

## Contributing to Peace in Northern Ireland: *Terra Nova's Midsummer Night's Dream*

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This article examines the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* put together by Terra Nova Productions in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 2019.<sup>1</sup> Terra Nova Productions (directed by Andrea Montgomery) is a professional theatre company known for its intercultural work, already demonstrated in its first engagement with Shakespeare, *The Belfast Tempest* (2016). This challenging intercultural production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was characterized by gender-switched characters, multi-racial casting and the integration of amateur actors into a professional cast. Alongside these features, the production emphasized Northern Irish legacies. In response to Northern Ireland's complex history, not least the so-called "Troubles," peace was an underlying imperative in this *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which was supported by the European Union's PEACE Program. This article aims to emphasize the importance of the socio-political context in this production at several levels, not just in terms of the final outcome. The workshops and intercultural weekends organized for the amateur actors, their rehearsals with the professional cast, the performances themselves and the active engagement with the audience after the performances were all oriented to fostering peace. The play becomes the perfect scenario to confront and challenge audiences and all the agents involved: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* brings about a socio-political transformation, and, in the process, is itself transformed.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Terra Nova Productions; Northern Ireland; Troubles; PEACE Project

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## Una contribución a la paz en Irlanda del Norte: La producción de *Midsummer Night's Dream* de Terra Nova

El presente artículo explora la producción de *A Midsummer Night's Dream* de Terra Nova Productions en Belfast, Irlanda del Norte, en 2019. Terra Nova Productions (dirigida por Andrea Montgomery) es una compañía teatral conocida por su trabajo intercultural, lo que ya se pudo ver en su primera adaptación de una obra de Shakespeare, *The Belfast Tempest*. Esta innovadora producción intercultural de *A Midsummer Night's Dream* se caracterizó por los personajes que cambiaban de género, por un reparto multirracial y por la integración de actores aficionados en un reparto formado por profesionales. Además, la producción puso en valor el legado de Irlanda del Norte. Para dar respuesta a la compleja historia de Irlanda del Norte, sobre todo con el conocido conflicto norirlandés, uno de los objetivos obligados de la producción, financiada por el programa PEACE de la Unión Europea, consistía en dar importancia a la paz. Este artículo destaca la relevancia del contexto socio-político en esta producción a varios niveles, no solo en el resultado final. Los talleres y los fines de semana interculturales organizados por los actores aficionados, los ensayos con los actores profesionales, las propias representaciones y la continua interacción con el público después de las actuaciones estaban orientados a fomentar la paz. La obra se convierte así en el escenario perfecto para confrontar y retar al público y a todos los agentes involucrados: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provoca una transformación socio-política y, en el proceso, también se transforma a sí misma.

Palabras Clave: Shakespeare; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Terra Nova Productions; Irlanda del Norte; conflicto norirlandés; Proyecto PEACE

This essay examines Terra Nova's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* staged in Ards and North Down Borough in Northern Ireland in 2019. Terra Nova Productions—directed by the Canadian writer Andrea Montgomery—is a professional theater company in East Belfast known for its intercultural work. Its first engagement with Shakespeare was *The Belfast Tempest* (2016), an intercultural project created for the celebrations of the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death that included gender-switching and community performance.<sup>2</sup> Participation in Terra Nova Productions is open to the entire community regardless of disability, profession, or age. Terra Nova's challenging and innovative intercultural *Dream* is characterized by its revision of Shakespeare's play-text and supplementing it with excerpts from other works by Shakespeare, as well as gender-switching (for instance, the characters of Theseus and Hippolyta are replaced by Thesea

<sup>2</sup> Terra Nova Productions fits the characteristics of small theaters identified by David Hartwig (2021): it is a small company which serves a specific geographic community, attracts audiences of about one thousand people per production and has a small annual budget.

and Hippolytus) and multi-racial casting. However, its most distinctive feature is the ground-breaking combination of professional and amateur actors—the latter playing Titania's and Oberon's retinues of fairies, the mechanicals and members of Thesea's and Hippolytus' courts. The skills of the community are also demonstrated in the set and costumes, made by local volunteers. Terra Nova's *Dream* is a visually compelling—and successful—instance of community engagement and community practice, mainly oriented at promoting the peace agenda. This adaptation places emphasis on sustained community engagement throughout the whole process of bringing the production into being. The workshops and intercultural weekends organized for the amateur actors, their rehearsals with the professional cast, the performances themselves and the active engagement with the audience after the performances aimed to promote peace between the different communities in Northern Ireland.

