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## Planetary Shakespeares

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeit of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars; as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical pre-dominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on . . . Fut! I should have been that I am, had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.  
(*King Lear* 1.2.125-38)

Shakespeare was the first playwright to use the word “planetary”, soon followed by Robert Daborne in *A Christian Turn’d Turk*, 1612 (“Persuade no more, we have no will to act, / Or not to act more than those orbs we see, / And planetary bodies, which in their offices / Observe the will of fate: the difference is, / They are confin’d, we are not”). Shakespeare’s characters often question “the will of the planets” (186) in the context of the Copernican Revolution (when, to use Donne’s famous words, “new philosophy calls all in doubt”), and the relations between Nature and Art, as famously happens in *The Winter’s Tale*, which captures debates familiar in Renaissance literature and culture. In *King Lear*, Edmund claims for himself the self-determinism of the homo faber suggesting man’s emancipation from the conditionings of a universal system of relations. But what happens if and when that system, however defined, fails and the illusion of man’s autonomy and self-sufficiency is unveiled for what it is? In his seminal book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) Amitav Ghosh writes: “In a substantially altered world, when sea-level rise has swallowed the Sundarbans and made cities like Kolkata, New York and Bangkok uninhabitable, when readers and museumgoers turn to the art and literature of our time, will they not look, first, and most urgently, for traces and portents of the altered world of their inheritance? And when they fail to find them, what should they—what can they—do other than to conclude that ours was a time when most forms of art and literature were drawn into the modes of concealment that prevented people from recognizing the realities of their plight? Quite possibly then, this era, which so congratulates itself on its self-awareness, will come to be known as the time of the Great Derangement”. The Indian writer crucially adds: “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination”. Great novelist that he is, Ghosh produces a scathing critique of modern literature, which in his opinion has thoroughly failed to account for the magnitude and consequences of the environmental crisis, thus becoming complicit with the various “modes of concealment” that we use to deny that we are facing an unprecedented threat to our existence.

In the era of the Great Derangement, we have the opportunity once again to make Shakespeare our contemporary. Is Nature more important than man-made structures? Are we masters of our fates and how do we relate to our planet Earth? Are we dependent on “planetary influence” or is the planet dependent on us for its survival? In how many different ways may Shakespeare help us to reflect on humanism and post-humanism at a time when the planet is facing an ultimate state of crisis?

“**Planetary Shakespeares**” offers a way to tackle such issues while going beyond the present concern with Global Shakespeare and suggesting multifarious ways in which Shakespeare’s infinite variety and complexities can offer an entrance point to the humanities, enabling them to confront planetary crises and reconsider relations among nature, art and technology, as well as the need to reconfigure our sense of reality both socially and epistemologically. Now that we have moved into the digital, the virtual, the cyborg, and the posthuman ages, and the notion itself of reality has been challenged from different angles, including our experience of augmented reality, we have become aware of new turning points in history, and how they affect



our perception of the contradictions embedded in our sense of the real. Theatre best captures such transformations and possible contradictions. “Planetary Shakespeares” offers convenient gateways into the most varied experiences of ‘the real’ via a plurality of interconnected issues.

### **Topics**

The Congress wishes to address questions related to the role of Shakespeare in connection with contemporary concerns about the destiny of our planet and human beings at a time when humanism has been deeply challenged. By moving from ‘globe’ to ‘planet’ and its possible, multiple configurations, the Congress will prompt reflection on ecologically related preoccupations about the Earth and human beings and culture in our post-human age. How can the contemporary world imbued with a sense of virtual reality and cyborg life be reconciled with Shakespeare’s own sense of the world?

The Congress will foster discussion of the many ways in which Shakespeare may be conceived as ‘planetary’, reaching out to resonances with new cultural galaxies of enquiry, debate, and knowledge. It will bridge the Gutenberg print age with the flourishing of humanism and the era of the virtual and the post-human, raising questions about our own understandings of the humanities at a time of manifold crises. In addition, the Congress will provide the occasion for connecting Shakespearean studies and practices to new forms of social awareness and engagement, as well as of innovative takes on our sense of the real. It will offer several areas of debate, emphasising the relation between eco-concerns and the position of the human and post-humanity, in relation to the rise of technology, the digital and the virtual. In doing so, the Congress will invite us to rethink aesthetic, social, cultural and political categories beyond current Shakespearean views.

#### **General**

The Congress welcomes proposals that delve into a myriad of themes and approaches that captivate the attention of contemporary Shakespeareans. These may encompass, but are not confined to, historical studies, textual analyses, translation, performance, adaptation, appropriation, cultural studies, explorations of race, gender dynamics, psychoanalysis, considerations of disability, and innovative teaching methodologies. In this expansive exploration, the Congress encourages a collective reconsideration of aesthetic, social, cultural, and political categories, pushing boundaries and urging us to transcend prevailing perspectives on Shakespearean scholarship.

#### **Eco-Shakespeare**

In the early millennium, ecocritical readings brought new perspectives on Shakespeare; today, in the 2020s, the Anthropocene may be seen as not merely one of the themes to be associated with the playwright and his works, but an inescapable context of all readings, linking the cultural logics of our perilous times and those of Shakespeare himself. An already ‘globalized’ phenomenon, showing its adaptability and resilience, ‘Shakespeare’ is an ideal vehicle of exploration and dialogue, community and care – a way of bringing diverse people together to face the crisis, whether in the theatre, in the open, or in the classroom.



### □Reconfiguring 'Global' Shakespeare

Responses to what has been seen as a neo-colonialist perspective in some conceptions of 'global' Shakespeare have opened up new paths for the questioning of biases that may inform the very notion of 'the global'. Today, the languages of universality and 'the global' are still invoked, especially by artists and the general public, but have widely become topics of suspicion in academic circles. At the same time, Shakespeare's works have elicited new interpretations, performances and pedagogical practices that demonstrate how they are capable of engaging with urgent issues that have a truly global impact. The 2026 Congress is an opportunity to put fresh critical pressure on the uses, both pro and con, of all the vocabularies of 'universality'. Repositioning the notion of a singular global Shakespeare to that of a plural universe of Shakespeares addresses the ways in which 'the planetary' speaks to the term 'universal' resonating with 'multiversal'. The notion of a 'multiverse' can help us reflect on the implications of moving beyond global Shakespeare and renewing critical discussion of his oft-praised 'universality' by seeking to confront and examine a plurality of coexisting 'Shakespeare universes' where canons and fanons (or fan canons) are not mutually exclusive.

### □Shakespeare Galaxies

It is not a coincidence that the same scholar who coined the expression 'the global village', Marshall McLuhan, also reflected on epistemological reconfigurations bound up with developing technologies. In 1962, he famously invented the label 'Gutenberg Galaxy' for "the ways in which the forms of experience and of mental outlook and expression" had been "modified, first by the phonetic alphabet and then by printing". He also envisaged a refashioning of such a Galaxy in an electronic age. The 2026 Congress offers an opportunity to reflect on the evolving constellations of 'Shakespeare Galaxies', considering the myriad forms of past and contemporary Shakespeare remediations – from print, to the moving body, to the hybrid and virtual spaces of cyberart and cyborg theatre, etc. — with a new awareness of the variety of meanings generated by theatrical props and prostheses, utterances, gestures, and forms of kinesis, in emerging performance disciplines, venues, and media.