



Shakespeare Bulletin

The Journal of Early Modern Drama
in Performance

Performance Review Guidelines

Last updated November 2024

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Performance Review Guidelines

What is a performance review?

As Peter Kirwan and Kathryn Prince note in *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Contemporary Performance*, “The questions of what contemporary Shakespeare performance is and who gets to define it remain unanswerable” (8). In many ways, therefore, a performance review is an attempt to provide answers to those unanswerable questions.

Put more simply, a performance review does what you might expect from its name: it provides a critical review of a particular performance. But, just as there are countless genres, methods and media for performance, so there are a multitude of ways in which an author might approach reviewing the performance upon which they are focusing.

As you might expect, however, there are criteria which a performance review needs to meet in order to be accepted for publication in *Shakespeare Bulletin*. These guidelines have been designed to answer any questions you might have, and help you make sure any review you submit for consideration in the journal not only has the best chance of being accepted with minimal edits, but offers an engaging, informative, and enjoyable experience for anyone who comes to read it.

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What types of performance does *Shakespeare Bulletin* review?

The journal welcomes reviews of performances of (or significantly rooted in) the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Aside from this, we define performance widely, and are open to reviews of theater productions, live or “as live” theater broadcasts, digital theater, films, television series, web series, audio drama, and performance art that reinterpret early modern drama for today’s audiences. We welcome reviews of performances from around the world and in any language.

Shakespeare Bulletin is always open to proposals for reviews of any event which can be considered to offer a performance of Shakespeare or early modern drama – so if you have an idea for a review that doesn’t fit into this list, we would love to discuss it with you!

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Who can be a performance review author for *Shakespeare Bulletin*?

We are happy to accept enquiries from both experienced reviewers and those looking to publish their first piece; from emeritus professors to postgraduate researchers; and from independent scholars to tenured academics. *Shakespeare Bulletin* is an academic journal, and therefore seeks reviewers who are looking to interrogate performance with academic rigor.

What should my review look like?

You can find guidance on *Shakespeare Bulletin*'s house style, as well a guidelines document specific to structuring and formatting performance reviews, on the journal's webpage: press.jhu.edu/journals/shakespeare-bulletin.

We encourage you to take a look at past reviews published in the journal to see how to format your review's title, header, author credit, and any image captions. For those without institutional access, there are a number of reviews in open access issues available to view on Project MUSE: muse.jhu.edu/journal/339.

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Should my review focus on describing the performance objectively, or on my subjective experience of it?

Any performance review will inherently offer *both* a description of the production *and* the reviewer's individual experience of the specific performance they saw. However, striking the right balance between the two will be individual to each review.

In terms of description, try to think about how much a *Shakespeare Bulletin* reader who had not seen this production would need explaining to them. So, in a review of a performance of a Shakespeare play, relaying the plot isn't necessary; but an explanation of the story of a new work based on Shakespeare, or of a very obscure early modern play, will likely be helpful in their navigation of your analysis.

Your review will become part of the archive of the production you saw, and of the performance of the work more widely. Key information about directorial, design, performance and adaptive choices are the kinds of details readers coming to your review in the months and years after the performance occurred will want to know.

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Should my review focus on describing the performance objectively, or on my subjective experience of it? (*cont'd*)

Reviews are naturally subjective, as any production will appeal to some more than others. Putting across your own opinion of a production helps to illuminate what it was like to experience it. It is important to interrogate *why* the production made you feel the way it did. Whether your reaction to a performance is positive or negative, it is not enough to say simply what you liked or disliked – your opinion needs to be backed up with critically engaged analysis.

While a performance review is not the same as an article, it is an academic piece of writing. Having a central argument about the performance is a good way to tie your review together, as well as helping you demonstrate why it offered a valuable contribution to contemporary performance and is worthy of review.

Ultimately, your review needs to be fair and accurate, assessing the performance on its own terms. Even if a performance was not what you were expecting, it is important to review what you actually saw, and not a hypothetical version you wish you had seen.

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Will I get paid if my review is accepted for publication?

As *Shakespeare Bulletin* is an academic journal, we are unable to pay for submissions. All performance review authors receive a gratis physical copy of the journal issue in which their review appears.

Do I need to arrange my own tickets to see a performance I am reviewing?

Yes – the journal is unable to purchase or arrange complimentary tickets for performance review authors. As long as the review has been commissioned and agreed, you are welcome to contact the theater yourself and mention that you are writing a review for *Shakespeare Bulletin* to see if they are able to provide complimentary tickets, but we cannot guarantee that theaters will offer comps, especially for popular productions.

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I still have questions! Who do I contact?

As mentioned earlier, these guidelines are designed to answer the kind of questions you might have about writing a performance review for *Shakespeare Bulletin*, but they are of course not exhaustive.

If you have any further questions that haven't been answered here, then please reach out to us at SBPerformance@marybaldwin.edu and the Performance Reviews Editor will be happy to discuss them with you.

Benjamin Broadribb
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