence of specific questions—at the time the interviews were sent, the marketing strategy had not emerged yet—and to the lack of involvement of the actors in this regard. On the other hand, the association between OP and the Mayflower passengers' pronunciation is corroborated by promotional articles. Apart from the video highlighted earlier, the link is also suggested in press releases:

Thanks to the work of Paul Meier, audiences can get a sense of what it might have been like to eavesdrop on opening night of "Hamlet" or "Romeo and Juliet" at the Globe Theater in London or to listen in on a shipboard conversation on the Mayflower as it approaches the shores of the New World (KU News Release 2010; US Fed News 2010; Targeted News Service 2010; Science X 2010).

The Shakespeare's Globe and the Mayflower are juxtaposed, equating the pronunciation of Shakespeare's works with that of the passengers aboard the ship for the New World. Hypothetically, this connection, read along Meier's words in the video, taps into the desire—publicity usually addresses needs or desires—to do without the author's perceived alienness and make him fundamentally American. Less famous expeditions to the US such as the one in 1607 (see Remini 2017: 27) might have been connected with OP and Shakespeare, but that of the Pilgrim Fathers was chosen, thereby associating the playwright to the alleged fathers of the American nation. It would be necessary to verify the success of the production, but based on what Meier reports, and on the turnout spotted in the filmed version I had access to, it can be assumed that audiences were drawn to the production, and that the marketing strategy might have played some role in this. In other words, the association between Shakespeare's speech and the Pilgrim Fathers' pronunciation might have resonated with the American audiences' wish to construe and perceive Shakespeare as American.

At this point, one might contend that Shakespeare has been "naturalized" in the US (Sturgess 2013: 259), which renders implausible the perception of his alienness and the desire to further appropriate him, on any level. Yet, the traces of Englishness still surviving in American productions of Shakespeare might account

for an underlying perceived foreignness, and suggest that there is still an interference in the American relation with Shakespeare. In addition, by claiming that “many Americans view Shakespeare as academic, elitist, out of touch, and irrelevant” (2021), the actor Hanzlick-Burton invokes a widespread alienness to Shakespeare originating from the insertion of the poet into high culture; yet one wonders whether the term “irrelevant” might also stem from a sort of perceived unrelatedness of Shakespeare to American society.

To conclude, “multiple reasons,” as Meier (2021) himself claims, are attributable to his use of OP, although they do not come into existence at the same time nor carry the same weight. Some—the director’s interest in Shakespeare and in dialects—were his original reasons which then came to interact with others concerning qualities of OP, that is, its “vernacular swiftness,” “speed” and, secondarily, the restoration of rhymes. The willingness to appropriate Shakespeare, however, does not seem to have brought about the theatrical production, but it might have attracted audiences.

*Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland*

b) Radio production (2012)

Moving on to the radio production, it was recorded after the staging under the supervision of Paul Meier, who cooperated with Ryan McCall (music) and Jason Slote (sound design and post production) (KU News Release 2012). The program was broadcast in 2012 and starred the same actors as the theatrical production, but, despite its germane relation with the latter, the former resulted from the appreciation of OP.

In the interview, Meier tends to portray the radio production in conjunction with the theatrical one without highlighting any particular reasons for its making,¹³ but the KU News Release of the staging reads as follows: “after the stage production closes, the cast will spend several days in the recording studios at Kansas Public Radio, creating a radio drama production, complete with music and sound effects, *to ensure that the performance is available*

13. In this regard, Meier claims: “It was always supposed that we would do a radio production as soon as the stage production closed before the actors forgot their lines and so forth” (2021). He also suggests that in all likelihood “they [the radio production and the staging] were conceived at the same time” (2021).

to everyone through radio broadcast, netcasts and CD" (2010; italics mine). The director's willingness to increase the availability of the performance is confirmed by the actors, who emphasize the advantages of OP:¹⁴ if Geschien limits himself to mentioning the "unique" character of the recording thanks to pronunciation, Hanzlick-Burton equates OP with the original vocal rendition of the play, and claims that Meier might have been eager to show the effects of adopting OP ("tone, meaning and feel of a Shakespeare play"; Hanzlick-Burton 2021).