After one of the free performances of Terra Nova's *Dream*, an audience member remarked in the post-performance survey: "It's interesting in this play that there is a [*sic*] constant change and conflict—between partners and family. Every single person is in conflict. Wouldn't it be lovely to get a houseplant [the love-in-idleness flower] and solve it all? The play doesn't really solve itself. Instead, it's about opening the eyes, to see things" (Montgomery and Schultz 2019, 56). This comment differs from the customary perception of the play as a healing story with sparkling fairies, mechanicals and an ending that emphasizes natural harmony. For this member of the audience, the play is not a non-troubling celebration of love. Instead, it becomes a viable way to confront and challenge the audience, raising public awareness of the history of political and religious conflict in Northern Ireland, and more specifically, in Ards and North Down Borough. Given the recent complex history in Northern Ireland with the so-called "Troubles" (the conflicts between Unionists—those wanting to remain part of the U.K.—and the Nationalists—those desiring to be part of Ireland), peace is an underlying imperative in this *Dream*: the production is part of a project supported by the European Union's PEACE Program. Moreover, the whole project also took place "against the backdrop of a bitter local election and the on-going challenge of Brexit" (Montgomery and Schultz 2019, 2). Suddenly, the Irish border was a part of small talk again and ghosts of the past were haunting the present. Shakespeare's play was an excellent fit for tackling these conversations, since, despite its focus on love, "violence and precarious cessation of martial conflict" loom large at the margins of the plot: "Theseus plans his wedding to Hippolyta in the hopes that it ends ongoing wars between Athenians and Amazons" (Garrison and Pivetti 2018, 1). This essay aims to show how this site-specific production underscores Northern Irish legacies while highlighting how the transformative power of Shakespeare might be used to imagine a better, more peaceful future.

The present article is the result of my work as an embedded researcher with Terra Nova Productions in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during the production process of their *Dream*. I start with the theoretical framework, then briefly explain the history

of the company and outline the ethnographic methodology used in my work with the company. I then move to analyze the process of production, the changes made to the play-text, the performance and the post-production. Lastly, I examine how the community was transformed throughout the whole process and conclude that Terra Nova's reinterpretation of Shakespeare's play for local audiences supported the formation of better communities by promoting peace and social acceptance.

### I. COMMUNITY-BASED THEATER/ PARTICIPATORY THEATER

As Lois Keidan wrote in *The Guardian*, “socially engaged practices are a way of empowering the disempowered and including the excluded, and can achieve radical and remarkable transformations” (2008). Terra Nova's *Dream* is a project that emerged in response to social and community needs, and it belongs to the long tradition of participatory theater projects that see theater as a space of transformation and collaboration. Participatory theater projects tend to build on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1972] 2017) and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* ([1974] 2019), which are critical to the field. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is regarded as a foundational text of critical pedagogy that proposes an innovative and fruitful relationship between teachers, students and society in which the learner is a co-creator of knowledge. And just as learners in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* are active in their own learning, so too are audience members in Boal's book, with the aim of transforming the reality they are living in as much as *Theatre of the Oppressed* highlights the idea of theater as a means of promoting social and political change. Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton's *Drama for Learning* (1995) is also seminal in the field, and it is equally based on the premise of the transformative power of theater; how it becomes paramount in bringing about personal and collective changes and transformations. Recent scholarship on amateur Shakespeare further explores this transformative power of theater and the emotional and personal impact it may have on all the agents involved.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, community-based practice theater needs further study; the facet that has received the most attention is prison Shakespeare, which has been analyzed in several monographs, such as Robert Pensalfini's *Prison Shakespeare* (2016) and Amy Scott-Douglas' *Shakespeare Inside: The Bard Behind Bars* (2007).

Community theater is in line with applied theater, for both fields highlight social change and activism, but they differ in their goals and approaches. Community theater “closely allies itself with a particular community, develops performances about that community's concerns, and involves some level of participation from community members” (Brokaw 2017, 445). The main achievements of community theatres in comparison to professional theater companies is that they involve more

<sup>3</sup> Books on Shakespeare and amateur theater include Michael Dobson's *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance: A Cultural History* (2013) and Stephen Purcell's *Shakespeare in Amateur Production* (2017).

performances of more productions, more participants and larger audiences. Its most striking characteristic is the active participation of residents, thereby impacting people's lives in many ways. Similarly, the aim of applied theater is to "improve the lives of individuals and create better societies" (Nicholson 2005, 3-4). Applied theater focuses on contemporary concerns and socially engaged art that promotes well-being, transforms individuals in the process and improves "the lives of their actor-participants and their communities" (Wolfgang 2021, 356).<sup>4</sup> While community theater engages a specific community to build community bonds, applied theater involves working with marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as prisoners or refugees. In applied theater, performance is not the main goal, whereas in community theatre it is. Nicholson (2005), Thompson (2009) and Brenner *et al.* (2019), for instance, engage with applied theater in their books to emphasize its activism. Both community theater and applied theater subscribe to the belief that individuals can be transformed through theater.

