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# All the World's On Stage?: Metatheatrical Presence of Indigenous Absence in Public Works' *As You Like It*

## Introduction

The Seattle Repertory Theatre's Public Works program is community-based theater program that excels in blurring the lines between the real and the imagined—bringing into being the relationships, values, and ways of being it represents onstage. Public Works' mission is to create "theater of, by, and for the people rooted in the values of equity, imagination, and joy" ("Public Works"). Seattle Rep's Public Works, originally created in 2013 at the Public Theater in New York City by Lear deBessonet, partners with various community and social service organizations from around the greater Seattle area to invite individuals from all walks of life to join the Seattle Rep in creating "ambitious works of participatory theater" ("Public Works"). Seattle Rep's Public Works has been creating these ambitious works with the community since 2017, when they did a musical adaptation of Homer's *The Odyssey.* In 2019, the program produced a musical adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, the subject of this study, followed in 2020 by a virtual production of *Twelfth Night*. Public Works was created by deBessonet and Oskar Eustis with the intention of creating a theater program that blurs the lines between spectator and performer, creating theater that enacts and embodies democratic principles and ways of being in relationship with other people. Public Works was also designed with the explicit intention that the program would not act in a way that perpetuated colonialism and colonial dynamics. Eustis spoke of Public Works in terms of colonialism, saying, "We began by bringing theater out to the people. And that was a wonderful, generous act. But it also had a certain tinge of colonialism about it. We had art, we are gonna offer it up to you. We needed

actually reverse the circle" ("Under the Greenwood Tree" 1:28). Seattle Rep's Public Works uses the policy of never entering a community and offering them anything the Rep thinks they might want, whether it be free tickets to see shows, access to performance classes, or opportunities to perform on the Rep's stages. There is no point at which the Rep enters a community space to which it does not belong without first having been asked to come there. Instead, they reach out to community partner organizations and extend invitations for the communities to be in relationship with the Rep in whatever capacity the communities want. The Rep's Public Works program then responds, altering the structure of the program adopted from New York to fit community requests. Seattle Rep's Public Works partners with eight community organizations from across the great-Seattle area. These include Boys and Girls Clubs of South and North Seattle, which "enabl[es] young people to reach their full potential by emphasizing academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyle"; Byrd Barr Place, which provides "older adults and adults with disabilities with vital resources to help them thrive;" Compass Housing Alliance, which "builds and provides supportive affordable housing and emergency services to people who are homeless or low income;" Jubilee Women's Center, which "supports women experiencing poverty by helping them to build stable and fulfilling futures;" Path with Art, which "harnesses the power of creative engagement to support people recovering from homelessness, addiction, and trauma;" ReWA, a "non-profit multi-ethnic organization that promotes inclusion, independence, personal leadership, and strong communities by providing refugee and immigrant women and their families with culturally and linguistically appropriate services;" Seattle Central College, which "advocates for social change…offering short- and long-term certificates, associate and bachelor degrees;" and Sound Generations/Ballard Senior Center, which "provides older adults and adults with disabilities with vital resources to help them thrive" ("Public

Works"). A number of criteria go into the selection of partner organizations to which Public Works reaches out with invitations to a partnership with the Rep, one of which is that the individuals whom the partner organizations engage should collectively be representative of the people living in the greater-Seattle area.

In this paper, I will interrogate the ways in which Seattle Rep's Public Works' 2019 production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* succeeds or fails in its goal of creating decolonial theater. This paper will read the adaptation and the production it begot in terms of its engagement (or lack thereof) with the Indigenous communities of the Pacific Northwest and Indigenous ways of knowing. I am a settler scholar and uninvited guest living on Coast Salish land. Through the process of researching and writing this paper I have had the privilege of learning from and with Indigenous and settler scholars. I acknowledge that there are more settler voices featured in this paper than there are Indigenous voices. This is an ironic shortcoming of this project due in part to the dearth of Indigenous scholarship on the specific focus of this paper and in greater part to my failure to let Indigenous voices guide the direction, scope, and focus of this project. I acknowledge that this paper, like Public Works, is a work in progress. More than an authoritative voice on this topic, it is my hope that this paper will be read as an example of a single and incomplete way of thinking about the work being done by the Public Works program and how the program *and I as a researcher* can more effectively do work that is fully decolonial.

In this paper, I argue that Seattle Rep's Public Works 2019 production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It,* adapted by Shaina Taub and Laurie Woolery and directed by Timothy McCuen Piggee, uses metatheater in order to decenter Shakespeare as an authority over the production, instead positioning performers, audience members, and the theater itself as those with authority over the play's meaning. This use of metatheater takes important steps to preempt Shakespeare

from acting as an active tool of colonial violence, but becomes insufficient to convert the absent presence of Indigeneity in the production into a full presence, due in part to the lack of Indigenous voices onstage. In the first section of the paper I will perform a close reading of *As You Like It* in terms of the ways in which its strategies of adaptation work to mitigate the potential for Shakespeare to reproduce colonial dynamics and enact colonial violence upon both performer and audience. This section will focus specifically on several moments of metatheater in the production, which I argue are the moments in the play with the greatest potential to subvert Shakespeare as an authority over the narrative, space, and artists. In the second half of the paper I will look specifically at the ways in which Indigenous communities and ways of knowing as well as (post-)colonial discourses appear in Public Works' *As You Like It* as an absent presence, reading the ambiguity of the production's engagement with Indigeneity as a performative sign of Public Works is an institution currently engaging in an imperfect and incomplete process of decolonization.

A central question guiding this inquiry is: How does Public Works' 2019 production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* resist, reproduce, and/or reimagine legacies of theatrical colonialism, as in line with the program's anti-colonial mission, particularly given the ways in which Shakespeare has historically been used to perpetuate colonial violence? Whether or not Shakespeare is *inherently* colonial is an active topic of debate among Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and community members. Playwright Yvette Nolan (Irish and Algonquin) rejects the idea that Shakespeare is inherently colonial, arguing instead that Shakespeare is "a tool" (Nolan 7). Métis and English scholar Jason Woodman Simmonds writes that "'Shakespeare' need not function as an author's name per se, but…more as a way to identify a collection of texts (and theatrical productions) as a body of work" (Woodman Simmonds 17-8).

In other words, Shakespeare is less an author and more of a relational network—with the plays of Shakespeare the author, themselves the products of adaptation from multiple sources, a single node in a web of performances, ideas, and relationships (15).