Given their close cooperation with Meier, the performers can be regarded as key informants, and the greater accessibility of the radio production taken as rooted in the specialness of OP (Geschien 2021; Hanzlick-Burton 2021) and the sharing of its qualities (Hanzlick 2021). The value of these aspects is corroborated by the words of the director himself in the KU News Release (2012),¹⁵ in which Meier gives importance to the adoption of the plays' original pronunciation and stresses the recovery of devices—rhymes, puns and other wordplay—as well as the vernacularity of OP. But, if the source of the press release is deemed not completely reliable, one can still take into account the several references of the director to the characteristics of OP, pointed out while discussing the staging and pronunciation.

14. GESCHIEN: "[...] Professor Meier arranged to have the production recorded at the Kansas Public Radio studios nearby for the radio production, since our production was so unique in utilizing OP. He had hoped the radio production would allow us to reach a broader audience" (Geschien 2021). HANZLICK-BURTON: "I believe that the stage production was converted into a radio production so that more people and more listeners would have the opportunity to hear a Shakespeare play the way that it was intended to sound. I believe Paul Meier wanted as many people as possible to hear how the pronunciation impacts the tone, meaning, and feel of a Shakespeare play" (Hanzlick-Burton 2021).

15. "If the simple fascination of hearing the text spoken as the opening night audience heard it over 400 years ago isn't enough, consider that OP restores scores of lost rhymes, puns and other wordplay that the intervening centuries have erased," Meier said. "Add to this the down-to-earth, vernacular nature of OP that instantly vanquishes the lingering idea that only really posh speech is appropriate for performing The Bard. All this adds up to something very intriguing to all with more than just a passing interest in Shakespeare" (KU News Release 2012).

Consequently, the radio production seems to derive from a desire to make the theatrical production accessible to a wider public, springing from some qualities of OP—suitable for an aural medium like the radio. On a final note, if it is no surprise that Meier nor the actors hint at the *Mayflower*, it is instead startling that no passing mention of the passengers is provided in the radio press release (KU News Release 2012), which might suggest a change of strategies—probably due to the medium?²—in the marketing campaign.

LINGUISTIC ISSUES

Although the characteristics and implications of OP have a strong link to both productions, they seem to be at the heart of the radio production. Now linguistic issues will be considered in that they may allow for further considerations on appropriation.

The resemblance between OP and American accents is presented in promotional articles of both the staging and the radio production (KU News Release 2010; Barkhorn 2010; US FED News 2010; Science X 2010; KU News Release 2012).¹⁶ Meier foregrounds the similar elements of American English¹⁷ and OP—informal tone and rhoticity—while detaching Shakespeare’s original language from “precise and polished delivery,” referring to standard British English. In a BBC text about OP and Americans, the voice coach goes even further by claiming that OP is “so much more American” than the preferred RP (qtd in Ro 2018).

On the other hand, in the interview I conducted—perhaps due to its scientific nature as part of a research project—the director does not indulge in generalizations and carefully draws parallels between OP and General American or GenAm, the standard variety of American English:

16. “American audiences will hear an accent and style surprisingly like their own in its informality and strong r-colored vowels,” Meier said. “The original pronunciation performance strongly contrasts with the notions of precise and polished delivery created by John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier and their colleagues from the 20th century British theater” (KU News Release 2010; Barkhorn 2010; US FED News 2010; Science X 2010; KU News Release 2012).

17. American English is “not a singular dialect but a family of different regional dialects” (Alley-Young 2020).

*Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland*

RUSSO: If you have as a point of reference OP and then we try to understand if it's more similar to American English or RP, what would you say?

MEIER: [...] It's a *difficult fact to quantify* but I would say that OP and General American are more similar than OP and RP are.

RUSSO: Does it have to do with r sounds?

MEIER: I would say so. *I think that's a huge part of it, the fact that OP and GenAm are both rhotic accents. I would say that that is the dominant similarity* (Meier, 2021; italics mine).

