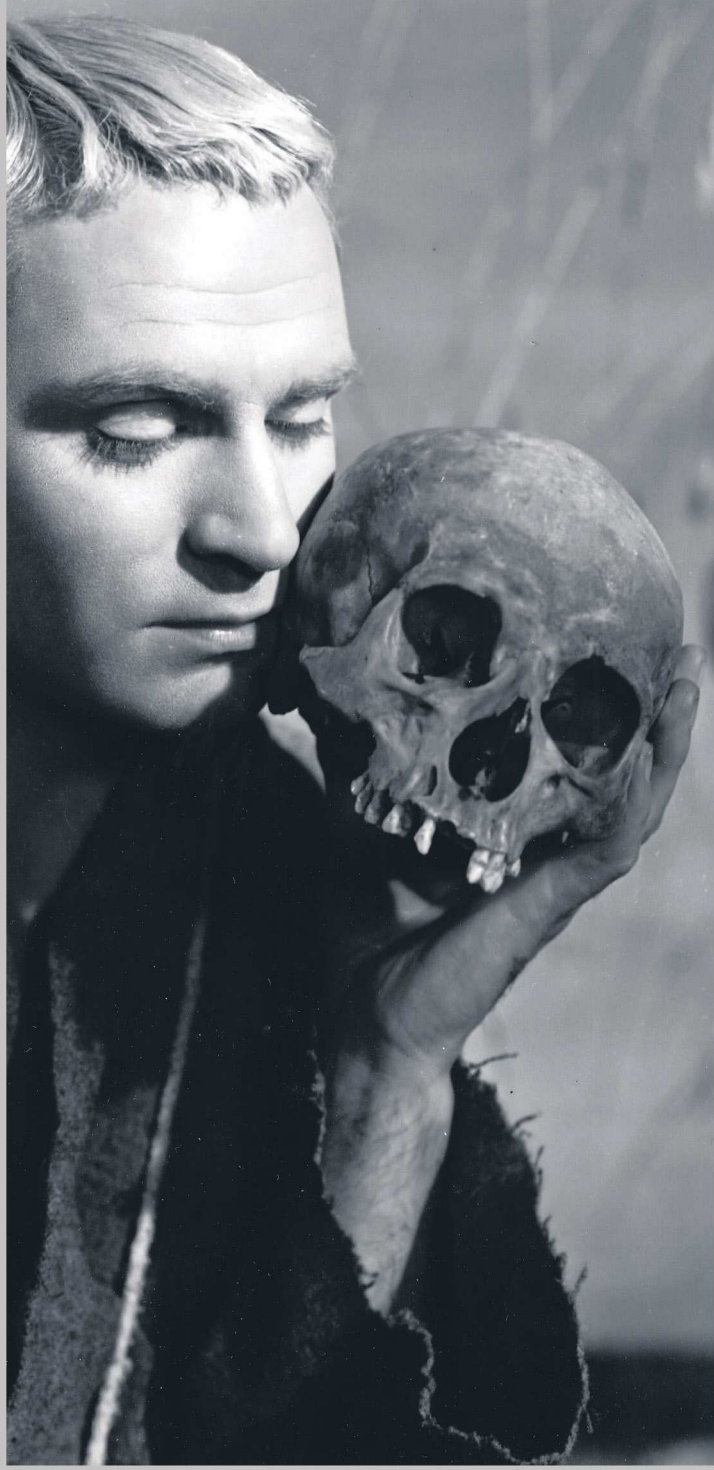


Postcolonial Interventions

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POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS

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Cover Image: Lawrence Olivier in *Hamlet* (1948)

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Editor's Note

Martin Orkin remarks that, “Since their first performances, Shakespeare’s texts have been and are, in a manner of speaking, travellers to countless always different locations” (1). And just as travellers are often altered by their experiences, so are Shakespearean texts and the stature of Shakespeare himself, who no longer remains just the Bard of Avon. The journeys have of course been inflected with considerations of race and power, especially in the former colonies where the study and production of Shakespeare have often been born of a matrix of hegemonic intent and interpellated intellect. However, just as Shakespeare’s plays are remarkable for their capacity to resonate on multiple levels, the remarkable popularity of Shakespeare in diverse cultural contexts across the globe, several decades after the collapse of the British Empire, cannot simply be explained by a lingering effect of colonial discourses. As Dionne and Kapadia explain, “Today, reconstructions and revisions of Shakespeare’s works continue as the plays are co-opted by postcolonial and minority cultures, further shattering the notion of the universalist interpretation that privileges West-

ern experience as primary. As such, Shakespeare's plays can no longer signify an exclusively British, or even Western, identity; instead, they function as sites of contest reflecting a manifold of cultures" (6). The papers in Vol. 1, Issue 2 of *Postcolonial Interventions* attest to this transformative logic and the uncontainable plurality Shakespearean texts have engendered and accommodated, as they take the readers across time and space, media and language, genre and discipline to tease out not just the lasting relevance of Shakespeare, 400 years after his death, in a global culture but also to analyse the intersections of race, space, and power that shaped Shakespeare's own texts and punctuated his proliferation across former colonial outposts. While Claire Chambers explores the particular significance of *Othello*, as a play that foregrounds concerns of race and gender, in the context of various Indian Shakespearean adaptations, on both stage and screen, Cecile Sandten dissects the significance of Dev Virahsawmy's rewriting of *The Tempest*, another text that not only foregrounds race but even operates as an allegory of colonisation. Both papers reveal the myriad modes through which the Bard continues to be localised and indigenised which definitely challenges the hegemonic designs to which the Shakespearean oeuvre has been subjected. Of course, such processes are neither novel nor infrequent. Therefore, apart from an examination of recent adaptations of Shakespearean texts, this issue also looks back at some of the earlier attempts to voice resistance through

reworking of Shakespearean texts as evident from either Lamia Zaibi's exploration of George Lamming's celebrated novel, *Water with Berries*, and its reworking of the Caliban-Prospero paradigm or Sarah Mayo's analysis of the production and translation of Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha*, a transcreation of *Macbeth* in Apartheid-era South Africa. Both papers focus on the fraught and complex nature of postcolonial negotiations and how assertions of selfhood are often mired in inexorable discursive pitfalls which only ensure the perpetuation of stereotypes. It is not as if Shakespeare himself was free from such pressures. As Masoud Farahmadfar's paper highlights, Shakespeare, conditioned by the dominant discourses of his own times, dealt with various such stereotypes, whether with regard to Persia, or Africa or other exoticised, Otherised spaces. As Innocent Ngulube points out in his paper, it is this proliferation of colonial discourses through the Shakespearean texts which enraged postcolonial artists and critics like Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Ayi Kwei Armah, who wanted to decolonize African education systems. However, as the paper points out, in African countries like Malawi, Shakespeare still dominates the school and university syllabi as a constant presence even as Malawi authors become 'optional' and glide in and out of various syllabi. While part of the answer may be found in the machinations of colonial and neo-colonial policies, the remarkable aesthetic and affective appeal of Shakespearean texts across time, space and culture cannot be denied either.

This perhaps explains why whether in India or elsewhere not only does Shakespeare continue to live in a thousand different avatars but continues to speak to audiences in a variety of different situations. This is again evident from the concluding paper of the issue by Sayantani Chakraborti, which focuses on Vishal Bhardwaj's transposition of the tragedy of *Hamlet* onto the troubled terrain of Kashmir. To borrow the words of Dionne and Kapadia, "Such examples speak to the hybridity of Shakespeare's influence but also the densely woven nature of his 'local habitation'" (3) – a fact that is also illustrated by Tapati Gupta's scholarly and personal peregrinations across various Shakespearean adaptations in her foreword. But what makes possible such plethora of local habitations? One possible answer is offered by Kiernan Ryan who finds in Shakespeare's plays a "revolutionary universalism" which articulates "the potential of all human beings to live according to principles of freedom, equality and justice" (emphasis original; 9), dramatized from what Ryan calls "an egalitarian perspective that is still in advance of our time" (emphasis original; 15). As Ryan fervently asserts,

It's my contention that this profound commitment to the universal human potential to live otherwise is the secret of the plays' proven ability to transcend their time. This is what drives their radical dissatisfaction with Shakespeare's world, divorcing their vision from the assumptions and attitudes that held sway in

early modern England, and opening them up to the future and the prospect of the world transfigured. That prospect — the tidal pool of futurity that inflects their language and form at every turn — is what propels Shakespeare's plays beyond the horizon of his age to speak with more authority and power than ever to ours. (9)

In a postcolonial world rife with inequality, conflict and violations of humanity, the transfiguring potentiality of Shakespeare will inevitably generate many more adaptations and transcreations that will continue to address the diverse transformations of human history, here on this bank and shoal of time. And postcolonial studies, in keeping with Patrick Williams' classification of it as an "anticipatory discourse, looking forward to a better and as yet unrealized world" (Williams 93), will surely continue to find in such creations resources of both pleasure and hope. We wait; "Readiness is all".

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Shakespeare Travels

Tapati Gupta

It is best to begin with stories. In 1942, when China was at war with Japan, a Chinese-language production of *Hamlet*, set in Denmark, was staged in a Confucian temple in Jiangan in southwestern China. The director, Jiao Juyin (1905–1975), wed the foreign setting to the allegorical space of the temple and the historical exigencies of the time. The balcony in front of the shrine of Confucius was used as a makeshift stage, and the audiences were seated in the courtyard—with a clear view of the shrine and the action on stage. The temple thus became both a fictive space of performance and a context for the reading of China and Hamlet’s Denmark. This extraordinary moment has several implications. The meanings of this wartime *Hamlet* were complicated by the intruding presence of the Confucian shrine on the makeshift stage and the setting of the temple. Jiao insisted on the primacy of his locality, and the performance created a communal experience during the war intended to stir patriotic spirit in Confucian, moral terms. The production subscribed to a national agenda during a time that witnessed a deteriorating economy, in-

tensified conflicts between the Chinese Communist (CCP) and Nationalist (KMT) parties, and major setbacks in the Chinese resistance to Japanese invasion. While Laurence Olivier's similarly jingoistic *Henry V* (1944) has been considered as an example of what Walter Benjamin called "the aestheticizing of political life," (121) Jiao's *Hamlet* is an exercise in the politicization of art. Shakespeare has been absorbed into the political life during times of war.

While the temple *Hamlet* readily connected Shakespeare with the connotations of the local venue, other directors used allegory to reconfigure Shakespeare and Asian identity multinationally. In Ong Keng Sen's multilingual *LEAR* (1997), staged with English subtitles, actors from several Asian countries and their characters were poised for a search of cultural identities as the pan-Asian production played to full houses in Singapore, Tokyo, other parts of Asia, and Europe. The power-thirsty eldest daughter (performed cross-dressed), who spoke only Mandarin and employed *jingju* chanting and movements, confronted the Old Man (Lear), who spoke only Japanese and walked the stage in the solemn style of *noh*-performance. The subtitles defamiliarized the Shakespearean lines and decorporealized Asian performance practices at once. The sensual overload of the performance overwhelmed its international audiences, who, despite their best effort, would always miss something. While this uniquely multilingual performance recast the questions of race and nation in

a new light, its bold experiments of hybrid Asian styles were controversial. The performance physicalized, in linguistic and dramaturgical terms, the promise and perils of globalization and the uneasy coalition among participants of this transnational project.

Seen afar from the European perspective, the contrasts between the Asian languages and styles were flattened by their similarities. However, seen from an Asian perspective, the difference between Asian cultures was accentuated by the performance. The production highlighted the discrepancy between Asian languages and styles, and between Chinese and Japanese perspectives on World War II. Both Jiao's and Ong's intercultural productions stage contradictions and raise complex issues related to cultural politics and international touring. They register similar concerns about shifting localities¹.

But to make the story a bit more personal, I want to recount an occasion when I met the Prince of Denmark in Copenhagen. I had crossed the bridge from the side of the National Museum and gone up to the gate of the Christainsborg Palace when an aged man, a bit bedraggled, accosted me. "Is that a camera?" he asked. "well, yes," said I. "Can you take my photo?" I did.

"Can you take a photo of us together?"

"O no, I have no time."

"I am Hamlet."

I walked on pretending not to hear.

“My creator, himself a great traveller, though he must have performed a grand tour of Europe since he has written so much about Europe and European characters and transplanted them on to English soil, he has now set us loose upon the world, to roam around freely and without the constraint of ‘context’.”

“But you are transplanted in new contexts, political, social, cultural and linguistic, you are commodified, globalized, maimed, mutilated, quartered, do you enjoy it?”

“This, what you call commodification, Boss does not find anything wrong with it, since his name is retained and he acquires new robes, though some are ill fitting, others are fine. But I have no time. I must be off to Elsinore.”

I rubbed my eyes, I had been walking too long, and unlike Sweden here the midnight sun was weak. I re-traced my step back to the Metro station.

Is it a bane or a blessing? This business of “commodification?” Why should the word acquire a stigma, if one can accept the doubtful economics of ‘globalisation’ why not ‘commodification’? I had once been part of a proposed project of the Centre for Ibsen Studies, University of Oslo. The project was titled ‘Ibsen in Use’. Despite the aura of cul-

tural politics and cultural diplomacy the project opened the way to multifarious angles of inquiry into the relevance of the 19th century modernist dramatist in 'other' climes and cultures. So shall we classify it as an issue of "positive commodification"? If the materialistic approach is blameworthy then one may also question the profit motive of global capitalism, but then can culture thrive without capital? I should say, no, but then in India, since colonial times adaptation-translation of Shakespeare² may be seen as a nationalist weapon to deconstruct the colonizer's Book, that is Shakespeare. One may talk about Indian "appropriations" of Shakespeare and feel proud of our achievement, but then from the contemporary, post-post-colonial angle, I feel 'accommodation' would be a better word. It validates our own culture and de-thrones the 'culture of the First', or at least gives an equal status to the 'Culture of the Second.' Peter Brooke's epic work 'The Mahabharata,' perhaps paved the way for this equalization of cultures. But Brooke was still diffident to the source whereas contemporary adaptations-re-creations of Shakespeare in the Asian power bloc makes free with Shakespeare wily nilly. Some of the productions appear like a zoomed digital photograph with the bytes distended beyond recognition so that the photograph becomes full of 'noise'. I am not trying to assess the aesthetic merits of such productions but only trying to state a fact. Since space is limited, I have not the scope in this article to trace the evolution of an 'Indian modernity' to which adaptations of Shakespeare

fitted in, gelled into our culture, phase by phase. I have tried to do so in the context of my article on Utpal Dutt's translation of *Romeo and Juliet* (Gupta, "Proscenium", 157-177).

The evolution of an Indian modernity vis-à-vis colonial western cultural influences, postcoloniality, and the contemporary global and glocal flows can really be the material for more extensive research into the modalities of adapting translated western drama and its performance in India. One could study Indian adaptations of Shakespeare and examine how they reflect the basic parameters of an evolving Indian modernity. Such research might lead to a path breaking methodology to gauge adapted drama's relevance for any society and culture and could therefore be of value to theatre, translation and cultural studies in general.

In this article I will analyse the modalities of 'commodification' and 'accommodation' of Shakespeare in the culture of Bengal from different time frames, perspectives and socio-political angles.

First I am taking up the metaphysical issue of Evil and its manifestation in *Macbeth*. In colonial Bengal Shakespeare's world was felt to be so far dissociated from the middle class Bengali concerns that the need was felt to mould the bard into the mores of our society, not only by localizing names of persons and places but the ambience of popular culture and beliefs too. In Haralal Roy's *Rudrapal*

the weird sisters are represented as tantric *bhairabis*. The source culture acquired an indigenous look through transcreation. The politics of translation as an intercultural exercise paved the way towards decolonization of the bard. The path was being paved by which Shakespeare could be positively commodified and re-dressed as a local cultural artifact.

As mentioned above, the witches are depicted as practitioners of the Tantric cult. Tantrism forms the basis of the Shakti/Kali worship in Bengal and is held in disdain by the Vaishnavites (also a very popular Bhakti cult) who worship Krishna³. In *Rudrapal* the three 'bhairabis' (equivalences of Shakespeare's witches) are worshippers of Chamunda Kali whom they address as 'karalbadani maa' (mother with a terrifying look) whom they have to worship on 'chaturthi' (fourth day from new moon) and 'amavashya' (new moon night).

In the mass psyche Tantric occult practices are regarded as nefarious, grotesque and harmful. The black magic is executed by ingredients as horrific as those in the witches' cauldron⁴. Here Hecate is Shabsadhak (one who practises his yoga using a dead body) the chief priest, and the witches correspond to the three 'bhairabis', his assistants, also practitioners of black magic. The cultural border crossing of the Elizabethan Evil lies in the repeated assertion that they are amoral, that they are neither good or evil, but 'yoginis' trying

to acquire spiritual power or 'shakti'. The intercultural element remains however, linking them to the Source Text: the fact that they effect evil consequences since Rudrapal-Macbeth so desires. The theatricality of these Tantric rites performed in the darkness of the creamatorium, 'smasan' (not Shakespeare's heath) are as thrilling as Bankimchandra Chattopdhyay's depiction of the tantric yogi in his novel *Kapalkundala*⁵. What is relevant for our discourse is the indigenization of the Celtic element of the Source Text, the paralleling of Elizabethan attitude towards, and belief in, black magic with similar popular and fearful notion of Tantric rites in Bengal, accommodating the coloniser's Book into our own cultural mores, the duality and ambivalence of Shakti/mother goddess worship in Bengal, while at the same time making Shakespeare recognizable in the text, though in the foreign garb of the Bengali language and 19th century popular culture. Within the text is inscribed the semiotics of 19th century cultural nationalism and subtle 19th century Hinduite patriotism – twice we are told that Macbeth has conquered the Muslims⁶. Here is commodification and a concretization of a remote culture within local folds. Yet we must not forget the dilemma of a 'dual culture' suffered by 19th century English educated Bengali intellectuals; the see-saw rhythm of attraction towards Shakespeare, the desire to maintain the basic flavour, and the simultaneous desire to re-dress a foreign traveller in Indian robes.

In Ujjwal Chattopadhyay's 21st century adaptation of the play, staged by Kaushik Sen, the problem of Evil acquires a stronger political-ontological colour. Freed from the need to decolonize an already de-colonised and globally commodified bard, Chattopadhyay and Sen overtly link the text to contemporary and universal politics, even using topical linguistic signs. Sifting through *Macbeth* (1605-6), and Rudrapal, Haralal Roy's 1874 adaptation of it in Bengali and Ujjal Chattopadyay's more radical Bengali adaptation of 2010-11 and witnessing Kaushik Sen's 2011 production of the last, one may assess the politico-social necessity of certain adaptive strategies that validate important issues regarding the flow of evil in different climes and cultures and the dramatists'/directors' political response to it in diverse cultural and economic contexts⁷. In the light of post-independence adaptations, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* becomes a more universal paradigm of metaphysical, existential, ontological, psychological and sociological apprehension of evil. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* the performance of evil and its influence was dependent on the individual who by himself need not be evil. This Renaissance vision was carried through in Haralal Roy's *Rudrapal* though the witches, by virtue of their transformation into agents of an Indian religious cult lose some of their mystery though they acquire a certain mystique in terms of social acceptance and popular superstition. In Sen's production Evil acquires an objective amorality and relentless inevitability typical of the

post-war, post 9/11 world psyche. The Shakespeare play functions as a catalyst not of cathartic regeneration but moral emasculation signifying an unredeemable future.

We fear that the disease that plagued Scotland during Macbeth's tyrannical rule has also infected our land and our times, and the infection is so deep-rooted that the simple act of replacing one leader with another will not cure it. Our version of Macbeth though otherwise faithful to the master playwright's text does not believe in, nor accept,... the restoration of order at the end of it all, but fears the future under yet another version of tyranny. (Sen, Brochure to the production)

The ending of Ujjal Chattopadhyay's text is not as pessimistic as Sen's production: Chattopadhyay's Chorus ends on an affirmative note though the objective situation is bleak. The modern text topicalizes while the 19th century text had sensationalized, sentimentalized and melodramatized *Macbeth* according to the tastes of the Bengali audience of the time. Both explore the semiotic layers of the Source Text in terms of the specific socio-historical climate of Bengal. And that is precisely what an adapted drama text is meant to do.

The famous 19th century poet Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay re-wrote *The Tempest* highlighting the romance of Miranda and Ferdinand, as Nolini and Basanta, in his *Nolini Basanta*. The source

culture acquired an indigenous look through transcreation. The politics of translation as an intercultural exercise paved the way towards decolonization of the bard. The accession of agency in a linguistic nationalism is the subtle appropriation of Shakespeare who was more precious to the British than the Empire. I would prefer to call it an act of 'accommodation'. What strikes me as most remarkable in this play (there is no record of its performance but to me it appears quite stageworthy) is the way Shakespearean humour has been moulded into the crucible of racy humorous urban slang of the 19th century. The Shakespeare text is thus used, shall we say 'commodified', to rub the gloss off a foreign texture and made to express popular humour, which guarantees its popular appeal for the Bengali reader/audience.

From the middle of the nineteenth century (1855) was being built up in Bengali literature, the exuberance of the tradition of picaresque adventurism, didacticism, farce and derision. Coarse stories, oral in nature, also formed part of the fabric of nineteenth century literary culture. So in Bengal the ground was already prepared for the reception of Shakespeare's fools and tolerant appreciation of the amoral as well as questionable ingredients of society. Jokes and pranks reveal the psyche of a nation and are embedded deep in local culture. The adventurous strain in Elizabethan culture, the deep seated nautical temperament, the sailor's loose conduct and generic songs are either omitted by

Hemchandra or transferred into something bawdily urban and smacking of the nineteenth century babu's excursions into brothels. The salty, sea-drenched ambience of *The Tempest* is transformed. Shakespeare's Stephano enters singing, "I shall no more to sea, to sea/Here shall I die ashore (II. ii, 43-44)". In *Nolini Basanta* Tilak sings: "O amar adorini pran /Chalo jabe gangasnan/Hathkholate tomay amay khabo paka pan./Chalo adorini pran". (Bandyopadhyay)

Hemchandra's transliteration is in keeping with the cultural ambience in which he locates Shakespeare. The metaphoric, ribald implications of 'gangasnan' (literally taking a bath in the Ganges), taking paan together, and 'adorini pran' or 'O my heart's darling.' Let us now take Trinculo's speech in *The Tempest*: "If I were in England now ... not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver... When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they would lay out ten to see a dead Indian (II. ii, 28-34)". The locale-specific recreations of the people of Shakespeare's own time is transferred into locale-specific reference to the space of the target text and satire against Hemchandra's urban contemporaries. Uday-Stephano says that the babus of Calcutta nowadays make merry ever so often; indulging in 'bibir nautch' (referring to what the white sahib would call 'nautch girls'), horse's dance, spirits' dance, motley clown's dance – they spend money on all this. Yet they do not give even a fistful of rice to a beggar. I find

here a discourse on re-historicized topicality.

There is intercultural fusion of the seventeenth century Shakespeare text with local nineteenth century colour. As Shakespeare was steeped in his own age, so also was Hemchandra's rendering of the Shakespeare text. Although the historical time and culture were so different, the culture overlaps between the source culture and target culture lead to embedding in the target text subaltern voices that are critical of their colonial betters. Specificities differ, but the genre remains the same. In this way the translation is made to create cultural equivalences. There is a lot of such criticism in Shakespeare's other plays, such as *Measure for Measure*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest* etc.

In the Bengali text, the Stephano-Trinculo-Caliban scenes are the most theatrical. Cultural and societal differences induce differences not only in the material of the jokes but also body language and interpersonal interactions, while the slang and colloquialism are quite untranslatable. Hence the target text can match the source text in temper, not in linguistic and referential equivalences. Yet Hemchandra is most free and spontaneous in these scenes in which translational hurdles induce freedom from the shackles of the Grand Narrative. Shakespeare travels into an-'other' culture and is happily received into the Indian indigenous. *Nolini Basanta* lends itself to a coherent discourse on post-colonial translation.

Hemchandra makes Prospero-Baijayanta the king of Konkan (in south west coast of India) and Alonso-Chitradwaj king of Gujarat (north western India), while he uses the language of Bengal for re-locating the bard in India. And is he trying to create a nationalistic idea of India by encapsulating, re-scripting a British book in an indigenous mode⁸? Does it foreground the idea of India as incredible, exotic, and vast? Is it a patriotic homage to its magic, through an idealistic veneration of the bard? Does it exhibit a nationalism shorn of malice towards the colonizer, patriotism eclectically open to Western literature? Here we have an example of adaptation of a Shakespeare play at a point in Indian history when in Bengal especially, intellectuals were enmeshed in what I have called 'dual culture'. Commodification is here modified by deference to the source culture.

In the post-independence phase actor-director-playwright Utpal Dutt (1929-1993) had engaged himself in Shakespeare performance almost throughout his long career. He also belonged to the intellectual domain of 'dual culture' and was initiated into Shakespeare performance in the travelling troupe of Geoffrey Kendal. In his own theatre group he began by performing Shakespeare in the original but he soon turned to performing in Bengali translation and also translated some of the plays himself, because he wanted to make Shakespeare a people's dramatist attuned to Bengali middle class concerns. As far as Dutt is concerned Shakespeare

traverses all the phases of Indian modernity, colonial, post-colonial and globalised. Shakespeare is made to do a time travel through the phases of modern Indian socio-cultural history. But unlike contemporary directors, Dutt, always enmeshed by the intellectual restrictions of the 'dual culture' was not in favour of making drastic changes to the original text. In his translations he aimed to make Shakespeare's blank verse accessible to the common, non-elitist public in actable, stageable Bengali dialogue in prose, as in his *Romeo-Juliet*. It is a creative and responsible accommodation of the source culture into a receptor culture; an equalization of status of the culture of the First and the culture of the Second⁹. Dutt also assumes the role of a creative commodifier, a cultural crusader with no intention of capitalistic gain, except in the realm of theatre and literature. He performed Shakespeare in villages, in unconventional 'one-wall' spaces in front of semi-literate audiences, in *jatra* style. As John Russell Brown realized while watching *jatra* plays in Orissa, as recorded in *New Sites for Shakespeare*, Shakespeare lends himself ideally to the *jatra* style. Dutt here demolishes the binary opposition between early modern England and early modern India. Scene by scene the first is transformed into the second, mainly through the acting style, space and audience composition. One may perceive here an instance of Dutt's conception of theatre dialectics as mentioned above. By bringing Shakespeare into the open air setting of backward Indian villages Dutt was not only dislocat-

ing the locale but also disclaiming the proscenium stage and Victorian realistic presentation which he so disapproved. He thereby harked back to the Elizabethan temper of staging and the work done by William Poel earlier in the century. This kind of open staging also linked him with the work of the mid-century travelling companies (of which his mentor Geoffrey Kendal's was one) which performed in pubs and halls and barns, meadows and trucks.

More important is Dutt's commodification of Shakespeare to establish his own political Marxist aim. Shakespeare who belonged to the Renaissance age of emergent capitalism, professionally in the service of the monarch, is made to reveal the underlying layer of subaltern concern. This is not done through any material change but through subtle inflexions in attitude. To him, Shakespeare, in spite of his courtly affiliation, was mainly a people's poet. Dutt once met a burly English labourer drinking beer in a Pimlico pub and asked him a few questions about drama. "As I see it, mate," growled the man, "This here Shakespeare did not wrote about kings, not half. He wrote about me." Then after a slight pause, he said with a sad smile, "So they tell me. How should I know?" ("British Theatre" 11). Dutt endeavoured to take Shakespeare close to the people, especially those belonging to a different environment. Dutt's later Shakespeare productions were also vehicles for representing his theory of dialectics of theatre.

Utpal Dutt's philosophy of the theatre and acting was based upon a firm belief in Marxian dialectics which he explained as "...a scientific principle which declares that nothing in this universe is static, everything is always changing. The idea is not new. One finds it in the philosophy of ancient Greece and in Buddhist philosophy. But what is unique in Marxian dialectics is the idea that the change is no ordinary change. At each moment everything is changing into its opposite. Within every object, every person, every thought, are two opposed principles which co-habit, yet clash with each other — amity and strife exist side by side. The result is that all objects, persons and thoughts, by changing continuously, become something different, even opposite, to what it was" (*Gadyasangraha* 205). On this logic Shakespearean drama is a constantly evolving concept; the audience's attitude to it is also changing all the time. Most significant is the fact that an actor-director has to be aware of this dialectical process. The actor should keep in mind that he is both himself and the person he impersonates and becomes. He keeps in mind the Shakespearean ambience and its trans-cultural connotations when played to an audience separated from the milieu by oceans of time and space. Dutt was no advocate of change for change's sake (Dutt, "Taking Shakespeare" 19-20). He was deeply aware of what Italy and the Mediterranean meant to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In his intensely researched work *Shakespearean Samajchetana*, he cites primary sources to show the

ways in which trade in England was being affected by competition with the Mediterranean. The plight of the poor, the antagonism towards Italy and all things Italianate are discussed with the help of documentary evidence. Even though the cult of the Mediterranean was making deep inroads into society Shakespeare was one with the poor masses in looking back nostalgically towards the older times. Dutt projects Shakespeare as a sympathiser of the poor who were so rudely cut off from the traditional Roman Catholic religion with all its trappings and attendant superstition.