In reading Public Works' adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* with the intention of understanding how the adaption and the Rep's production negotiate Shakespeare's colonial potential, I find that this adaptation/production includes theatrical devices and ways of knowing that are either non-Western or that challenge or subvert the authority of Western performance and knowledge traditions. The questions this analysis provokes are questions that are crucial for understanding what it means for Seattle Rep's Public Works to engage in a process of decolonization: If the work being done is not Western, is it decolonial? If it is decolonial is it necessarily Indigenous? To begin to answer these questions, a definition of decolonization must be established. In "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and K Wayne Yang argue that "decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools," and, I imagine, theaters. They write, "As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonization" (Tuck and Yang 1). This perspective makes it very easy to see Seattle Rep's Public Works as an organization that, while creating theater in a way that is equitable, horizontal, participatory, and accessible, is not engaged in any way in the process of decolonization. While I completely agree with Tuck and Yang's assessment, I am choosing in this paper to look at decolonization slightly differently, only because the conclusion that Public Works is in no way decolonial because it does not engage in land repatriation stops a deeper conversation on how colonial dynamics show up and are reimagining, resisted, and reified in the

theater Public Works creates. Thus, when I use the word "decolonial" in this paper, I am defining it in terms of its opposite: colonial. "Decolonial" in this paper carries a watered-down meaning from that provided by Tuck and Yang: it means, taking steps to avoid, nullify, reverse, or replace colonial language, dynamics, and violence.

**Decentering Shakespeare's Authority Over *As You Like It* with Metatheater**

The story of Public Works' adaptation of *As You Like It* is as follows: Duke Frederick has banished his brother (sister in Seattle Rep's Public Works production), Duke Senior, to the forest of Arden. Duke Senior's daughter, Rosalind, has remained at the court with her cousin, Celia, Duke Frederick's daughter. Orlando, the youngest son of Sir Rowland Du Bois, has been shunned by his older brother, Oliver, after the death of their father, who was hated by Duke Frederick and friend to Duke Senior. In an attempt to prove his worthiness or die in the attempt, Orlando fights in the court wrestling match and wins against all odds. At the match, he and Rosalind meet and instantly fall in love. Upon discovering that the winner is the son of Sir Rowland Du Bois, Duke Frederick refuses to acknowledge Orlando's victory and Orlando escapes the court, with his friend and servant Adam to the Forest of Arden. Rosalind, too, is banished by Duke Frederick for her mother's treason and Rosalind, along with Celia and Touchstone the clown escape to Arden; Rosalind disguised as a man, Ganymede. In Arden, Orlando and Rosalind-as-Ganymede meet and Rosalind begins to test Orlando to see if his love for Rosalind is genuine. They meet Duke Senior and her community of people exiled from the court, including Jacques, a cynical artist/philosopher. Two love stories evolve parallel to Rosalind and Orlando's: one between Touchstone the clown and a man Andy (Audrey in Shakespeare's version) from Arden and another between Phoebe and the shepherd Silvia (Silvius, in the original). When Duke Frederick discovers that Orlando has escaped to Arden, he

sends Oliver to the forest to find him. Orlando saves Oliver from being killed by a snake and the two brothers are reconciled and Oliver forgiven. Oliver and Celia then fall in love. Rosalind decides Orlando's love for her is real and is ready to marry him. Duke Frederick hears of the quadruple-wedding in preparation and sets out to stop it. When he arrives in Arden, however, he has a change of heart and is welcomed into the community of Arden (Taub and Woolery; Shakespeare).

Seattle Rep's Public Works' *As You Like It* opens with a song that sets the stage for the rest of the performance and establishes the show's ethos as a product of Public Works. It also establishes the terms on which the play was adapted. The song, "All the World's a Stage" takes its title from perhaps the most famous line from *As You Like It*; the adaptation begins from a place of maximum familiarity and the Rep's production follows this example: separating the audience from the stage is a red velvet curtain. Whether or not one has been to a theater before and is familiar with its conventions—and 44.8% of *As You Like It* attendees were new to the Seattle Rep, if not theater in general ("Production Summary")—this curtain is recognizable as the iconic symbol of the theater. It is less a default than a powerful signifier literally framing the rest of the show from beginning to end. The music begins and Keiko Green, the actor playing Jacques, emerges through the split in the curtain. As she sings, the curtain parts slightly, revealing her to be standing on a smaller stage identical to the larger stage on which it stands, complete with a scaled-down red velvet curtain (As You Like It 1:12). This layering of one stage upon another requires that audiences—particularly those familiar with theater typically found behind a red curtain—become aware of theater in a way they are typically asked to take for granted. Faced with the iconic image of the stage, audiences are required to think of it as a stage. Western theater is such that audiences familiar with its conventions go to the theater expecting to

forget it's a theater, to instead be transported to another world through the power of performative storytelling. The effect of the smaller stage on which Jacques stands is that audiences see Jacques as standing on a stage that is meant to be a stage, rather than a neutral space that is simply awaiting transformation into something and therefore signifies nothing. The stage in Public Works' *As You Like It* is not an empty signifier, but rather acts as a counter-monument to the Theater with a capital T, in which the curtain traditionally marks the invisible fourth wall separating real from imagined, theater-goer from theater-maker. This is a division that Public Works was structured to challenge.

The inverse of "All the World's a Stage is "All [this] stage is the world." Public Works, as performed in the first verse of the song, takes up this inverted meaning in two senses: first, in the sense that the world that the audience is about to see on stage is reflective of the world outside the theater, and, second, in the sense that what is happening in the imaginary world onstage is also happening in "real life" at the same moment; the phrase carries both representational and presentational connotations. Jacques, whom the stage directions in the *As You Like It* script identify as "a philosopher…working on an unfinished philosophy" (Taub and Woolery 4), sings in presentational direct address to the audience,

> All the world's a stage / And everybody's in the show / Nobody's a pro / All the world's a stage / and every day we play our part / Year by year, we grow / Learning as we go / Trying to tell a story we can feel / How do you make the magic real? (Taub 4)

This opening verse, the beginning of the prologue, acts as an introduction to the Public Works program disguised as a series of meditations on life from a cynical artist. The line "and everybody's in the show" invokes the audience as participants in the performance while reminding them of what they likely heard when coming to see this production: out of the

seventy-six actors they're about to see on stage, only five are "professional actors" represented by the Actors Equity Association ("Production Summary"). The rest are community ensemble members coming from all walks of life from across Seattle and King Country. Audiences likely know on some level that the production they are seeing is a "community show," possibly because they are coming to see a friend or family perform or because the free ticket or extensive cast list signaled that this production was different from the work the Rep usually produces. The irony of "nobody's a pro" sung by one of the show's five Equity actors calls members of the audience (admittedly, like myself) who entered the theater associating "community" with "low quality" and adjusted their expectations accordingly, on their prejudice. Jacques sets a baseline for the level of talent we can expect to see moving forward, and in doing so makes each audience member aware of what prejudices, expectations, and beliefs about what it means to be "amateur" and what "theater" is they brought with them.