Relying on precision, the voice coach does not make a comparison between OP and the broad label of American English, but prefers focusing on the resemblance between reconstructed pronunciation and General American. Meier claims that the similarity is stronger than that between OP and RP, and attributes it to the rhoticity of the former, but only after the researcher's initial prompt. On discussing OP later on, an additional similarity emerges, "vernacularity," which is often referred to by Meier: "RP vowels are much more muscular and pointed whereas in GenAm and OP the vowels are richer and there's less muscularity with diction. So more vernacularity with OP and GenAm" (Meier 2021).

The comparison between American English and OP, however, is not obliterated: the director recovers it when discussing the accent used in Shakespearean stagings in the US. Starting by maintaining the widespread adoption of American English in Shakespeare theater and indirectly rejecting the need for linguistic appropriation, the director states that "OP, the OP experiment or the OP world is certainly confirmation that American English is perfectly adequate and more than adequate to do a very, very fine Shakespeare production" (2021).¹⁸ In other words, the voice coach sees OP as further evidence of the suitability of American accents for Shakespearean stagings. However, the very fact that the adequacy of American English is called into question might elicit further reflection on its adoption and significance in the panorama of Shakespeare's American productions.

Analyzing the relationship between American English and Shakespearean stagings is beyond the scope of this paper, but in view of Meier's words, the performers' stances are worth

18. OP relies on the natural accents of actors (see Crystal, 2005).

mentioning. Both actors stress the fact that RP is common when performing Shakespeare, or that if American English is adopted, it corresponds to a “heightened” version of the language (Gieschen 2021), “a sort of Mid-Atlantic accent” (Hanzlick-Burton 2021), characterized by traces of British English. This contrasts with Meier’s words, so one wonders whether the influence of the English pronunciation might hinge on the type of stagings—e.g., more traditional vs. experimental.

With reference to the relation between OP and American English as depicted by the actors, it appears either as cautious or non-existent. When presented with the supposed greater closeness of OP to American English, like Meier, Gieschen adopts a prudent attitude:

In some respects, yes, it is closer to American English than to RP. OP is a rhotic dialect, which it shares in common with American English (for the most part). RP is a non-rhotic dialect, and that missing “R” sound really makes a difference. I’m just guessing here, but to me, that rhotic quality is what really distinguishes the “earthiness” of OP compared to the “airiness” of RP (Gieschen 2021).

If Gieschen recognizes a partial resemblance between OP and American varieties, Hanzlick-Burton rejects it by claiming that she “would describe OP as being the most closely related to the Scottish accent” (2021).

In summary, the similarity between OP and American English or, in the case of the director, General American is not striking, and a linguistic appropriation of Shakespeare is clearly not pursued nor contemplated by Meier—the playwright’s works are already integrated into the American linguistic fabric. Nevertheless, the adequacy of American accents, and the use of RP or the Mid-Atlantic accent as suggested by the performers require careful investigation, in that they could shed light on the relation between Shakespeare and American English and even on the perception of the playwright in the US.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the case of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2010, 2012) reveals the intervention of several factors—varying in importance—in the use of OP, whose common denominator ties in with some

*Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland*

qualities of Shakespeare's reconstructed pronunciation. Furthermore, contrarily to my expectations, the study shows that the association between the playwright's and the Pilgrim Fathers' pronunciation does not stem from the pursuit of further appropriation of Shakespeare on the part of Meier, a British director. Rather, the association between OP and the speech of the Mayflower passengers is portrayed as having commercial value and stemming from a successful marketing strategy. Although the correlation between theatrical turnout and this strategy is in need of greater evidence also in light of its absence from the publicity for the radio production, appropriation and some targeted alienness of Shakespeare are suggested.