Shakespeare felt the pull of these opposing forces of Italian Roman Catholicism from which the people of England were forcefully sheared off and Protestantism was imposed on them. This is evident in his portrayal of Friar Lawrence in *Romeo & Juliet*. Also the emergent materialistic force of Renaissance capitalism was felt. Shakespeare's constant evocation of woods and forests, according to Dutt, suggests his alienation from his age and a harking back to old monastic and social ideals, though of course Shakespeare does criticise the clergy where criticism is due. In his discourse on *Timon of Athens* he goes into details over the Mammon-worshipping new civilization of Athens which fails to understand Timon in whom Dutt finds a Christ figure, an angry Christ though, to whom the forest is the better place. In *Timon* Shakespeare portrays a failed Christ. The bard has come to realize the irrelevance of Christianity and

the old Italian faith in the wake of the new Mediterranean utilitarianism (Dutt, *Somajchetona* 184-203).

An interesting feature of the politics of representation is Dutt's attitude to Friar Lawrence in *Romeo-Juliet* who is made to run away from the scene of discovery, in spite of the fact that Dutt considered him an important character. In his book on Shakespeare's social consciousness he had pointed out how Shakespeare's social consciousness is primarily a religious consciousness. Monks like the Friar are idealized by the bard in an effort to show the value of the old order as opposed to the utilitarian trend of the time. The Capulets and Montagues in all ages are the business rivals. They are possessive about their children and even their grief is garbed in the language of wealth. The Friar is aware of the true value of human emotions but by making him run away and not stay back to exonerate himself Dutt stresses his ordinariness and marginalization. According to Utpal Dutt Shakespeare had idealised him as a true representative of Christ; one who harks back to values that the new age had rejected. Dutt made him helpless against the forces of the nouveau riche and their retainers. He is a failed pastor unable to protect his proteges from an insensitive Establishment. Dutt made the character fit into his ideological framework but took his cue from Shakespeare.

Utpal Dutt's *Julius Caesar* was always played before an urban audience. He produced both English and Bengali versions in modern dress. It became what we today call an 'analogue play.' Dutt explored the political potentialities of the play. He knew nothing of Orson Welles's production when he produced both the original play and Jyotirindranath Tagore's (elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore) 1907 Bengali translation of it. Although it was a faithful literal translation some changes which dislocated the milieu did occur. Diehard Shakespear-ans of mid-century Bengal found it difficult to digest Dutt's drastic metaphoric displacement in which Caesar's personality merges with Hitler's, in the garb of Chaplin's Dictator. The pre-Christian Mediterranean locale transforms into the modern and universal as Dutt played havoc with Shakespeare's *Dramatis Personae*. In a printed Programme Note to the English performance he describes Caesar and Antony as Fascists, Marcus Brutus as Socialist, Cassius and the other conspirators are all Communists. Paradoxically enough, Dutt who was always in sympathy with the poor and greatly in conformity with Shakespeare's understanding of mob psychology describes the Commoners as Fascist thugs! Dutt in his own political plays re-interpreted history in terms of the present, and in the present as well as in history he found material for a nation's mythology. The same mythmaking process he found in Shakespeare's play and this he bound into an imaginary framework dislocating Roman history, and contempo-

rary Elizabethan nuances in the Romans' conspiracy, but adhering to Shakespeare's basic design: the tragic failure of revolution, the human face of idealism, the difficulty of annihilating the idea of a superhero from people's minds, the transformation of a man into a hero and the hero into a man. And all of this through novel theatrical means: "We presented Brutus's and Anthony's Forum speeches as radio broadcasts. The Phillipi battlefield was shown as the ruins of a bombarded city... the last act was punctuated by the sound of machine guns and flying bombers" (Dutt, "Little Theatre" 47-48). Elsewhere he stated that "A modern interpretation of Shakespeare must typify Shakespeare's place, not in the past, but in the present life of the nation and of the world... Like his fellow artists the writer, the poet, the musician, the director has a social responsibility to discharge" (Dutt, "Shakespeare and the Modern Stage"). No Indian director before Dutt had thought this way nor did they have an interpretive approach. When produced in English in 1949 Dutt found the play answering the political needs of the predominantly Jewish cast that comprised The Amateur Shakespearians. Zionists the world over were at that time campaigning against oppression. Director's meaning, actors' meaning, and audience's meaning did indeed give to Shakespeare's meaning a dialectical dimension! Dutt's theatre leads to similar interpretive productions of the future¹⁰.

Othello seems to have been to Dutt the most challenging of Shakespeare's plays, for ever since Kendal first initiated him to it, he produced it on and off, in the original and in his own translation (the script is lost, unfortunately). As stated in the preface to his version of *Romeo and Juliet*, Dutt analyses character against the socio-cultural background. Othello and Iago are both part of the commercial world of the Mediterranean and are, in a sense complementary. Iago is conscious of colour differences and is enraptured by the spectacle of coins dropping in the satchel (Dutt, *Towards* 8). Othello is tarnished by the cruelty of a harsh possessive world and submits to its evil. He is a tragic character but also an embodiment of evil, the evil generated by Mediterranean Renaissance cupidity. In Utpal Dutt's own acting there was both involvement and detachment no matter what role he performed. The audience felt that Dutt became the character he portrayed but was also critically analysing it all the time and conveying his own impression. He became a pitiable Othello, a love-sick man, a great hero, but also cruelty incarnate. Yet these dialectical oppositions and changes did not rob the play of its Shakespearean quality. Realizing the tremendous mass appeal of the play he produced it before village audiences in *jatra* style and noticed how greatly the audiences were swayed by the traditional emotions of pity and fear. Shakespeare was de-colonized, the Mediterranean world rebuilt in a new way in the villages of Bengal.

Dutt, attempted a faithful translation, his own, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play in which he saw immense audience appeal. The free verse he substitutes for Shakespeare's blank verse is stiff but racy if spoken with accents in the right places. Athens represents the Establishment, the utilitarian world that seeks to regulate the emotions through rules and norms. Even the 'rude mechanicals' cannot find a proper place in Athens to rehearse their play. Only by escaping into the forest can identity be established but there too magic and the irrational forces take over: Puck creates havoc. The wood becomes the symbol of the human sub-conscious where the fears of childhood take the shape of strange creatures and human beings are threatened with metamorphosis. As Dutt explained, "While Bottom literally turns into a donkey in the forest the long process of men turning into donkeys has been continuing in the minds of men for a long time. Bottom's appearance as half donkey and half man is the ultimate image of the social alienation of man. Bottom was the model for Ionesco's man turning into rhinoceros" (Dutt, Director's Note to *Chaitali Rater Swapno*, n.p.). Reviewers faulted Dutt's stage setting because the fairies danced behind a jungle of polythene. But wasn't this the visual equivalence of the sub-conscious world behind a translucent veil? (See Gupta, "Shakespeare, the Mediteranean").

I have discussed Utpal Dutt's work on Shakespeare in such detail since I feel that no other transla-

tor-director has made such consistent research oriented efforts to re-instate Shakespeasre on the modern Bengali stage without distorting the basic Shakespearean theatre ambience. His attitude of creative commodification gives a novel dimension to the world wide travels of Shakespeare.

The contemporary stage is free from bardolatry and to my mind Dutt has a hand in it. Today we are also free from the need to de-colonise the bard hence in Calcutta one witnesses *King Lear* and *Hamlet* done in more or less literal translation. There are more experimental or avant garde productions which are doing the rounds though the aesthetic merits are not to be assessed within the ambit of this single article.

However, I shall mention a few: Abanti Chakraborty in her solo performance, *Lady Macbeth* (2015) keeps to the original Shakespeare lines and angle of approach but creates an entirely novel space often with psychological and metaphysical implications by intelligent light design. The story telling technique connects with age-old pre-modern dramatised narrative but on the proscenium it connects with the creative solo performances of her peers. She is a visionary director who has utilised symbolism, expressionism and surrealist practices in her theater design of *Lady Macbeth*. Particularly relevant are the gestures using a heap of sand and a knife as an allegory for the power building process and murder for attaining that. Sudden changes

of light also served to ensure the emergence of a different space which enriched the performance. Her avant garde style of communication, in defiance of popular melodramatic modes, effectively communicated the turbulence experienced by the character to the audience.

My second example is *Macbeth Badya*, which recently toured Europe. Director Manish Mitra in a 50 minutes performance recreates through different Indian dance forms, the concept of *Macbeth*. It tells the story of a modern man and his strivings for power. The performance is based on traditional Indian ragas, accompanied by the pakhawaj. And narration is the fusion of various forms of traditional Indian dance such as kathakali, bharanatyam, kathak, and traditional theatre forms — kutiyattam and yakashagana. *Macbeth Badya* is a performance in which poetry of movement and music resonates with the semiotics of Shakespeare's tragedy. The merging of traditional dance theatre through a medley of dance forms yoked to a worldwide attempt at re-planting Shakespeare in modern times and in modern and indigenous art forms. *Macbeth Badya* carries the travels of Shakespeare and his commodification to an extreme postmodernist realm, creating a form that hybridizes both oriental and occidental worlds.

In fact a separate direction of research could be flagged off from this point. In the eastern power block today a lot of such experimentation is on

to accommodate the bard in other traditional art forms lending an added edge to extra-linguistic translation. The story with which this article begins is representative of translation of political space. We must also consider translation into different aesthetic spaces: Shakespearean plays in the form of Chinese opera, Japanese *kabuki* and also puppetry, a Korean *Midsummer Nights' Dream* based on the magical performances of Korean supernatural beings. Examples could be multiplied (See Chaudhuri and Lim; Trivedi and Ryuta; Kennedy and Lan etc.).

I have quite compulsively confined myself to regional production since first hand acquaintance is needed for convincing theatre research. Lastly my focus has been on Shakespeare in the theatre for to the bard, “the play’s the thing”. Finally one reason behind the world-wide utilization/commodification of Shakespeare is that through Shakespeare local artistes could be made part of the world’s cultural dialogue. Carmen Romano, founder of the Santiago-based *Fundación Teatro a Mil* said in an interview taken by Olga Garay-English, “...The arts ... promote social cohesion through building community—but also by asking provocative and reflective questions. We don’t take things for granted; we’re committed to creating common space where folks can gather and become engaged through the arts” (“Where Art Leads the Way”). Shakespeare scholars, actors, translators and directors create an international platform on which

varieties of Shakespeare products transmit an aesthetic force to bind world cultures by gelling into one personality, Shakespeare. The Hamlet I met in Copenhagen was right. 'Commodification' is not a bad word.

Finally it is interesting to note that the process of translating, re-costuming, re-configuring Shakespeare has also led to a de-iconization of Shakespeare. To be made into an icon to me appears like being chilled into stagnation, living in a freezer. Life involves change, re-thinking, re-conceptualizing as well as remembering and re-remembering. Brexit may be an insular movement, but Shakespeare roams around freely transmigrating into other cultures even making them his own. Shakespeare is theirs and ours, yours and mine. Shakespeare the catalyst lends himself to all imaginations without losing his identity.

Notes

1. See Alexander Huang's *Chinese Shakespeare: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange* for more details.

2. I use this term since every translation of a play meant for the stage becomes an adaptation.

3. The Tantrics were then in the popular imagination the social and religious other, although tantrism was at the base of Sakti worship. The bhakti cult was more innocent and aesthetic. Tantrism was associated with sensuality, sexual licentiousness, gory and grotesque rites.

4. But the ingredients required by the head priest, Shabsadhak, are related to Hindu religious practice, e.g. a lock of Shiva's hair when he was dancing in frenzy angered at Sati's death, the lock is available in a deep snow covered crevice the blood of the buffalo freshly sacrificed to the Devi Chhinna masta, the mud from the funeral pyre of Ravana which is still burning. This detail is anachronistic but symbolical of the destruction of evil. Shakespeare is indigenized and ethnicised by allusion to Indian mythology and religion. There are references to the great heroes of the Mahabharata, e.g. Bhim and Judhishtir.

5. Numerous stories were associated with this occult practice which was not always for doing evil But tantra in the popular imagination was stigmatized by a shadow of witchcraft. Adaptation of drama justifiably seasons the source text with the local.

6. Duncan's Norwegian enemy becomes 'Yavan' and Muslim in Rudrapal.

7. Ujjal Chattopadhyay in a brief four sentence introduction to the play stresses that he is not always very faithful to the original. His interest lay in focusing on the greed and lust of rulers as expressed in the speeches and attitude of the ordinary people.

8. Although Hemchandra was a noted Nationalist and his epic Brittasanghar bear witness to this fact, in some of his shorter poems he unabashedly praises the British. His poem written on the occasion of Queen Victoria's jubilee and the one extolling the Prince of Wales on his visit to India are cases in point. In other poems he describes the sorry plight of his motherland and suppli-

cates the British rulers to look after their poor children and be merciful. In yet other poems he strongly condemns India's state of bondage and advocates freedom. This intriguing duality in his approach to colonialism, the ambiguity, if not vacillation, in his nationalistic zeal perhaps explains why he does not highlight the rebelliousness of Caliban-Barbat in his Bengali adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

9. I use the terms 'First' and 'Second' for convenience and there is no right wing motivation.

10. One may cite David Tucker's 'promenade' production at Stratford 1992-93 session where Caesar was a mixture of Yeltsin and Ceaucescu , and Calpurnia , Raisa Gorbachov . The battle scenes were analogues of civil war in Bosnia.

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“To Love the Moor”: Postcolonial Artists Write Back to Shakespeare’s Othello

Claire Chambers

ABSTRACT:

In this essay, I consider the issue of ‘writing back’ through the case study of how William Shakespeare’s tragedy Othello has been adapted and challenged by global writers. I begin by exploring Salih’s parody and inversion of Othello in Season of Migration to the North, through which he not only exposes Mustafa’s colonized anger towards his white lovers, but also calls into question Shakespeare’s depiction of the ‘noble Moor’ (III. iv: 26). In doing so, he is participating in what literary critics term intertextuality; in other words, he creates a web of references to other texts. Later post-colonial writers have fashioned full adaptations of Othello or ‘written back’ to the play. I scrutinize Toni Morrison’s 2012 play Desdemona, which is accompanied by music from the Malian singer Rokia Traoré. Morrison brings Desdemona centre stage and suggests that her individual beauty and purity were partly facilitated by an almost-silenced

figure in the play, her attentive African maid, *Barbary/Sa'ran*. For the essay's second half, I examine a group of Indian artists writing back to *Othello*. Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara* (2006) is the second film in a twenty-first-century Bollywood trilogy of Shakespearean adaptations. In *Omkara*, issues of caste and bi-racial identity in colour-conscious India replace Shakespeare's interest in the people then known as blackamoors. Finally, I engage with comic novelist Upamanyu Chatterjee's short story 'Othello Sucks', in which his characters are critical of Shakespeare. Their irreverence towards the play in the context of New India is entertaining and instructive.

Keywords: writing back, postcolonial, William Shakespeare, Othello

Introduction

In the late summer of 1600, Moroccan ambassador Abd al-Wahid bin Masoud bin Muhammad al-Annuri came to London. Along with his entourage of more than a dozen people, he resided in England's capital city for six months. Some believe that he provided inspiration for William Shakespeare's *Othello*, first performed soon afterwards in 1604 (Harris 23-30), although this is contested by such scholars as Gustav Ungerer (102). Al-Annuri's presence in England arose from Elizabeth I's dream of creating a durable and mutually benefi-

cial alliance with the unfamiliar Muslim world. In 1570, Elizabeth had been excommunicated by Pope Pius V for her Protestant beliefs and for reinstating the reformed church established by her father Henry VIII. Following this ostracism from Catholic Europe, the Queen began encouraging trade with Turkey, Persia, and Morocco. Protestants saw reflected in Sunni Muslim religious practice their own antipathy towards idol worship and veneration of a holy book. In his new monograph *This Orient Isle*, Jerry Brotton rightly highlights the financial shrewdness that lies behind some Elizabethan Englanders' belief in a mirroring between their Protestantism and the Muslim religion. Brotton remarks that Islam was viewed as "a faith with which [England] could do business" (np.). Yet Elizabethans misunderstood Islam and refused to accept the religion on its own terms. The English imposed on Muslims anything other than their correct name: they were 'Mahomedans,' 'pagans,' 'Turks,' 'Ottomites,' 'Moriscos,' 'barbarians,' or 'Saracens.'

Such lexical deviation chimes with the inconsistent treatment the Moroccan delegation received in England. At first, Elizabeth fêted the 42-year-old al-Annuri and his team with pageantry, jousting, and lavish meals. She had already become addicted to Moroccan sugar, the cause of her famously ruined teeth. The queen now gave sweeteners to the North Africans in the hope of fostering trade, political ties, and a military alliance against Cath-

olic Spain. In contrast, the English masses became increasingly hostile towards these Moroccan visitors. Following frequent food shortages in the 1590s and a failed coup by Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex in 1601 (Younger 591), the jittery London public turned against the strangers, the first Muslims that most of them had ever seen. Rumours abounded that the delegation comprised spies rather than envoys, and a moral panic developed over stories that they had poisoned members of their party on the Strand (Brotton np.). In response, Elizabeth made a declaration of protection for “her own natural subjects,” whom she described as being “distressed” in these times of scarcity. She disingenuously expressed alarm at “the great number of Negroes and blackamoors which (as she is informed) are carried into this realm since the troubles between her highness and the King of Spain” (Elizabeth I np.). Echoing the “great annoyance” of her subjects about the lavish honouring of her visitors, the queen went further to criticise them as “infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel” (Elizabeth I np.). Recommending their immediate isolation and swift deportation, she resorted to the device, still popular today, of making political capital from attacking immigrants. Wisely deciding that the time had come to leave England, al-Annuri and his followers went back to Morocco in February 1601.

In 1605 William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* was first performed. It featured a rich-

ly dressed man, the Prince of Morocco, who tries to woo the beautiful and witty heroine Portia. He is the first of the playwright's 'Moors,' since *The Merchant of Venice* is thought to have been written in the late 1590s. In the play, the Moroccan is eloquent and handsome; he is described as "a tawny Moor all in white" who cuts a striking figure (II.i: stage direction; emphasis in original). Just as his outward appearance is designed to impress, so too is he seduced by opulent surfaces. He fails the test set out in Portia's late father's will, whereby her potential husbands have to choose correctly from three caskets of gold, silver, and lead. Of course, the Moroccan selects the gold casket, concluding that "so rich a gem" as Portia could not possibly be "set in worse than gold" (II.vii.55). He thus loses Portia's hand in marriage. Fortunately, her preferred suitor Bassanio is willing to "give and hazard all he hath" for Portia, as dictated on the inscription to the humble lead casket that he chooses (II.vii.9).

Whereas in *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare is working within the popular but stereotypical 'Turk play' of his era, in his tragedy *Othello* – on which my critical gaze is primarily focused in this paper – he transcends this genre's limitations. *Othello* is a play that has always been receptive to adaptations and postcolonial rewritings. As the Pakistani novelist Zulfikar Ghose observes in his book *Shakespeare's Mortal Knowledge*, *Othello* is a truly noble man, in contrast to the calumny

of “lascivious Moor” with which Iago taints him (I.i.125). In fact, if Othello has a fault, Ghose suggests that it is his “sexual frugality” (82), which leads him to make too great a distinction between body and spirit. This enables evil Iago to work on both Othello’s jealousy about his wife and on the “base racial instinct” (75) the villain shares with his fellow white Venetians. The consequence is that a “beast with two backs” is created – not through sexual union but the conjoining of Desdemona and Othello in death (Ghose 73–103). With its Molotov cocktail of false friendship, cross-cultural love, racism, military confrontation, and extreme sexual possessiveness, *Othello* proves irresistible to many artists from postcolonial backgrounds.

This essay explores some of the most notable global reconfigurations of *Othello*, through the lens of Ashcroft et al.’s notion of postcolonial writing back. The texts I choose for this purpose include Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, Toni Morrison’s *Desdemona*, Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Omkaara*, and Upamanyu Chatterjee’s “Othello Sucks.” My rationale for selecting these postcolonial rewritings is, firstly, that they are evenly split between Anglophone and non-Anglophone production (*Season of Migration to the North* was originally written in Arabic, while *Omkaara* is a Hindi film). Secondly, each text examines a different aspect of Shakespeare’s play. Salih thinks through the play’s representations of racism and sexuality, Morrison is similarly interested in rac-

ism but also in its imbrication with gender, Bhardwaj transplants Shakespeare's concern with race onto caste, and Chatterjee's characters are critical of Shakespeare being taught in twenty-first-century postcolonies. The article is divided into two main parts, the first focusing on the African diaspora, with the locations of Sudan, black Britain, and the African-American United States taking centre stage. The next section takes India as a case study, and I scrutinise the history of cinematic adaptations of *Othello* as well as Chatterjee's recent story about the tragedy. The primary methodological technique is close reading of the texts alongside historical documents and critical works on the Indian and African diasporic contexts.

One of the key concerns of postcolonial critics has been to interpret how authors from formerly-colonised countries have "written back" to classic novels from the English literary canon. The phrase is sourced from the title of the book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), by Australian academics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Alluding to Salman Rushdie's pun on the *Star Wars* film *The Empire Strikes Back* (Rushdie; Kershner np.), they argue that postcolonial authors question and parody colonial ideas, writing back to the centre to contest accepted truths. In countering imperialist assumptions, the postcolonial writers whom these theorists discuss also remake the English language and recast the form of the novel. However, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's positioning

of non-Western authors' challenge to colonial discourse actually tethers them to European ideas as the central stake they seek to uproot. Ashcroft and colleagues still accord too much attention to "the West," even if the writers they analyse seek to dismantle its assumptions. Given this and other blind-spots, several theorists have interrogated the terms "postcolonial" and "writing back" for their colonial baggage (Dirlik; Ahmad; Dabashi; Hauthal). However, I follow Mike Hill in striving to initiate a "return to 'writing back' in a new and different way" (62) – in my case, in a way that aims at decentering European thought and letters. I want to suggest that postcolonial re-creations of Shakespeare have moved beyond "writing back" to more creative and confident conversations across spaces and tenses.

African Diasporic Rewritings of *Othello*

In 1966, the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih published an Arabic-language novel *Mawsim al-Hijra ila al-Shamal*. It was translated into the English title *Season of Migration to the North* in 1969 and is now a Penguin Modern Classic. In this landmark text for postcolonial literary studies, Salih depicts the cultural conflict that ensues when two rural Sudanese Muslims move to Britain and then return to Africa. Events in *Season of Migration to the North* are related by an unnamed narrator who passed several years in Britain during the interwar period pursuing a higher education. Returning to his seemingly timeless village in rural Sudan, the

narrator meets a mysterious older man called Mustafa Sa'eed. Mustafa had also attended university in the colonial metropole. We are told that during his time in Britain he seduced numerous white women, leaving behind a string of broken hearts, suicides, and one murder.

One of his lovers who takes her life, the married mother Isabella Seymour, is enthralled by Mustafa's exotic blackness. Desdemona to his Othello, she loves his outlandish stories of the landscape, animals and people of Africa. However, Mustafa is alert to the racism underpinning her interest, as when she assumes he is a cannibal. He plays along with her fantasies, inventing fictions about the 'dark continent.' We are explicitly invited to make connections between the novel and Shakespeare's play when Mustafa asserts, "I am no Othello, I am a lie" and later, "I am no Othello, Othello was a lie" (33, 95). Later, during Mustafa's toxic sadomasochistic relationship with the British woman Jean Morris, he suspects infidelity and finds a man's handkerchief that does not belong to him amongst her possessions. In contrast to the chaste and submissive Desdemona, Jean is nonchalant, even defiant, on being confronted with this evidence. She tells Mustafa it is his handkerchief, and when he doubts this, she responds, "Assuming it's not your handkerchief [...] what are you going to do about it?". Before long, Mustafa finds further belongings that are not his – "a cigarette case, then a pen" – and the handkerchief is thus reduced to a small piece

in the larger puzzle of “the tragedy [that] had to happen”(162). Salih thus parodies and inverts *Othello*, not only by exhibiting Mustafa’s malevolence towards his white lovers, which stems from anger at his colonial condition, but also by calling into question Shakespeare’s depiction of the “noble Moor” (III.iv.22). In doing so, he creates a web of references to other texts through intertextuality¹.

However, whereas *Othello* is situated on the periphery of Salih’s text, later postcolonial writers have fashioned full adaptations of or written back to the play. In her important study *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison argues that mainstream white American literature developed its own identity by casting African Americans in a shadow narrative. Morrison maintains that the notion of American individualism flourishes when cast against the stereotypical but inescapable bondage of slaves and their descendants. “Freedom,” she writes, “can be relished more deeply in a cheek-by-jowl existence with the bound and unfree, the economically oppressed, the marginalized, the silenced” (64). Through her 2012 play *Desdemona*, Morrison grafts her own comments about the United States onto Shakespeare’s seventeenth-century English context. Morrison’s play, directed by American Peter Sellars and with music by the Malian singer Rokia Traoré, posits that Desdemona’s individual beauty and purity were partly facilitated by an almost-silenced figure in Shakespeare’s work: her attentive African maid, Barbary. Desde-

mona was also invisibly aided by Iago's wife, the working-class character Emilia, who in Morrison's play is given lines in which she mocks the entitlement of the titular heroine: "Unpin me, Emilia'. 'Arrange my bed sheets, Emilia'. That is not how you treat a friend; that's how you treat a servant" (43). Despite allowing several characters to criticise Desdemona, Morrison also intends her play as a womanist attempt to give Shakespeare's heroine a stronger voice. As Joe Eldridge Carney explains, "Morrison's desire to create a more significant role for Desdemona came from her sense that Shakespeare's tragic heroine has been given insufficient attention, particularly in performances, a neglect that can be located in the critical tradition as well" (np.).

In Shakespeare's play, we only learn of Barbary's existence in Act IV, Scene III, when a heartbroken Desdemona tells Emilia that she is haunted by the Willow Song that her mother's maid sang while dying after being jilted by a lover. Morrison assumes that Barbary is a slave name, given that the word means 'Africa,' so in Desdemona she gives the character her original appellation of Sa'ran. Indeed, Sa'ran contradicts her mistress's claim that they shared many experiences as young people and were friends². She tells Desdemona that they shared nothing and that Desdemona misunderstood everything about Sa'ran because she didn't even know her real name:

Barbary? Barbary is what you call Africa. Barbary is the geography of the foreigner, the savage. Barbary equals the sly, vicious enemy who must be put down at any price; held down at any cost for the conquerors' pleasure. Barbary is the name of those without whom you could neither live nor prosper. (Morrison 45)

Here Sa'ran highlights the silencing and “put[ting] down” of the African presence in the West, while simultaneously drawing attention to the indispensable nature of this presence. Such silencing is partly achieved through violent renaming. The play's very first line is “My name is Desdemona” and the female protagonist continues with a page-long soliloquy on the negative connotations of her name, explaining that Desdemona means “misery”. She calls into question nominative determinism, declaring, “I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose” (13). Through this, Morrison signals the importance of nomenclature in establishing identities. In addition, ‘Barbary’ shares an etymological root with ‘barbarian,’ demonstrating the racially charged constitution of the English language. By confronting Desdemona and her “problematic posture of alleged ‘color blindness’” (Carney np.), Sa'ran forces Desdemona to confront her own racism, especially through the way she names and thereby colonises others, producing the dominant “geography of the foreigner.”

In Morrison's 2012 play *Desdemona* is a little old-

er than the teenager envisioned by Shakespeare. She and her former servant as well as Desdemona's murderous husband meet in the afterlife and engage in conversation. By putting her characters in the liminal space between life and death, director Peter Sellars claims that Morrison "create[s] a safe space in which the dead can finally speak those things that could not be spoken when they were alive" (Sellars 9). The white woman admits that in her childhood Barbary was the only person who allowed her imagination to soar by telling her "stories of other lives, other countries" (18). In Morrison's writing back, it is therefore the female companion as well as Othello who inspire the girl with stories of faraway lands and their different customs. Towards the end of the play Morrison's Othello character articulates the rage felt by Sa'ran and him (and by the fictional Mustafa before them) that their story is "cut to suit a princess' hunger for real life, not the dull existence of her home" (51). A self-absorbed character in Morrison's play, Othello criticises his wife and claims, "You never loved me. You fancied the idea of me, the exotic foreigner who kills for the State" (50). But the Nobel laureate also gives Desdemona some devastating lines through which she censures Othello for his violent temper and misogynist views of her, most notably: "I was the empire you had already conquered" (54). Iago does not appear in Morrison's re-visioning of Shakespeare and Peter Erickson points out that this serves to "place[...]" the emphasis on Othello and Desdemona as the makers of their own desti-

nies and thus makes them logically the ones in the afterlife who are responsible for coming to terms with their own actions, with no recourse to blaming Iago” (np.). It also has the effect of making Morrison’s play more female-centred than Shakespeare’s original, with Desdemona and Sa’ran as the pivotal (non-romantic) pairing. Iago exists off-stage and is only occasionally mentioned, as when Cassio declares, “Now Cyprus is under my reign. I am the one who decides. Othello gone from life; Iago suffering in a police cell” (53). Much of this dialogue is set to Traoré’s ethereal score, with the lyrics projected onto screens and incorporated into the play. The otherworldly music that accompanies Morrison’s play intensifies the narratives of competing violence in *Othello*.