Through this song, Public Works also acknowledges and supports the diversity of levels of familiarity with theater audience members are bringing to *As You Like It.* In the lyrics of the three minute song, there are twenty terms that are either specific or adjacent to the world of theater, including "stage fright," "duet," "roles," "critics," "costume," and later, in the song's reprise, "ghostlight" (Taub 4-5, 70). These words are introduced throughout the song as part of an extended metaphor connecting human development from childhood to adulthood with the process of performing a play from beginning to end. Children who are "unaware inside [their] youth of the difference between make-believe and truth," grow to "worry what the critics have to say." As adults, Jacques sings, "we question our roles / can't seem to find our light / sick of waiting in the wings of the same life night after night" (5). This crash course in theater terminology is not a condescending lecture to audience members less familiar with theater but

rather is an invitation for an audience coming to the theater from many different places to think generatively with the production about the ways in which theater is inseparable from "real life."

Ultimately, in "All the World's a Stage" the life-as-theater metaphor is secondary in importance to the lived experience, both logistical and intangible, of participating in Public Works. The Public Works program runs on a yearly structure, with classes and community events occurring from October to June and culminating in a summer rehearsal process for a series of four performances over the first weekend in September. Many Public Works participants are involved in this program "year by year"—a program that, like Jacques, seeks to answer the question, "How do you make the magic real?" (4). In other words, how does a program like Public Works create theater that resonates with the community in ways that are powerful enough to catalyze transformational change? The question that must be asked is, in "trying to tell a story we can feel," who does Public Works include in the "we"? For whom is *As You Like It* a story that can be felt? What has the potential to be changed by this production and what dynamics—particularly the colonial dynamics implicit in any production of Shakespeare—stand to be reified?

With the exception of many of the song lyrics, which are primarily inspired by the themes of Shakespeare's play more than language taken directly from the text, the dialogue spoken in this adaptation is primarily made up of abridged but otherwise unaltered passages taken from the original play, with a few notable exceptions. It is these exceptions, I argue in this section, that work to prevent the adaptation from alienating audience members who have not had, or who have had a negative, previous relationship with Shakespeare, particularly audience members of color for whom a performance of Shakespeare has the potential to reify dynamics of colonial violence. In their essay in *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Contemporary*

*Performance*, Andrew James Hartley, Kaja Dunn, and Christopher Berry argue that Shakespeare does not necessarily have to reproduce dynamics of colonial violence. Shakespeare "becomes a problem," they argue, "when [it] is positioned as the redeemer of people of colour and marginalized populations, when it is marketed to funders as a panacea for cultural ills, or when—on college and university campuses—it dominates the theatre and the classroom to the exclusion of less traditional alternatives" (Hartley et al. 176). While the structural ways in which Public Works both participates in and resists these problematic deployments of Shakespeare deserves a rigorous discussion, this section of the paper will look to several moments in the Public Works adaptation that depart in obvious ways from the original Shakespeare, using one-off comments both for comedic effect and, relatedly, to decenter the work of Shakespeare and resist the normalization of its conventions.

These metatheatrical comments, spoken primarily by the characters Jacques and Touchstone and inserted into the flow of Shakespeare's language, serve a formally decolonial purpose. Even while having little to no impact on the development of either the plot or characters, these lines work to disrupt the potentially colonial exchange between the language conventions being projected on stage and the audience receiving their impact. One of the most effective of these lines occurs near the end of the show. The quadruple wedding is about to begin and Rosalind, having exchanged her Ganymede disguise for a wedding dress, approaches Orlando as herself, singing, telling him the man Ganymede he had been spending his days with in anticipation of meeting Rosalind was her all the time. At this moment, Touchstone intervenes, asking Orlando incredulously, "Did you seriously not realize it was her all along?" before being hushed by Duke Senior and pulled back into the crowd (As You Like It 1:38:05). By asking the obvious question of how Orlando could possibly not recognize Rosalind even as she is dressed

up as the man Ganymede pretending to be Rosalind, herself, Touchstone acknowledges a convention of Shakespeare's plays that Shakespeare audiences are typically expected to take for granted: that disguises in Shakespeare plays, no matter how incomplete or imperfect, always work until such time as the disguise wearer chooses to remove them. Rather than faulting an audience for not being able to accept at face value that Rosalind's disguise could work so well, Touchstone faults Orlando for not being able to see through a disguise so obvious, and in doing so allies himself with the audience, particularly those in the audience for whom this particular (confusing and unintuitive) Shakespeare convention was indeed confusing or unintuitive. In asking this question, Touchstone neither alters Shakespeare's plot (the song moves on without an extended discussion of Rosalind's performance of Ganymede) nor his characters (we, the audience, are not expected to see Orlando as an idiotic or ridiculously unobservant character). He responds to Touchstone singing, "No, I didn't know / It doesn't matter though," then to Rosalind, "I can't imagine any lover but you" (64). Touchstone's comment triggers a kind of process of elimination wherein, faced Orlando's inability to realize he was talking to Rosalind the whole time, we can rule out those whom the adaptation does not place at fault for this confusion—the audience, Orlando—only to be left with the person who wrote the scene in the first place. Rather than positioning Shakespeare as the "redeemer of people of colour and marginalized populations," in this moment the adaptation denormalizes Shakespeare's convention and begins to flip the script, positioning the audience, who are given the option to accept Orlando's insistence "it doesn't matter, though" or to sit with Touchstone's confusion, as the potential redeemers of Shakespeare.