Applied Shakespeare is a subfield within applied theater. Shakespeare is usually a favorite author in community practice as he provides a certain distance and creates a safe space for experimentation. Ruiter (2021) and Eklund and Hyman (2021) have explored the need to make Shakespeare useful and relevant to the causes of social justice, while Wolfgang notes that the companies that promote participatory theater "produce the work of Shakespeare through their own particular regional lens" (2021, 358). *Dream* is one of Shakespeare's most popular plays in community practice. The adaptation by Théâtre du Bout du Monde in Paris (*Le Songe d'une nuit de mai*, Miguel Borrás and Philippe Guérin, 2010) is a case in point. Like Terra Nova's *Dream*, its cast consisted of a combination of amateur and professional actors. Workshops were distributed across different venues, reaching a heterogeneous group of people—a center for the homeless and a care home for elderly people, among them. This wide range of people turned their "challenges into assets" (Schwartz-Gastine 2013, n.p.). *The Midsummer Night's Dream: A Play for the Nation* performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company with amateur mechanicals from around the country in 2016 is another instance. *Dream* by Parrabbola Theatre Company (London, U.K., 2018) also aimed to embrace change and diversity in order to reach the different cultures and traditions within the community.<sup>5</sup> All these projects built on community skills and talents. However, Terra Nova's *Dream* differs from the other three in its more direct engagement with the audience, because of Terra Nova's dialogic model of interaction, not only between professional actors and amateurs, but also between performers and spectators. Terra Nova's production, for

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<sup>4</sup> William Floyd Wolfgang uses the term "grassroots companies" to refer to those theater companies that are independent and whose work is not designed for audiences outside local communities, very much in the style of Terra Nova Productions.

<sup>5</sup> Parrabbola Theatre Company of the U.K. was also in charge of an immersive, open-air production of *The Winter's Tale* as part of the annual Earagail Arts Festival in Ireland. The cast included professionals and amateurs. One of the production's aims was to hint at the political uncertainties of present-day society, mainly as a result of Brexit (the audience was made aware of the implications of imposed borders between Ireland and Northern Ireland, for instance).

example, removed the barrier between cast and spectators by replacing the traditional raised stage with a stage at seat level, facilitating a more immediate connection between the audience and the performance. For Terra Nova, spectators are not mere passive onlookers but extremely active, and their agency must be taken into account in productions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

When I applied for a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship, I included in the proposal a possible collaboration with Terra Nova Productions. Three years later, after being awarded the E.U. grant, I approached Andrea Montgomery, the director of the company, and Josh Schultz, its project manager, in January 2019 to discuss my specific role during my collaboration with them. In this first meeting, I also learned about the history and aims of the company. As the company's *Dream* was then in production, it was decided I would help in the office and would be immersed in the process to "better understand the myriad interactions between company and community, and company-as-community" (Hartwig 2021, 378). I therefore acted as an embedded researcher, following theatrical ethnography.

For the analysis of Terra Nova's adaptation, I am drawing on Katherine Steele Brokaw's methodology (2017) and mobilizing my own involvement with the production. Brokaw's methodology consists of three different stages: 1) ethnography—working as a participant/observer in the production; 2) practice as research—working alongside practitioners; and 3) applied theater/community performance—investigating projects that involve and impact local communities. Thanks to my involvement in the production, I was permitted access to deeper ethnographic insights and became involved with the production in many different ways: participating in the intercultural weekends and going through the surveys, which helped me to see the broad scope of the project. I discovered that Terra Nova's *Dream* had to be studied in relation to a wide range of cultural performances that surrounded it: workshops, intercultural weekends, rehearsals and engagements with the audience. In other words, to study Shakespeare ethnographically was, in this case, to consider what happens both on and off stage.

Montgomery is a Canadian artist who founded Terra Nova Productions in 2007 with a very specific mission "to create excellent theatre where different cultures meet, people explore and the world is changed" ("What We Do"). The company aims to "make participants and audiences feel a shared sense of wonder" ("What We Do") and to ensure that the theater it creates exhibits a range of cultural influences and speaks to a diverse audience. An immigrant in Northern Ireland, Montgomery has suggested that her status as an outsider helps her express herself (Montgomery 2022). Montgomery draws on her immigrant status and her experience as a third-culture individual; her approach to power sharing and intersectionality is iterative and listening-based, rather than academic. She describes herself not as an autodidact but a "communo-didact" (Montgomery 2022).