When Shakespeare’s Iago proclaims, “Men should be that they seem” (III: iii: 133), he is of course dissembling. While gaining Othello’s assent to this truism, Iago also sets the general thinking about men who are not what they seem. In this way, he plants doubt in Othello’s mind about Cassio and the possibility that he and Desdemona are lovers. More broadly, by creating this white character who is so far from what he seems and Othello, the black man destructively duped by him, Shakespeare shadows forth a great deal about the lie that underpins imperialism. Many black and South Asian writers have pushed Shakespeare’s ideas onto updated versions of his plays that reflect on our globalised world shaped by racism and structural inequalities.

Indian Rewritings of *Othello*

Having explored two African diasporic rewritings of Shakespeare's *Othello*, I now turn to what Ania Loomba (2012) has called the "made-in-India *Othello* fellows." In other words, I am interested in those Indian writers who, from Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809–1831) onwards, have looked to this play about love, jealousy, and race for inspiration and critique. In her essay "Film's Shakespeare," Poonam Trivedi defies accusations of "bardolatry" (148) and colonial cultural cringe to trace the history of Shakespeare on the Indian big screen. She shows that this history goes back to 1935 and Sohrab Modi's *Khoon-ka Khoon*, a cinematic re-rendering of an Indian stage version of *Hamlet*. In part because the British colonisers laid emphasis on an English literary education for the Indians over whom they ruled (see Viswanathan), but also in some measure as appropriation and subversion of the colonial furniture, there were many filmic versions of Shakespeare's plays. *Hamlet's* blend of politics and metaphysical mystery seems to have proven the most popular of the Bard's plays for Indian auteurs. In the early days of Indian cinema, indigenous directors found themselves between the rock of leaving Shakespeare "pure and pristine" or the hard place of making him entirely "bowdlerized and indigenized" (Trivedi 151). By the mid-twentieth century, the most successful adaptations relocated the plays to India in their entirety. Directors "transcreated" the Shakespearean

originals (Lal, Two; Seven), taking ideas from their plots and themes rather than writing back to the plays in an overtly critical way.

The Bengali film *Saptapadi* (Kar) was probably the first piece of Indian cinema to namecheck Othello. In it, a pair of starcrossed lovers – a Brahmin boy and an Anglo-Indian Christian girl – fall in love during a performance of that other text about a relationship transgressing social and racial fault-lines. Then came Jayaraaj Rajasekharan Nair’s *Kaliyattam* (1997), a Malayalam remake of *Othello*. It is set against the backdrop of Kaliyattam or Kathakali, a devotional Keralan form of folk-theatre and dance. In *Kaliyattam*, Jayaraaj shifts Shakespeare’s racial concerns onto caste, since the plot revolves around a romantic pairing between a low-caste Theyyam performer and a Brahmin girl. Jayaraaj also changes Shakespeare’s somewhat trivial, somatic device of a handkerchief that fuels Othello’s jealousy into an opulent cloth that also served as a consummation sheet for the two protagonists. In Ashish Avikunthak’s short documentary-style film *Brihnlala ki Khelkali* or *Dancing Othello* (2002), he re-envisioned Arjun Raina’s dance theatre show *The Magic Hour* (2000). Like *Kaliyattam*, both of these 2000s adaptations use Kathakali, that art form mindlessly consumed by Western tourists to India, as a launchpad to discuss the Shakespearean play that is most concerned with what Graham Huggan (2001) calls “the postcolonial exotic.”

The first of two Indian “Othello fellows” whose work I want to discuss in detail is Vishal Bhardwaj. *Omkara* (2006) is Bhardwaj’s second film in a twenty-first-century Bollywood trilogy of Shakespearean adaptations. (The other two are *Maqbool* [2003], a remake of *Macbeth*, and *Haider* [2014], which relocated *Hamlet* to the Kashmiri conflict.) In his essay “Theorising *Omkara*,” John Milton argues that Bhardwaj remains faithful to Shakespeare’s tragedy, but makes it relevant to contemporary Indians. Issues of caste and bi-racial identity in colour-conscious India replace Shakespeare’s interest in the people then known as blackamoors. *Omkara* Shukla (Ajay Devgan) is the son of a Dalit mother and a higher-caste father. Known as Omi, he is repeatedly castigated as a ‘half-breed’ or ‘half-caste.’ Raghunath Mishra (Kamal Tiwari), who is father to Dolly (the Desdemona figure, played by Kareena Kapoor), is duly angry about his daughter’s elopement with this swarthy gangster. Dolly is contrastingly Brahminical and has a pale complexion. Yet she is unperturbed by the gossip circulating around them as a mismatched couple, declaring, “A crescent, though half, is still called a moon.” Othello’s status as a general fighting against the Turks is altered in the film so that Omi leads a gang in Uttar Pradesh (Bhardwaj’s home province) serving a shadowy political figure known as Bhai sahib (Naseeruddin Shah). This allows Bhardwaj to explore the endemic corruption that would garner widespread attention with the 2011-12 Indian anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare (see Sengupta np.).

The villainous Iago character is Ishwar Tyagi, who is known as Langda ('Lame') because he has a pronounced limp. Langda is played brilliantly by Saif Aif Khan, who frighteningly broods, plots, and swears his way through the film. To adapt Coleridge's famous phrase, if his felonies are not as "motiveless" as Iago's are, he nonetheless exudes pure "malignancy" (315). Langda has a motive for his evil because he is passed over for promotion in favour of a rival, Kesu Firangi (Vivek Oberoi). Omi chooses to replace himself with Kesu (the film's Cassio character) when he leaves his position as an underworld don to get involved with mainstream politics. In revenge for being passed over, Langda works on Omi's jealousy about his ingénue bride. Dolly's father's words, "A girl who can deceive her own father can never be possessed by anyone else," come back to haunt Omi, just as Brabantio's line "She has deceived her father and may thee" is a repeated leitmotif in *Othello* (I.iii:289). The idea that a deceitful daughter will become a wanton wife finds resonance in a South Asia where women and human relations are often held hostage, and sometimes brutalised, in the name of family connections and arranged marriages. Ironically, though, a film that is relatively progressive on caste and gender reverts to ableist stereotypes. Langda's disability is linked with his evil acts in a way that recalls the sinister hunchbacked *Richard III* of Shakespeare's history play. This grotesque stereotype reflects badly on the embodiment politics of the film and that of the society it seeks to entertain. In *Postco-*

lonial Fiction and Disability, Clare Barker reflects on the “invisibility” of disabled people in South Asian biopolitics (140), although it should be noted that in the twenty-first century activists and scholars such as Anita Ghai have acted as staunch critics of normative able-bodied discourse (Ghai, “Millennium”).

Omkara presents a range of views on women’s rights, from the misogynistic to the progressive. The picture usefully raises the issue of violence against women. There are some powerful scenes, as when we see Langda’s sexual violence towards his wife Indu. (In the film *Indu*, unlike Iago’s wife Emilia, is also Omi’s sister, making Omi and Langda brothers-in-law.) Instead of a handkerchief, the film uses the device of a gold Indian waistband, which has sexual overtones because of its suggestion of a chastity belt locking up a woman’s ‘honour.’ Omi gives this priceless ‘kamarband’ to Dolly as a wedding gift, but Langda persuades Indu (Konkona Sen Sharma) to steal it, so as to mislead Omi into thinking Dolly has gifted the waistband to Kesu. When Omi sees Kesu’s girlfriend, the dancer Billo Chaman Bahar (Bipasha Basu), wearing it, he goes out of his mind with jealousy. He has already been worked upon by Langda’s suggestive remarks about Dolly’s faithlessness, which he then cleverly appears to disavow, saying, “Me and my filthy mind.” The auditory detail of the film’s tragic final scene allows for even more pointed critique of men’s cruelty to women. Viewers are as-

sailed by the stark creaking sounds of a swinging bed on which Omi strangles Dolly – and this has been foreshadowed by various hanging seats that feature throughout the film. The morbid swinging sound is accompanied by the song “Jag Ja,” which contains the repeated lyric, “Oh ri rani, gudiya, jag ja, ari jag ja, mari jag ja.” This translates as, ‘Oh my queen, my doll, come on wake up now,’ spelling out that Dolly has long been treated as a plaything whose puppet-strings were pulled by the men in her life.

Indu, the Emilia character – Omi’s sister and Langda’s wife – makes a stirring speech near the film’s end about how the Hindu scriptures have painted women as temptresses and unfaithful. Going a part of the way with Emilia in her ‘proto-feminist’ speech from *Othello*, Indu rails against the injustice that “even after holy fires approve us, we’re regarded disloyal sooner than loyal.” On the other hand, the heroine Dolly has little agency, and when her father lambasts her relationship with Omi she presents it as something over which she had little choice:

Papa... please forgive me. I can't live without Omkara. Don't trust what your eyes say. Your eyes will betray you. God knows how it all began, how I lost my heart to Omkara. I was in love... before I knew anything. I remember feeling like a blind bird plunging down an empty well. Everything seemed hopeless. And then

I decided I'll end my wretched life. But then there was no point to it, when who I was dying for didn't even know why. Rajju will marry me dead. [...] Let me confess... I'm yours and yours only. Put me down in your list of slain.

Here Dolly depicts herself as unintentionally losing her heart to Omi, adding to his “list of slain,” and making him the warrior and possessor and she the conquered and the possession. Her only flashes of action are half-heartedly to consider suicide before dismissing this as pointless, and to assert with some spirit that she would rather die than go through with her arranged marriage to fiancé Rajju. *Omkara* is surprisingly explicit for a Bollywood movie, but it is a shame that Bhardwaj did not see fit to allow Dolly to own her sexuality in choosing Omi as her partner. Shakespeare's Emilia stridently criticises men as “all but stomachs, and we all but food.” By contrast, in *Omkara* Dolly cloyingly tells Indu that a way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Indu to some extent challenges this, but only to counter with her grandmother's wisdom that the way to keep a man is by keeping him sexually rather than digestively satisfied. That said, Indu does echo Emilia's lines, “They eat us hungerly, and when they are full, | They belch us” (III.iv:99-100), when she states that women should leave their men somewhat hungry, otherwise “the day they get satisfied they'll puke you out like nobody's business.” It is nonetheless telling that the seventeenth-century play is more

vocal about women being treated as meat than the twenty-first-century film.

This being a Bollywood film, songs and dances are a routine component. The songs are unusual in being written by Bhardwaj, who is a composer as well as a director, and limited to just two item numbers led by the provocative Bianca character, Billo. The first of these, *Beedi* (Cigarette), contains the lines, “*Beedi jalaileh jigar se piya | Jigar maa badi aag hai,*” which in the subtitles are unromantically translated as ‘Light your fag from the heat in my bosom,’ and elsewhere as ‘Light your cigarette [sic] from the heat of my heart’ (Reddy np.). In Hindi, however, the word used is ‘jigar,’ meaning ‘liver.’ Although the phrase may be literally translated as ‘heat of my liver,’ it has connotations of intense, fiery passion. This is because in Hindi and Urdu letters, love and desire is said to originate in the liver rather than the heart. The difficulties of translation are highlighted here, given that the South Asian and Western traditions pinpoint different organs as the seat of passion.

In some ways *Omkara* may be linked through intertextuality as much to *Kaliyattam* and *Dancing Othello* as to Shakespeare’s *Othello*. All three productions use the 400-year old story of jealousy to illustrate caste issues. Like *Kaliyattam*, *Omkara* alters the handkerchief to a more substantial garment – whereas Jayaraaj used a cloth, Bhardwaj deploys a jewelled waistband as the “net / That shall en-

mesh them all” (II:iii.328–29). One possible reason for this repeated conversion of the handkerchief into more valuable artefacts is that the consummation sheet and waistband are visible metonyms of chastity in the Indian context. Secondly, the handkerchief is no longer seen as a prized possession with sexual connotations as it was in Shakespeare’s day, so that Othello’s interpretation of it as “ocular proof” of Desdemona’s infidelity can seem unconvincing to modern audiences (III.iii.361; see also Smith 4–8). *Omkara*, like its filmi predecessors, is an assured postcolonial adaptation that is neither derivative of, nor obsequious to, Shakespearean dramaturgy. Bhardwaj conveys a sense that Shakespeare belongs to everyone, so his work is open for both homage and critique.

Comic novelist Upamanyu Chatterjee contributed a short story entitled “Othello Sucks” to the issue of *Granta on India* edited by Ian Jack in 2015. In it, as the story’s title suggests, his characters are critical of Shakespeare, and their irreverence for the play and its context is highly entertaining. In the very first line of the story, Chatterjee breaks the fourth wall to debate its generic conventions, which owe a debt to non-fiction, radio plays, and “a comic strip in prose.” He also knowingly introduces the story’s “four principal dramatis personae” (169): Father, Mother, Elder Daughter, and Younger Daughter. The two girls reluctantly study Shakespeare at their “good right-wing south Delhi Punjabi” school (170). Younger Daughter declares

that *Othello* sucks early on in the story, providing the story's title, while Elder Daughter retorts that she was lucky not to read *The Merchant of Venice* as the older sibling was compelled to do. Younger Daughter objects to Othello's wordiness and multiple meanings, and claims that Desdemona sucks even harder than Othello: "No one in fact is sorry to see her strangled. It does improve the play" (175).

Father derides the educators who put Shakespeare on Indian children's curricula, rhetorically asking: "do we want them as adults to speak in iambic pentameter when they apply for internships to CNN-IBN?" (Chatterjee 170). It is worth noting that Father is not objecting to the privileging of an English-language text over ancient Indian or Bhasha literatures, because CNN-IBN is an Anglophone news channel where confident speakers of English are in high demand. Instead he takes a utilitarian approach to education, desiring the inculcation in his daughters of a modern, tech-savvy English that will be useful on the job market. Above all, Father is troubled by what he sees as "the fundamental assumption of the play that Othello is dumb because he is black" (Chatterjee 175). Since A. C. Bradley's 1904 monograph *Shakespearean Tragedy*, many critics have viewed Othello as a "noble barbarian" who reverts to "the savage passions of his Moorish blood" once he has been manipulated by Iago (Bradley 186). If Father is correct about *Othello's* underlying racism, it is especially prob-

lematic in the girls' multicultural Delhi classroom. There Cheik Luigi Fall (a mixed-heritage "black guy" on whom Younger Daughter has a crush) and the dark-skinned teacher Mrs Dasgupta both come up against "racist and skin-conscious" Indian assumptions (Chatterjee 171, 172).

In the story, Chatterjee reproduces a key quotation from Laurence Olivier's autobiography *Confessions of an Actor* on blacking up for the role of Othello:

Black all over my body, Max Factor 2880, then a lighter brown, then Negro No 2, a stronger brown. Brown on black to give a rich mahogany. Then the great trick: that glorious half yard of chiffon with which I polished myself all over until I shone ... The lips blueberry, the tight curled wig, the white of the eyes whiter than ever, and the black, black sheen that covered my flesh and bones, glistening in the dressing-room lights ... I am Othello. (qtd. in Chatterjee 175-176)³

The quotation is well chosen. In it, Olivier explores his blackface act with relish, providing a detailed description of the layers of makeup he paints on himself and the gauzy material he uses to polish his skin to a shine. The actor's fascination with his own unfamiliar "black, black" colour and stereotypically white teeth empties Othello out of culture and makes his race the primary preoccupation. Just as Olivier reduces the black general he

plays to the colours of foundation and their brand names, so too the thespian makes Othello seem even less human through references to his sheep-like “tight curled wig” and to the act of polishing, which produces a “rich mahogany” like that on expensive furniture. The cosmetics, with their precise shades of “Max Factor 2880” and “Negro No 2,” are rendered attractive through the adjectives “shone” and “glistening.” Indeed, Olivier-as-Othello seems almost edible in the shape of those unnatural, vivid “blueberry” lips. This is juxtaposed with the “Belgian chocolate” (174) comparison for which Younger Daughter reached when describing Cheik Luigi Fall’s skin. The two metaphors expose the racial faultlines both of 1980s Britain from which Olivier writes and the contemporary Indian society “Othello Sucks” is set in.

But, as the lively speech I have already quoted suggests, perhaps the most significant way in which Chatterjee’s characters subvert Shakespeare is through their language use. Father frequently code-switches into Sanskrit phrases such as “*Nirbhaya Bhavah*” (180) (‘Be free from fear’), appropriates and alters hackneyed phrases (“Hell hath no fury like a man overlooked” (173)), and quotes Shakespearean couplets freely. By contrast, the Daughters fall for an argot of speed: “Communication is possible only by means of SMS, email or sign language” (181). All the Indian characters speak with self-possession in a Hinglish that shows no sign of being brow-beaten or colonised

by Shakespeare's canonical English. Indeed, postcolonial confidence is the key attribute shared by these "made-in-India Othello fellows" and other postcolonial writers, who borrow from the Bard to shed light on the concerns of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Sudan, India, and the African-American United States. They do so very successfully, and it will be interesting to see how adaptations of Shakespeare in general and *Othello* in particular develop and change as we move further into a twenty-first century already scarred by colonialism and its afterlives.

Conclusion

This essay has analysed a few of the most important non-Western reworkings of *Othello* from the last five decades. Adapting Ashcroft et al.'s late 1980s idea of writing back, I suggested that Salih, Morrison, Bhardwaj, and Chatterjee transpose Shakespeare into new contexts in order to create topographies of the indigenous rather than the singular, dogmatic "geography of the foreigner" censured by Morrison's Sa'ran. The paper read multiple postcolonial adaptations/transcreations of *Othello* across diverse locations, cultivating a comparativist approach by investigating different genres, including films, a play, a novel, and a short story. The piece opened with an exploration of Shakespeare's early seventeenth-century context and the visit of a Moroccan envoy to London. The sojourn began well, but ended in ignominy and the

Moroccans' retreat from England in the face of local intolerance. This incident may have provided material for two of Shakespeare's most important plays about cross-cultural encounter: *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. Because *Othello* has proven especially ripe for appropriation by non-white writers, it is this play that garnered the most attention from the present essay.

In the next section, two texts from the African diaspora came under scrutiny: the non-Anglophone novel *Season of Migration to the North* and Toni Morrison's English-language play *Desdemona*. In Tayeb Salih's novel, the British Desdemona figure Isabella Seymour is fascinated by Mustafa Sa'eed's implausible stories about Africa, while Jean Morris taunts Mustafa with his cuckoldry, not least through the loaded symbol of a handkerchief. Toni Morrison likewise criticises Desdemona's exoticisation of Africa, moving Shakespeare's Barbary from the sidelines of *Othello* and initiating discussion of the power of naming by calling her Sa'ran. Unlike Salih, Morrison shows awareness of the intersectionality of oppression by figuring forth Othello's gendered streak of violence as well as Desdemona's white privilege.

Indian rewritings of *Othello* then came under the spotlight, with an overview of three films: Ajoy Kar's *Saptapadi*, Jayaraaj Rajasekharan Nair's *Kaliyattam*, and Ashish Avikunthak's *Brihnlala ki Khelkali* or *Dancing Othello* (2002). However,

the paramount non-Anglophone movie I evaluated was Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara*. The essay argued that *Omkara* is hobbled by the ableist politics inherent in Saif Aif Khan's admittedly bravura performance as the lame villain known as Langda. The film is more ambivalent about feminism; violence against women is roundly condemned, but the ways in which women can and should resist are left unclear. The final text under study was another Anglophone piece: Upamanyu Chatterjee's humorous short story "Othello Sucks." Chatterjee uses the character of Father to satirise Shakespearean pedagogical approaches in twenty-first-century India and the racism that may lurk in Shakespeare's portrayal of Othello as 'reverting to type' once subjected to Iago's poisonous manipulation.

In sum, this essay has charted how non-Western writers, most of them the subjects of formerly-colonised countries, are turning their gaze back on Shakespeare. The decolonisation of the English literary canon is only possible if scholars attempt to recover the voices of the conquered, while recognising, with Gayatri Spivak (104) the fraught, contingent, and incomplete nature of this endeavour. My politicised version of writing back seeks to draw attention to overlooked texts by celebrated authors such as Toni Morrison, to non-Anglophone narratives, and to neglected aspects of novels at the heart of postcolonial literary studies such as Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. The subject of Shakespeare and his con-

temporaries' relationship with the Muslim world with which I opened this essay has received a great deal of interest of late (see Brotton; Hutchings). What artists like Salih, Morrison, Bhardwaj, and Chatterjee emphasise, however, is the exotic way in which Shakespeare portrays "Barbary" (IV.iii.25) and the Indian who "threw a pearl away" (V.ii.343). This exoticising gaze, as we have seen, is reversed by those who call Africa and India home. By turning back the scrutiny onto the West and its most prized author, these authors demonstrate that another way of seeing is possible. Displacement of Western hegemony and Shakespearean dominance is not likely and nor is it the objective of these authors, but what they do achieve is to offer supplementary valences that change our readings of *Othello* very substantially.

Notes

1. For more on Salih's transcreation of *Othello*, see Harlow; Calbi; Hassan 106–7.

2. Interestingly, an earlier text by Toni Morrison, the novel *Sula* (1973), is all about female friendship on a more equal basis. In interview, Morrison says of this book: "Friendship between women is special, different, and has never been depicted as the major focus of a novel before *Sula*". (Tate 157).

3. I would like to thank my student Elise Robson for reminding me of this section from Upamanyu Chatterjee's short story and for her interesting readings.

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Transcultural Tempests: Dev Virahsawmy's *Toufann*, A Mauritian Fantasy

Cecile Sandten

ABSTRACT:

Even though Shakespearean adaptations and rewritings initially emerged in a post-colonial context under conditions of asymmetrical power relations that were operative under colonialism (the “writing back rewrite”), today, a different kind of cultural synergy characterises the “individual rewrites” of Shakespeare emerging from postcolonial spaces. In the latter, specific national, local, regional or indigenous contexts help to redefine and create new dimensions in which to understand the Shakespearean play in another light. This is gradually being acknowledged in debates on “postcolonial Shakespeares”, wherein we have witnessed a paradigm shift from the literary practice of “writing back” and “rewriting,” which aims at correcting colonial misrepresentations, towards a more differentiated, multifaceted and necessarily complex approach of transcultural adaptation.

This essay makes the argument above by way of a close reading of Dev Virahsawmy's Toufann, A Mauritian Fantasy (1999), an English translation of a play originally written in Mauritian Creole that is an adaptation of Shakespeare's The Tempest, King Lear, Hamlet and Othello.

Keywords: Transcultural, Shakespeare adaptations, linguistic, postcolonial

Even though Shakespearean adaptations and re-writings initially emerged in a post-colonial context under conditions of asymmetrical power relations that were operative under colonialism, contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare in a postcolonial context have moved beyond the post-colonial literary strategy of “writing back” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin) to the colonial centre. Today, a different kind of cultural synergy characterises the “individual rewrites” of Shakespeare emerging from postcolonial spaces. These transcultural adaptations rework the most famous and familiar of Shakespearean plotlines and characters in line with, and in response to, their own local settings. In this way, many of these adaptations tackle and foreground the central issues of race and ethnicity, class and caste, colonial history, gender and language, that are at the forefront of postcolonial critical approaches to Shakespeare’s plays. This is gradually being acknowledged in debates on “postcolonial Shakespeares”, wherein we have witnessed a paradigm shift from the literary practice

of “writing back” and “rewriting,” which aims at re-dressing colonial misrepresentations, towards a more differentiated, multifaceted and necessarily complex approach of transcultural adaptation. I argue that adaptations of Shakespeare in a postcolonial context broadly fall into one or more of the following four (though by no means exhaustive) categories.

First, the “true to source-” or “affirmation rewrite” that rewrites, adapts, or produces a Shakespearean play in the original and attempts to recreate the period of the original in its specific scenography and perform the play according to presumed “Shakespearean” acting conventions. This first approach was frequently adopted as part of the British “civilising mission,” and is characterized by a certain degree of reverence for the Bard. It shows an affirmation of the effectiveness of the British Empire’s English education system, and is the product of English-educated colonial subjects that inherently glorifies Shakespeare, the English language, and British culture.

Second, the “writing back rewrite” that adapts or produces a Shakespearean play in the original, but performs it in a national, regional or local setting and thus attempts a more ‘native’ interpretation of the text. This approach might be political or radical, in that it produces forms of resistance against the Western source text and its hegemonic implications. Correspondingly, Shakespeare is, albeit in-

advertently, initially regarded as the pre-eminent icon of English cultural superiority and European civilisation. In this approach, an analysis of power relations and of the inherent dominant discourse is enacted. The authority of the Shakespearean source text is subsequently subverted via hybridity, strategic transformation or syncretism.

Third, the “individual rewrite” that adapts or produces a Shakespearean play in the specific national, regional, local or indigenous adaptation and translation, often editing or adapting the text to reflect a particular socio-political, cultural and historical matrix that would allow the elements of the play (theme, plot, characters) to resonate in its specific transcultural context. This approach is the one that is most prevalent today, especially in more recent Shakespearean adaptations. It can also be described as an individual and transformative approach to Shakespeare that does not necessarily need to be anti-colonial, and it can be with or without reverence for Shakespeare. The Shakespearean texts in this approach are frequently used as a vehicle for the writer’s own creativity that results in an intercultural or transcultural viewpoint. Consequently, this approach is less concerned with “writing back” to the former Empire than with using the Empire’s cultural material to the advantage of the writer’s own literary/dramatic tradition. Such rewrites can effectively be read as transcultural hybrid works.

Fourth and finally, the “mutilation rewrite” that rewrites, adapts, or produces a Shakespearean play in a de-glamourising version, often for the purposes of mainstream or middlebrow entertainment as opposed to high culture.

In the frame of Shakespeare in colonial/postcolonial contexts, Ania Loomba (168) argues that there has been a “mobility over centuries of a certain European vocabulary of cultural difference.” To elucidate her point, she writes:

Of course, *Othello* and *Oroonoko* register a very different sense of “otherness.” But certain conceptual similarities between the two texts help locate those differences in history. Exoticism marks Behn’s novella but is also germane to *Othello*: *Othello*’s conflicted presence in Venice includes, crucially, the glamour that attaches to the exotic, as it does the horror attendant upon the “turban’d Turk.” Both versions of black men are placed within the discourse of European civility, and both are unyoked from that by violence. (Loomba 168)

The three Shakespearean characters Caliban, *Othello* and *Shylock* are, however, depicted as representatives of “otherness” in completely different ways. *Othello*’s “linguistic abilities are also part of his particular foreignness, of the seductive charm of another kind of non Europeanness than Caliban’s” (Loomba 175). Accordingly, Shakespeare’s own era was, according to Loomba, profoundly

shaped by the recognition of different national and racial identities. Thus, as Loomba (171) claims, *The Tempest* “participates in and mediates between several different discourses of travel and otherness” thus showing its grounding in both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean discourse, by using the vocabularies of “difference” in both discourses interchangeably. However, Shakespeare’s *Tempest* – one of the plays that has been used most frequently in transcultural interpretations and postcolonial rewritings – cannot be claimed as a purely Western text any longer after all the reappraisals of Prospero’s role from that of a benevolent patriarch to an oppressive colonialist (Singh 5). As stated by Jyotsna Singh (5-6), “[t]hese critical revisions followed the decolonisation movements in the former colonies of Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, which imaginatively claimed Caliban as their ancestor while politically they claimed their lands.” This idea of criss-crossing of literature, or in other words intertextuality, is identified by Loomba as a form of “contact zone” which is also responsible for the creation of new literary genres (*Postcolonial* 70).

Thus, this essay sets out to examine the reciprocal process of exchange and the dialogic mode (Bakhtin) that characterises recent Shakespearean adaptations in postcolonial literatures in English. In other words, “rewritings” of Shakespeare in a postcolonial context are not mere interpretations, translations or adaptations, but, as Loomba implies,

original artistic works that reference, converse and engage with Shakespeare's plays. It is also important to ask what happens to texts/authors that/who are caught between different and even contradictory literary and cultural influences. Shifting from a mode of "writing back to the colonial centre" to a transcultural approach is thus not necessarily one without its own conflicts at hand.