As regards the relation between OP and American English, the two varieties, extraneous to the rhetoric of appropriation, are not seen as remarkably similar, but perceived analogies emerge: they derive either from technical characteristics (e.g., rhoticity) or impressionistic terms (e.g., vernacularity). Thus, in view of the appeal of OP to Americans, it cannot be excluded that the similarities between the two pronunciations might have been experienced as totalizing by some and drawn American institutions to Shakespeare's reconstructed pronunciation. If this were the case, it would be worthwhile to examine the significance of any perceived resemblance as affecting the process of staging performances in OP.¹⁹

This being said, appropriation, albeit not validated by the director nor the actors, cannot yet be ruled out when it comes to the use of OP in the US. Before proceeding with more investigations, it would be desirable to carry out a deeper exploration of Shakespeare's relation with the US through a linguistic lens, with the aim of shedding light on the actual interference of the author's Englishness, the value of RP, and the use of American accents in Shakespearean performances. If appropriation is sought after and derives from perceived alienness, the latter should be clearly identified and, given Paterson's words and the testimony of the per-

19. Specifically, it would be worth exploring why it is that the commonalities between the reconstructed pronunciation and American English are capable of persuading organizations to invest in productions in OP.

formers on RP and the Mid-Atlantic accent, the pronunciation used for the playwright's works might be a good starting point.

Owing to its nature as a pilot study, such research probably raised more questions than it answered. Further investigations into the two productions—particularly into the motives of the University of Kansas for supporting Meier's initiative and those of audiences—and into other American performances will be needed to shed further (and clearer) light on the use of OP in the US.²⁰

*Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland*

20. I wish to thank Prof. Paul Meier, Ms Hanzlick-Burton and Mr Gieschen for their invaluable time, great devotion and genuine enthusiasm. Also, I desire to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Mechele Leon based at the University of Kansas for providing me with precious material for my research. Last but not least, it is my desire to thank Prof. Plescia for her constant feedback, infinite patience and practical advice; Prof. Borysławski for his invaluable help and thought-provoking suggestions, and Prof. Simonetti for his generous feedback.

WORKS CITED

- A *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Dir. by Paul Meier, 2012. <https://www.paulmeier.com/dream-radio-broad>. Accessed April 23, 2021.
- Alley-Young, Gordon. "American English." *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, 2020. Via Discovery Sapienza. Accessed April 23, 2021.
- Baltimore Shakespeare Factory, Email. 22 April 2021.
- Barkhorn, Eleanor. "What Did Shakespeare Sound Like?" *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 25 Oct. 2010. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2010/10/what-did-shakespeare-sound-like/65088/>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2021.
- Barrett, David. "The Original Pronunciation of Shakespeare's Writing." 29 Oct. 2020. <https://www.stsd.org.uk/the-original-pronunciation-of-shakespeares-writing/>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.
- Blank, Paula. *Shakesplish: How We Read Shakespeare's Language*. Stanford University Press, 2018.
- Cartelli, Thomas. "Introduction." *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations*. Routledge, 1999, pp. 9-21.
- Crystal, David. *Pronouncing Shakespeare: The Globe Experiment*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- , "Tyndale OP." 24 July 2013. <http://david-crystal.blogspot.com/2013/07/tyndale-op.html>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.
- , "The lure of sounds." 23 Sept. 2014. <https://blog.oup.com/2014/09/original-pronunciation-movement-david-crystal/>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.
- , "Original Pronunciation." <http://originalpronunciation.com/analysis/>. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.
- , "It must have been like this." *Around the Globe*, no. 61, 2015, pp. 42-43.
- , *The Oxford Dictionary of Original Shakespearean Pronunciation*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Dillard, Joey L. *Toward a Social History of American English*. Series Contributions to the Sociology of Language. De Gruyter Mouton, 1985, pp. 51-72.
- Gieschen, Matthew. Personal interview. 25 February 2021.