The strategic aims of the company involve the promotion of interculturality, audience development (both the cast and the audience are equally important) and good governance. Intercultural performance, of course, demands great care from the theater and must overcome numerous obstacles in practice. Erin Julian and Kim Solga (2022) highlight some of the shortcomings of diversity practice, noting, for instance, that some companies do not move beyond representations of diversity on stage and fail to provide deeper engagement. Aware of these difficulties, Montgomery included minoritized (non-white) actors in decision-making processes. Terra Nova's work did not simply show minoritized bodies to signal its awareness of diversity, but involved them in the process of creation, as I have personally witnessed in rehearsals, during which Montgomery constantly asked for ideas. Another characteristic of Terra Nova's work is that the production intended that the audience engage in emotional labor itself; Terra Nova's *Dream* arguably has some attachment to feeling, but there is no banality or patronizing attitude.<sup>6</sup> Terra Nova, then, aims for community engagement, audience participation, interculturality and diversity while being aware of the dangers of practicing diversity.

This essay will explore how the company adapted the play-text of Shakespeare's *Dream* to its larger project of supporting social peace in Northern Ireland, and examine how this production transformed the community of Ards and Down Borough and influenced those who participated in it.

### 3. TRANSFORMING THE PLAY: TERRA NOVA'S *DREAM*

One of the characteristics of this *Dream* is the consistent transformation of the source text. Montgomery made several cuts, reducing the text to what was relevant to her purposes, and included some insertions. She decided to swap the genders in some of the roles to provide a woman-centered approach to her adaptation. For instance, King Theseus was replaced by Queen Thesea in a gesture at contemporary politics. As I note elsewhere, “[a]t the time the script was rewritten, there were two women in power in the UK, Queen Elizabeth II and Theresa May,” who was England's second female prime minister after Margaret Thatcher (García-Periago 2019, 440). Although Montgomery hinted subtly at these women in power, she aimed to present the audience with a more benevolent woman who would magnanimously accept the lovers' liaisons at the end of the play. The gender swapping not only applied to King Theseus, but also to the mechanicals, who were played by white Irish women, as Montgomery wanted to highlight female talent in community actor circles and to broaden opportunities for women. Bold, powerful and strong female characters became an important part of this production.

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<sup>6</sup> See Barnes (2020) for an in-depth analysis of the consequences of sentimentality in a considerable number of documentaries.

Another change was casting minoritized actors in the roles of Lysander (Jamal Franklin), Hippolytus and Oberon (David Monteith), and Helena (Comfort Fabian). Montgomery's casting choices ensured racial, religious and class diversity as a way of challenging the mostly white audience. On Census Day, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011, in Ards and North Down Local Government District (2014), only 1.46% of the population was from an ethnic minority population and the remaining 98.54% was white ("PEACE IV Plan 2014-2020," 17). Minoritized actors are extremely unusual in the area, and the production raised the visibility of diverse bodies, leading the audience to question their potential biases. Some of the lines spoken by Lysander, such as "I am, my lord, as well derived as he,/ As well possessed. My love is more than his;/ My fortunes every way as fairly ranked" (1.1.101-103), acquire a more profound resonance in the mouth of a minoritized actor, since they inevitably hint at race as the factor that distinguishes Lysander and Demetrius.<sup>7</sup> When it comes to the cutting of the text, a great number of lines were eliminated. In some cases, the reason behind the elimination was redundancy. This is the case of 1.1.138-151, Hermia and Lysander's exchange about the numerous complications of love. These lines may, however, also have been omitted because they include references to war, and might detract from the message of love. On other occasions, lines were omitted due to the complexity and obscurity of the references involved. Allusions to the Trojan war, Carthage, Ariadne and Antiopa were removed, since simplicity—rather than obscurity—was pursued in Terra Nova's *Dream*. In yet other cases, lines were not in agreement with the message the company was trying to convey through the adaptation. For instance, in Act I, scene i, the director chose to omit Hermia's lines, "Nor how it may concern my modesty/In such a presence here to plead my thoughts" (1.1.60-61). This omission is in keeping with the woman-centered approach of the play, as modesty is not one of the qualities of women the director wished to emphasize.

The text was also revised so that the idea of love as a deceptive illusion that enables abusive relationships disappeared, and a message of love as a powerful antidote prevailed. In Act IV, scene i, for instance, the problems with consent were downplayed by having Puck lift Demetrius' enchantment at the end of the play, thus enabling him to consent to his marriage with Helena. In fact, from Act IV, scene i, to the end of the performance, the relationship between Demetrius and Helena became extremely physical and touchy-feely, as they made the most of every opportunity they had to hug and kiss, with Helena initiating this contact. As Helena was played by a minoritized actor, her agency acquired an added significance and gave her even more power.