This is illustrated in Dev Virahsawmy's transformative adaptation of Shakespeare, *Toufann, A Mauritian Fantasy* (1991)¹, a modern three-act comedy within which the playwright turns the master-slave dialectic on its head in order to illustrate "the abundant potential of the stage to achieve different meanings or readings according to the context in which [the] play is staged" (Banham, Mooneeram, and Plastow 292). The cultural and linguistic contexts of the play should thus be considered in greater detail, not least because Virahsawmy himself has written extensively on the linguistic history of Mauritius². Virahsawmy is also a passionate campaigner for the establishment of Mauritian Creole (his preferred term is "Mori-sien") as the national language of Mauritius which, according to him, should become the language of literature, culture and government, as well as daily life. From 1966 to 1987, he was actively involved in Mauritian politics, being one of the founders of the *Mouvement Militant Mauricien*. *Li*, Virahsawmy's first play in Mauritian Creole, was written in 1972 when he was imprisoned for political activity

and struggling with censorship. *Li* is a play that articulates protest and does it, significantly, not only via its content but also its choice of language (Mauritian Creole). Since then, he has concentrated on writing in Mauritian Creole and published the Shakespearean adaptations *Zeneral Makbef* (an adaptation of *Macbeth*, 1981), *Trazedji Makbess* (a translation of *Macbeth*, 1997), *Enn Ta Senn Dan Vid* (a translation of *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1995), *Zil Sezar* (a translation of *Julius Caesar*, 1987) and *Toufann* (an adaptation of *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello*, 1991). His Creole play, *Sir Toby*, was written in response to Border Crossings' production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in Mauritius.

Virahsawmy's writing of translations and adaptations of Shakespeare puts him alongside a range of other writers from the African continent who have found in Shakespeare a vehicle to represent and redress postcolonial concerns and issues. Translating and rewriting Shakespeare's plays in Africa has thus increasingly become a means of broaching local political issues. Perhaps the most distinguished writer is the late President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania with his two Kiswahili versions of *Julius Caesar* (*Julius Caezar*, 1963 and *Juliasi Kaizari*, 1969) and *Mabepari was Venisi* (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1969). Nyerere seems to have undertaken his translations primarily as a celebration of the richness and beauty of the Kiswahili language. Thus, his initial motivations for adapting/appro-

priating Shakespeare were nationalist: “[...] as a way of disarming detractors of kiswahili who said it could not be the vehicle of science and high culture, and who were opposed to its adoption as a national language [...] thus assisting the meteoric rise of literature in kiswahili to its status as a national literature today” (Klein 217).

Apart from Nyerere, there are other writers who translate and adapt Shakespeare, such as Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin in Ethiopia, the Congolese Sony Labou Tansi, Wale Ogunyemi in Nigeria, or Thomas Decker in Sierra Leone³. There is a commercial version of *Macbeth*, *Umabatha*, the *Zulu Macbeth*, from South Africa (1970) which was also staged at Shakespeare’s Globe, London, as part of the Celebrate South Africa Festival in April 2001. In many cases the motivation for these explorations of Shakespeare in an African context were not only to enjoy the supposedly universal themes of the plays, but also to entertain their audiences with their clever and witty language, storytelling, complex riddles and proverbs. As Martin Banham and Jane Plastow summarize:

In Africa, theatre matters. African theatre is entertainment, but it can also be aesthetically, politically, socially and spiritually committed, and often it is all these things simultaneously. Moreover, much modern African theatre refuses to be compartmentalized into a particular form of presentation. Instead it draws on

indigenous performance traditions including dance, music, storytelling and mime, and combines them with ideas of drama drawn from experiences of Western colonialism, to create theatre forms which are syncretic and inclusive in both form and content. (vii)

With his plays in Mauritian Creole, Virahsawmy has shown that language as a site for cultural expression and cultural identity is able to trouble the political and cultural establishment by the subversive presence of a popular tongue that the political establishment cannot control. When Shakespeare is translated from English to Creole, the audience also changes from an elite minority to a general majority as Creole is the lingua franca of Mauritius and a vehicle for the continuation of the oral tradition among its people.

In *Toufann, A Mauritian Fantasy*, Prospero, the powerful philosopher king, spends his time writing and carrying out research in his laboratory. He leaves his brother Yago, the Prime Minister, with the responsibility of running the country's affairs. Prospero relates to his daughter Kordelia how Yago got into power, which resembles the rise of tyrannical governments in certain African states and beyond:

hard-working, intelligent...too intelligent. Cunning. Little by little, he managed to get absolute power for himself. Without me even noticing, he gets rid of ministers one after the

other – putting in his men everywhere, police, army, the law...everywhere you go, nothing but his men. And so, bit by bit, he got all the power. It's meant to be basic to any democracy that you separate the executive from the legislature! Not him.... (220)

Yago, who is obsessed with power, joins forces with the country's oldest enemies, King Lir and his brother, Prince Edmon, to overthrow his brother through a military coup. In the confrontation Prospero's wife is killed and Kordelia, their new-born baby, is spared. Prospero and Kordelia get into a "nutshell of a boat" (219) and set sail in uncharted waters. They finally land on an island and Prospero, the computer genius, turns it "into a little paradise" (221). Coconuts are filled with whisky and the island is flowering with "weed" (hashish). The only inhabitants of the island are Kalibann and his mother Bangoya, a black slave who was abandoned by a white pirate after he had fathered Kalibann, who later becomes Prospero's scientific assistant. Like in *The Tempest*, Kalibann was the owner of the island before Prospero arrived.

Time passes and Prospero and his daughter Kordelia have now lived on the island for twenty years. Through patience and much research, Prospero has developed his science in order to exert total control over people and nature. Prospero is thus able to create a typhoon ("Toufann") to capture the ship that is carrying those who had toppled him

from his Throne. The typhoon/ “Toufann” thus becomes “the instrument of [his] revenge” (221). More so than in *The Tempest*, the notion of sinning, repentance and revenge are frequently expressed by various characters. The binary of paradise and hell is also mentioned more than once, highlighting general human desires and fears. The passengers cannot make any sense of the mysterious cyclone, which appears to have flown their ship across the island and landed it on a mini-lake with mountains all around. Thus in *Toufann*, the powerful have to capitulate not only in the face of nature but also to the influence of science and technology.

Prince Ferdjnan, son of King Lir who had deposed Prospero, is among the victims of the shipwreck, and while exploring the island, he is hypnotised by Aryel, a robot whose creator is no other than Prospero. Aryel, “a blonde giant with blue eyes” (219, original italics), is a child of Prospero’s science, a creature of his vast, scientific Frankenstein-like competence. Hence, Aryel does what Prospero orders him to do according to his abilities as a ‘magical’ robot: “Captain, if something’s difficult I do it instantly. Things that are impossible take me a little longer” (219). Aryel takes Prince Ferdjnan to Prospero and Kordelia. Prospero’s plan is taking shape: he has decided that his daughter Kordelia would sooner or later marry Prince Ferdjnan to re-conquer/recover his lost kingdom. However, the crucial part of Prospero’s plan falls apart when his daughter Kordelia reveals that she wants to

marry Kalibann, and not the Prince. “He doesn’t have royal blood,” Prospero objects. “He has human blood.” “That’s enough for me,” Kordelia replies (251). Prospero thus surrenders control. He throws the Red Key, and with it, his magical powers, into the sea.

As critics have observed, the red key that Prospero throws into the sea is symbolic as it was the emblem of the Labour Party headed by Navin Ramgoolam, who led Mauritius to Independence (Zabus). A Mauritian audience would thus recognise Virahsawmy’s political allusion and identify Prospero at that moment in the play as Ramgoolam. In *Toufann*, Prospero is depicted as an absolute ruler who often refers to himself as being Godlike, especially in relation to his servant/robot Aryel: “I am his God – I created him. He is the child of my power, my science, my technology: the creature of my competence. [...] And, whenever I wanted, I could make thousands more just like him” (221). When Kordelia says to her father: “You behave as if you wanted to take the place of God” (219), Prospero answers: “Well, daughter, you’re very close [...] Today, I am the one who controls Toufann, I control the tempest, I am the one who decides, I am the one who controls everything [...] I’m completely in control” (219, 221). As a “scientific genius,” Prospero thus “has a lot of power – over nature and over people” (227). Nevertheless, it is Ferdjinan who advises him to be more compassionate, pointing out that his arrogance will not lead to

a happy end. According to Ferdjinan, Prospero's need for revenge does not "give him the right to play with people's lives. He has no right to play at God, using his power for revenge. If only he could learn a bit of compassion, that might change it all" (248).

Toufann has been translated into English by Nisha and Michael Walling. Originally, the play's title is "Ennfanteziantrwaak," which translates literally into "a fantasy in three acts." Michael and Nisha Walling's translation of the title into the "a Mauritian Fantasy" makes it helpful for an English audience to be able to locate the socio-political and cultural setting of the adaptation at once. Nevertheless, the English translation of *Toufann* is partly problematic as the most obvious signifier of Mauritian identity – its language, Mauritian Creole – is lost almost entirely. In their attempt to make the play accessible to an English audience, Nisha and Michael Walling have translated almost all of it into English, keeping Mauritian Creole only for the 'lesser' characters of Dammarro and Kaspalto. Some passages that feature these two characters are left deliberately untranslated, especially the scene in which Kaspalto and Dammarro, disguised as Yago and Edmon, reappear on stage singing in Creole (231).

Toufann is thus an "individual rewrite" and transformation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Othello* – in the context of

transcultural and multilingual Mauritius. More specifically, Virahsawmy goes beyond the straightforward approach to translation as in his other Shakespearean adaptations such as *Zil Sezar* (*Julius Caesar*) or *Trazedji Makbess* (*Macbeth*). Rather, he uses Shakespeare's themes, his language and his characters as a trigger for social commentary and critical reflection on the political, cultural and economic realities of Mauritian everyday life, as well as universal concerns that affect communities around the globe in postcolonial societies and beyond. Collectively, his adaptations articulate the problems of aging and parenting, but also explore the human attributes of self-knowledge and self-deception, as well as the relationship between the individual and society, idealism and materialism, wealth and poverty, law and arbitrariness in Mauritian society and elsewhere.

This form of social commentary in the plays is also infused with a playful sense of humour. Just as the characters in Shakespeare's drama often play and jest with language, so do the characters in Toufann. For instance, when Poloniouss says: "I was using metaphor, Your Majesty," Edmon replies without knowing the term: "I don't care what you were using metal for – I want a better speech at the Royal Wedding! [...]" (241). In another sequence, Edmon and Yago discuss how they can take over the control of the country:

EDMON: Prime Minister Yago, to inaugurate my

reign, we need to establish a policy of universal order.

YAGO: Certainly, Your Majesty. However, in order to permit a policy of universal order, there must first be universal chaos. The question therefore arises: how do we begin to create chaos?

EDMON: Perhaps with a policy of fun. There is a general excess of seriousness amongst my subjects. A lack of frivolity. I don't have a court jester. Imagine – what sort of a jester monarchy is this? I want a jester. And dancing – I want all the sailors to dance. A policy of universal mirth. My eternal reign should go down in history as the Golden Age of clowning. (240)

The excerpt above pokes fun at, and makes light of, the administrative bureaucracy of political decisions and their implementation. This is heightened in the appropriation of the phrase “the Golden Age of clowning,” which debases and ridicules Elizabeth's I reign and her rule over the commonwealth as an unserious and incompetently clownish one.

Toufann is thus chiefly based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, though characters from other Shakespearean tragedies are introduced such as Cordelia, King Lir and Edmon (Cordelia, King Lear and Edmond from *King Lear*), Yago (Iago from *Othello*), and Poloniouss (Polonius from *Hamlet*) who are ascribed new character traits and, at times, different physical appearance. These ‘altered’ Shake-

spearean characters are self-reflexive, even meta-reflexive about their roles in the play. Yago, for instance, complains about his own character composition:

I've just about had enough of this. [...] Oh yes – let's all blame Yago. Ever since that little runt Shakespeare used me to stir things up between Othello and his wife, everyone thinks I'm to blame for everything that goes wrong anywhere in the whole world [...] If only you literary critics would realise that I'm not at all bad!" (242-243).

As mentioned, Virahsawmy's play was originally written for a "local" Mauritian audience. In their translation of *Toufann*, Nisha and Michael Walling point out that, in one scene, King Lir is intertextually alluding to a specific political speech, in which Harish Boodhoo, the leader of the Parti Socialiste Mauricien (PSM), a splinter group of the 1979 ruling Mauritian Labour Party (MLP), "likened various ethnic groups in Mauritius to monkeys defending their mountains from one another, which is not made obvious in the translation itself" (Walling and Walling quot. in Banham, Gibbs, and Ofsisan 254). Moreover, Virahsawmy makes many linguistic jokes and puns in Mauritian Creole that are simply untranslatable for a reader from the "West." Mauritians, on the other hand, will immediately understand the satirical references to the scandals of government ministers, among other

things. Virahsawmy also ridicules politicians who use their imagination as does Polonious, which the character of King Lir criticizes as follows: “You’re always using your imagination. It’s not a good idea for a politician” (222).

Other, more direct political allusions abound in *Toufann*. Depicting the 1990s as a time of political uncertainty in Mauritius, Virahsawmy “exploits social structures and historical realities that successfully connect with the audience’s experience and cause them to engage with the play” (Banham, Mooneeram, and Plastow 290). Under the constitution adopted in 1968, Mauritius was a constitutional monarchy with the British monarch as head of state. Towards the end of the play, Ferdjnan tells Prospero that “the world changes all the time. That’s what you have to understand, Prospero. Perhaps your logic had some sort of value once. But the wind has changed. We don’t believe in anyone’s privileges any more” (250). As his speech conveys, Ferdjnan represents the most realistic character in the play who is well-educated in power-politics. In 1991, the year when *Toufann* was written, a constitutional amendment was passed in Mauritius, providing for a republican form of government, with a president that was to replace the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, as Head of State. The amendment went into effect in 1992. In *Toufann*, Virahsawmy expresses the ambivalent attitudes that many Mauritian citizens had towards this political change as, on the one hand, people wanted to

welcome democratic developments in the country, yet, on the other hand, they were critical and wary of the government.

The one Shakespearean character whom Virahsawmy almost totally transforms in *Toufann* is Caliban. While he is described in Shakespeare's dramatis personae as "a savage and deformed slave," Virahsawmy portrays his Kalibann in the stage directions as follows: "He is a young man, around 25, of mixed race. He is good looking, intelligent and hardworking" (219). Whereas in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Caliban's "otherness" and inferiority, as well as his naiveté, are highlighted (1.2.359-363), in *Toufann* Kalibann is no longer a slave but Prospero's assistant and technician. As Kordelia says of him admiringly, "He's my father's assistant. He knows all the secrets. Like the passages where the cameras can't spy on us. He's even disconnected the dungeon surveillance camera for a bit..." (226). Moreover, the most crucial scene in *The Tempest* between Caliban, Prospero and Miranda where Caliban famously tells Prospero, "You taught me language; and my profit o't / Is, I know how to curse" (1.2.364-365), is completely missing in Virahsawmy's *Toufann*. When Prospero intends to give Kalibann his freedom, the latter does not react to these intentions with gratitude or emotion at all. Only when Prospero asks once again, "Are you glad that I'm giving you your freedom?" (233) does Kalibann react: "But I am already free, Mr. Prospero. [...] You never stood in my way" (233).

As Walling argues, Virahsawmy's Kalibann does not understand the concept of freedom because he feels free within the social structure as it is set up; his knowledge is limited, although his intelligence isn't" (Walling quot. in Wilkinson 121). Kalibann, who is called "batar" by Prospero (the Mauritian Creole term for 'bastard,' 'person of mixed race,' and an illegitimate person) is also an embodiment of the cultural hybridity of Mauritian society. Critics have noted how his hybridity symbolically "defies the boundaries that colonial communities create between what is included and what is excluded" and "overthrow[s] the slave-master relationship that has, in various ways and under different forms, been part of the history of Mauritius" (Mooneeram 19-20). In the work, therefore, Virahsawmy does not highlight the idea of the formerly colonised who will always feel inferior to the coloniser. Rather he focuses on Kalibann as the paradigm of métissage: He represents the common man who, on the one hand, is the result of the country's colonial legacy and, on the other hand, represents the future leader of the state. Whether he will become an autocrat is open to discussion and interpretation at the end of the play. When Kordelia and Kalibann's reign begins, Prospero warns them not to make the same mistakes that he has (252). Virahsawmy's version of *The Tempest* thus stays relatively faithful to Shakespeare's original but, in other respects, loosely adapts both text and context in order to comment on Mauritian society and the country's political history.

Virahsawmy's adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* also changes it from a tragicomedy to a comedy, a deliberate decision on the playwright's part since the genre of tragedy is not common in Mauritian theatrical culture (Virahsawmy quot. in Wilkinson 112). The characters in the play frequently refer on a meta level to their situation as being in a play written and directed by a playwright. In one scene, for instance, Prospero says to Kordelia, "You will understand. When it's finished. When the final curtain falls. Oh – it's too soon to explain now. It's like a play. I've written it, and now I'm directing it scene by scene. All the actors have to do is perform the way I want them to" (229). After King Lir has abdicated, Edmon becomes King at one stage and Poloniouss says to him, "Majesty – they're writing the script now. Best to play your part in the comedy" (240). Yago also voices at one point: "Whatever your viewpoint, this whole thing is turning into a farce. Can't you see that it's all somebody else's play?" (243). At the end of the play Aryel says to Kaspalto and Dammarro: "Don't worry. I'll talk to the boss I'll get him to write a new story. [...] Cast off, then!" (253). All these comments indicate that Virahsawmy is using his characters frequently to consciously comment on their role as characters within the play, or that the whole situation, as highlighted by Aryel, is simply "a phase to be passed through. We all have to emerge from it, and return to reality" (238). *Toufann* also inverts Prospero's rule as "lord" of the New World (5.1.162), and as puppet master and

manipulator of all the other characters. In *Toufann*, Kordelia's remarks cast a doubt over her father's powers: Whether he really has full control over the typhoon and whether he truly has scientific knowledge or is simply overestimating his powers is ambivalent.

In order to show the difference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and to make the play correspond to a Mauritian historical and cultural context, Virahsawmy inserts and introduces elements of Mauritian culture, language and places as well as political events that are known and important to Mauritians. There are numerous remarks in the play concerning people's rights, dignity and claims to power and knowledge. These comments are not specifically made against England or France as the former colonial powers but rather as a critique of the corruption and fraud, as well as forms of supremacy, fascism, dictatorship and despotism, that have plagued and continue to afflict various countries on the African continent today. The figure of autocracy or monarchy in *Toufann* is, naturally, Prospero. He reiterates throughout the play that he has absolute power and that "[i]t's better to have one central intelligence which controls everything" (232), as "the central brain is indestructible" (232). He thus alludes to the idea that knowledge is held by the economically and politically powerful. Aryel, echoing Prospero's thoughts in conversation with Ferdjinan, says, "Plans are made by the knowledgeable and the strong. The others just

have to go along with it” (236). Edmon and Yago’s greed for power becomes evident in the scene in which King Lir abdicates (234). According to Yago, “[i]t doesn’t matter if the country is nothing but a prison, hospital, asylum and cemetery. Power is all that counts!” (235). Hence, many of the characters in the play are variously obsessed with power and how to gain access to it.

Another, more humane, form of power and rule can be observed in the character of King Lir who, at one point, states: “we think that because we are strong or powerful we can do as we please” (239). He is the only character who gestures at power’s corrupting force if abused. At an earlier appearance in the play, he exclaims: “Power tends to corrupt, therefore give power to the people. Organise an election” (234). He directly mentions democracy as a crucial part of a fair and just life. Like King Lear in Shakespeare’s play, King Lir in *Toufann* learns the hard way how to be humane and recognises his mistakes which he reveals in conversation with Poloniouss: “We went along with Edmon and Yago in deposing Prospero. Poor man: heaven knows where he is now. [...] All day I’ve been thinking of Prospero and his child. [...] I’ve lost it all. My son, my kingdom, everything”; “[...] I’m a monster, Poloniouss” (239; 240). Poloniouss answers: “No, Majesty. You’re a human being; and like all human beings, you make mistakes. The sign of a good man is that he recognises the mistakes he’s made” (240). In this sequence, Virahsawmy

clearly draws on Aristotle's notion of "hamartia" (tragic flaw) and "anagnorisis" (recognition).

The character's comments on power and democracy grow more and more numerous and intense towards the end of the play. The climax comes in the scene where Ferdjinan pleads with Aryel for change and freedom, summing up what is needed to be done in order to topple the oppressive regime:

FERDJINAN: Your're paralysed because of what your conscience is doing to your soul. You're finding it impossible to act because the mistakes of the past are getting in the way of today's reasoning. But you have to understand that things have changed.

ARYEL: Ferdjinan.

FERDJINAN: Aryel, you're the one who made me see clearly. Prospero may have made you, but he hasn't been able to stop you having feelings. He can threaten you as much as he wants: today you are free. You're free because you have dared. We have to dare. (248)

Ferdjinan's last words, "We have to dare," allude to Virahsawmy's own convictions in his political campaigning for Mauritian Creole as the lingua franca in Mauritius. As the first writer to write an entire play in Mauritian Creole, his pioneering work in fighting for the establishment of Creole as a language of literature and daily use has been noted by critics.

Challenging the dominant perception of Creole as the language of slaves who tried to imitate their French masters, Virahsawmy supports the use of Creole as a means of claiming a native Mauritian identity that does not deny the political reality of the country's legacy of colonialism. Rather, in line with Édouard Glissant's notion of linguistic hybridity and a "poetics of relation[ality]", Virahsawmy acknowledges how Mauritian Creole has emerged out of French, English and indigenous languages. In an interview, Virahsawmy has expressed that Creole is the expression of the Mauritian people, speaking positively of its hybridity and métissage, "its vitality and capacity to adapt" and hence marker of "a supra-ethnic identity in a plural society" (*Le Week End*). Ferdjnan's "We have to dare" (248) expresses these ideas succinctly. When Kordelia says to Prospero, "What reality is left? [...] Dreams have to become realities, and realities dreams. [...] There's a new form of reality struggling to be born. You've got to accept it, Father" (251); this "new form of reality" of which she speaks is the Mauritian experience of cultural and linguistic métissage that Virahsawmy articulates throughout his play.

Although many of the allusions in *Toufann* are culturally and politically specific, and carry most resonance with a local Mauritian audience/reader, Virahsawmy nevertheless sees a merging of local concerns in the play with more universal issues that are fundamental to the situation of postco-

lonial societies. (Virahsawmy quot. in Wilkinson 114). Despite this, Virahsawmy's work is not well-known outside Mauritius; his readership remains largely within his own country. Nonetheless, Virahsawmy has been successful in using the theatre as a vehicle for communal regeneration and cultural awareness. In *Toufann*, Mauritian Creole becomes a creative language that transculturally bridges different historical languages. As Roshni Mooneeram summarizes,

“Toufann” is a Hindustani and Bhojpuri word for cyclone, a familiar natural occurrence in Mauritius. [...] Not only is Mauritian Bhojpuri increasingly influenced by the Creole language, but it also feeds back into Creole which has appropriated several of its lexical items. The word “Toufann” becoming itself text – manifold, diffuse – the title starts an intertextual argument that situates the play within a specific history and society. (18)

Importantly, Virahsawmy does not exclude the colonial circumstances under which Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was introduced to Mauritians by the British – which was mainly to educate the upper class and elite, or those who already knew or had been taught English. *Toufann* in the Mauritian Creole version thus breaks the boundaries between the well-off and educated Mauritians and those less educated who are capable of understanding Creole only. Virahsawmy thus deliberately uses Creole to spread awareness of Shakespeare and his works

but not the imperialist ideologies that had primarily been transported with Shakespeare during the period of British colonisation in Mauritius. Therefore, instead of focusing on a single model, “*Toufann* adopts a broader heteroglossic strategy, transposing across one or several systems of signs, creatively adapting from more than one tradition, more than one type of text” (Mooneeram 18). This transcultural mode of writing thus adopts, adapts and translates Shakespeare into Mauritian Creole in order to, first, demonstrate how “high culture” (Shakespearean drama) can be rendered in a supposedly ‘low’ or ‘inferior’ linguistic system, and, second, to articulate a new political agenda of cultural and linguistic métissage. When asked why he originally decided to translate/adapt Shakespeare, Virahsawmy answers:

I have translated different works into Mauritian Creole for several reasons. To show that Mauritian Creole is capable of expressing “great thoughts.” To build bridges between cultures. To indicate that the establishment of Mauritian Creole as national language does not mean cultural autarky. (Virahsawmy quot. in Wilkinson 111)

Virahsawmy’s *Toufann* is thus less a “writing back rewrite” of Shakespeare than a transcultural “individual rewrite.” This does not mean that political issues are not addressed at all in the play, or that because it is a comedy, it does not offer a serious

critique of Mauritian society. On the contrary, the political content and references in the play are particularly resonant within a contemporary Mauritian context and are expressed in the various viewpoints of the characters. Interestingly, the translation of the comedy back into an English version, which grants a “Western” audience access to the play, reverses the process that many African writers and translators of Shakespeare during the 1960s, such as Thomas Decker or Julius Nyerere, were engaged in. In *Toufann*, Virahsawmy thus addresses the plurality and hybridity of Mauritian society which is a result of complex histories of colonisation and de-colonial efforts to critique and redress these histories of epistemic violence, elision, suppression and marginalisation. Virahsawmy’s transcultural mode of Shakespearean adaptation in Mauritian Creole thus allows the formerly colonised to speak a new language characterised by métissage, one with which he becomes the coloniser’s rival in literary sophistication. The play demonstrates how, in spite, or perhaps because, of the contemporary era of globalisation, with English as the dominant medium of communication and lingua franca, languages such as Mauritian Creole play an ever more vital role in the formation of a distinct linguistic, cultural and historical awareness in postcolonial societies around the globe.

Toufann, Dev Virahsawmy’s adaptation of Shakespeare thus illustrates, as Kwok-kan Tam, Andrew

Parkin and Terry Siu-han Yip summarize, how Shakespeare's plays provide many postcolonial writers with "valuable opportunities to exercise their imagination in the transcultural contexts of experimenting with a Western form that can be adapted for local appreciation, which at the same time will add a new dimension to the world reception of Shakespeare" (Tam, Parkin, and Siu-han Yip, ix). Moreover, as a transcultural Shakespeare adaptation, *Toufann* is formally characterised by linguistic and cultural hybridity as well as syncretism. As a revision of four popular plays written by the icon of the British literary canon, it represents a counter-narrative that seeks to redress and re-configure historical and contemporary power structures and imbalances.

From the first appearance of Shakespeare's plays on stage, there have evidently been countless adaptations of his works. However, postcolonial and transcultural rewrites remain a distinct sub-category of adaptations because they offer a means to formerly subjugated, colonised and marginalised voices and cultures to rework and re-inscribe the dominant narratives of Western modernity (especially with respect to the binary concepts of colonised/coloniser, margin/centre, servant/master, them/us) as well as critically interrogate the concepts of class/caste, gender and race. It is this process, and not merely product, of transcultural adaptation, that involves the interaction and conflict of socio-cultural, political and historical forc-

es with “relations of continuity, discontinuity and hybridization” (Walter 27) that gives rise to the “literary surplus” value and the criss-crossing, that is the intertextual references and incorporation of different texts in Shakespeare adaptations in and from a postcolonial context which lead to the creation of new literary genres. *Toufann* definitely is a comedy which falls into this category by hybridizing Shakespeare’s dramatis personae in order to produce a counter-discourse (Gilbert and Tompkins 33) – to Western conceptions of “otherness,” but also to dominant discourses around contemporary Mauritian socio-cultural and political issues.

Notes

1. *Toufann*, or *A Mauritian Fantasy* was published in an English translation by Michael and Nisha Walling in Banham, Gibbs, and Osofisan (217-254). *Toufann* was performed by Border Crossings, an international company that works in theatre and creates dynamic performances by fusing many forms of world theatre, dance and music. The company perceives itself as “work[ing] across the borders between cultures and art forms, and between nations and peoples, and has gained a wide audience in many places, such as the UK, Brazil, Egypt France, Hungary, India, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and the Seychelles” (*Border Crossings* 2002). *Toufann*, or *A Mauritian Fantasy*, along with others based on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, was also the subject of a conference at London University’s Birkbeck College in December 1999.

2. His dissertation, “Towards a Revaluation of Mauritian Creole”, focuses on a theme that subsequently influenced all his ensuing work.

3. For a brief discussion of Decker’s translation of *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It* (*Udat Di Kiap Fit*) into Krio, see Banham and Jones 121-136. For a discussion of examples of staging Shakespeare in Ghana, Malawi and Eritrea see Gibbs and Matzke (15-34).