There are three other similar moments in this adaptation of *As You Like It* that serve similar, though not identical, purposes. At one point, Rosalind exclaims, "Alright, everyone,

we've got to plan a quadruple wedding in under two minutes" (Taub 60). Later, after Rosalind sings her eleven o'clock number, Jacques interrupts to tell Rosalind to get ready for the wedding "starting in like thirty seconds," to which Rosalind protests that the wedding is tomorrow. Jacques responds, "Yeah, well, you've been out here monologuing all night" (63). Once again, a simple interpretation of these lines would be to say that they serve to make Shakespeare's text more "accessible" through humor that acknowledges the ways in which life on stage is *different* from real life. Even through Rosalind's monologue is a song with lyrics that are for the most part not taken directly from Shakespeare, Jacques positions the monologue, the formal structure for which Shakespeare is famous, as an obstacle to the story. Jacques' reference to the monologue gives the sense that Rosalind is almost late because Shakespeare didn't give her enough time to both deliver her monologue and get to her wedding before it starts. Jacques' irreverence separates Shakespeare the author from the characters of *As You Like It*, giving the actors and the audience the ability to both fully commit to the stakes of the story while critiquing the means by which the stakes were contrived. To invoke Hartley et. al. again, Shakespeare's writing in the world of the play is not a "panacea for cultural ills" but rather an obstacle to be overcome in telling the story effectively.

It cannot be denied that that Public Works absolutely contribute to the final of Hartley's "problems of Shakespeare" in that Shakespeare "dominates [the Public Works repertoire almost] to the exclusion of less traditional alternatives." Without minimizing or trivializing the potential harm this decision to privilege Shakespeare above other non-Western, non-canonical narratives, regardless of why and how it was made, may inflict, I want to show how Public Works attempts to paradoxically challenge Shakespeare's dominance within an adaptation of his work. In Piggee's *As You Like It*, Jacques reprimands Orlando for leaving copies of his poorly written

love poetry around the forest, saying "I pray you mar no more trees with writing love songs in their barks" (33). Later, when Jacques and Orlando meet again, Jacques says sarcastically, "Oh look its Romeo's understudy" after Orlando interrupts her telling Rosalind about the song she's writing called "All the World's a Stage" (45). Romeo, Shakespeare's iconic romantic lead—a monument to a particular understanding of the romantic—speaks Shakespeare's famous love poetry. Orlando, as "Romeo's understudy," is not given the privilege of speaking Shakespeare's poetry, so must write his own. Of course, Shakespeare wrote Orlando's poetry as much as he wrote Orlando himself. However, in Public Works' adaption, Shakespeare's version of Orlando's poetry is converted into a boy-band dance number in which he compares his love for Rosalind to a hamburger. This metatheatrical (or, perhaps more accurately, inter-theatrical) comment distances the adaptation from Shakespeare as an invisible and universal authority, not only by replacing his poetry with pop songs, but also by positioning characters inside the play like Jacques as having knowledge, if not control, of the casting and adaptation process.

The casting of Public Works' *As You Like It* is another avenue through which Public Works has the opportunity to engage, reify, or challenge Shakespeare's potentially violent colonial impacts. *As You Like It* was cast in a way that, on the surface appears to engage in a "color blind" approach, but that actually shifts the default racial identity of many of Shakespeare's characters from white to non-white. Four out of five of the Equity actors cast in *As You Like It* were performers of color. This contrasted to the community ensemble, which, despite efforts on the part of Public Works administration to cast an ensemble fully representative of Seattle, was disproportionately (though by not means entirely) white. While I do not have specific data detailing the racial demographics of the cast, Shirley Brice Heath writes

in her report on Seattle Rep's Public Works' *The Odyssey* in 2017 that the cast was "predominately white"(Heath 102).

That being said, the casting choices of *As You Like It*, if analyzed in terms of race in conversation with the text of the adaptation, illuminate the ways in which this production attempts to avoid enacting colonial violence through its casting process. In "Pedagogy: Decolonizing Shakespeare On Stage," Hartley et. al. perform an analysis of a University of North Carolina Charlotte production of *Twelfth Night* to advocate for a form of non-realist "culturally conscious" approach to casting Shakespeare. In this approach, the casting can be non-realist (e.g. white actors playing the children of Black parents, etc.) while at the same time "the race of the actors is allowed to signify" (Hartley 182). In other words, this approach avoids the violence of "color-blind" casting requiring actors of color to act as if they were white and requiring audiences to deny race any signifying power. In Piggee's *As You Like It*, the casting was non-realist; a white-presenting actor played Duke Frederick while his sister, Duke Senior, was played by a Black actor. At the same time, all actors spoke the text in their own voices. None of the actors regardless of race performed with any form of British dialect and the actors of color spoke the lines as they would if they were saying them themselves; there was no attempt to "act white" by any of the performers. This is not to say that this "culturally conscious" casting approach in anyway neutralizes the inability of Public Works to cast the community ensemble in a way that is fully representative of Seattle. Nor is it to say that *As You Like It* is fully decolonized by the casting practices its creative team employed. It is to say that Public Works was able to cast a Shakespeare production historically performed exclusively by white actors with actors of color while not limiting the roles for which any individual, regardless of race could be considered and without requiring that actors deny their own identities to perform

whiteness and in doing so position it as both normalized and superior. This act, as inadequate as it may be to fully decolonize Shakespeare, is nevertheless an act that, if not actively decolonizing, avoids a casting model that reproduced colonial violence by mobilizing Shakespeare performance as a tool of white supremacy.

Public Works' adaptation, furthermore, does not switch characters from being white-by-default to being "racially neutral." While still allowing all characters to potentially be played by anyone of any race, the adaptation subtly shifts the default race of some of the characters from white to non-white by the ways that it rewrites the role of privilege as a theme in the play. The character of Orlando, specifically, is re-imagined to become a character who, rather than having been denied the privilege he feels he deserves, is suffering from a failure of the meritocracy. Ryan Farrar characterizes Orlando as a character primarily motivated to "maintain distinction by claiming the privilege due to a man of his pedigree" (Farrar 317). Orlando, according to Farrar, is bitter that his brother has denied him the superior privilege and position he is entitled after his father's death. Public Works' adaptation reframes Orlando's motivation. In the song that introduces his character in the play, "The Man I'm Supposed to Be," Orlando sings of his brother treating him "like an animal, not a man." He continues, "Now I'm grown and I've got no job no degree / So no one takes me seriously / Just another uneducated punk with no shot / But I'm not / And soon they'll see" (Taub 6). Orlando, in comparing himself to his brother says that Oliver "may have inherited his [their father's] money, but I got his skills" (7). In this adaptation, Orlando's goal is not to assert himself as deserving of privilege, but rather to "prove their version of [him] wrong" and assert himself instead as deserving being treated like a human being. The fact that the actor playing Oliver is white and the actor playing Orlando is Filipino in Piggee's 2019 production only underscores the fact that, in this production, Orlando is the subject of