Act V, scene i differed most from the source text as the director inserted several excerpts from other Shakespearean works to emphasize the celebratory ending. In this production, the mechanicals' interlude was preceded by a masque in which two groups

<sup>7</sup> The source of all quotes from Shakespeare's works is William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells *et al.* Clarendon Press (1986).



came together: the white-clad citizens of Thesea's Athena (played by the white men and women of the community) and the friends and attendants who had come with Hippolytus to witness his marriage, all wearing brightly colored, loose clothing (played by the mixed-race, immigrant and visibly minoritized men and women of the community). As Montgomery herself put it, "in our imagination they've all had a few days to eat and drink and flirt, and they throw together the masque as a way of celebrating this get-to-know-you" (Montgomery 2022). The masque showed that peace is nothing without love and that love should go beyond all types of barriers, be they based on religion, gender, or race. Those participating in the celebratory masque recited famous lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, such as "O, that I were a glove upon that hand / That I might touch that cheek!" (2.2.25-26). The masque also included excerpts focusing on peace from *Henry IV Part 2* and *Henry V*, which were especially significant for Northern Ireland, where the conflicts between Unionists and Nationalists have been part of the recent history of the area, and peace is the longed-for goal. At one point, one of the local actors explicitly stated "I come to sue for peace," adapting the line from Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1* in which Hotspur bitterly notes that the king had not come "[t]o sue his livery, and beg his peace" (4.3.64). The sentence was then followed by a quotation from *Henry IV Part 2*: "a peace is of the nature of a conquest; for then both parties nobly are subdued, and neither party loser" (4.1.315-317). Famous excerpts from *Henry V* also appeared, similarly intended to invoke the theme of peace: "in peace there's nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility" (3.1.3-4); and "the naked, poor, and mangled Peace, / Dear nurse of arts, plenty's, and joyful births" (5.2.37).

The local actor finished her intervention by urging once again for peace through another quotation from *Romeo and Juliet*, and other local actors at the back of the set pointed out that peace and love should go hand in hand. To support their point, they quoted from *Romeo and Juliet* once again: "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun" (2.2.2-4), followed by an excerpt from Sonnet 116 ("love is not love/Which alters when it alteration finds, / Or bends with the remover to remove./ O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark") and one from *As You Like It*: "No sooner met but they looked; no sooner looked but they loved; no sooner loved but they sighed" (5.2.27-28). These quotations, offered without context and chosen for their focus on romantic love, highlighted Shakespeare's authority in commenting on love and reconciliation. The theater director did not want to delve into the context of the quotations, but aimed to compile a large number of excerpts that seemed to argue for the victory of love over any obstacle. By including these excerpts invoking Shakespeare's broader *oeuvre*, the ending drew on the playwright's cultural authority to argue for a communal celebration of love in pursuit of peace. This was underscored by the subtle distribution of the lines between the two groups (the white-clad citizens of Thesea's Athena and the friends and attendants who had come with Hippolytus) and the attention paid to positioning and body-language amongst them, changing as it did from the stiff formal beginning court scene to the mingling at the end of the play.

The staging of the production in Ards and North Down Borough highlighted its strong ties to the local contexts and, in arguing so passionately for love and peace, spoke directly to the past political and religious conflict in this region. Some of the professional actors involved in this production were from Northern Ireland—Patrick McBrearty as Bottom, Roisin Gallagher as Hermia, Stefan Dunbar as Demetrius, Rosie McClelland as Titania and Thesea and the newcomer Conor Cupples as Puck. The amateur cast was also from Northern Ireland, but about 30% of them were immigrants, mixed-race people and members of the global majority (Montgomery, 2022).<sup>8</sup> The woods in *Dream* would have had a ready-to-hand local analogy in Belfast in the Sunflowerfest, a three-day festival of music and art in Hillsborough (a village just outside Belfast) that produced the same kind of carnivalesque space as the woods. And even the timber used to produce the stage platform was from Northern Irish forests. Furthermore, there is a strong Protestant and Unionist presence in Ards and North Down Borough, with 75.05% of the population having been brought up within the Protestant religion (“PEACE IV Plan 2014-2020” 17). The recent past of Northern Ireland is haunted by the “Troubles”; the violence associated with the conflict only having come to an end on 10 April 1998 thanks to the Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement.

Walls are part of this legacy in this city, and also in the production. The walls in Montgomery’s adaptation were designed to invoke the Belfast Peace Walls, originally built to control the sectarian tensions between the two groups. These walls still stand as a reminder of the past and a symbol of the still troubling present. Montgomery’s decision to include walls in her production—Snout as Wall and the walls that are part of the background, designed by the different communities involved in the project—was intended to highlight the fact that wounds have not healed yet and a peaceful de-escalation of conflict is still sorely needed. The production further emphasized its message by following up the peace-promoting masque with the appearance of Snout. Thus, when Snout emerged in Act V, scene i, immediately after the masque, the audience was invited to consider the political significance of walls and make a direct connection to the situation in Northern Ireland. In Shakespeare’s play-text, Snout as Wall physically separates Pyramus and Thisbe. However, in this production, the actor playing Snout appeared with only a couple of bricks on their head and in the hands, visually demonstrating that the wall presented no solid barrier to those who wanted to breach it. As such, the production made an appeal to the audience to interrogate and transcend the legacies of violent conflicts in their region.