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Appropriation of Shakespeare's Plays in the Postcolonial World: The Case of Malawian Education

Innocent Akilimale Ngulube

ABSTRACT:

This paper seeks to examine why the postcolonial world perennially appropriates William Shakespeare's plays instead of decolonizing them as purveyors of British colonialism and possibly of British neocolonialism now. In this regard, the paper uses Malawi as a case study which is a landlocked country located in South Eastern Africa bordered by Tanzania to the North, Zambia to the North West, and Mozambique to the South East and West. In particular, the paper argues that the Malawian education system appropriates Shakespeare's plays because of their timeless and universal applicability. This appropriation is illustrated by the commanding presence of Shakespeare's plays in English syllabus at both secondary school and university levels. Thus, in order to account for this continued appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in Malawian English syllabus, more specifi-

cally the study of *Literature in English*, the paper employs neoclassical literary criticism with a leaning on Samuel Johnson's treatise on Shakespeare's universality and postcolonial justifications for such universality. The paper starts by foregrounding the colonial use of Shakespeare's plays and its attendant critique. The paper then explores neoclassical and postcolonial justifications for the universal appropriation of Shakespeare's plays before putting the Malawian English syllabus into context. Finally, the paper teases out socio-political ramifications of appropriating Shakespeare's plays in Malawian education since the attainment of independence in 1964.

Keywords: appropriation, William Shakespeare, decolonization, postcolonial world, universality

Introduction

This essay examines the appropriation of William Shakespeare's plays in the postcolonial world. Appropriation, according to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, "describes the ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture...that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities" (15). Thus, the essay seeks to interrogate why postcolonial societies perennially appropriate Shakespeare's plays when these plays are not only anachronisms but also vestiges of British colonialism. The essay argues that postcolonial so-

cities perennially appropriate Shakespeare's plays because of their timeless and universal applicability, particularly in terms of themes and characters.

The significance of Shakespeare's plays is that they are not so much objects of popular culture as they constitute core texts in most postcolonial English syllabi. It is against this backdrop that this essay employs a case-study methodology which examines the continuous appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in Malawian English syllabus. To this end, the essay will examine pedagogical objectives behind the appropriation of Shakespeare's plays at secondary school level and university level. At secondary school level, the essay will examine the successive appropriations of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet* while at university level the essay will examine the appropriation of *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* in the Department of English at Chancellor College, the largest constituent college of the University of Malawi.

Shakespeare's Plays and British Colonialism

The perennial appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in the postcolonial world cannot be meaningfully examined outside the context of British colonialism because these plays and British colonialism emerged coincidentally. Indeed, Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin reveal that "Shakespeare lived and

wrote at a time when English mercantile and colonial enterprises were just germinating” (1). Again, Michael Dobson reveals that after Shakespeare’s death in 1616, his promotion “as both symbol and exemplar of British national identity which began in earnest with the Patriots in the 1730s...reached its climax at Garrick’s¹ Jubilee in 1769” (185). This fateful intertwining of Shakespeare’s life and death with British national identity explains why the colonial machinery readily found his plays handy not only for economic profiteering but also for imposition of British culture on colonized subjects. In fact, Loomba and Orkin further reveal that “colonial masters imposed their value system through Shakespeare” (7). More importantly, Loomba and Orkin locate the imposition of colonial values through Shakespeare in education and administration as follows:

...colonial educationists and administrators used Shakespeare to reinforce cultural and racial hierarchies. Shakespeare was made to perform such ideological work both by interpreting his plays in highly conservative ways (so that they were seen as endorsing existing racial, gender and other hierarchies, never as questioning or destabilizing them) and by constructing him as one of the best, if not ‘the best’ writer in the whole world (1).

This revelation highlights the deliberate abuse of Shakespeare’s plays on the one hand and the sub-

terfuge of dominating colonized peoples through an opportunistic valorization of Shakespeare's genius on the other hand. However, by using Shakespeare's plays and his lionized renown to impose colonial culture over colonized cultures, the British establishment exhibited what Jacques Derrida describes as logocentrism and metaphysics of presence which denote "the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for a [transcendental] signified" (49). In other words, the reinforcement of cultural and racial hierarchies through Shakespeare's plays manifested a systematic and irrepressible desire to subsume colonized cultures under British culture which supposedly dwarfed and surpassed them all as illustrated in the violent hierarchy of British culture over colonized cultures.

In the introduction to *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*, Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia give credence to such damning revelations of Shakespeare's colonial abuse. In it, Dionne and Kapadia acknowledge that Shakespeare "was ceremoniously installed by Garrick in 1769 as the national poet of England and his work...taught and performed thereafter in England and her colonies as the unifying art of a civilizing culture" (2). However, that British colonialism was a civilizing mission in disguise is an unpalatable yet inescapable truism since the use of Shakespeare's plays as cover-ups only exposed the entire colonial sleight of hand. Revealingly therefore, John Elsom acknowledges that "Shakespeare

is home to those who want to sink their teeth into the very meat of British culture” (2). That is to say, apart from other purveyors of British colonialism, Shakespeare’s plays most efficaciously facilitated the internalization of British culture to its core.

At any rate, the colonial abuse of Shakespeare’s plays complicates their appropriation. This is because the process of appropriation itself is deceptively double-edged. Thomas Cartelli affirms that appropriation “is not the one-way street some might like it to be; even self-constituted...linguistic or cultural usurpation may be sucked into the vortex of Shakespearean unconscious and made subject to a colonization of the mind” (17). In other words, the appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays is by no means a seamless process as it is fraught with the veiled risk of having the appropriator’s mind subliminally colonized or neo-colonized. That is to say, without realizing it, the appropriator of Shakespeare’s plays runs the risk of perpetuating British neocolonialism as an offshoot of British colonialism.

African Critique of Shakespeare’s Plays as Purveyors of British Colonialism

The enduring potential of abusing Shakespeare’s plays for British hegemonic ends continues to attract appropriation debates across intellectual echelons. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia confirm that “There has been, in the last 10 years, an explo-

sion of critical interest in the way Shakespeare has been made to accommodate local cultures across the globe” (5). In Africa, particularly, this explosion of critical interest focuses on the promulgation of British culture through Shakespeare’s centrality in colonial education.

Perhaps the most tenacious African critics of the promulgation of British culture through Shakespeare’s centrality in colonial education are the Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah. In his book entitled *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi posits that Shakespeare’s “greatness was presented as one more English gift to the world alongside the *Bible* and... had brought light to darkest Africa” (91). In other words, British colonialists sought to convince colonized Africans that the imposition of Shakespeare and the *Bible* on their cultures was a philanthropic favor. This process of trying to dominate others through their consent is called hegemony which according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin involves “the power of the ruling classes to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all” (106). Suffice it to say that the imposition of Shakespeare and the *Holy Bible* on African cultures was a hegemonic attempt whose success depended on exacting consent thereof.

Needless to say, the success of colonial hegemony found expression in the consent of Africans to

adopt British syllabus in which Shakespeare held sway. Ngugi points out that “English studies in schools and higher institutions of learning became systematized after the Second World War... and with very few variations they offered what also obtained in London” (90). In principle, the systematization of English studies and its eventual institutionalization across the British colonial empire illustrates the consent of colonized peoples to be dominated culturally. It is not surprising therefore that Ngugi elaborates that “The syllabus of the English Department...meant a study of the history of English literature from Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton to James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards and the inevitable F. R. Leavis” (90). In short, the consent of Africans to study the history of English Literature rather than to study the history of their own indigenous literatures perpetuated cultural brainwashing which was at the heart of British colonialism.

In effect, Ngugi draws on his own secondary school experience in Kenya and on Malawian pedagogical policy soon after independence as microcosms of British hegemony. With the wisdom of hindsight, Ngugi recalls that “in Alliance High School, which I attended, Shakespeare, like the Speech Day, was an annual event” (38). Admittedly, the equating of the Speech Day with the staging of a Shakespeare’s play as annual events implies that British politics and education were two sides of the same hegemonic coin. The overall effect of conflating

politics with Shakespeare's plays was an insidious erosion of Kenyan traditional values from the vulnerable minds of future native intellectuals.

Ngugi perceives a similar tendency in Malawian education under the first president, Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who, incidentally, was a British-trained medical doctor. Ngugi notes that "in Malawi, Banda has erected his own monument by way of an institution, The Kamuzu Academy, designed to aid the brightest pupils of Malawi in their mastery of English" (19). Like the Kenyan scenario, the real motive behind the mastery of English was to inculcate British values in Malawian future leaders at the expense of their indigenous values. As if the erection of Kamuzu Academy was not treacherous enough, Dr. Banda proceeded to propagate inferiority complex among Malawians as Ngugi (1986) further notes that "For good measure no Malawian is allowed to teach at the academy – none is good enough – and all the teaching staff has been recruited from Britain" (19). At any rate, Ngugi's critique of British colonial education hinges on the accusation that it induced alienation from and inferiority complex in African indigenous values which rendered colonial subjects servile and hence ripe for political and economic exploitation.

Like Ngugi, Ayi Kwei Armah problematizes the degrading effects of British colonial education on African indigenous values by making recourse to his secondary school days at Achimota. In his memoirs

called *The Eloquence of the Scribes*, Armah recalls that “When I got to secondary school...I entered a learning world in which practically everything I did in the classroom was planned to pull my mind steadily away from the narratives and realities I knew from home, toward a different kind of narrative, made in Europe” (41). Armah’s recollection encapsulates that colonial education was quintessentially tailored to entrench Eurocentric worldviews by systematically repressing African worldviews. No wonder, Armah discloses that “The educational policies they instituted were in keeping with...socialis[ing] generations of African children [to] identify with European values, in the practical sense of seeing philosophy as European philosophy, history as European history, literature as European literature” (44). It is against this background of westernizing Africans through colonial education that Shakespeare was abused as a conduit for Eurocentric values.

Nevertheless, the iconoclasm against Eurocentric values as demonstrated by Ngugi and Armah points to decolonization efforts being made in Africa. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define decolonization as “the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms...includ[ing] hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved” (56). It follows that Ngugi and Armah epitomize the revolutionary crusade of revealing

and dismantling British hegemony through education via Shakespeare's plays as institutional and cultural forces that still remain in African postcolonial societies.

Justification for Apolitical Universality of Shakespeare's Plays

The perennial appropriation of Shakespeare in African postcolonial societies makes one wonder as to what is in the Bard's plays for these societies to compromise decolonization efforts. Indeed, what is so special about Shakespeare's plays that the entire postcolonial world naturally relates to them in spite of their British hegemonic repute?

The quest for the apolitical relevance of Shakespeare's plays began in the neoclassical period. According to M.A.R. Habib, Samuel Johnson stands out as a neoclassical critic whose "famous preface to, and edition of, Shakespeare's plays played a large part in establishing Shakespeare's reputation" (302). That is to say, for one to understand why the African postcolonial community relates to Shakespeare's plays at the apolitical level, one has to start the search for definitive answers in Samuel Johnson's preface as a bastion of Shakespeare's reputation.

For Johnson, Shakespeare appeals to humanity beyond any racial creed and strictures because his plays convey universal themes, events and char-

acters. In fact, Johnson holds that Shakespeare is “the poet of nature: the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life” (305). What Johnson implies is that by faithfully reflecting the fundamentals of human nature, Shakespeare transcends racial boundaries and is therefore rightfully rendered universal. Moreover, Johnson adds that Shakespeare’s characters are “the genuine progeny of common humanity [who] act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated” (305). Thus, Shakespeare’s works form a universal nexus of humanity that withstands the test of time from generation to generation.

More importantly, different scholars across generations agree with Johnson’s seminal justification for Shakespeare’s universality. For example, in a book called *Is Shakespeare Still our Contemporary?* John Elsom answers the title question by referring to “German critics [who] had talked about the immortality of Shakespeare, his eloquent handling of fundamental human themes which are supposed to change little from age to age” (1). In other words, the fact that themes in Shakespeare’s plays have remained relevant to humanity over the ages proves that the Bard is still our contemporary — in keeping with Friedrich Nietzsche’s prophetic opinion that “Some are born posthumously” (3). As such, the immortality of Shakespeare’s genius suggests that his plays can be appropriated to cast light on human vicissitudes through time and space.

Even postcolonial critics acknowledge the immortality of Shakespeare's relevance to the human condition. Like John Elsom, Ania Loomba underscores the fact that Shakespeare's plays stand the test of time because they address issues that span human history. In an introduction to the book called *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Loomba argues that Shakespeare's plays "form a bridge between the past and us: even as we read in them stories of a bygone world, we also continually re-interpret these stories to make sense of our own worlds" (4-5). In other words, the fact that Shakespeare's plays connect the past and the present of human existence demonstrates that they are universally relevant to the understanding of the human condition across time and space.

It is this universal relevance of Shakespeare to the human condition that cues in the global appropriation of his plays. To this end, Dionne and Kapadia insist that "Shakespeare's plays are the perfect texts for...appropriation since his works...have been historically constructed as the author of pluralism, and not only as the icon of British hegemony or the poet of a fading traditionalism" (2). That is to say, notwithstanding their unwitting alignment with British hegemony or their anachronistic status, Shakespeare's plays are perfect for appropriation essentially because they embody common contours of human coexistence.

Likewise, Thomas Cartelli exonerates Shakespeare's plays from the incriminating association with British hegemony by emphasizing the bard's universality. In his book called *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations*, Cartelli underlines that "A decolonized or decommissioned Shakespeare, freed from his service to imperial interests...could presumably be remobilized to address ancillary concerns about social...redefinition" (170). In other words, the decolonization of Shakespeare guarantees the utilization of his plays as global properties for social redefinition rather than private properties for hegemonic machinations.

Generally, the abuse of Shakespeare's plays for hegemonic machinations prompted three major responses from colonial subjects and, by extension, from postcolonial subjects. Loomba and Orkin observe that,

Intellectuals and artists from the colonized world responded to such a Shakespeare in a variety of ways: sometimes they mimicked their colonial masters and echoed their praise of Shakespeare; at other times they challenged the cultural authority of both Shakespeare and colonial regimes by turning to their own bards as sources of alternative wisdom and beauty. In yet other instances, they appropriated Shakespeare as their comrade in anti-colonial arms by offering new interpretations and adaptations of his works (2).

This observation intimates the fact that Shakespeare has been a vortex of cultural contention between British culture and colonized cultures. Apart from blind mimicking of Shakespeare's valorization, the last two responses complement each other to form the bedrock of resistance against British hegemony. That is, by turning to indigenous bards as sources of alternative wisdom and beauty, the second response undermines the strategic valorization of Shakespeare as the alpha male of literature across the world. On the other hand, by adapting Shakespeare as a vehicle for counteracting colonial values, the second response exposes the tactical abuse of Shakespeare and hence affirms the universal nature of the bard's plays. On the whole, then, both responses depict Shakespeare as a unifying figure whose plays resonate with the world at large and not as a divisive figure as constructed by colonial masters and a coterie of their successors.

The universal resonance of Shakespeare's plays demonstrates why they are appropriated to refute British hegemony even in the present neocolonial era. Dionne and Kapadia affirm that,

Today, reconstructions and revisions of Shakespeare's works continue as the plays are co-opted by postcolonial and minority cultures, further shattering the notion of the universalist interpretation that privileges Western experience as primary. As such, Shakespeare's plays

can no longer signify an exclusively British, or even Western, identity; instead, they function as sites of contest reflecting a manifold of cultures (6).

This affirmation shows that Shakespeare's plays form a liminal or interstitial or in-between space between postcolonial cultures and Western cultures. Such space, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, is a "transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (117). This transcultural flux explains why Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin underscore that "identification is never simply a movement from one identity to another, it is a constant process of engagement, contestation and appropriation" (117). In other words, identification is inherently fluid in that different cultures constantly borrow from each other thereby engaging in cultural contests, so to speak. To this effect, Homi Bhabha further affirms that "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4). It is within this possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy that the constant appropriation of Shakespeare's plays can be located.

However, the constant appropriation of Shakespeare's plays for hegemonic purposes continues to render them into ideological battlefields between the Western world and the postcolonial world. Indeed, Ato Quayson concedes that Shakespeare is "appropriated to bolster up ideological positions on both the right and the left and provided means of self-identification in both the West and the postcolonial world" (158). Thus, the Western world appropriates Shakespeare's plays to dominate the postcolonial world while the postcolonial world appropriate Shakespeare's plays to undermine Western domination and assert their cultural difference. Dionne and Kapadia empathize with the postcolonial position that "For those who live the effects of British colonialism, what better to steal than the very words, figures, and plots of the bard?" (3). Put succinctly, this rhetorical question captures the use of Shakespeare as an antidote to British hegemony which the bard has posthumously been forced to bear.

Similarly, Loomba and Orkin view Shakespeare's plays more as contested loci of cultural hybridity than carriers of hegemony. Actually, Loomba and Orkin elucidate that "Shakespeare's plays overlap with post-colonial concerns...[and] provid[e] the language for expressing racial difference and human sameness as well as colonial hybridities" (10). In other words, by providing the language for expressing racial difference and as well as human sameness, Shakespeare's plays act as a nexus of

cultural coexistence that is rooted in common hybridity. Unsurprisingly, Loomba and Orkin maintain that,

The study of Shakespeare made [the colonized] hybrid subjects [and] many post-colonial critics regard the hybridity of colonial and postcolonial subjects as a potentially radical state, one that enables such subjects to elude, or even subvert the binaries, oppositions and rigid demarcations imposed by colonial discourses (7).

Clearly, the hybridity of colonial and postcolonial subjects emanating from the study of Shakespeare's plays underpins their efforts to subvert colonial discourses which are essentially vectors of British hegemony. Michel Foucault defines discourse as "a group of statements ...belong[ing] to the same discursive formation...for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined" (131). What Foucault means is that to set up a group of statements and a group of conditions for their existence is to possess the power to determine truth and falsity within a specific discursive context. As such, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin add that discourse becomes "a system of statements...by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges... and values upon dominated groups" (37). It stands to reason that in the colonial set-up, British colonialists formed the dominant group which tried to

impose its values on the colonized as the dominant group through opportunistic interpretation of Shakespeare's plays.

However, the pedagogical appropriation of Shakespeare's plays by colonial and postcolonial subjects do not so much subvert hegemonic discourse as manifest the Bard's universality. In a chapter aptly called "Parables from the Canon: Postcolonizing Shakespeare" from his book entitled *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* Ato Quayson acknowledges that "Through educational curricula all over the world, Shakespeare has demonstrably become international cultural property without equal. Individuals everywhere turn to Shakespeare for images by which to interpret personal and social realities" (159). In other words, education has been the channel through which postcolonial subjects appropriate Shakespeare's universality to interpret their personal and social realities.

Appropriation of Shakespeare's Plays in Malawian English Syllabus

According to Thomas Cartelli, there are five ways of appropriating Shakespeare's plays namely: satiric, confrontational, transpositional, proprietary, and dialogic. Specifically, Cartelli claims that satiric appropriation "tend[s] deliberately to fracture and fragment an array of Shakespearean texts, unmooring them from their established contexts and reassembling them in ways that render them

absurd” (17). Satiric appropriation bears strong resemblance to confrontational appropriation because the latter “contests the ascribed meaning or prevailing function of a Shakespearean text in the interests of an opposing or alternative social or political agenda” (17). As for transpositional appropriation, Cartelli opines that it “isolates a specific theme, plot or argument in its appropriative objective and brings it into its own, arguably analogous, interpretive field to underwrite or enrich a presumably related thesis or argument” (17). Similar to transpositional appropriation is proprietary appropriation which as Cartelli puts it, “involves the application and elaboration of an avowed friendly or reverential reading of appropriated material” (18). Finally, Cartelli describes dialogic appropriation as “the careful integration into a work of allusions, identifications, and quotations that complicate, thicken and qualify that work’s primary narrative line to the extent that each partner to the transaction may be said to enter into the other’s frame of reference” (18).

In the Malawian context, the education system has been employing transpositional and proprietary appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays. As Cartelli observes it, “appropriation, particularly in its proprietary mode, has been the favored practice of parties devoted to the nationalization, domestication, naturalization, and institutionalization of Shakespeare” (18). Thus, the Malawi Government, through the Ministry of Education, Science

and Technology has since independence not only isolated analogous themes, plots or arguments of Shakespeare's plays to enrich axiological sensibility of Malawians but has also reverentially applied Shakespeare's plays to local socio-political realities as illustrated by English syllabi at both secondary school and tertiary levels.

At secondary school level, the appropriation leans towards Shakespeare's tragedies save for *The Merchant of Venice* which was the first to be incorporated into the secondary school syllabus. However, one could surmise that *The Merchant of Venice* was appropriated to foreground themes of race, religion and commerce. Ania Loomba asserts that *The Merchant of Venice* "offers yet another perspective on race, being the only play in which Shakespeare brings together issues of commerce with those of race, and also the only play in which he focuses on the Jewish difference" (20). Unsurprisingly, *The Merchant of Venice* was thematically apt considering that Malawi had just won independence from Britain in 1964 and was in the process of building its national image in terms of racial, commercial and religious relations with fellow African countries and the rest of the world.

After *The Merchant of Venice*, however, The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has been rotating Shakespeare's tragedies in the English syllabus for secondary education after a specific number of years. The first tragedy to be

appropriated was apparently *Macbeth* which was followed by *The Merchant of Venice*, then *Macbeth* again, then *Julius Caesar* and now *Romeo and Juliet*. This chronology shows that while other Malawian and European literary texts come and go in and out of the secondary school English syllabus, Shakespeare's plays have remained the core texts over the years and will probably remain so in years to come.

Likewise, at the tertiary level, Shakespeare's plays form core texts in faculties of Humanities; instructively so in the English Department at University of Malawi, Chancellor College. The major difference between Shakespeare's tragedies at secondary school level and university level is that at university level there is not only a wide coverage of Shakespeare's tragedies but also advanced analysis. For example, at Chancellor College, Shakespeare's tragedies (*Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) are covered under the core course eponymously called Shakespeare (ENG 411). Interestingly, this course is offered at fourth year and is compulsory for both English majors and minors and strategically tailored for students who are currently trained to teach *Romeo and Juliet* at secondary school after completing their university education.

The question, however, is why are Shakespeare's tragedies accorded core status when other Malawian and European texts are accorded optional status

to the effect that they can be opted in and out of the English syllabus at both secondary and university levels? The first reason as earlier noted is that the appropriation of Shakespeare's plays represents the institutionalization of the British education legacy. Dionne and Kapadia emphasize that "As privileged texts that were taught as models of British history and experience, Shakespeare's plays appeared in many native translations, adaptations, and performance contexts" (6). It is not surprising therefore that Malawi as a former colony of the British Empire appropriates the canon in the spirit of preserving the colonial education tradition.

The second reason can be attributed to the universality of Shakespeare's themes, characters and plots. Thus, the Malawian education system is obliged to appropriate Shakespeare's plays because their themes, characters and plots can be related to the indigenous milieu. For example, political themes conveyed by plays like *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* at the secondary school level correspond to the second national goal of education in the Malawi Senior Secondary Teaching Syllabus for Literature in English which first aims to "inculcate acceptable moral and ethical behavior" (iv) under the key theme of "good governance and democracy, human rights, politics" (ix). In fact, Tracy Irish accounts for this enduring transpositional and proprietary appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in English syllabi across the globe by stating that:

...while knowledge of Shakespeare may well have roots in our colonial past, the level of adoption, adaptation and interrogation of Shakespeare in performance in almost every world language seems to owe more to his ability to raise questions about human ideas, beliefs and social regimes common to us all (5).

In other words, Irish suggests that the fact that Shakespeare's plays strike a chord with human ideas, beliefs and social regimes beyond racial boundaries exonerates his plays from their unwarranted complicity with colonial hegemony. Indeed, for Irish, the level of transpositional and proprietary appropriation, adaptation and interrogation of Shakespeare's plays far outweighs their dabbling in British colonial hegemony.

The final reason for the continued appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in the Malawian English syllabuses is again intimated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in the Senior Secondary Teaching Syllabus for Literature in English. The second aim of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology under the second national goal of education is to "develop in the learner an appreciation of one's culture and respect for other people's cultures" (iv). To this end, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology recommends the use of "African and the world plays and a collection of Malawian plays (where possible, priority should be given to Ma-

lawian works)” (ix). Thus, by recommending the concurrent learning of African, global and Malawian plays, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology hopes to cultivate a global image in the learner. As the Principal Secretary Responsible for Basic and Secondary Education, Anjimile Mtila Oponyo, reiterates, “secondary education is critical as it provides additional knowledge, skills, values and attitudes crucial for enabling Malawians to cope with the complex and sophisticated socio-economic and political environment of the global village to which Malawi belongs” (v). In other words, by studying Shakespeare, Malawians access universal values that are indispensable to meaningful participation in globalization.

However, although this trio of reasons justifies why it has been necessary for Malawian education system to appropriate Shakespeare’s plays, it does not escape the pitfalls of appropriation.

Indeed, the appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays in Malawian education can be viewed as a catalyst for British neocolonial hegemony based on two side effects. The first side effect is the marginalization of local playwrights in the English syllabus especially at secondary school level. Of course, Chancellor College offers Malawian Literature which covers some Malawian playwrights but the fact that Malawian plays are not given priority as stipulated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology makes Shakespeare eclipse local play-

wrights, thereby steadily encouraging an insidious erosion of intellectual respect for local literature altogether.

The second side effect is the fomentation of identity crisis which directly follows from years of English conditioning. As Loomba and Orkin state that Shakespeare “became, during the colonial period the quintessence of Englishness and a measure of humanity itself. Thus the meanings of Shakespeare’s plays were both derived from and used to establish colonial authority” (1). Given that colonial authority has given way to neocolonial authority, it is little wonder that the corollary of insidiously imposing Shakespeare as the quintessence of Englishness and a measure of humanity today is the subtle entrenchment of inferiority complex in generations of Malawian students who unsuspectingly view themselves in the eyes of Englishness as illustrated by the nation-wide aping of anything Western.

Conclusion

The undeniable fact that we are living in a global village – with all its contradictions and imperfections – renders the advancement of universal values not only necessary but also inevitable. Thus, what is universally beneficial to human coexistence must be shared beyond superficial differences of race and creed. Thus, although Shakespeare is British by nationality and that he was variously

exploited by British colonialism, his plays belong to the world at large because they inherently and apolitically deal with global values and education, especially since the study of literature, is the most effective way of inculcating these global values across different generations. Even though there are still potential neo-colonial pitfalls into which the study of Shakespeare may tumble, there are enough alternate avenues which his texts illuminatingly explore. It is this inexhaustible plurality that perhaps still ensures his popularity. Indeed, it is not surprising that even after his death in 1616 Shakespeare's plays still hold sway over the world today as a befitting global cultural property.

Notes

1. David Garrick was an English actor and theatre manager who was the foremost Shakespearean of his day who lived between 1717 and 1779.

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Rewriting The Tempest, George Lamming's Water with Berries

Lamia Zaibi

ABSTRACT:

George Lamming's Water with Berries (1971) is representative of resistance works that proliferated in the 1970s. Lamming's preoccupations were defined and honed in the context of the anti-colonial movement of the 1950s, and while his vision is more sharpened and complicated in his later works, one can argue that Water with Berries, simply extends the themes developed in his earlier work. It is representative of post-colonial narratives that attempted at reworking Shakespeare's The Tempest, thus marking the endeavor of post-colonial writers to retaliate and write back...

As a re-writing of The Tempest and a reworking of the Myth of Caliban and Prospero, Water with Berries is illustrative of textual resistance, in relation to a canonical text. Lamming's attempt to retaliate against dominant discourses by inverting roles and imposing other meanings as seen from

the vantage point of the colonial subject is much in concordance with a rising interest in the play incorporated in the cultural forces against colonialism which was in full swing in the 1950s.

This essay is an attempt at showing how George Lamming uses the Caliban- Prospero model as a paradigm of resistance in view of recapturing their own cultural heritage and show that it has its own internal validity and ethos.

Keywords: resistance, culture, post-colonial studies, paradigm, language

Introduction

The construction of national culture was a major concern of the Caribbean writers of the 1930s and 1940s. The quest for the creation of a national culture and a distinct Caribbean identity knew its apogee in the burgeoning literature of the 1950s, a period marked by a great wave of migration to London, which intensified the exiled writers' sense of 'West Indianness' and their contribution in the project of forging a 'nation' and building national identity. Caribbean works of art were thus engaged in the project of national consolidation and national liberation, emphasising the centrality of culture in the nationalist project. The "native intellectual", Fanon states, "should be engaged in the search for the truths of a nation [which] are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has

found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge” (224).

