Ad-rap-ting the Bard: The Language and Aurality of Hip-Hop Shakespeares

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Hip-hop Shakespeares is a burgeoning genre that blends Shakespeare’s works with hip-hop’s music and storytelling performance style. A large number of hip-hop Shakespeares were developed for pedagogical and outreach purposes, but more recently, full-length hip-hop Shakespearean musicals have gained prominence. Looking closely at the Q Brothers’ Othello: The Remix that premiered at the 2012 Globe to Globe and had subsequent international tours, this paper details how the production illuminated Shakespeare as a viable conduit for breaking down stereotypes of hip-hop, and hip-hop storytelling as a device to complicate ideas about Shakespeare and race. The Q Brothers’ work demonstrates how a sophisticated use of musicality, aural differentiation, and adaptation processes result in hearing Otherness.