This message of peace recurred throughout the production, demonstrated, for example, in the larger number of fairies in relation to the source text, with Peaseblossom, Moth, Cobweb and Musterseed—Titania’s retinue of fairies—being accompanied

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<sup>8</sup> To prepare the audience for the play, a program was provided with information about the play and bios of the professional cast. The program also included all the people that were involved in the production and the capacity in which they were involved (Montgomery, Schultz and García-Periogo 2019).

by many more. Although Oberon's and Titania's retinues of fairies were in conflict throughout the production, the ending celebrate their new unity and depicts them dancing together as if they were part of a single retinue and their conflicts had vanished. Even the actor that played the role of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow (Conor Cupples), a Northern Irish professional actor, contributed to the promotion of peace. Although this actor can perform a plethora of accents, he used his West Belfast accent. This decision was far from arbitrary.<sup>9</sup> Puck is the last character to speak in the play when he utters the famous speech in which he claims that "all is mended" (5.1.441) and "Robin shall restore amends" (5.1.432). Given the specificity of Cupples' accent, the audience was reminded how site-specific this adaptation was. In addition, the speech put a message of hope in the mouth of a Northern Irish person, with "all is mended" acquiring a new, hopeful meaning, as if the conflicts between Unionists and Nationalists have been suddenly magicked away.

The production recycled materials from around the world and mixed local and global allusions in its dance and music, suggesting that its lessons could have broader implications. The local dance community was fruitfully included throughout the production, beginning with a trio of dancers drawn from the community who accompanied Titania throughout her appearances. This trio was composed of a locally born white secondary school student, a Chinese dancer studying at graduate school in Northern Ireland and an emerging black dancer and choreographer, Raissa Makougang, an immigrant to Northern Ireland. A dance sequence was also included after the celebratory masque mentioned above, as part of the hopeful message for the future. A group of six girls in blue velvet dresses performed to local music as a kind of tribute to the newlyweds. The use of local and traditional music from the area favored the locality of the production. However, Irish dancing is more associated with the south, not the north; hence, its inclusion as a Catholic practice in a Protestant setting affirmed, through interculturalism (Terra Nova's credo), the production's healing aims.<sup>10</sup> Finally, right after the mechanicals' interlude in Act 5, scene i, Montgomery included a performance of Chinese dance, by the graduate dancer mentioned above, that incorporated beautiful twirling moves to challenge her audiences as well as help to build bridges among various communities that are still affected by a difficult and troubling past.

#### 4. PURSUING PEACE BEYOND THE PERFORMANCE

Terra Nova's *Dream* is more than just another adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy. As a two-year community intercultural engagement program funded by EU PEACE IV 2014-2020, it involved one hundred and sixty-five workshops, masterclasses and

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<sup>9</sup> On accents, see Lee (2021). The book highlights the idea that accents operate as "metasigns" reinforcing certain stereotypes and social hierarchies.

<sup>10</sup> On their website, Terra Nova defines interculturality as "what happens at the points where cultures rub together, like tectonic plates." <http://www.terravanoproductions.net/intercultural-practice>

intercultural weekends, as well as active engagement and volunteering opportunities. In their grant proposal, Montgomery and Schultz asserted that the adaptation would “lead the audience on a journey from the heart of their own towns and villages into a magical world, and bring them back home—forever changed for the better” (2017, 5), thereby envisioning the transformative power of the production from the outset of the project.

The journey of those participating in *Dream* began with the recruitment from across the Ards and North Down area, with a focus on eight specific Targeting Social Need (TSN) areas. The journey continued with engagement workshops, which included dance, theater, music, craft, storytelling and creative writing. It then moved through two intercultural weekends, with the first one exploring the themes and ideas of the play, and the second one focusing on interculturality—among cultures, communities, religions, classes or races—and its potential definitions. I was able to attend the second intercultural weekend in March 2019, which set the tone for the rest of the rehearsal process and defined Montgomery’s directorial practice. The facilitators of these workshops—thirty-five professionals in total—supported and fostered intercultural values in their workshops, in line with Terra Nova’s credo. Around three months before the performances took place, there were rehearsals that lasted eight weeks for all community participants and four weeks of intensive work with both the professional and community cast. After that, five full performances took place in a transformed Queen’s Hall, Newtownards. In spite of the fact that the original aim of the adaptation was to have five hundred members of the local community engaged in the various processes of the drama project, which included arts and craft, acting, dance and musical arrangements, ultimately, seven hundred and thirty-five people were engaged in the production.