Fanon’s stance on the role of the intelligentsia underscores that narratives are liberating; a means whereby culture is recovered and national consciousness forged. This is achieved not only through the return to the past but also through the representation and interrogation of the ‘colonial drama’. As such, the Caribbean novel is engaged in the production and construction of the nation as “an imagined community”, a key concept in Benedict Anderson’s understanding of the nation:

The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow- members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. (6)

Anderson’s model of nationalism is based on the premise that nation formation is related to the emergence of “print capitalism”, which led to the spread of common ideas and a standard language, thus creating a shared culture. However, Anderson’s model has been challenged by many Post-colonial critics such as Partha Chatterjee whose main premise runs counter to Anderson’s argument that anti-colonial nationalism is a ‘derivative discourse’ built on a mere imitation of the coloniser’s lan-

guage and ideas (qtd. in Loomba 189). Conversely, Chatterjee contends that nationalism among the colonised, emerging out of the struggle against colonialism, is centred on the assertion and articulation of difference achieved through the valuation of its own culture (Chatterjee 6).

Cultural Resistance is hence articulated around the assertion of difference. Many Caribbean writers and critics, such as George Lamming, Kamau Brathwaite, Sylvia Wynter, Aimé Césaire, and Edouard Glissant have shown that language, religion, place and history have become unifying paradigms. The reworking of these paradigms is part of Caribbean poetics organised on the construction of identity, at the centre of the process of cultural resistance.

Central to the issues of subjectivity and agency are the use of the English language to retaliate against Western Eurocentric discourses. The concomitant appropriation and transformation of the English language is aimed at dismantling the Eurocentric discourse's organizing principles and totalizing 'truths' which construct identity around, among other things, the overlapping issues of race, gender and class.

In their endeavour to retaliate against dominant Eurocentric discourses, many Caribbean writers resorted to rewriting canonical texts such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The reworking of the

play marks the endeavor on the part of Caribbean writers and critics to challenge the dominant entities and reiterate the call for decolonization. Using a canonical text, like *The Tempest*, is a strategy of resistance aimed at demystifying the power dynamic on which colonialism is based.

Within the category of Caribbean writers who took up *The Tempest*, one can cite Fernandez Retamar, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Aimé Césaire. The different reworkings of the play followed the same course of endowing Caliban with a retaliating power, thus illustrating the culture of resistance, yet again. Caliban is indeed elevated to a heroic figure capable of imposing his will over his master, therefore empowered to make history.

In the different rewritings of *The Tempest*, Caliban was endowed with a symbolic dimension. He stands for the Caribbean man caught in a situation of utter dispossession not only of his power to act but of his right to speak. Caliban has hence become a model for post-colonial writers engaged in anti-colonial narratives that seek to dismantle master narratives and imperial discourses based on what Abdul Jan Mohamed calls the 'Manichean allegory' which works through negative representations and a process of 'othering the other'(109).

It is in this context that Lamming's reworking of *The Tempest* should be located. In an attempt to

debunk the myth generated by colonial conquest, Lamming gives the stage to Caliban — through the figure of Teeton, Roger and Dereck, three migrants from different origins — and confers on them the power to speak and change the course of history through different rebellious actions.

By exploring the relationship between the different characters, this paper argues that Lamming uses the Prospero- Caliban model as a paradigm of resistance. It aims to show that by reworking this paradigm, Lamming reenacts the ‘colonial drama’ at the heart of colonial power to explore the predicament of exile of West Indians in the post-independence era caught in the legacy of the colonial myth and the traumas of the past. The encounter between the descendants of Prospero and the descendants of Caliban ends up generating a spiral of violence conditioned by the traumas of the past, thus reiterating the curse of the encounter between both races.

The Poetics of Protest

The Tempest is centred on the dynamics of the master-slave relationship and the way the process of enslavement and entrapment of Caliban is carried out through language. Caliban is determined and constructed by the language of Prospero. Prospero’s words determine and fix the image of Caliban who is situated in and produced by the dominant language of Prospero. The latter achieves full

control over the former not only through imposing his language and all the values it carries but also through Caliban's internalisation of that negative image and the acceptance of his status.

Caliban acknowledges the power of magic of Prospero and voices out his acceptance of his status as inferior: "I must obey, his Art is of such power/ It would control my dam's god Setebos/ and make a vassal of him" (1.2 39). The scene where Caliban proposes to be a slave to Stephano praying him to be his God is a good example of how Caliban reiterates his master's words and identifies himself using the same identity constructions as his master's:

CALIBAN: I'll show thee every fertile inch O' th' island:
and I will kiss thy foot: I prithee to be my
god.

TRINCULO: By this light, a most perfidious, and
drunken monster, when's god's asleep he'll
rob his bottle.

CALIBAN: I'll kiss thy foot. I'll swear myself thy sub-
ject

STEPHANO: Come on then: down and swear (2.2. 60).

At different points in the play, Caliban is referred to in terms such as the "lying slave", "savage", "monster", "vile race", and "filth". This shows that the power of Prospero's language lies in its ability to frame Caliban's representation and self-perception. These terms which define and construct him as the native savage are meant to justify the colonial enterprise and his status as the subjugat-

ed other. That is, he becomes the archetypal figure of the colonised subject defined and produced by Prospero and by the assumptions regarding the use of language and its absence, on which the play is based. Bill Ashcroft explains the process by which Caliban is subjugated and relegated to the position of the savage “on whose nature/ Nurture can never stick” (4. 1. 188-9):

Caliban, as the marginalised indigene, is the antithesis of culture...in every respect he embodies the primitive colonized savage and indicates the comprehensiveness with which his depiction by an invading and hegemonic power justifies his subjugation (83).

The discourse whereby the subordination and subjugation of Caliban is justified can be traced in the speech of Prospero and Caliban in Act 1, scene 2. It lays bare the dynamics of power on which the relation between coloniser/colonised is based, and puts forth the implications of possessing language and the assumption of its absence:

PROSPERO: For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have
 cramps,
 Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath
 up; [...]

CALIBAN: This island's mine. When thou cam'st first,
 Thou strok'st me, and made much of me,
 wouldst give me
 Water with Berries in't, and teach me
 how

To name the bigger light, and how the
less,
That burn by day and night: and then I
love'd thee, [...]
Curs'd be I that did so! [...]
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king: and here
you sty me
In this hard rock, whilst you do keep
from me
The rest o'the island (1.2. 37-38).

Indeed, Caliban's speech to Prospero underscores the linguistic implications of the colonial enterprise and the way the colonial encounter depends on the assumptions that it is the coloniser who brings and purveys light, civilisation, language and above all culture. Caliban's forceful statement that "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother" is a bitter cry of his possession and inheritance of the land. His statements to Prospero like "teach me how to name the bigger light" [...] "whilst you do keep from me the rest o'the island" resonate as an avowal of the process whereby Prospero as the prototype of the coloniser snatches Caliban's land, thus exposing the mechanisms by which the colonial power takes over the place, wiping out all that pre-existed colonisation. Caliban's inarticulacy is juxtaposed with the power of Prospero to name the place and to perpetrate the names he attributes, which is a sign of power and a means whereby the coloniser controls reality for these names construct identity and translate a given attitude towards reality.

The core premises of colonial discourse are drawn upon by Miranda whose speech recalls that of Prospero and resonates as a justification of the colonial mission. It is governed by binary oppositions intrinsic to colonial discourse. Miranda's words fix the identity of Caliban as an "abhorred slave" "a savage" "a thing most brutish" and reveal the linguistic authority on which the colonial encounter is based:

MIRANDA: Abhorred slave,
 Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
 Being capable of all ill: I pitied thee,
 Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee
 each hour
 One thing or other: when thou didst not, sav-
 age,
 Know thine own meaning; but wouldst gab-
 ble, like
 A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
 With words that made them known (1.2.38).

Caliban is constructed and produced by the gift of language. His disempowerment and lack of agency stem from his absence of language. However, this does not impede him from retaliating against Prospero. His speech "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse / The red plague rid you / For learning me your language" (1.2.39) resonates as a bitter shriek for resistance. Caliban's use of Prospero's tongue to curse him implies the use of language as a tool of resistance and retaliation.

His curse translates into an attempt at inverting the power structure that relegates him to the position of the savage and marginalised. It epitomises the potential of turning the mother language to one's advantage and transforming it to fit one's purposes. The dialectics of appropriation and transformation that this model of linguistic resistance purports accounts for its use by writers engaged in anti-colonial narratives. Bill Ashcroft underlines the transformative power of language showing that the power of Caliban's language does not reside in cursing the master but rather in transformation, hence its use as a weapon of resistance in post-colonial writings:

Caliban is not imprisoned in language incontrovertibly because it is by using Prospero's language (or any other) that Caliban can actualize his own possibility for being. This power is the key to the transformative dynamic of post-colonial writing and cultural production. Such a dynamic emerges in Caliban's determination to answer back to one who has such manifest power over him (91).

Yet, the debate about the validity and necessity to embrace and adapt the language of the coloniser as the only route towards resistance hovers between acceptance and total rejection. The perspectives of George Lamming, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott, for instance, run counter to that of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo, one of the fervent advocates of the need to break ties with English and recover

one's language. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming discusses the post-colonial writers' dilemmas vis-à-vis the use of English to write counter-narratives:

Caliban is his convert, colonized by language, and excluded by language. It is precisely this gift of language, this attempt at transformation which has brought about the pleasure and paradox of exile[...] I am a direct descendent of slaves, too near to the actual enterprise to believe that its echoes are over with the reign of emancipation. Moreover, I am a direct descendant of Prospero[...] using its legacy of the language not to curse our meeting but to push it further, reminding the descendants of both sides that what's done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the same gift endowed with different meanings, may grow towards a future[...] which must always remain open (15).

Lamming's perception of the Caliban/Prospero model can be understood in terms of the dialectics of entrapment and empowerment and/or transformation. This accounts for the paradoxical nature of exile where pleasure and bitterness co-exist. Exile is marked by alienation and disillusionment. However, it is this very alienation that paves the way for self-awareness and coming to terms with one's past, a necessary and key step towards a comprehensive understanding of one's present and creating one's future.

Lamming's relation to English is somehow ambivalent. On the one hand, he recognises that Caliban is totally inscribed in English and imprisoned by that language. On the other hand, he states that this "gift of language" is a prerequisite for self-awareness and resistance. It is only by negotiating and producing new meanings that Caliban can mend the fragmented pieces of his identity and move ahead. Indeed, Lamming goes even further by admitting that he is a descendant of both Caliban and Prospero. That is, he takes in the whole history of alienation and displacement related to the drama of the Middle Passage and concurrently declares the English language as his language, a necessary language, and a "necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way"(109).

In Search for Lost Origins

Water with Berries is centred on the migratory experience of three artists from the island of San Cristobal. Teeton, Derek and Roger fled their native island seeking liberation and growth. However, their journey to the very seat of colonial power further intensified their sense of entrapment and their failure to liberate themselves from the burdens of their colonial past. Hence, the theme of migration is a backdrop against which Lamming explores the predicament of exile of West Indian Intellectuals in the post-colonial era.

The narrative examines the interracial relationships between Teeton and his landlady, the Old Dowager and that of Derek, Roger and Nicole. These relationships are representative of the complexity of the exile situation which is a surrogate for the 'colonial drama' of the encounter between the former coloniser and colonised. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming describes the predicament of exile as "a reciprocal process" in which "to be a colonial is to be a man in a certain relation; and this relation is an example of exile" (25).

In a sense, the three protagonists are different facets of Caliban caught in a state of dependence and resignation. Teeton is emotionally entrapped and totally subsumed to the power of Old Dowager feeling like "a puppet that moved at the sound of her voice" (36). Derek seems to be unable to evolve in his career as an actor for the only role he plays is that of the dead corpse. Roger, an East Indian musician, is in a deadlock situation further complicated by the conflictual relationship with his wife Nicole, a white North American woman.

Yet, as the plot unravels, the three protagonists' sense of dislocation becomes more acute as they come to realise that "time had begun to put a strain on their refuge" and that "the islands were no longer behind them" (69). They all start to question their subject positions and their relationships based on dependence. Their awareness of their status leads them to undertake violence in a thirst

for transformation and liberation. As Taylor puts it, their violent acts result from “the leap of consciousness [that] occurs in the revolutionary moment [in which] the call to battle is made” (185).

This marks the change of the relationship between Prospero and Caliban thanks to the gift of language, given to Caliban by Prospero (and/or Miranda), allowing him to come to terms with the real nature of their relationship. As Wilfred Cartey points out, “the gift of language brings about a new way of seeing and informs the backward glance, making Caliban seek and ask the question of identity” (126).

By empowering his protagonists, Lamming transforms the trope of Caliban and adapts it to the post-colonial context. He reverses the situation by giving more credit to Caliban over Prospero, incarnated by Old Dowager whose eagerness for command and impulse for power recalls Prospero’s infatuation with controlling reality. While Lamming aligns with Shakespeare in his portrayal of Prospero, he replaces the male figure of Prospero by a female figure, hence pointing out to the change in the relationship between the descendants of both races in the post-colonial era. As Lamming points out:

Whereas Prospero in *The Tempest* is a male force because the world from which he is operating is aggressive, expansionist and conquer-

ing, by the time we get to *Water With Berries*, that world has now contracted in a way. It has now retreated; it has aged. And what we see in the Old Dowager is the age, the remoteness, in some way the impotence of the earlier Prospero (qtd.in Cudjoe 209).

By the end of the novel, Lamming also transforms the image of Caliban, through the character of Teeton, Roger and Derek, as he endows them with the capacity to retaliate. Contrary to Caliban in *The Tempest* who did not go beyond associating with Trinculo and Stephano, the three protagonists resorted to violence as part of their quest for identity. While *The Tempest* ends on a positive note, *Water with Berries* ends in a spiral of violence, represented as the sole possibility for the protagonists to come to grips with a new sense of self and fulfil the urge to return and take part in the imminent revolution in San Cristobal.

This implies that Lamming adds the dimension of violence in his reimagining of the relationship between the former colonizer and colonized, endowing violence with a therapeutic and liberating force. As M. P Joseph argues, Lamming's stance echoes Fanon's view of violence as a "cleansing force" (69). Indeed, Lamming claims that given the traumatic history and experience of colonialism, the relation cannot end in "a cordial manner" without a "smashing" for "there is almost a therapeutic need for a certain kind of violence in the breaking" (210).

By the end of the novel, Roger wants to burn the house of Old Dowager and put the Mona Bar to fire. He even goes mad and threatens Derek with a knife as Nicole tells him about her pregnancy. His actions, spurred by the prospect of having a white child, reflect the old fears of miscegenation and the anxiety of the mixing of two races. This is another detail that recalls the fear, voiced out by Caliban in *The Tempest*, that the contact will “people the isle with Cannibals” (Loomba 162).

Derek rapes a white woman on stage, following a racial insult from the theatre’s agent which filled him with rage and brought to the surface the racial constructions and the myth of the black savage. The detailed rendering of the rape scene and the representation of Derek as a “dragon of legend [...] released on the stage”, with a “cannibal rage”, a “monstrous shadow [...] spreading through the land” (242) recalls Prospero’s inscription of Caliban within the colonial myth of the Black savage when he accused him of the attempted rape of Miranda and “violat[ing] the honour of [his] child” (1.2.38).

While in *The Tempest*, Caliban ends up by regretting his plot with Stephano and Trinculo saying: “what a thrice-double ass / was I to take this drunkard for a God? / And worship this dull fool?” and decides to be “wise hereafter, and seek for grace” (5.1. 95), the fate of Teeton is thoroughly different. Lamming elevates him to a hero and a rebel. As

Teeton hears the news of an imminent revolt in San Cristobal and of the suicide of his wife Randa, he is filled with guilt. He regrets having deserted her after the San Souci affair, after which he had to escape because he tried with his fellows to overthrow the government in the region of San Souci.

Teeton feels an urge to return and take part in the burgeoning protest movements in his native island. He kills Old Dowager, after the latter kills Ferdinand, her husband's brother who informed her that their daughter Myra is not dead but rather kidnapped by his brother and brought up on a derelict island. Myra's story and her name recall Miranda, yet another detail that makes a strong link with *The Tempest*.

Lamming rewrites Miranda's rape by Caliban through telling the story of Myra's rape, a means to recreate the horrors of the colonial past. The violence of Myra's rape is hence inscribed within the violent legacy of *The Tempest* and can be read as a completion of that act. The detailed description of the rape scene brings to the fore the atrocity of the act itself: "they made a bonfire to celebrate their rape of me [...] they would rest and return, giving the interval over to the animals: father's two hounds [...] I couldn't tell which body was the man's and which belonged to the beasts" (150).

Moreover, the encounter between Teeton and Myra, who appears as a voice spirit in the desert-

ed heath, as Teeton recalls the Voodoo Ceremony voicing his inner wish to soak himself in the realm of ancestors and converse with the dead spirit of Randa, is a way to recreate the encounter between Caliban and Miranda. Lamming uses it to re-establish the connection with the African cultural heritage and hence celebrate Africa. Indeed, Lamming incorporated elements of African cultural remnants in the Caribbean as a way to retrieve a lost heritage, revive the memory of the past and raise an awareness of African connection. Stuart Hall argues that in concordance with the works of Négritude poets Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, and pan-Africanists, Caribbean writers are engaged in the rediscovery of Caribbean 'cultural identity' and in the recovery of the hidden or silenced key instances in the Caribbean history, namely the relation with Africa, the slave experience and the long history of fragmentation and rupture (qtd. in Williams 392-403).

The use of the Voodoo Ceremony in *Water with Berries* shows that the African heritage is present and that to establish a connection with the realm of ancestors is a prerequisite for self-understanding and survival in the midst of an alien space. In *Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming describes the Voodoo Ceremony or the Ceremony of the Souls, a Haitian ceremony, in which spirit possession is a significant moment, as one where:

The celebrants are mainly relatives of the deceased who, ever since their death, have been locked in Water. It is the duty of the dead to return [...] to speak, since their release from that purgatory of Water cannot be realised until they have filled the contract which this ceremony symbolises. The dead need to speak [...] The living demand to hear whether there is any need for forgiveness, for redemption... those alive and those now dead [...] are interested in their future (9).

As Voodoo Ceremony contains elements of African beliefs, its enactment is thus a way to ensure the survival of African cultural heritage. It is endowed with a symbolic dimension clearly hinted at through the overlapping of the present, past and future. The confrontation of the living with the dead represents a conjunction of moments. Laming construes this very conjunction as a medium whereby reconciliation and transformation could be attained. (King et al 64)

Indeed, the Ceremony of the Souls is used in relation to the dialectic of domination and liberation from the legacy of the past. It is invoked in relation to the theme of imprisonment in, and liberation from, the past, thus bringing into play the function of memory in recovering one's roots. At different points in the narrative, the three exiles voice out their tug of war between the desire to forget and leave behind the fragments of the past and their feeling of imprisonment in the shadows of the

past. For Teeton, for instance, exile could wipe neither his attachment to his home country nor his racial memory and the slave experience. As he puts it, “The island [is] a nerve his exile couldn’t kill” (110) and “slave [is] the kind of bait which he want[s] to bite” (94).

Cultural heritage is so important and precious that, though time has passed by, it has been safeguarded from oblivion. It is even present in the minds of those who took the path of immigration. It is deeply rooted in their souls, making them unable to distance or liberate themselves from its imprisoning power. Distance and space could not erase the power of the past which the main characters in *Water With Berries* have striven to detach themselves from. They cannot espouse the former coloniser’s way of life and melt fully in a different culture. They therefore seek to “return” to their country of origin through establishing a connection with the cultural heritage they long left behind. In spite of the coloniser’s endeavour to hybridise them and make them adopt his religion, educational system and way of life, their socio-cultural heritage functions as a shield against planned and forced acculturation. The migratory experience of the three artists in *Berries* turns into a constant struggle to recapture a lost sense of identity and place.

The Ceremony of the Souls is tightly linked to Lamming’s concern to render the experience of exile in London and the West Indian artist’s com-

plex quest for identity and self-comprehension. In one sense, it becomes a sort of voyage and a rite of passage from a state of loss and disorder to one of order and acceptance. It shows that liberation cannot be achieved simply by crossing borders but by achieving a full understanding and acceptance of one's past.

Indeed, through the character of Myra, a silent figure, Lamming sets the actions within the framework of the quest for identity. Myra's encounter with Teeton in the heath and her discovery of the world of the drums can be understood as a moment of liberation and a celebration of African heritage. It implies that the sole route towards harmony is the assembly of the fragmented parts of identity and the excavation of the suppressed elements of one's history, a prerequisite for liberation. Teeton's description of the Ceremony brings to the fore the force of liberation:

It's a family occasion [...] every eight years or so according to custom [...] the dead come forward [...] They speak about all the things that had never been said when they were alive [...] Sometimes they argue all through the night. For hours. The living and the dead. It will go on until they reach a point of reconciliation. Then you know it's the end. The end of all complaint from the dead; the end of all retribution from the living. The dead depart and the relatives are free at last to go home (117-118).

Through Teeton's account of the ceremony, Myra relives the long history of slavery and oppression and seizes the rekindled racial memory. Her experience of spirit possession is hence a site of confrontation with the legacy of her past, translating her desire to comprehend her present situation and envisage her future. Phrases like "slave was a name of a unique predicament. Like time, it signified every kind of moment, grew echoes in every corner of his history" (94) recur throughout the narrative foregrounding the importance of awareness of one's past which Lamming posits as a key step towards liberation.

Conclusion

Lamming's rewriting of *The Tempest*, which this paper attempted to explore through an analysis of the relationship between characters from different races, is to be contextualised within the dialectics of domination and liberation around which the novel is centred. It is closely related to the discourse of national liberation that marked West Indian culture in the neo-colonial and post-colonial era. The latter has had, whether directly or indirectly, a strong impact on Lamming's rendering of the Caliban-Prospero paradigm.

Its use as a paradigm of resistance in the narrative is an example of a wide variety of nationalist narratives in which the quest of identity is carried out and told from the vantage point of West Indian

protagonists. It is deeply anchored in the project of decolonization and is reminiscent of a discourse of liberation and assertion of identity which marked the 1950's- 1970's.

At the level of the narrative, the present, past and future overlap since the very representation of the present takes in the past predicament, in order to spell out an alternative future and articulate the possibility of transformation through the retrieval of culture. The liberating potential of the narrative resides in its success in mapping out the path to liberation and in expressing different models of liberation necessary to build up a culture of resistance.

Retrieving remnants of African culture through the Ceremony of the Souls exemplify the process of writing resistance in which the Caribbean novel is engaged. In this sense, writing becomes a journey, a quest for lost roots carried out at the level of memory. Language, the recovery of the past, the celebration of the community and folk culture are issues around which transformation is envisaged.

Language is used as a tool of resistance. The potential of resistance embedded in language is underlined in the Caliban-Prospero Model. Thus, Lamming falls within the continuum of writers who are engaged in a process of appropriating and transforming the English language to write back to Western Eurocentric discourse and produce anti-colonial narratives.

By celebrating Africa, Lamming attempts to establish a connection between Africa and the Caribbean, thus shaping a new reality that involves acknowledging the presence of Africa in the Caribbean. The very act of remembering the predicament of the past is a way to construct the present out of the traumas of the past. The centrality of the function of memory in the narratives translates Lamming's concern to redefine the community, hence contributing to the project of forging the nation.

The need to re-establish connection with Africa is, for Lamming, an important component of the construction of Caribbean identity. It is through the Ceremony of the Souls that Lamming articulates his main premise that liberation is a construct, a by-product of personal experience gained through the journey into one's past; a necessary act to develop an awareness of one's self and one's present that is key to political action and the anti-colonial struggle.

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“Against their forren foe that commes from farre”: Shakespeare and Orientalized Persia

Masoud Farahmandfar

ABSTRACT:

The history of Western creation of stereotypes of Persia and the Persians goes back to Aeschylus’ The Persians where he described Persia (and metonymically the Orient) as a zone of terror and irrationality, of excess and the demonic; these stereotypical images were later intensified in the works of such major Renaissance figures as Ludovico Ariosto, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, John Milton, etc. The present paper examines textual representations of Persia and the Persian in the works of the Bard in order to explore the underlying proto-orientalist style of thought, which has not been uncommon in those times. The textual representation of the Orient in general and Persia in particular is mostly imaginary, driven by fantasy and desire.

Keywords: Orientalism, Shakespeare, Persia, Ottoman, Stereotype.

I. Prologue

Shakespeare's plays have been keenly receptive of postcolonial readings, the Bard having dealt with many of the key concepts of postcolonial theory such as identity, race, and otherness ahead of most early modern authors. Many Shakespeare scholars have explored the concepts of race and otherness in plays as diverse as *Titus Andronicus* (Aaron), *Antony and Cleopatra* (Cleopatra), *The Merchant of Venice* (Shylock and the Prince of Morocco), *Othello* (the Moor), etc; however, the present paper aims to examine the representation(s) of yet another of these keywords—namely, the Orient in general and Persia in particular. A major question that arises therefore is how the Orient and the Orientals are represented in Shakespeare's oeuvre.

There are many references in Shakespeare's plays to things traditionally or stereotypically associated with the Orient: Persian attire, Arabian perfume, palm trees, the phoenix, magic and the supernatural, Orient pearl, and so on. There are also references to oriental people: Moors, Ottoman Turks, Persians, Egyptians, Arabs, and Tartars. Nonetheless, any examination of Shakespeare's Orient must be contextualized within the Renaissance proto-Orientalism.

II. The *Imagined Zone*: The Orient in the Early Modern Era

Elizabethans were interested in tales of exotic adventures, and playwrights tried to feed this hunger. It is not shocking that the main playwrights of the era have written at least one play dealing with the Orient and the Orientals.

If there ever was a time in the world's history when the eyes of Europe should have been turned to the Orient, the sixteenth century was that time. And if there ever was a period in which interest in the East was not merely one of curiosity or novelty, but an active interest made necessary by the conditions of the time, it was the Elizabethan period. (Wann 184)

There are of course many reasons behind such a widespread attention to exoticism. Early 16th century was the era of expansionism, when many travelogues were written and became available to the public: Richard Eden's *The History of Travell* (1577) and Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589) are two famous examples. Colonial exploitation of the rich natural resources in other lands was prominently foregrounded:

English readers were invited, in Hakluyt's pages (and later in the collections edited by Samuel Purchas) to look at the rest of the world from a shared perspective, to believe in their com-

mon investments in overseas travel, trade, and colonization, and to enjoy the prospect of their future global success. (Loomba, *Shakespeare* 12-13)

The growth of interest in writing exotic travel-ogues is in fact one offshoot of the rise of the concepts of nationhood and commonwealth during the early Renaissance. In *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (1992) Richard Helgerson underscores the linguistic and literary construction of nationhood (10). This discursive formation of national identity is mainly powered by two strategies: construction of sameness (assimilation) and difference (dissimilation). Assimilation is intra-national and dissimilation extra-national. Shakespeare's famous eulogy of England in *Richard II* ("This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle ... This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England" [II. i. 40-50]) is one literary example of intra-national assimilation. A literary example for dissimilation is Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), where the Renaissance Humanism offers a blueprint for colonial exploitation—later reflected in Shakespeare's *Tempest* (circa 1611). One other example is Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (circa 1602) where "Falstaff describes one of the women he fancies as 'a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty' and announces his intentions to make simultaneous love to two women thus: 'They shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both'" (Loomba, *Shakespeare* 14).

This Eurocentric ideology of the early modern era is also reflected in *Othello* (1603), where the other side of the world is depicted as an exotic place where "...cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (I. ii. 143-145). The anxiety of black presence is felt all through the play — "the character of Othello confirms the cultural prejudices of the time ... [when] the color black was associated with the demonic" (Mason 70-73). In 1601, Queen Elizabeth I issued the expulsion of blackamoors from England, for she was "highly discontented to understand the great numbers of Negroes and blackamoors ... who are fostered and powered here, to the great annoyance of her own liege people, ... [and] for that the most of them are infidels having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel" (cited in Loomba, *Shakespeare* 52). At the end, the excuse is religious. Religion has long been (mis-)used as an ideological state apparatus for the development of imperial projects—an idea that goes a long way back in history.

In the aftermath of the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Islam in the 7th century, the binary opposition of East/West took a new form: Christianity/Islam. Afterwards, the Crusades ensued. In 1095, Pope Urban II at the Council of Claremont "informed the audience that the latest Christian defeats (in Anatolia) were a consequence of human wickedness" and added:

Therefore go forward in happiness and in confidence to attack the enemies of God [the Muslims]. ... They have made Asia, which is a third of the world, their homeland—an area justly reckoned by our fathers as equal to the two other parts both for size and importance. ... There remains Europe, the third continent. How small is the part of it inhabited by us Christians! (cited in Macfie 17-18)

The opposition of Christianity/Islam, amplified by the threat of the Ottoman Empire of Sultan Suleyman, is felt in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*, etc. Therefore, for many years this multifaceted conflict between Europe and Asia endured. Stereotypes and negative images of the Orient and the oriental came to infiltrate the western discourse of knowledge. And Shakespeare was no exception: "the meanings of Shakespeare's plays were both derived from and used to establish colonial authority" (Loomba and Orkin 1).