discrimination. Despite the fact that in Shakespeare's text Orlando's poor treatment is purely the result of interpersonal conflict, rather than systemic inequity and racial discrimination, this adaptation positions Orlando as someone who is harmed by a system that refuses to reward his work because of some quality about himself he can't control. This quality is, according to Duke Frederick, his relation to his father, who Duke Frederick says was disloyal to him. Oliver does not know why he wants to harm Orlando, and he soliloquizes, "my soul—yet I know not why—hates nothing more than he" (9). Orlando's being denied an education, unable to get a job, labeled as a "punk" because those with more institutional privilege (wealth and position) refuse to give him what he deserves positions Orlando as someone experiencing systemic oppression at some level. While this adaptation does not assign a racial identity to Orlando, it makes it increasing improbable that Orlando would be played as an upper class white man, thus shifting the "default" identity of Shakespeare's character away from whiteness and privilege.

**Reimagined Presence and Real Absence of Arden's Indigenous Community**

Thus far, this paper has analyzed the ways in which Public Works has used metatheater as a tool that can work to prevent the relationship between Public Works participants, audience members, and "Shakespeare" from being a reproduction of the colonial encounter and enacting colonial violence. The second half of this paper will carry through the theme of metatheater to investigate the ways in which Public Works reimagines a performance of the colonial encounter specifically between Indigenous peoples of what is now known as North America and white, non-Indigenous settlers. Specifically, this section will take into account the presence and absence of Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing in Public Works' production, the way the land of the Pacific Northwest is addressed in the adaptation, and the ways in which decolonization is self-consciously performed within the plot of *As You Like It*.

For this second section, I will be primarily in conversation with the work of Métis and English scholar Jason Woodman Simmonds titled "Aboriginal Shakespeares as Communal Self-Fashioning." Reading the Public Works program in terms of Woodman Simmonds' analysis of Native Shakespeares reveals the parallels between Public Works' (meta)theatrical ethos and pan-Indigenous performance practices. Metatheatricality, Woodman Simmonds argues, is one of the modes of performance through which Indigenous communities are fashioned (Woodman Simmonds 31). Paraphrasing Geraldine Manossa (Cree), he writes that "as a performative medium, contemporary theatre is particularly well suited to Native performance traditions," citing especially "[t]he crucial link between Native performance traditions and theatre—the immediate interaction between speaker and listener, actors and audience" (26). Woodman Simmonds also writes about the differences between contemporary non-Indigenous theater and Native oral storytelling:

> Like oral storytelling, theatre is an 'interactive mode of production,' though the conventions of contemporary theatre (tiered seating, linear perspective, darkened house-lights) make it far less interactive than…the oral storytelling described above. In broad terms, contemporary theatre still retains the potential for interaction, and this potential is evident when characters such as Shakespeare's Falstaff in *Shakedown Shakespeare* play through the boundaries of the fourth wall to call attention to the stage as a stage. (26)

The theater produced by Seattle Rep's Public Works is not Indigenous theater, nor is it a form of fully interactive storytelling. The elements that prevent theater from being as interactive as Indigenous forms of oral storytelling—"tiered seating, linear perspective, darkened house lights"—are all used in Public Works' *As You Like It*, even though, as was argued in the first half of the paper, Piggee's direction as well as Taub and Woolery's adaptation reappropriated certain

elements of classical and contemporary non-Indigenous theater (like the red velvet curtain) that traditionally have been used to enforce the separation of audience and performers. Furthermore, it should be noted that Public Works cannot be called Indigenous theater because Indigenous individuals and communities did not play a significant role in the shaping and development of the program. That is not to say that Indigenous groups have been not been involved in Public Works and it is also not to say that Seattle Rep is not actively working against its colonial positionality as a white-led institution on Coast Salish lands. Seattle Rep's Public Works production of *The Odyssey* featured a group from the Duwamish Tribe ("Program" 7). The Tulalip Tribes Charitable Fund was in 2020 one of Public Work's sponsors ("Twelfth Night"). The Seattle Rep, a predominately white regional theater institution, in addition to paying Real Rent to the Duwamish Tribe beginning in July 2021, Seattle Rep runs a Native Artist in Residency program, offers free tickets for Native individuals, and opens up its Poncho Forum for free for Native groups ("Land Acknowledgment"). While Seattle Rep has recently begun to engage in an ongoing (and arguably imperfect) process of decolonization, there is not a significant Indigenous presence in Public Works at any level. Despite the clear points of difference separating Public Works from Indigenous storytelling and performance, Woodman Simmonds' characterization of Indigenous performative modes reveals certain key similarities between Indigenous theater and Public Works, specifically *As You Like It*. The "potential" Woodman Simmonds identifies in Shakespeare performance for it to take on characteristics of Indigenous performance is the degree to which it is metatheatrical—the ways in which it "call[s] attention to the stage as a stage"—and the ways it blurs the lines between spectator and actors. Public Works was created with the intention of blurring these lines and one of the ways it does this is through metatheater.

The rest of this section will continue to investigate the ways in which Public Works' *As You Like It* engages with an absent-presence or a present-absence of Indigenous communities and ways of knowing/storytelling. The initial question to be considered is the degree to which the use of Indigenous theater practices by Public Works is appropriation? Decolonization? Theatrical syncretism? Christopher B Balme defines theatrical syncretism as "a conscious, programmatic strategy to fashion a new form of theatre in the light of colonial or post-colonial experience. It is very often written and performed in a europhone language, but almost always manifests varying degrees of bi- or multilingualism" (Balme 2). He argues that syncretic theater "is one of the most effective means of decolonizing the stage, because it utilizes the performance forms of both European and indigenous cultures in a creative recombination of their respective elements, without slavish adherence to one tradition or the other" (2). This definition would fit Public Works' *As You Like It* if it were not for the fact that, in syncretic theater, "the dramatists and directors involved come from [I]ndigenous cultures" (5). Balme contrasts syncretic theater to its opposite: theatrical exoticism, which "involves the use of [I]ndigenous cultural texts purely for their surface appeal, but with no regard to their original cultural semantics" (5). Characterizing the ways in which Public Works' *As You Like It* engages with Indigenous semantics is an essential step in understanding how the production negotiates the colonial potential of Shakespeare. The remainder of this paper will continue to close read Public Works' *As You Like It* in order to determine where this adaptation and its relationship to Indigeneity and colonialism falls on the spectrum between theatrical exoticism and theatrical syncretism, colonialism and decolonialism.