During the workshops and the intercultural weekends, camaraderie was built up, which I, as an embedded researcher, both witnessed and experienced. For instance, the second intercultural weekend started with physical activities. First, a pair-work activity was organized in which participants had no information about one another and could only engage emotionally but not ask each other questions. In this activity, the bonding was very strong. Then, participants were told to create a group using a specific criterion—such as age or hair color—so that participants noticed the absurdity of using labels. In the evening, once interaction had been promoted through these activities, as well as during the breaks and lunch, a challenging and innovative activity took place. Participants had to bring objects that were important to them somehow. Nobody could have predicted the type of objects that people brought to the intercultural weekend: a sash worn by Orangemen traditionally marching on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July to celebrate Catholic defeat, among them. The woman who carried it explained how important it had been to her, since it had been worn by her grandfather, and she had great and fond memories of him. A lively and intense discussion ensued. The partner of this woman in the first morning activity was a Catholic and said his own family more or

less commanded him to run away the moment he saw a person with a sash. Amid these revelations, the couple's bonding during the morning exercises had been particularly deep. At the end of this intense intercultural weekend, people saw their prejudices challenged through collaborative memory work and the exchange of beliefs. The last activity Montgomery included in this intercultural weekend was a cardboard tree on which all the participants involved posted their anonymous resolutions going forward, inspired by their experience during that weekend. Theater was, then, the vehicle that facilitated communal coming-together. Via this intercultural weekend, participants not only learned about Shakespeare's play, but also about themselves and their peers, setting their preconceptions aside. Through the preparation for Terra Nova's *Dream*, interculturality in all its aspects was cultivated, contributing to the transformation of the participants involved in the production.

Impact on participants was calibrated in various ways. Data were collected from two sources. The first of these sources was the "Ards and North Down BC PEACE IV Programme Baseline Questionnaire," which every participant had to complete when they joined the project in order to share their thoughts on cultural identity and diversity. The same questions were then asked at the end of the project, allowing the team to analyze any change in attitudes. The second source was a face-to-face evaluation session run in small group sessions that took place at Queen's Hall on 19 May 2019, conducted by outsiders without Montgomery, Schultz or the other lead artists present. This session provided more qualitative data as well as some feedback, to be taken into account in future productions. As an embedded researcher, I worked on the monitoring and evaluation team, mostly including the data gathered at the Baseline Questionnaire in Excel charts, but I was not involved in the face-to-face evaluation session. However, Montgomery and Schultz generously shared their records with me. Engagement was measured in relation to the following Ten PEACE IV themed targets:<sup>11</sup>

1. An increase in the percentage of children and young people participants with new friendships with someone from a different community background—target 30% increase.
2. An increase in the percentage of participants who know more about the culture of some minority ethnic communities—target 40% increase.
3. An increase in the percentage of participants with a greater understanding and appreciation of the culture and traditions of others from a different community background—target 60% increase.
4. An increase in the percentage of participants who feel more comfortable discussing hard peacebuilding issues with others from a different community background—target 30% increase.

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<sup>11</sup> These are the targets as they appear in the proposal and final report of the records. Target % increase means that they met the target and exceeded it by the percentage stated. This lengthy excerpt from Terra Nova's records retains the variation in wording, punctuation and capitalization of its source.

5. An increase in the percentage of respondents who think sectarianism, racism, prejudice & intolerance towards others has decreased in the area—target 5%.
6. An increase in the percentage of participants with new friendships with someone from across the Border—target 5%.
7. Increase in the percentage of participants who are likely to get more engaged in the community as a result of participation on the program—target 30% increase.
8. An increase in the percentage of participants who think relations between people from different community backgrounds will be better in 5 years' time—target 7% increase.
9. An increase in the percentage of participants who think relations between people from different community backgrounds in the Ards and North Down area will be better in 5 years' time—target 8% increase.
10. An increase in the percentage of respondents who know quite a bit about the culture of some minority ethnic communities—target 7% increase.

As can be seen in this excerpt from Terra Nova's final report, all the targets were met and exceeded, and the production played an important role in fostering cross-community relationships. One of the most challenging questions the participants were asked was whether they felt comfortable discussing hard peacebuilding issues with others from a different community background. While only forty-nine percent of people highlighted their comfort discussing hard peacebuilding issues at the inception of the project, a significantly higher number—sixty-five percent—said so at the end. Although all the targets had been met, those targets that focused on the future—targets eight and nine—showed the smallest increase. Aware of these lower numbers in the targets that hinted at the relationships among communities in the near future, Terra Nova is currently working with youth from the area to ignite activism, aiming toward future transformation.