III. The Case of Persia

The division of the known world into a binary of the West versus the East dates back to the fifth century BC: "for the Greeks the essential dichotomy laid between East and West, Persia and Greece, Asia and Europe" (Macfie 15-16). Further, "when Herodotus' histories were translated into English in the sixteenth century, Persia emerged as an enemy of ancient Greek culture and civilization"

(Masood 8). Persia, in this context, denoted an exotic land much famed for its lavish splendor and arbitrary authority — all that was antithetical to European values.

Here I shall examine the representations of Persia and the Persians in Shakespeare's work, and will show how literature has been deployed for discursive construction of knowledge about the East—a discourse fueled by fantasy and desire.

The history of Western stereotypes about Persia goes back to the time of classical Greece and Aeschylus' *The Persians* (circa 470 BC) where the Persians are depicted invariably as the hostile 'other'. The same frame of mind could be seen in later works such as Thomas Preston's *Cambises* (circa 1560), Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587), Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-6), Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817), James Morier's *Haji Baba of Ispahan* (1824), and so on. And all these representations share one point: the use of (racial and cultural) stereotypes. These stereotypes reinforced the exotic image of the Persians in the minds of European readers. But how do these racial/cultural stereotypes work?

According to Homi K. Bhabha, the function of stereotype "as phobia and fetish" is that it "threatens the closure of the racial/epidermal schema for the colonial subject and opens the royal road to colo-

nial fantasy” (Bhabha 104). This clearly explains why Bhabha urges us to consider the notion of stereotype in terms of fetishism (Bhabha 106). The “structural link” that, according to Bhabha, exists between racial stereotype and fetishism is secured by a Freudian reading of the concept in Said’s *Orientalism*. For Said, stereotypes are practical apparatuses in the hands of the homogenizing discourse of colonial power. Freudian fetishism is also a kind of “fixation on an object that masks the difference [anxiety over the lack] and restores an original presence [desire for similarity]” (ibid.).

Now let us examine the use of such stereotypical images in Shakespeare’s work. References to Persian and the Persians can be found in seven of Shakespeare’s plays, namely, *King Lear*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *King Henry VI*, *Henry IV*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Twelfth Night*. These references fall mainly into two groups: either they allude to the ancient Achaemenid Kings (Cambyses, Darius and Cyrus) to exemplify the greatness of power and lavish luxuriousness, or they mention the contemporary Safavid Kings, especially the Great Sophy, Shah Abbas I (who reigned from 1588 to 1629) in order to warn the Christian world “against their forren foe that commes from farre,” (Spenser 138) as in Thomas Haywood’s *The Four Prentices of London* (1594) in which “Sophy the Persian” is pictured as a sworn enemy of Christendom who must be eliminated. *The Comedy of Errors* alludes to Persia as a land

of wealth and riches, a good place for a Western man of wit to gain a fortune quickly and easily. So when in the play the Second Merchant finds Angelo in financial trouble, he advises him to head towards Persia to be able to repay his debts,

SECOND MERCHANT. You know since Pentecost the sum is due,
and since I have not much importun'd you;
nor now I had not, but that I am bound
to Persia, and want guilders for my voyage.
Therefore make present satisfaction,
or I'll attach you by this officer. (IV. i. 1-6)

The Orientalist stereotype of heading due east to get rich is an ingrained motif in literature of the West, where the orient is supposed to be a land of opulence—the most memorable literary example is perhaps Rudyard Kipling's novella "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888), which is an imperial allegory.

In the same vein is the reference to "Persian attire" in *King Lear*, where Lear to Edgar does say:

You, sir, I entertain for one of my hundred;
only I do not like the fashion of your garments. You will say
they are Persian attire, but let them be
changed. (III. vi. 39-41)

The reference to luxurious "Persian attire" does in fact reflect the fashion for robes of embroidered

silk arrived in London along with an embassy of British merchants and adventures headed by the Sherley brothers (early in the reign of James I). Allusions to travels of Robert and Anthony Sherley to Persia appear in Shakespeare's plays here and there, and contextualizing their significance is useful.

Hafiz Abid Masood locates the "origins of England's interest in Persia as early as the reign of Henry VIII" (2); Sir Thomas Wyatt, Masood continues, mentions a Robert Brancetour as "the first Englishman in Safavid Persia, a forerunner of Anthony Jenkinson and other Muscovy company agents who went to Persia in 1560s and 1570s as well as the more celebrated Sherley Brothers who reached Persia towards the end of the sixteenth century" (Masood 5). The mission of these envoys was to convince, or better said to provoke, the Great Sophy (the Shah of Persia) to rise and stand against the Ottoman Turks who were a fatal threat to Christian Europe. In *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603) Richard Knolles, with prejudice to the interests of Christian Europeans, discusses Anglo-Ottoman relations in the early modern era and calls the Ottomans heretics and devils and their empire the "terror of the world ... thundering out nothing but still blood and warre" (n. pag.).

Therefore, for the safety of their own land and also for maintaining their own pivotal role in Mediterranean trades, the English stirred the Persians into

fighting the Ottomans. The age-old colonial policy of “divide and rule!” was employed to inflame sectarian differences; the Persians were Shiite and the Ottoman Turks were Sunni, and igniting their schism would have been beneficially important for the Europeans, because Persia would act as a buffer to fend off Ottoman’s threats to Europe. That is why the Shirley brothers were sent to the court of Shah Abbas; their mission was to help train the amateur army of the Safavids. They even received a generous pension from the Persian court, to which Shakespeare alludes in *Twelfth Night*:

FABIAN (to Sir Toby). I will not give my part of
 this sport for a pension of
 thousands to be paid from the sophy. (II. v.
 148-9)

The second reference to the Sophy in the play is made by Sir Toby, describing the bravado of a soldier:

Why, man, he’s a very devil. I have not seen
 such a firago.
 I had a pass with him, rapier, scabbard, and all,
 and he gives me
 the stuck-in with such a mortal motion that it
 is inevitable; and on the
 answer, he pays you as surely as your feet hits
 the ground they step on.
 They say he has been fencer to the sophy. (III.
 iv. 232-6)

These references show the prevalent interest in the

accounts of the adventures of the Sherley brothers (in about 1601) as ambassadors to the Shah. Shakespeare therefore has been familiar with these narratives.

Another allusion to the rivalry of the Great Sophy of Persia and Sultan Suleyman of the Ottoman Empire appears in *The Merchant of Venice*, where the Prince of Morocco speaks to the wise Portia as follows:

Therefore I pray thee lead me to the caskets
to try my fortune. By this scimitar,
that slew the Sophy and a Persian prince,
that won three fields for Sultan Solyman,
I would o'er-stare the sternest eyes that look,
outbrave the heart most daring on the earth,
pluck the young sucking cubs from the she-
bear,
yea, mock the lion when a roars for prey,
to win thee lady. (II. i. 23-31)

The Ottomans have been, since the Middle Ages, a constant threat to the Christian world; especially in the 16th century and under the leadership of Suleyman the Magnificent they reached the height of their power. Fear of the Turks is reflected in the literature of the time. Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* speaks of “faithless Sarazin all armed to point,/ In whose great shield was writ with letters gay/ Sans foy” (Book I, Canto II). He symbolically urges “the feeble Britons” to “uproar and mightily defend / Against their forren foe, that commes

from farre” (Book III, Canto III). Shakespeare in *Othello* describes the threat of Saracens for Cyprus which was at that time a protectorate of Venice. Nonetheless, Persia and the Ottoman Empire were not the same; they were rivals. However, they were generally taken to be alike—categorized under one single rubric of “enemies of Christian crusaders.” And this is expected of colonial discourse which is homogenizing; it uses general categories like oriental versus western: “underlying these categories is the rigidly binomial opposition of ‘ours’ and ‘theirs,’ with the former always encroaching upon the latter (even to the point of making ‘theirs’ exclusively a function of ‘ours’)” (Said 227). However, “such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things” (Said 59).

IV. Epilogue

English drama of the early modern period was informed by external threats to national identity, by the anxieties attached to the threat of Islamic conversion, by the impending menace of the Ottoman Empire to Europe; Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1590), Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603), and Robert Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turke* (1612) particularly depict the dual threat of the Turks in conquering both land and religion.

In that situation, England used Persia as a counter-

weight to the threats of the Ottomans; the Sherley brothers came to the court of Shah Abbas as English ambassadors to persuade, or rather provoke, the Shah of Persia to wage war against the Muslim Turks of the Ottoman Empire and thwart their advances into the Christian Europe. A short while later again Persia was used by the British to take back the Strait of Hormuz (Ormus)—a strategic shipway for transporting spice, etc.—from another colonial power, Portugal (in 1622). These colonial adventures were not unknown to major Renaissance writers. Shakespeare has alluded to the rivalry of Persian Sophy and Ottoman Suleyman in *The Merchant of Venice*; the Bard had been familiar with the colonial adventures of the Sherley brothers (*Twelfth Night*). Yet in almost all these Early Modern narratives we can see a partial view of the east (especially of the Middle East) on the basis of an ontological distinction between the Occident (the self) and its other, the Orient. The textual representation of the Orient in general and Persia in particular is mostly imaginary, driven by fantasy and desire.

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Haider in Hamletian Cloak: Shakespeare Walking Through the Bazaar of Wounds

Sayantani Chakraborti

ABSTRACT:

Shakespeare has been ceaselessly alluring film-makers with his diversified plots brimming with characters having myriad faces. Shakespeare's adaptations on celluloid have not only liberated the literary classics from the confinement of a strictly compartmentalized academic space but also have successfully made Shakespeare global. Bollywood was never idle in exploiting essence of Shakespeare(s) as inter-textual echoes and there were even direct text-to-film adaptations in the cinematic panorama of 1970s-80s. However, with Vishal Bharadwaj the Indian industry has touched the pinnacle. Maqbool (adaptation of Macbeth) and Omkara (adaptation of Othello) created instant history the moment they hit the floor. Bharadwaj's creative endeavours recast Shakespeare amidst Indianized settings so fluidly that the films often have outgrown the frame provided by the hypo-text.

Haider, is the final film in the proposed Shakespeare trilogy of Bharadwaj, for the purpose of which the filmmaker brings Shakespeare in insurgency-hit Kashmir of 1995 when civilian disappearances were hushed up under the rule of AFSPA. Kashmir's unshaken voice of truth scathingly ruptures the narrative of utopia created by the mainstream films with colourful sceneries and counters the discourse of bravery and heroism manifested in the patriotic films which actually succeeded in lulling us to slumber. Haider's Kashmir represents the images under the negative, where the darkness comes to the fore and the brightness recedes to the fading background. The prevailing dystopia, an exploration of which is also found in Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*, makes us glimpse another version of the dismal Denmark of Shakespeare. Haider, the Hamletian protagonist, robes himself in the mould of his alter-ego to articulate what is unvoiced, to reveal what is hidden.

Though Hamlet remains one of the most adapted texts all over the world, Bharadwaj's epoch-making version carves a universally acclaimed niche, in spite of being a mere shadow of the hypo-text. This paper proposes to talk about the multifarious issues from setting, including characters to the analysis of scenes, all spaces where Shakespeare is reprocessed in the making of Haider.

Keywords: Hamlet, Kashmir, Adaptation, Transculturation, AFSPA

*The Shakespearean understanding of life ...
is neither eastern nor western — just new in-
sights into the individual predicament.*

— (Mulyil, 1964, 7.)

Stage-to-film adaptations, no matter how successful the film may turn out to be, always involve the risk of being snubbed as inferior. However, if not from time immemorial, since the advent of motion pictures, adaptations are everywhere, not only in the obvious representation of novelistic stories but also in liberating plays from the confines of the proscenium arch and (re)-visioning them in filmic versions where images precede and often supersede words of mouth. There exist diverse opinions among critics centring on the debate, whether to consider adaptations as “minor”, “subsidiary”, “derivative”, “secondary” to the adapted texts or as products of artistic excellence (Hutcheon XII-XIII). In the words of the adapter-novelist John North in Louis Begley’s novel *Shipwreck* (2003), “[T]hrough images film conveys a vast amount of information that words can only attempt to approximate...but approximation is precious in itself, because it bears the author’s stamp” (Hutcheon 2). Though cinematic adaptation is an offshoot of popular culture that celebrates mosaic multiplicity, merging hierarchies and blending genres, questions of fidelity pervade the unconscious of the motion picture of a trans-genre adapted text, confirming Tagore’s thoughts “[C]inema is still playing second fiddle to literature” (qtd. in Hutch-

eon 1). The viewers of an adapted movie watch the film looking for the essential spirit of the original text and they are disappointed if thwarted from the comfortable position of foreknowledge by a jerk experienced through shuffling, reshaping and re-visioning of plot elements. So, it is the expectation of pleasure, aroused from the advantageous standpoint as readers of an established classic, possessing authority of the awareness of the primary text, which induces them to look for the cinematic transformations. Adaptation announces a celebratory self-proclaimed inferiority tied up in an obligatory relationship to the hypo-text preoccupying the dominant throne of classic superiority and the challenge lies in its emerging as a Sisyphus figure predestined to carry the burden of past as long as it lives, and yet becoming the indomitable outgrowing shadow of the source text. The filmmaker takes the task of reinterpreting, already knowing that his vision in attempting to decode and encode a classic will always be seen as a re-vision, a palimpsestic creation. The moralistic discourse of infidelity is now shifted towards inter-textuality and the filmmakers of adaptations are seen as readers with individualized reading abilities. It releases literature from the stifling confines of being unidirectional and broadens the arena for appreciation of adaptations (Hutcheon 1-22).

The journey of Shakespeare's plays from text to screen, via theatre, has been rough yet fascinating. Shakespeare was born in an age when global-

ization started by connecting continents through world trade and he had the dynamic potentiality to incorporate constant changes into his work not only to respond to erstwhile socio-political-cultural scenarios but also to embed seeds of universalism within them. If globalization is thought to be the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole, Shakespeare and the multiple adaptations of his plays in different mediums across culture proclaim the celebration of that: “The Shakespeare we confront today has been globalized beyond the confines of any single language or territory” (Bosman 286). Shakespeare has come down from the throne of Englishness and acquired disguises of various colours disseminated beyond the overarching grand-narrative of production confined only to English production houses like the Royal Shakespeare Company. Akira Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* (1957) and *Ran* (1985) are Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *King Lear* adapted as film versions encoded in core Japanese feel and flavour. Kurosawa re-contextualizes *Macbeth* in the feudal era of Japan, utilizes Noh performance, expands characterization and lets the blood of original dialogues induce life force to the flesh of the action film. *Ran*, again, is set in the feudal world of samurai, with some similarities and divergences with *King Lear*. In the *Bad Sleep Well* (1960), Kurosawa innovatively retells the story of Hamlet, against the backdrop of the post-Second World War period of crisis. Grigori Kozintsev’s *Korol Lir (King Lear)* deserves to be mentioned here along the same line.

The 1971 Russian adaptation of Shakespeare is a worldly acclaimed masterpiece reflecting the intensity of burning human emotions and passions of the tragedy of King Lear successfully on the visual medium. In the wake of “medialization and globalization” innumerable cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare have flooded the global market in the late twentieth and early twenty first century (Burnett 7).

Almost every filmmaker of Shakespeare’s plays faces the challenge of recreating something in a completely different medium for which the stage is the universally revered abode. There can be two forms of Shakespearean adaptations identified by Charles Marowitz in his *Recycling Shakespeare* (1991) – the “Fundamentalist Approach” where the director invests his creative energy in finding out unexplored nuances of meanings from the existing words on page and the “Reform Approach” where the audience is caught in enthralling awe in the view of the director’s incorporated originality into the existing text (Marowitz 8). However, it is Shakespeare and his flamboyant worlds that play the catalyst and prompt ingenious reformulations in various styles.

When the whole world is brimming with the glow of reinventing Shakespeare on the screen space, Bollywood, India’s film hub, has also contributed to the process with its uniquely customized Shakespeares. Interestingly the Bard has been the inspiring presence behind many plots and subplots of

Hindi films and there are acknowledged adaptations as well, *Do Dooni Char* (1968, Gulzar re-adapting from Bengali film *Bhrantibilas* which is an adaptation of *Comedy of Errors*), *Angoor* (1972, Gulzar's adaptation of *Comedy of Errors*), *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988, Mansoor Khan adapting *Romeo and Juliet*), *10ml Love* (2010, Sharat Katariya adapting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), *Ram Leela: Goliyon Ki Rasleela* (2013, Sanjay Leela Bhansali adapting *Romeo and Juliet*), to name only a few. The theatricality embedded in the intrigued and twisted plots, complex and layered characterisation, reiterative motifs and metaphors of Shakespearean plays have made them the irresistibly potent source of imitation for the hyperbolically dramatic Bollywood. However, it is Vishal Bhardwaj, who stands apart distinctively as a maestro in Shakespearean adaptation with his crowning trilogy of *Maqbool* (adaptation of *Macbeth* in the Mafia-based underworld released in 2003), *Omkara* (adaptation of *Othello* released in 2006) and the last but not the least *Haider* (re-contextualizing *Hamlet* amidst Kashmir Insurgency, released in 2014). Highly influenced by Kurosawa's adaptation of *Macbeth* in *The Throne of Blood* (acknowledged by Bhardwaj and stated in the blog-post of *Mail Online India*), the Bollywood director made up his mind to encode Shakespeare in Indian ethos to reach out the masses: "My [Bhardwaj's] films are inspired by Shakespeare's works but are not meant for Shakespearean scholars. I try to identify with the spirit and essence of the play by giving it a

twirl that appeals the Indian audience” (qtd. in Srivastava, n.p.). He intermingles core Shakespearean elements with typical Bollywood masalas to cook a fusion cuisine, for Bhardwaj believes the success of a film lies in its appeal to the mass and Haider turns out to be his “first golden goose”, being declared as “the fifth highest-rated crime drama of all time” (*NDTV Movies*). There have been debates and critical opinions of both shades concerning the aptness of the translocation of Shakespearean classics and Bhardwaj’s rather bold attempts to debunk the Shakespearean myths, making a topsy-turvy of themes and contexts. However, Tatlow’s remarks on the transculturation of Shakespeare are instructive in this context. He states:

Every engagement with a Shakespearean text ... is necessarily intercultural. The past is really another culture, its remoteness disguised by language that can occasionally appear as familiar as we seem to ourselves, whom we understand so imperfectly (Tatlow 5).

Adaptations across the frontiers of diverse cultures have always involved translocation of themes and characters deeply rooted in the conventional ethos of the culture of their genesis. Culture operates like language, providing a structure for every individualized expression. Relocating Shakespeare in the background of an Indianized setting essentially raises the concern about instability resulting out of the mishandling of the knitted plot design. Never-

theless, Bharadwaj, in his adaptations, re-visualises Shakespeare in a neatly woven milieu soaked in Indian rationale. His Shakespeares are transcultural appropriations converging and merging paradigms of classics and at the same time re-confirming Jonathan Bate's analytical comments on appropriation: "Shakespeare' is not a man who lived from 1564 to 1616 but a body of work that is refashioned by each subsequent age in the image of itself" (qtd. in Cartelli 2).

This paper focuses on analysing *Haider*, as a trans-cultural Shakespearean adaptation, re-contextualized in the illusory Elysium of Kashmir. Indian cinema has been highly instrumental in sketching the grand narrative of nationalism around Kashmir for decades. The stereotypical representation has either shown the valley as a hub of terrorism positing the deadly terrorists against a passionately patriotic army thriving hard to restore balance to the 'heaven on earth' (as in films like *Border*, *Mission Kashmir*, *LOC Kargil*, *Lakshya*, *Fanaa* et al) or cast as a place of natural beauty and bounty with floating shikaras, snow-capped mountains and flower-laden slopes (as in *Mission Kashmir*, *Fitoor*, *Kashmir ki Kali*, *3 Idiots*, *Noorie* et al). Vishal Bharadwaj along with the Kashmiri journalist Basharat Peer (author of *Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir*, a personal account of Insurgency hit Kashmir in the 1990s) have moved beyond the familiar discourse of Kashmir's charm and charisma to lay

bare the repressed mini narratives of the Kashmiris as well as of Kashmir. The intrigued plot of Shakespearean *Hamlet* is moulded and revised to shape the unsung history of the bereaved people, to echo the subdued cries of the ripped apart soul of the land of Kashmir.

Haider begins in a strained ambience when a doctor agrees to perform an appendicitis operation on the leader of a separatist group. The doctor, Hilaal Meer (played by Narendra Jha), arranges everything for the success of the operation to save the life of the ailing leader and even takes the risk of carrying the patient secretly in his ambulance, tactfully handling the enquiry of the Indian Army on the check post. He brings the sufferer into his own house caring less for his own endangered life and reputation and manages to relieve him from his pains, much to the indignation of his wife, Ghazala (played by Tabu), who is anxious and nervous at keeping a militant in the house. The next morning they wake up with a call from the local masjid delivering the message of a military raid. While going out to respond to the announcement, agitated Ghazala expresses her worry for their only son Haider. The apprehension of unease and disquiet is injected in the very beginning, in parallel with the introductory exchange of dialogues between Bernardo, Marcellus and Horatio who give us the assumption of the political turmoil of Denmark in the hypo-text. Here, in Kashmir, the residents live their lives on their nerves, torn apart between the

military and the militants. In the film, the doctor is accused of sheltering terrorists in his house and is taken away for questioning while their house is bombed to dust in a devastating encounter. Haider (played by Shahid Kapoor) returns from Aligarh, where he studies British Revolutionary Poets, after the news of his father's "disappearance" reaches him. Repositioning *Hamlet* amidst the Insurgency-stricken wounded Valley is indeed an audacious and intuitive attempt on the part of Vishal Bhardwaj.

Kashmir insurgency is the conflict between the separatists and jingoists (demanding either Kashmir's cessation from India and accession to Pakistan or complete independence of Kashmir) and the Government of India. From the inception of Kashmir as a border-state of India edging Pakistan it has remained the cynosure of the nation's security politics. The geographically unsettled location (causing territorial dispute) and the rise of religious fanaticism (the state has a majority of Islamist population) among the residents have made the access of democracy limited in the region of Kashmir, promoting rise of local political leaders often supporting the causes of the militants and being instrumental in provoking the residents against the Government policies. A disputed election in 1987 fanned the fire of insurgency in the valley when some of the members of the legislative assembly supported armed groups against the Indian government ("Insurgency in Jammu and

Kashmir”) and the President’s rule was sought after for almost a decade. Incidentally, the elections in Kashmir has never been a peaceful democratic process: “The history of elections held in Jammu & Kashmir right from October 1951 to 1999 is full of recorded evidence that points out large scale state supported rigging, coercion and out-right brutality in the early years and use of gun point to drag the helpless Kashmiris out of their homes to cast vote, in the later years” (“Kashmir: Nuclear Flashpoint”). Amidst the commotion of a state election the ultimate sufferers are the local residents whose destinies are tossed between the oppression of the militants and ineptitude of a government, as is clear in the words Prem Nath Bazaz, a Kashmiri journalist and activist, summarized in 1978: “After independence, rulers of J & K State were not the freely chosen representatives of the people as they should have been but were the nominees and the protégés of the Central Congress Government... their source of power was New Delhi... not even once the elections were fair and free and a candidate holding independent views had slim chance to be elected” (“Kashmir : Nuclear Flashpoint”).

Bhardwaj has aptly painted the dismal political scenario and the malfunction it causes in the social and personal lives of the Kashmiris in the canvas of Haider. In Bhardwaj’s narrative, the political turbulence and the hapless plight of the Kashmiris play the trope intensifying Haider’s bereavement of losing his father. Kashmir has been conferred

the rule of AFSPA following the insurgency of the 1990s. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts (AFSPA) granting Indian Army with special powers in disturbed areas has undergone scathing criticism in the hands of Bhardwaj. He makes a parody of the unruly massacre and oppression the so called protectors of the rules are involved in. Some of the special powers under the act include, arresting suspected persons without warrant, firing upon or using forceful means against a person acting against law (even if it causes death), to search any premise and take suspected persons in custody for indefinite period and most importantly legal immunity of the army officers for their actions as their actions are always thought to be justified and rightful (“Armed Forces Act”). Bhardwaj has raised a voice of protest in minutely portraying the reign of terror in the lives of the Kashmiris under the power of Indian army. The scene where a local resident hesitates to enter his own house unless and until his identity card is checked by someone is cursory but pertinent glimpse of the traumatic psychological scar left on the inhabitants of the land. After the implementation of AFSPA it became mandatory, for everyone entering and leaving the land, to stand in a queue for body-search and every native resident has to follow this strict identity-check method such a numberless times that it becomes an inarguable episode of his/her existence. Haider is rescued twice (once by Arshia, his childhood companion and the second time by Salman-Salman, his young-age friends-turned-spies) from the unnecessarily unavoidable compli-

cations of questioning and searching of the officers of the Indian Army. Bhardwaj's portraiture never dithers in divulging the narratives of an afflicted state. The Kashmir scenario registered in "'Hum-sheera', 'Humsaya': Sisters, Neighbours: Women's Testimonies from Kashmir", an article written by Ritu Dewan recording the evidential statements of the local habitants (published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in October 1994) seems to tell the tale of Haider's *mise-en-scène*:

Violence has completely destroyed the day-to-day life of the Kashmiri people. Fear of the security forces seems to be overriding as it is they who target the ordinary people. Bunkers proliferate in every area. Guns protrude from the windows, pointing directly at the street and passers-by, always ready to fire. The BSF, brought in ostensibly to ensure the security of the populace, actually generates a terrible, constant insecurity... Farewell greetings have changed from 'Khuda Hafis' (God be with you) to 'Sahi Salaamat Laut Ana' (come back safe).
(Dewan 2654, emphasis mine)

Dewan's article was an outcome of her visit to the Valley during 1994, as a member of the social services organization Women's Initiative and her accounts coming out of interviews of the Kashmiris stands a testimony to the verisimilitude of Bhardwaj's screenplay. The filmmaker vows to bring forth the histories of the terror-stricken Kashmiris who have lived the lives amidst the roar of violence.

Following the rule of AFSPA during the Kashmir conflict of 1990s, disappearances of the civilians were common and kept as a hushed up issue which nobody dared to discuss in the fear of the military forces. Remarkably, Dewan's article written with an aim to publicize voices of the ordinary people, hidden behind the clamoured media coverage of law and order issues of the Valley, reports an incident of which Bhardwaj's story is unmistakably chained:

In Bandipora town, tehsil and district Baramulla, we visited, among many others, the family of Aiyaz Ahmed Mir Shahri, killed in custody on November 8, 1991. He was severely tortured, as was evident in the photographs of his body – wounds, cuts, holes, electric shocks on his eyes, head, throat, tongue, chest, arms, abdomen, private parts, legs. His body was thrown into a ditch from where it was picked up by the villagers. (Dewan 2654)

Scenes from *Haider* showing the torments of the captives in military camps, the abuses and injustices inflicted on them faithfully reflects countless such narratives of 'disappeared' Kashmiris.

The chronicles of bravery and martyrdom of the Indian soldiers, fighting the insurgents and Pakistani soldiers, reaching us from different media, are not rare. Bollywood has given us many films praising our soldiers' valour in defying severe climactic conditions and sacrificing their lives in guarding the Line of Control from terrorists. Bhardwaj's is

a completely different attempt in presenting the story of Kashmir inside out. Bhardwaj illuminates on setting *Haider* in Kashmir (in an interview with *The Indian Express*):

It was the political turmoil and the 25 years of tragedy of Kashmir that compelled me. Our way of looking at Kashmir has either been cosmic—only for shooting songs—or rhetoric, where we show a man in a phiran, holding a Kalashnikov. *Haider* is the first film where we see *Kashmir from the inside*. I don't think we have made a mainstream film about the issue. (qtd. by Singh in "Kashmir is the Hamlet of my Film" says Bhardwaj", emphasis mine)

Kashmir with its ulcerated serenity comes alive on the screen and seems to speak of its silenced pain in shrieking. The land has always remained appealing to us for its offer of heavenly glimpses, its awe-inspiring beauty of nature's bounty. Bhardwaj probes into the layered veneer of the soothing beauty and with *Haider*, the viewers, roam into the darker alleys, penetrate into the shadowy truth lurking behind the unperturbed tranquillity. *Haider's* Kashmir does not offer solace to a ripped soul, rather its own soul is torn apart. The valley of Jhelum has become a Golgotha for its own residents. People disappear and never return compelling their families for never-ending waits. Initially, Bhardwaj had prepared a synopsis of an espionage thriller for *Haider* and on showing it to Gulzar, he complained its lacking of the tragedy of Hamlet. It is then Bha-

radwaj was initiated to a realistic account of Kashmir's pity through Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*. As the director acknowledges, "If Basharat was not a part of the film, *Haider* wouldn't be made or it wouldn't be made this way" ("Haider"). *Curfewed Night*, a heart-wrenching autobiographical record of Kashmir's tormented soul, remains the genesis of *Haider* providing the irresistible urge to reveal blasphemous truths.