The Forest of Arden, in which much of *As You Like It* is set, in Public Works' adaptation is a metaphor for Public Works as it exists as a community space and as a theatrical ethos. The

songs sung onstage "in Arden" performatively bring into existence the Public Works community that is being represented onstage as the community of people in Arden. Within this performative framework in which the performance onstage both represents a fictional community and creates/presents a real one, the lyrics of the song "In Arden" position the Public Works program as one that is self-consciously engaging in an imperfect and incomplete process of theatrical decolonization. In 2017, Public Works at New Yorks' Public Theatre staged Taub and Woolery's adaptation for the first time. Interviews with community ensemble members and community partners featured in a documentary about the production reveal that the cast of this production was highly attuned to the fact that Arden as it was constructed onstage was a metaphorical representation of Public Works. Samantha Williams, the Beacon Site Director at PS 1 Center for Family Life, said that because of the way that "it brings different communities together…Public Works is like Arden" ("Greenwood Tree" 19:57). Mayelyn Perdomo Santos, who played Phoebe, describes the moment in *As You Like It* when Orlando invades the Greenwood Tree scene intending to attack the people of Arden gathered there and instead is accepted by the community. She says, "That's not something we [the ensemble on stage] had to pretend. It's very real to Public Works….We have people from all sorts of backgrounds and all sort of…life stories, that I think outside of the context of Public Works would sort of marginalize that person, but our community is a space where they can kind of let go of that pretense and they can be loved and embraced and accepted" (35:31). I have argued elsewhere that Public Works performances, including *As You Like It*, evoke a sense of transformative potential because the of the ways the program structure makes it possible for transformations that occur to the fictional community of the play occur simultaneously to the real community of actors onstage.

In *As You Like It*, the people of Arden are the followers of Duke Senior, who went to live in the forest when she (he, in the original Shakespeare) was forced into exile by her brother, Duke Frederick. As I have argued, Public Works goes out of its way to identify the Public Works community with the community of Ardenites in the play. There is a song, titled "In Arden," that establishes the fluidity and self-consciousness of the Ardenite community. After the full company sings, "In Arden, Oh in Arden, Oh in Arden. How shall we learn to be?" Duke Senior sings, "Calling all our friends and family in exile / Gather round as we make a song! / How shall we sing of grace in this strange place? / I don't know, but I'll sing along" (Taub 22). The references to singing play into the metatheatrical themes that have been ubiquitous throughout the show, blurring the lines between the characters and the performers onstage portraying them. Duke Senior presents Arden as a community whose values are clear and understood, but who is not yet sure how to act in a way that matches those values. Duke Senior continues to sing, making clear what the values and ideals of the Ardenites are: "We shall try to find the use in our distress / We shall answer to adversity with kindness /…/ We shall study all the sermons in our stones / We shall hear the language of our hearts and bones / We shall read the book in the brook and sacred spring / We shall listen for the truth in everything" (22-3). There is great confidence in what it is toward which the Ardenites aspire, and also great consciousness that it is an aspiration the people of Arden have not yet achieved. They ask, "How shall we learn to be?" not because they don't know *what* they shall be, but because they don't yet know *how* to be it. The Ardenites will "sing along" as they learn, before they know. This analysis is important because it allows me to claim that this juxtaposition of clear values and evolving practices in the representation of Arden is also a presentation of Public Works as a program. Public Works is a program with a clear mission: "Create theater of, by, and for the people rooted in the values of

equity, imagination, and joy" ("Public Works"). Yet the ways in which it achieves this mission are still evolving. The parallels metatheatrically drawn between the Arden and Public Works communities imply that this song is self-referentially presenting Public Works as an institution—a body—that is still a work in progress. A close reading of "In Arden" reveals references to Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being within the song, suggesting that Public Works is positioning itself specifically as a *decolonial* work-in-progress. The song privileges embodied knowledge as a way of knowing. Duke Senior sings, "Oh when the icy winter wind benumbs my body / Even though I shiver, I am still alive / I smile and thank the wind for its honesty / Reminding my skin it's thick enough to survive" (Taub 23). The song also preserves language from the original Shakespeare text that speaks of the natural world as a source of knowledge that can be accessed by, "study[ing] all the sermons in the stones" (23). The privileging of knowledge derived from embodied experience of the land is not a Western practice, yet the questions remain: If it is not Western, is it decolonial? If it's decolonial is it Indigenous? What would it take for an institution like Public Works to be decolonial?

In order to more fully unpack the implications of this parallel between Public Works and the world of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, the role Indigenous land plays in both the daily operations of the Seattle Repertory Theatre and the design of Piggee's *As You Like It* must be acknowledged. The Seattle Repertory Theatre is located on the land of the Coast Salish people, including the traditional land of the Duwamish tribe, a fact that is acknowledged on the Seattle Rep's website ("Land Acknowledgement"). The community of Arden in this adaptation is also on Coast Salish land. Because Taub and Woolery adapted *As You Like It* with the intention of showcasing the people and communities of New York City, not Seattle, part of Piggee's direction of this adaptation makes it specific to the Pacific Northwest and the cultures and

experiences of people in Seattle. There is a moment in the show after Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone have decided to escape to the forest of Arden when we see a screen showing a map of the West Coast of the United States. A little animated airplane is flying North up over I-5. The video cuts away from this screen right as the airplane is over the San Juan Islands, a voice-over finishes saying, "This is your pilot once again. We are about to make our final approach into Arden. On behalf of everyone here at Arden Air, I'd like to thank you for traveling with us today. [I] hope you find your stay in Arden peaceful and restorative. Arden Air. Because time travels in diverse places with diverse persons," and a community ensemble performer with two orange batons directing (dancing) the plane onto the runway (As You Like It 36:44). The San Juan Islands were and are the lands of the Strait Coast Salish peoples including the Lummi, Songhees, Saanich, and Samish tribes and nations (Stein 6). Seattle Rep's Public Works' Arden, therefore, is on the Indigenous land of these peoples. In his book *The Aesthetics of Island Space: Perception, Ideology, Geopoetics,* which includes a critical reading of the San Juan Islands in terms of Prospero's island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* Johannes Riquet writes that