Terra Nova also aimed to calibrate the impact of the free performances on audiences. After the free performances, audiences had post-show discussions with the director and were also asked to complete surveys after the show. Post-show discussions were crucial to gaining an in-depth understanding of interculturality and the impact of certain artistic choices. In this sense, Terra Nova follows in the footsteps of other shows, like the Utah Shakespeare Festival, which includes “sixty-minute Play Seminars after each performance” that are intended “to promote deep conversation” (McPherson and Moncrief 2021, 393). The seminars that Montgomery and some members of the cast had with the audience tackled a range of topics, including the promotion of diversity and inclusion, the role of Terra Nova in building bridges between different communities and the changes made to the play-text. The role of Montgomery in the post-show discussions was to guide audiences in negotiating their reactions to the performances and to openly discuss incendiary topics such as race, gender and religion addressed in the performance. Montgomery did not prepare a set of questions in advance to guide

the discussion, since each post-show discussion was meant to be—very much in the spirit of the Utah Shakespeare Festival—a “forum rather than a lecture” (McPherson and Moncrief 2021, 396), thus allowing a richer interaction to take place.

Terra Nova's *Dream* received a positive response from its audiences. One of the audience members claimed: “the swapping of the genders was very powerful and changed my problems with the play's gender politics” (Montgomery and Schultz 2019, 58). For another member of the audience, the minoritized cast made a difference. When Lysander, played by Jamal Franklin, said “I am as worthy a man as you,” adapted from the “as well derived as he” (1.1.101), the line uttered by a black actor in a majority white society achieved more resonance and relevance. A comment made during a post-show in-person survey pointed out how having the community cast contributed to making Shakespeare less intimidating, especially for those for whom this adaptation of *Dream* was their first encounter with the playwright. This comment is thought-provoking, as it suggests that the adaptation made Shakespeare relevant and accessible to a great number of people in Ards and North Down Borough. The presence of the community cast added new dimensions to the play and, ultimately, to Shakespeare.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As an adaptation of Shakespeare, Terra Nova's *Dream* underwent a transformation. The changes to the text—gender reversals, powerful female characters and a multi-racial cast, among others—and additions to it, including well-known Shakespearean sonnets and excerpts from other plays, highlight that adaptation “comes through repetition with a difference” (Reilly 2018, xxii). After all, adaptation is a “process of making the adapted material one's own” (Hutcheon 2006, 21). But Terra Nova's *Dream* also explores how Shakespeare fits into our contemporary world, focusing on a very specific and complex socio-political context—Ards and North Down Borough with the backdrop of the Troubles, Brexit and the ensuing problematic of the Irish border. Locality is present in the adaptation through most of the main professional cast and amateur actors. But the stage itself alludes to the socio-political context via the presence of the walls, which inevitably refer to the Peace Walls in Belfast. One of the most remarkable additions to the text is the court masque for the wedding in Act V, scene i that strongly advocates for love and peace. For the audience of Northern Ireland with its complicated recent history, the impact of this final scene was powerful and resounding. Via this message, Terra Nova's *Dream* reinvigorated the ties that bind people and aimed to disrupt or break the barriers that divide us, inevitably adding new layers to Shakespeare's text.

This essay has shown that a community-based adaptation cannot be studied in isolation, but has to be analyzed alongside the wide range of performance practices that are necessary for the final outcome, such as workshops and rehearsals, and that such an adaptation can be transformative for the community members involved. This essay has also stressed the importance of studying and analyzing the works of Shakespeare

produced outside the metropolis, by small companies with small budgets. The adaptation and the performance practices around Terra Nova's *Dream* brought together communities across cultural, race and gender boundaries. The conclusion of Terra Nova's *Dream*, in which its entire diverse cast participates, raises hope for the Ards and North Down area and the community. As a participant observed in Montgomery and Shultz's final report, they hoped "that changes that are happening right now will bring us to grow tolerance, open-minded attitude and to the point where intercultural society will be something natural" (Montgomery and Schultz 2019, 46).

Aware of the concern and skepticism about the future, the company organized legacy sessions (several meetings with all the people involved in Terra Nova's *Dream*) a year after the performances in Newtownards to ensure the longevity of their ideas and values within the community. Leading local communities to have conversations they would never have had otherwise, Terra Nova's *Dream* carried meaning in relation to the contingencies of time and place where it was performed, and fostered open dialogues in which hot-button topics were addressed. This social justice initiative witnesses the transformative power of Shakespeare. By focusing our attention on companies like Terra Nova Productions, we can generate a new understanding of Shakespeare as a foundation for community-building.

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