- Hanzlick-Burton, Margaret. Personal interview. 22 Mar. 2021.
- History.com Editors. "The Mayflower." *History Channel*. 4 Mar. 2010. Last modified 23 Nov. 2020. <https://www.history.com/topics/colonial-america/mayflower>. Accessed 7 May 2021.
- Hopkins, Helen A. "Founding Fathers: Patriotic Ceramics and Shakespeare in the United States." *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, Vol. 1, no. 13, 2020, pp. 1-5.
- Jones, Maldwyn A. *Storia degli Stati Uniti d'America: Dalle prime colonie inglesi ai giorni nostri*. Translated by Enzo Peru, Giorgio Bombi, Anna Maria Lichtenberg, Rossella Bernascone, Andrea Silvestri, Bompiani, 2005, pp. 13-68.
- KU News Release. "Professor's research allows audience to hear Shakespeare's words in his own accent—KU News." 22 Oct. 2010. <http://archive.news.ku.edu/2010/october/22/shakespeare.shtml>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2021.
- . "Shakespeare comedy in original pronunciation to premiere on KPR—KU News." 11 Apr. 2012. <http://archive.news.ku.edu/2012/april/11/shakespeare.shtml>. Accessed 21 Apr. 2021.
- KU Theatre. "Performing Shakespeare in its original pronunciation." *Youtube*, 30 Sept. 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQvD2Hj-Odc&t=2s>. Accessed 23 Mar. 2021.
- Lahr, John. "Talking the Talk." *The New Yorker*, 19 Sept. 2005. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/09/19/talking-the-talk>. Accessed 17 Apr. 2021.
- Meier, Paul. "A Midsummer Night's Dream: An Original Pronunciation Production." *Voice and Speech Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 209-223.
- . "Paul Meier: My Journey to Now." *Voice and Speech Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018, pp. 105-115.
- . Personal interview. 24 February 2021.
- Paterson, Ronan. "All One Mutual Cry: The Myth of Standard Accents in Shakespearean Performance." *Shakespeare and Accentism*, edited by Adele Lee, Kindle, Routledge, 2020, pp. 96-117.
- Remini, Robert V. *Breve Storia degli Stati Uniti d'America*. Translated by Rino Serù, Giunti Editore, 2017, pp. 3-69.

- Ro, Christine. "How Americans Preserved British English." *BBC Culture*. 8 Feb. 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180207-how-americans-preserved-british-english>. Accessed 22 Apr. 2021.
- Schueller, Malini Johar, and Watts, Edward. "Introduction: Theorizing Early American Studies and Postcoloniality." *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*, edited by Malini Johar Schueller and Edward Watts, Rutgers University Press, 2003, pp. 1–25.
- Schueller, Malini Johar. "Postcolonial American Studies." *American Literary History*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2004, pp. 162–175.
- Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Dir. By Paul Meier. Videorecording of University Theater production, produced by Mechele Leon, released by Films for the Humanities. November 2013.
- Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us About Our Past and Future*. Kindle. Penguin Books, 2020.
- staff, Science X. "Professor's Research Allows Audience to Hear Shakespeare's Words in His Own Accent." *Phys.org*, 22 Oct. 2010. <https://phys.org/news/2010-10-professor-audience-shakespeare-words-accent.html>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021
- Sturgess, Kim C. Review of "Shakespeare in America by Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2013, pp. 256–59.
- Targeted News Service. "Professor's Research Allows Audience to Hear Shakespeare's Words in His Own Accent." 22 Oct. 2010. Accessed 23 Mar. 2021.
- , "Students, Alumni Win Awards at Regional Theater Competition." 3 Feb. 2011. Accessed 23 Mar. 2021.
- The University of Kansas. "KU Theatre—Performing Shakespeare in its original pronunciation." 30 Sept. 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQvD2Hj-Odc&feature=youtu.be>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2021.
- US Fed News. "Professor's research allows audience to hear Shakespeare's words in his own accent." 25 Oct. 2010. Accessed 23 Mar. 2021.

- Vaughan, Alden T., and Vaughan, Virginia Mason. *Shakespeare in America*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Wakelin, Martyn. "English on the Mayflower." *English Today: The International Review of the English Language*, Vol. 2, no. 4. October, 1986, pp. 30–33.
- Younger, Robert C. *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

*Emiliana Russo
Sapienza University
of Rome, Italy
University of Silesia
in Katowice, Poland*