> Like Shakespeare's island, the island of San Juan was a highly contested space, the site over which competing claims for the ownership of the entire archipelago were enacted. Not only were the islands the sites of various violent clashes between Anglo-Americans and Native Americans, but they were also at the heart of the territorial dispute between Britain and the United States that escalated in the 1850s, a dispute that revolved around the difficulty of drawing definite boundaries in the fluid archipelagic world of the Salish Sea. This world of land and sea—an island world in the full etymological sense of the word—also helped to shape a distinctive island aesthetics that both engages with and calls into question canonical Western island representations. (Riquet 178-9)

As I argue in this paper, Public Works Seattle's Arden "both engages with [reproduces] and calls into question Western…representations," presenting a community that is politically fluid, deeply aware of the land (both imagined and real) it occupies, and actively replaying and reasserting—or, as this production makes it seem, unable to shake off—colonial ways of knowing, all at the same time. Given the setting of Arden on Coast Salish land, the absence of a human population Indigenous to the forest of Arden in Shakespeare's play speaks multitudes about the way this production negotiates its (de)coloniality. The conflicts in the play are not dramatically unlike the conflicts Riquet describes that make the San Juan Islands a "highly contested space." Riquet describes a "territorial dispute" over the Strait Coast Salish peoples' land between the British and the United States; these are two colonizing entities fighting over the control of stolen land. In *As You Like It*, there are similarly two competing "settler" groups: the people of the court, led by Duke Frederick, and the people of Arden, whom Duke Frederick banished to the forest. Both groups, both non-Indigenous to the land, claim some level of authority over Arden and the people who live there.

The second conflict, which Riquet calls "various violent clashes between Anglo-Americans and Native Americans" (a phrase which fails to position the Anglo-Americans, not Indigenous peoples, as the primary perpetrators of violence and gross injustice), also appears in Public Works' *As You Like It*, not unproblematically as the conflict between the people living in Arden and the deer who live in the forest. Jacques interrupts "In Arden" to protest with a paraphrased/modernized version of the speech Shakespeare wrote for Jacques:

> But do you realize that the deer we eat for dinner
>
> Are actually thinking feeling creatures who lived here long before we came?
>
> And when we occupy their native home and hunt them down,

We're no better than your brother who displaced us just the same! (Taub 23).

To which Duke Senior replies with a line taken directly from the original play, "Jacques, I love to cope with you in these sullen fits for you are full of matter!" (23). The language "lived here long before we came," "occupy their native home," and "displaced us just the same" is language taken from Indigenous and postcolonial critique. The deer in this production act as proxies for Indigenous peoples that are not in the play, making the people Indigenous to Arden into a very present absence. This is problematic because it contributes to a portrayal of Indigenous people as "thinking feeling *creatures*," yes, but not quite *humans*. Furthermore, it prompts a reflection upon the colonial positionality of Duke Senior and her followers while simultaneously burying it in Jacques' character, characterizing it as one of Jacques' "sullen [yet also, Duke Senior's response implies, valuable] fits." Jacques continues, saying, "But the deer themselves are just as bad as we are! / I recently saw one with an arrow in his heart, on his dying breath, / And when the other deer went by they just ignored their wounded kin, / Deliberately leaving her to a cold and lonely death! And another thing! Wait, I lost my train of thought…" (23). This effectively reverses any critical reflection on Duke Senior's role as a colonizer by instead presenting Jacques as a well-meaning but overcritical, overzealous, misguided advocate for the way of being *she* perceives to be just, which, we are meant to believe, not only does not exist, but also is ridiculously impractical. Such a characterization is a not uncommon caricaturization of the radical left. Public Works' adaptation welcomes Jacques and her ideas, but also dismisses them as misguided, which, admittedly, they are, as they miss the larger justice issue at hand: the absence of an Indigenous population of Arden.

Another place in which Indigenous communities occupy a present absence in Public Works *As You Like It* is in the scene in which Orlando invades the forest of Arden demanding

food from Duke Senior's community. Given the pieces of (post)-colonial discourse introduced in "In Arden," it is easy to read this scene as an attempted re-imagining of the colonial encounter that nevertheless falls apart under closer scrutiny. In his essay "As You Like It: The Thin Line Between Legitimate Utopia and Compensatory Vacation," Ryan Farrar describes the scene in which Orlando threatens Duke Senior and his followers in highly charged language. He writes that in this scene, Orlando "desperately resorts to a caricatured state of primitive hostility as he draws his sword against the Duke and his court" (Farrar 373). Conversely, Farrar describes Duke Senior and his followers as "civilizing forces" that allow Orlando to enjoy Arden for the "paradis[e]" it is (373). Words like "civilizing," "primitive," and even "paradise" echo colonial discourse that justified colonialism as a "civilizing" mission intended to convert or kill "primitive" Indigenous populations living in (often island) "paradises". Farrar's reading of Orlando as "primitive" and Duke Senior as "civilizing" is interesting, if his use of language troubling, because of the ways Public Works' production (and even Shakespeare's original text) challenge that binary characterization. In the scene of the Public Works adaptation, the community sits down onstage for a potluck. They sing, "Under the Greenwood Tree / Come and live with me / If you want to be free / […] / I will not be free / until we are all free / Under the Greenwood Tree / You shall see no enemy / […] Do not fear / All are welcome here" (Taub 27). Orlando enters, "brandishing a sword" and demands, "Forebear, and eat no more! He dies that touches any of this fruit till I and my affairs are answered," to which Duke Senior replies, "What would you have? Your gentleness shall force more than your force move us to gentleness…Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table" (28). Orlando's response contributes to the colonial language associated with this passage: "Speak you so gently? Pardon me, I pray you. I thought that all things had been savage here" (28). This scene presents a confused re-imagining of the

colonial encounter. On the one hand, the subtle introduction of Indigenous ways of knowing into the lyrics of "In Arden" position Duke Senior et. al. as a sort of quasi-Indigenous stand-in. Orlando's belief that the people of Arden had been "savage" supports this, as does the fact that he, a settler, approached the people of Arden with threats of violence. Significantly, these colonial threats, unlike the historical colonial encounter, do not become actual genocidal violence. This adaptation seems to be indulging in a kind of alternative history, reimaging the colonial encounter as one that ends in peace and mutual understanding. I am curious to what extent this reimagining was productive in terms of how it influenced the thinking/relationships of those involved in the program. This re-imaging is problematic because it places the responsibility for converting this violent encounter into a peaceful one on the empathy, generosity, and sacrifice of an "Indigenous" group; we are meant to believe the colonial encounter can be transformed because the Ardenites invite others onto their land with the words "all are welcome here." Our ability to evaluate this scene in terms of its de-colonial potential is stymied by the unclear positionality of the people of Arden as sort-of Indigenous even while they clearly are not. Were the people of Arden on land that was rightfully theirs, and Orlando were (as, in Public Works' production he seems to be) a person inflicted with the violence of discrimination, their attitude of non-violence and "all are welcome here" would be entirely appropriate. In order for Public Works' adaptation to realize its anti-colonial potential, it would have to clarify the position of the individuals and communities in the play in terms of how they relate to colonialism and Indigeneity.

The third way in which Indigeneity shows up in Public Works' *As You Like It* is in the performative power of the acknowledgement of the agency and authority of non-human life. Near the end of the show, Rosalind is alone onstage in the forest of Arden, contemplating her

identity and who she will become when she marries Orlando. In an eleventh-hour moment of reckoning, the stage directions say she "calls out to the forest": "Hey Arden! If you have a sermon in your stones / Then Arden, speak the language of my heart and bones / Oh Arden, help me see the light in everything! What was it I heard them singing?" (Taub 61). Then, according to the stage directions, "Rosalind listens as Arden speaks to her in the form of wind and light in the way that only nature can communicate" (62). In Seattle Rep's production, Rosalind listens, alone on stage, and we hear in response the ensemble, not visible, singing, "Together we'll heal our would / Together we'll heal our wound" (62). As a member of the audience, I experienced Rosalind's cry of "Hey, Arden" as a moment of profound performative transformation. Up until the moment Rosalind says "Hey, Arden," Arden had been treated as an objective landscape; people acted on and "In Arden." With "Hey, Arden," Rosalind acknowledges the agency and subjectivity of the forest itself, bringing the audience into an awareness of Arden's agency as something that had always been there, but that had been overlooked. There are a number of ways this performative moment can be theorized. It is tempting to characterize "Hey, Arden" as a performative utterance as defined by J. L. Austin. Austin defines performative utterances as utterances "in which to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which by saying or in saying something we [the speaker] are doing something" (Austin 12). In other words, performative utterances are utterances that bring a condition into being that the utterances seem, on first glace, only to describe. "Hey, Arden" is certainly a performative utterance in the Austinian sense, if taken only on the presentational level, and only if it is assumed that the theater space does not have its own agency as a place; Rosalind, by addressing Arden, represented by the stage, as a place with subjectivity, seems to be describing the agency of the space when actually she is endowing the space with agency that does not, in fact, exist outside of the made-up world of the

play. However, this theory is insufficient to characterize what is happening in this moment, not only because it requires the assumption that the space did not, in fact, have agency or subjectivity of any kind, and still does not even after Rosalind provokes the audience into perceiving it does, but also because it looks only at the presentational level: the effect the words spoken onstage have on how the audience perceives the reality of the actual theater space. Farrar suggests that in this play "the forest is endowed with a spirit that later centuries would identify as Romantic" (Farrar 368), meaning presumably that the play values nature for the potential it has to enrich human life. However, this characterization too is insufficient because it fails to recognize the fact that Rosalind *acknowledges* the agency and subjectivity of Arden. She does not give it that agency. I argue that "Hey, Arden" can be more fully understood in terms of Indigenous ways of knowing, specifically what settler scholars Adam J. Barker and Jenny Pickerill call "doings," or "embodied practices that have significance beyond their material movements and impacts. Doings frame embodied actions as complex, relational (between people, but also with the more-than-human world), and transformative of both self and space" (Barker and Pickerill 641). According to Barker and Pickerill, "It is this acting with non-human entities that distinguishes Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge-making from non-Indigenous theory" (647). The "Hey, Arden" moment in Public Works' *As You Like It* is a performative representation of an embodied "doing" by Rosalind in relation to Arden. The production is representing an Indigenous way of doing and engaging with place in a way that acknowledges its agency and ability to act *with*. However, the performer playing Rosalind is Black and, like most if not all of the *As You Like It* cast, not Indigenous. The play not performed in a forest, or even outdoors. It is performed inside a theater, on a stage. In the opening song and throughout the show, the stage is positioned as a place of utmost signifying power. This continues until the end of the play, when Duke Senior

ushers everyone off the stage, but Jacques stays behind, saying, "there is still much matter to be heard and learned out here" (Taub 70). "Here," in that moment and in light of both Jacques' "All the World's a Stage" and Rosalind's "Hey, Arden," means both Arden *and* the theater. Yet, this form of interacting with place, when the place is the Seattle Repertory Theatre, cannot yet be said to be Indigenous, in all the heterogeneity of the term. If Public Works' adaptation is representing Indigenous practices and ways of knowing in the story it is telling, it is not (yet) Indigenous voices doing the representing.

**Conclusion**

What remains to be discussed is what (de)colonial potential there is, if any, in a program like Public Works and shows like Public Works' *As You Like It* as they exist now and, more importantly, what (de)colonial reality there will be when Public Works becomes unambiguous about its active relationships with the Indigenous people, communities, tribes, and nations of the Pacific Northwest. It cannot be conclusively said that Public Works fully achieves its goal of creating "theater of, by, and for the people" through its production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Public Works does not engage in theatrical exoticism, engaging Indigeneity only for its "Otherness," but neither does it produce truly decolonial theatrical syncretism because it fails to engage Indigenous voices both in the story it tells and the ways it tells it. This failure on the part of Public Works on two levels to include Indigenous voices as a present presence can be seen as a metatheatrical failing. Metatheater thus acts both a means of mitigating the potential for Shakespeare to be used as a tool of colonial violence and a device Public Works embodies in its as yet incomplete and imperfect attempts to become a decolonial theater institution. Public Works' transformative power lies in its ability to use metatheatrical devices to blur lines between audience and spectators, between amateur and professional, and between real and imagined.

However, the absent presence of an imagined Indigenous community in *As You Like It* is in no way the same as a real presence of Indigenous communities, voices, and ways of knowing in this production. Reading Public Works' adaptation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in terms of its relationship to colonialism and Indigeneity illuminates the importance in this case of enforcing the separation between real and imagined, even while re-imagining the real work Shakespeare can do with community to undo colonial violence and work toward more fully decolonial theater.

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