The representation of the dance of autocracy (in the name of democracy) unleashed by the armed forces on the valley of Kashmir is discomfiting yet unequivocally veracious. The diseased anatomy of the land reeks out odours of suppression and persecution turning the valley into a penitentiary where the inhabitants are trapped within the claustrophobic panoptic of the AFSPA-ed officers. Haider's tormenting portrayals in the scenes showing never-ending fruitless wait of the families for their 'disappeared' members, armed officers thoughtlessly shooting and killing the captives, truck full of corpses, the plagued plight of the half-widows contribute to weave the dismal milieu. Reworking Hamlet's statements about his rotten state and damaged world, Bhardwaj makes Haider aphoristically aver: "*Pura Kashmir kayedkhana hain mere dost*" ("The entire Kashmir is a prison, my friend").

Haider returns home only to find his childhood memories turned into ashes and his mother in an unusually close relationship with his uncle Khur-

ram (played by Kay Kay Menon). Desperate to find his ‘disappeared’ father Haider begins his search alone. It is perhaps for the first time in his life, Haider has felt the cleft from his mother. The relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet has multiple shades with some obvious Oedipal undertones subtly squeezed in by Shakespeare and it is never a conventional mother-son relationship. Bharadwaj skilfully includes episodes suggesting the not-so-normal affinity of Haider and Ghazala, clearly assumable even by a non-Shakespearean reader. Haider is shown excessively and a bit abnormally dependent on and close to his mother, in the scenes where an adolescent Haider puts perfume on his mother’s neck and kisses her, or in the earnest conversation between Ghazala in bridal dress and Haider in the disguised madness before her ceremony of marriage to Khurram. Ghazala reminisces how little Haider used to say “*Jab main bada ho jaunga, main Mouji se shaadi karunga*” (“When I will grow up, I will marry my mother”), how he used to feel angry even at his father touching his mother. Haider, by the time knowing about the conspiracy behind his father’s death, replies in a tone of contempt “*Par ab to unke bhai apko chhute hain, ab main kya karun?*” (“But now his brother touches you, what can I do now?”). The incestuous avidity is subtly dispersed here through the brilliant acting and dialogues, keeping in mind the prejudices of the Indian audience. Ghazala, on the other hand, manifests superfluity of emotions and concerns for her son. She caresses him affectionately, cannot sleep in

the night tormented by the thoughts of Haider's possible peril, leaves food when he does not turn up for few days – acts more like a beloved than a mother. However, Bhardwaj's *coup-de-maitre* lies in releasing her from a marginalised, passive role predestined by the source text as well as by the confines of a Muslim household and making Ghazala a more humane character than Shakespeare's Gertrude has been. His endeavour has seen a success in the unparalleled performance of Tabu. Ghazala emerges to be a character of flesh and blood with her humanly passionate desires and faults. Actress Tabu who plays the character "Ghazala", explained:

Ghazala is torn between her idealistic husband, opportunistic brother-in-law and her innocent and passionate son. Somewhere she feels she has the responsibility to keep everything in control but obviously she can't. Her love for her son is crazy. She is always trying to protect him from being misled and misguided....Haider's predicament is that he doesn't know what to do with his mother—whether to love her, hate her, believe her or kill her. (qtd. by Singh in "Tabu : My Role in Haider is to die for")

Bhardwaj liberates Ghazala from the guilt of being a conspirator in murdering her own husband with which Shakespeare's Gertrude is burdened. Ghazala emerges to be less intriguing than her Shakespearean counterpart. In the Haider-Ghazala scene amidst the debris of their bombed house (which is a restructured replication of the closet

scene in *Hamlet*), Ghazala confesses that she in a state of panic revealed the secret of the militants being hidden in their house to Khurram and proves her innocence in not knowing Khurram's motive of using the secret for his double-purpose objective, winning a position of power at the cost of his brother's life and making a path for legitimizing his love for *bhabijaan* (sister-in-law). For a moment it strikes the audience whether Ghazala is again manipulating his son by playing innocent as she is shown to do often to make Haider obey her wishes. It is towards the end in the graveyard, that Ghazala ultimately supersedes the intertextual echo by sacrificing her own life for her son and emerges as a "true '*mujahid*', a fighter for justice" (Dewan 2657, emphasis mine). She frees herself from the constraints of passionate desires leaving for Haider the ultimate message "*Intekaam se sirf intekaam hi aata hai*" ("Revenge only results in revenge") — a message that is not far from Shakespeare's Hamlet which itself serves as an interrogation of both revenge and revenge tragedies. Bhardwaj's Gertrude is saturated in the colours of the bereaved Kashmir where women are compelled to linger infinitely for their disappeared husbands whose whereabouts remain forever unknown. Soudiya Qutab's article "Women Victims of Armed Conflict: Half-widows in Jammu and Kashmir" based on a conducted survey (2010) of extensive interviews of half-widows of different villages of the region of Kashmir lays bare the "kahanis" of multifarious (social, economical, legal, psychological and familial) hassles faced

by the women whose husbands 'disappeared' and the whereabouts of whom never could be found:

Besides the uncertainty about the existence of their loved one, they do not get official recognition of their status, as there is no proof of the husband's death... These women, therefore, cannot reconcile with their loss, and their grief becomes prolonged. (Qutab 258-259)

Their existence becomes ostracized, traumatized and stigmatized and they even struggle to eke out a living. Though Ghazala is never shown struggling for life in a state of acute poverty, her oscillating predicament, as a half-widow, vouchsafes the micro narratives of all Kashmiri women. More than sketching her as a diplomatic mind, Bhardwaj concentrates on drawing commiseration of the audience. Her follies of ignorant trust, melodramatic manipulations and indulgence in sexual cravings that are instrumental in the death of her husband and the tragic dilemma of her son recede in the shadowy background and the compassionate tale of a woman neglected by her husband, betrayed by her lover, excessively affectionate to her son on whom she puts her life, surfaces up. In Ghazala's speech Bhardwaj squeezes in the plight of the half-widows of Kashmir. The quandary of the mass of the native women whose husbands has been taken into custody as potential suspects of acts of terrorism reconfigures the 'histoire' laying bare the mishandling of the special powers the armed forces in-

deluge in. Their husbands never return, no trials are held, no FIR is taken, the fine line between the victim and the innocent is never drawn and even the simplest news of where the captives are imprisoned never reach the awaiting relatives. Ghazala in Bhardwaj's hand becomes the representative of all those Kashmiri women who are pathetically torn between an envisioned widowhood-in-future and a tormenting present. The character of Gertrude thus acquires a very different identity in Bhardwaj's hand and contributes to the multidimensional exploration of the crisis in Kashmir.

Bhardwaj even takes the liberty of omitting one of the most important characters, of Horatio's, bestowing on Arshia (Ophelia in *Hamlet*) the plot-function of playing the role of Haider's sole confidant as well as his female companion. Arshia does not remain unassertive and shadowy under the larger-than-life image of the titular protagonist. Unlike Hamlet's Ophelia, she emerges to be a woman of independence and her character compensates for a lack of Horatio in Haider. Anjan Dutta, a noted Bengali filmmaker, in a review of Haider, published in *The Telegraph* on 15th October, 2014, accused Bhardwaj of robbing Haider of the "main pillar of construction called Horatio":

Why does Vishal do away with the main pillar of construction called Horatio in *Hamlet*? Here is where the whole film finally cheats us, the discerning as well as those unaware of the text.

William knew what he was doing. By robbing the primal, most important confidant called Horatio, Haider ends up having no worldview. (Datta)

Nevertheless, Arshia, having conferred with multiple roles, frees the plot of Haider from the necessity of Horatio. She escorts Haider when he returns from Aligarh, feels and shares his unexpressed pain of a shattered memory and always remains a shoulder for Haider to peacefully lean on. If a Horatio were there, it would have made the plot unnecessarily lengthy and tedious. Arshia (played by Shradda Kapoor), again, becomes the instrument connecting Haider and Roohdar (the character replicating Ghost of Old Hamlet). However, like her inter-textual parallel, Arshia, caught in the web of a tormenting psychological dilemma, unable to comprehend the ways of the world where a father betrays her daughter's trust and a frenzied lover murders his beloved's father, sacrifices her own life releasing herself from the burden of a self-built guilt. Bhardwaj takes liberty with the characterization along with moulding the scenes to suit the re-visioned backdrop he has provided to the narrative of Hamlet. Arshia's character acts as an exemplary one revealing the troubled situation faced by the women of Kashmir. Caught in the web of violence Arshia realizes her plight as a ploy in the game of politics, manoeuvred by her own father and police officer Parvez Lone along with Haider's uncle and local political leader Khurram, rather

late. Bhardwaj through the character highlights the power-play prevalent in the valley between the armed and the unarmed where the innocents and the ignorant are victimized. His creative endeavour releases the adaptation from being a slavish imitation, making it a process of reinterpretation and recreation. The viewers experience the palimpsestic echo through the memory of the source text which resonates in repetitions with variance.

The same pattern reappears in relation to the ghost of Hamlet's father who becomes in Haider a separatist leader named Roohdar. In the words of Anjan Dutta, "By making the Ghost an extremist, Vishal makes the huge blunder of robbing Hamlet's revenge of its complexity" (Datta). In Shakespeare, it is the Ghost of Old Hamlet who fanned the flicker of revenge in Hamlet and there have been plenty of debates regarding the ethical identity of the ghost. Haider's Roohdar (literally 'rooh' means soul/ spirit; played by Irfan Khan) narrates a story to Haider, the story that he claims to have the advantage of knowing from spending tortured nights and days in the dungeon-darkness of the jail where he was kept with Hilal Meer (Haider's father), a story of the days they spent together as 'rooh' and 'sharir' (soul and body), 'daria' and 'pani' (river and water), inseparable in anguish until the latter's death by gunshot. Like the ghost in Hamlet, it is Roohdar who plants the seeds of revenge in Haider's mind voicing-over his father's last wish in taking '*intekaam*' (revenge) on his uncle for lending

hand to such a heinous conspiracy. However, the hypotextual enigma re-echoes here in the disparity between Roohdar's version of portraying Hilaal as a tormented figure seeking revenge of his prescribed destiny and Hilaal's portraiture in the initial scenes of being an excessively concerned doctor for whom saving a patient's life matters more than his own. Can a person, who even in the moment of crisis, remembers to instruct medicinal doses to a militant-patient think of revenging his own brother by making his son shoot at his eyes? Haider, not having any other choice, had to put his faith in Roohdar's version of the story as do the audience but the rupture is suggestive. The implied issue of Haider getting trapped and manipulated by the opponent separatist group in dismantling Khurram from his position of power and thereby moving one step closer to the tower of power in Kashmir echoes and re-echoes even after the film ends, just as the ghost of Hamlet announces his resonance throughout Haider and the shadows of preceding revenge tragedies never leave Shakespeare. Moreover, it is the persona of Roohdar, that becomes a tool for Bhardwaj to trace the sub-current of the terrorized reign spread in the valley.

The moments in which Haider touches the height of the marvellous are the scenes of the rambling monologue and the wonderstruck enactment of the play within a play. Haider, like the Prince of Denmark, disguises his motives of revenge in an adopted cloak of madness and for Bhardwaj the

madness of the Bard becomes the trope to present the maddening plight of the people in Kashmir. Interestingly enough, the scene of the monologue is shot using graver shades, mostly greyish. The initial line given to Haider is a reworking of Shakespeare's "To be or not to be: that is the question" in Act III, Scene I – "*Hum hain ke hum nahin/ Hum hain to kahan hai/ Aur gaye to kahan gaye*" (Do we exist or do we not? If we do, then where? If not then where have we gone?) It requires the talent of a master-mind to imagine the Hamletian dilemma in the lives of the Kashmiris. The quintessential Shakespearean question turns out to be the hushed up howls of the Kashmiris whose right to self-determination, at odds with the hegemonic intent of the state, produces a cauldron of violence and nihilism that matches the anguished utterances of the Shakespearean tragic hero.



Figure 1: "Hum Hain Ke Hum Nahin" ("To be or not to be") scene from *Haider*

Haider, representative of the powerless ordinary men of the Valley, speaking from a raised platform

in front of countless heads, reveals strikingly sacrilegious truths questioning the disappearances and mass slaughter of the mass in the name of protecting a country from terrorist attack. It is here, Haider's story becomes the life-haunting narratives of thousands of Kashmiris and Bhardwaj attains the height of universality the Bard possesses. Haider's voice becomes the call of conscience which has remained buried deep within the practised complacency of a terror-stricken marginalised existence. Through the matrix of Shakespeare and the apparent mumbling of raving Haider, Bhardwaj exposes the bleeding wounds of a postcolonial nation state.

Such remarkable episodes highlight how Bhardwaj uses Shakespeare's own concerns about state and authority in Hamlet to a telling effect in his portrayal of Kashmir which acts as the lifeline of the adaptation. This is again evident from the simulation of the 'play within a play' episode from Shakespeare, where the representation soaked in the flavours of Kashmir is a manifestation of the traditional folk dance Dumhal, performed in the valley by Wattal tribes. Bhardwaj successfully employs the folk structure to provide Haider the occasion of enacting a living replica of the disappearance-murder-incest riddle right in the celebratory function of his mother's re-marriage.

The scene remains a rich tapestry, with the feast of colours amidst the bleak snow-covered stony background, the throbbing of multiple instruments

producing a harmonious symphony out of a mind in discord, Shahid's brilliant dance performance and Gulzar's shivering lyrics of *Bismil*—"Mat mil, mat mil,/ Gul se mat mil/ Aye bul-bul-e bismil" ("O Nightingale of the hurt one/ Don't meet the flower") – all contribute to build the thrilling momentum. The theatricality of the climax leaves the audience in mesmerizing magical spin confirming the triumph of the director in giving the relish of a real Shakespeare. Interestingly, the slice of Kashmir, presented in imitation, completes the process of familiarization compelling the viewers to willingly suspend their disbelief in reimagining the crisis of the valley.



Figure : 2. "Bismil" song sequence from *Haider* (replicating Play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*)

Bhardwaj's genius lies in tuning every single Shakespearean chord to sing the soulful rendition of Kashmir. The world of *Haider* entangled in the orb of Kashmir scrupulously exhibits the visible darkness where friendship and betrayal, love and revenge, unrest and calmness coalesce. The role of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two royal spies in

the disguise of Hamlet's friend, appointed by Polonius to keep an eye on the Prince of Denmark, is replaced by Salman and Salman in Haider. They serve the purpose of comic relief in their visibly freakish imitation of Salman Khan (a leading Bollywood Actor with huge fan following) in talking, acting and dressing -- in every possible way. Despite the comic mimicry, the audience is constantly kept in anxious end, even in the funny moments, by repetitively reminding of the real identities of Salman and Salman set in a mission of espionage by Arshia's father, Pervez Lone. The uncanny similarity, of both the Salmans, resembles the inseparableness of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and they meet the same fate of being brutally murdered by the protagonist. Yet, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they too act as governmental spies and practice deceit and violence against Haider to ensure rather tenuous prospects of material gains. In the process, the creation and existence of Salman and Salman operates as a mechanism blackening the portrayal of Kashmir where even the most meagre material gains are enough to induce ethical violations of one degree or another.

The one character that embodies best this pervasiveness of ethical violations where mere survival is most precarious is perhaps the character of Khurram, Haider's paternal uncle, who along with police officer Pervez Lone, in the role of Polonius, plays a key role in unravelling the world of violence, betrayal and greed that dominates everyday

life in Kashmir. Their fraudulent conspiracy discloses how the surreptitious power-plays involving the men of influence contribute to (dis)colouring the lives of thousands of Kashmiris. Khurram, an advocate by profession, is shown in scenes from Haider, disguising his real motive of attaining rule over Kashmir under the garb of helping out defenceless families of ‘disappeared’ people. A person, who himself, uses underhand means to ‘disappear’ his own brother, contriving a joint plot with the police officer is really a sham, yet the fidelity with the actuality of Kashmir is unnerving. However, Bhardwaj also humanises the character of Khurram. Towards the end of the film, his serpentine Claudius-like mask falls off, in the sight of Ghazala’s impending death worn in a girdle round her body. In a freeze-frame shot, there is no revengefulness in the villain’s eyes, there is no fear of death, his sole concern lies in saving his beloved. This is the mark of originality that Bhardwaj imparts Khurram with. He is given a genuine passionate emotion of love which contradicts his connivances in a way that Shakespeare’s Claudius lacks.

This complexity proves to be an integral feature of Bhardwaj’s film and become manifest in the conclusion as well. While the ending with its bloodshed and littered dead bodies obviously recalls the conclusion to Hamlet, there is no vision of providential benevolence with flights of angels. Yet just as the Shakespearean prince had acquired the wisdom of “Readiness is all”, Haider too find release

from the logic of revenge and spares Khurram, even as he lies writhing in pain, having lost both legs after Ghazala sets off the explosives in her suicide-bomber's vest. The culminating metamorphosis is impregnated with a possibility of a new dawn, a sunrise for Kashmir, free from *intekaam* (revenge) — a truth that Hamlet himself realises much too late.

Contextually repositioning Shakespeare into the valley of Kashmir, Bhardwaj thus interlaces Shakespearean tragedy with the political cataclysm of the crucified state. Kashmir emerges as a character in *Haider*, blatantly voicing the unvoiced, untamed and fearless like a rustic child who speaks truth and nothing but the truth. Haider's agonized frustration in search of his disappeared father, his helpless trauma after knowing the truth of ruthless autocracy practised under the garb of democratic shelter of protection, his lunatic frenzies desperate to find a remedy from the inescapable power game — all divulge long-buried harsh realities of thousands of Kashmiri's lives. Kashmir, is truly, the Hamlet in *Haider*, impregnated with the existential crisis, where the ghastly image of hell lurks behind the facade of heaven. The tormented history of Kashmir blends with the political turbulence of *Hamlet's* Denmark and Shakespeare's England in the canvas of *Haider*: prophetically mirroring the crisis of states, astutely interrogating the ethics of authority and persistently exploring the labyrinths within individual psyches, Shakespeare lives with renewed metamorphoses of his texts.

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'What witchcraft is this!': The Postcolonial Translation of Shakespeare and Sangomas in Welcome Msomi's uMabatha

Sarah Mayo

ABSTRACT:

This article revisits the now-famous isiZulu adaptation of Macbeth, Welcome Msomi's uMabatha, produced at the University of Natal in the midst of apartheid South Africa in 1970. The production has remained critically vexing due both to the uncertain distribution of author-director responsibility for the play's creation between black and white South Africans and to the blanket Western critical response to the play as revelatory of true cultural Zulu-ness. This article therefore traces uMabatha's complex composition and production history in order to answer the most predominant remaining critical question: what exactly was translated in this play, and to what effect? I argue that an answer to this question requires consideration of the ideological intersections between Shakespeare's dissemination in colonial and apartheid South

Africa and the production's conscious attempts to construct equivalences between the world of Macbeth and Zulu culture—in particular, between Macbeth's iconic witches and Zulu sangomas.

The use of sangomas within the play offers an important lens through which we can understand the play's logic of cultural translation, for sangomas occupy a role in Zulu culture that is quite distinct from witchcraft. Sangomas are rather diviners who operate socially in opposition to the kind of possibly malevolent witchcraft depicted in Macbeth, but who were chronically misread by colonists as witches. uMabatha in fact perpetuates a post-colonial version of this misreading through its derogatory language and through its uncontextualized performance of divination practice before a Western audience almost unanimously unaware of the difference between the functions of sangomas and witches in Zulu culture. As a result, I argue that what the play offers is less a translation of Shakespeare than a translation of Zulu-ness that is simultaneously not a translation at all, but a false confirmation of Western preconceptions about what it means to be Zulu.

Keywords: South Africa, traditional healing, witchcraft, theatre, Macbeth

As projects like the MIT Global Shakespeares Video & Performance Archive and 2012's landmark Globe to Globe Festival testify, there has been

no shortage of global Shakespearean adaptations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; a key handful, however, have kept scholars in anxious debate for decades after their initial production. Among these is Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha* (1970), an adaptation of *Macbeth* composed and performed in isiZulu and thereafter commonly but unofficially subtitled 'The Zulu *Macbeth*.' It is not Msomi's isiZulu text, however, that has primarily continued to raise critical questions; rather, scholars have remained fascinated and puzzled by the play's performance, reception, and production history. As a result, critics and scholars have sometimes overlooked the implications of the translation decisions made in the composition of the play—how, why, and to what effect, for example, the show's creative producers translated key images and figures from *Macbeth* not only into the isiZulu language, but into Zulu cultural equivalents. This essay seeks to fill a gap in the critical history by examining in particular the alteration of *Macbeth*'s witches—signifiers as iconic in the play's history as the bloody daggers used to kill Duncan—into *sangomas*, traditional Zulu healers. Although many critics and reviewers of the play accepted the presentation of *sangomas* as Zulu cultural equivalents to witchcraft without further question, this move amounts to a crucial dual translation—of Shakespeare on one hand, and of the cultural and historical realities of ubungoma [divination] practice on the other—into a theatrical space in which their complex respective his-

tories in colonial and postcolonial South Africa are erased. In order to better understand this erasure and its potential to reaffirm British cultural hegemony, it is necessary to briefly trace both the history of Shakespearean dissemination in colonial and postcolonial South Africa as well as South Africa's own historical relationship to the *sangomas* working within it.

Shakespeare's dissemination throughout South Africa during the tumultuous colonial history of the early nineteenth century occurred in two major forms: the first was in the growth of colonial theatre, which began in military performances before receiving official inauguration in the opening of governor Sir George Yonge's African Theatre in 1801, celebrated with a production of *Henry IV, Part One* that the Cape Town Gazette glowingly hailed as a "customary honor paid to our Immortal Bard" (qtd. in Wright, Introduction 15). Despite a sweep of Puritan anti-theatrical sentiment in the 1830s, Shakespeare's plays continued to be performed throughout the nineteenth century for white settlers, for whom being involved in the consumption of Shakespeare offered proof of their "affiliations with the imperial and colonial centres" (Orkin, "The Shakespeare Connection" 235).

The more crucial realm in which access to Shakespeare and, by proxy, to these "imperial and colonial centres" was granted or denied was in early mission schools and later third-grade or work-

ing-class schools. Although from a postcolonial standpoint we might expect missionary educators to have programmatically diffused Shakespeare and other canonical British authors among native South African children in a move toward assimilation, in reality educators who attempted to do so were countered by more utilitarian educational officials who saw little use for poetry and drama in a schooling system increasingly designed to create a middle-class workforce by teaching black and lower-class white South African children “Christianity, the English language, and vocational skills” (Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* 29). Thus, while the English language was maintained as a ‘civilizing’ force in the education of black South Africans, the high-culture English literature that established a connection with the British metropole was withheld from most of the black South African population, save those whose expected vocation required more advanced administrative and technical skills or “exceptional trust and responsibility” in the case of future tribal chieftains (Watson 21). Literary education, then, was tied to the means of social mobility for certain colonial subjects—the selectiveness of its distribution in part defined the social and economic divisions colonists hoped to impose.

The postcolonial education system under the formalization of apartheid in the Bantu Education Act of 1953 deliberately diminished this previously open (albeit rare) social mobility, and the stress on

black African vocational education that had formed a long-standing part of the racist undercurrent of educational policy became, again, overt. H. F. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs and later South African Prime Minister, avowed to Parliament that “There is no place for [the Bantu student] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. . . For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community” (qtd. in Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* 163). The result of this anti-assimilatory ideology was that, according to David Johnson, the early years of apartheid saw only a very small percentage of the black student population (0.07 percent) placed in secondary schools where they would be exposed to and take exams on Shakespeare; it was only in the 1960s that Shakespeare was introduced to younger Bantu pupils as well, with “a strong emphasis on being able to summarize the details of the plot” (Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* 170-71). The few interpretive readings of Shakespeare taught to black students seem to have mainly focused on the universality of Shakespearean themes as well as the demonstration in the plays of moral order and harmony, deliberately bypassing “[i]ssues such as those involving language and power, racism or conditions of material struggle,” as Martin Orkin wrote in 1986 (“The Shakespeare Connection” 240). This restriction of interpretive possibilities (reminiscent of the colonial censorship of immoral content in fiction) was, as Orkin

has argued, implicitly if not explicitly connected to attempts to teach black South African children the appropriateness of their social place. Indeed, writer and actor Bloke Modisane acknowledged the educational intent to distance rather than elevate black students by pointing out in his 1963 autobiography *Blame Me On History* that Bantu education had been an “education for a Caliban” (Modisane 179).

For black South African writers like Welcome Msomi, then, exposure to Shakespeare was a carefully monitored part of their schooling as children, inscribed in such a way as to offer the Shakespearian texts as universal treasures while reminding students at the practical level of segregation and censorship that they were not allowed unquestioned access to the cultural and social power that Shakespeare represented. Msomi, for example, recalls encountering Shakespeare through a seventh-grade reading of *Julius Caesar* and an applauded performance of Mark Antony’s oration that inspired him to pursue involvement in the theater; when he attempted to enroll in the University of Natal’s Department of Speech and Drama, however, he was reminded that he “had to apply to the Minister of the Interior to get into a white university” (Msomi, “Why *Macbeth*?” 78). For a writer like Msomi to produce a Shakespearian adaptation in this environment was therefore to produce something already politically complex through its context within the South African apartheid system.

Black South African writers' perceptions and uses of Shakespeare during this time, however, varied enormously. Contrary to British colonial and South African apartheid views that Shakespeare was either above politics or, if necessarily political, then at least committed to the kind of hierarchy and social order that reinforced rather than questioned colonization and apartheid, some South African writers like the late Es'kia Mphahlele, novelist Peter Abrahams, and short-story writer Can Themba argued for a Shakespeare that was, or could be, primarily sympathetic to Africa—an example of white settler culture that might not exclusively “dominate[] and impoverish[] black people . . . [but] provide[] the route to an enlarged self-consciousness” (Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* 174). Can Themba, for example, acknowledged Shakespeare's role in the cultural imperial mission to spread the dominion of the English language—recalling jokingly that *Julius Caesar* was the “starting point in the Shakespearean odyssey for many an African who has staggered through literacy,” as it was for Msomi—while at the same time recognizing that gaining a Shakespearean education could be a form of resistance rather than imposition (150). Themba in fact encouraged black men to take on markers of European high culture like Shakespeare so that, in the face of their oppressors, they could “[t]alk as if the high-brow things came naturally to you” and make their “trembling whiteness look[] round at you with that curious mixed reaction of fear, wrath and horror” (Themba 153).

The ‘universality’ of Shakespeare, which seemed to translate on political rather than idealistic grounds as ‘superiority,’ could be co-opted.

In the theater, the appropriation of Shakespeare took on added levels of complexity. Theater was already an available format for commenting on South African political crises; workshop plays, for example, like those of Athol Fugard, explored relationships with the institution of apartheid while also challenging the principles of segregation through multiracial casting and the collaboration of black and white artists—although the collaborative relationship was often somewhat hierarchical in that the plays usually “made use of white directors, devisers and managements” (Crow and Banfield, “South African ‘Workshop’ Play” 98). Shakespearean appropriation, too, could be deliberately subversive, especially within smaller independent and university theaters with the creative freedom to “interrogate[] the dominant racist ideology in production choices” (Quince 88). Even in appropriations lacking overt political messages, production choices in performing Shakespeare came with practically unavoidable political import. Given the history of English literacy teaching in South Africa, for example, the choice to perform Shakespeare in English or in another language made an immediate impact: as Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong’o argued in his *Writers in Politics* (1981), the language one in which one writes “predetermines the answer to the most important question for producers of

imaginative literature: For whom do I write? Who is my audience?" (53-54).

This question was crucial for playwrights during apartheid, since theater audiences were racially segregated and English was not the dominant language in South Africa according to the percentage of speakers. In fact, as Natasha Distiller notes, South Africa's lingua franca, if it can be said to have one among its eleven official languages, is isiZulu, the language in which Msomi composed *uMabatha*: as of 2000, Theo du Plessis estimated that isiZulu had the greatest percentage of speakers in South Africa at 23%, followed by isiXhosa and English in only fifth place (Distiller, *Shakespeare and the Coconuts* 29; du Plessis 95-110). English, as the language of power in part because it was not the language of the majority, could be deployed in the theater as part of a claim to cultural authority, especially when combined with the cultural cachet of Shakespeare.

Writing or adapting plays in a South African language other than English makes a different claim: it offers evidence that the black South African, contrary to colonial logic, has "a language, a history, a culture of his own" (Crow and Banfield, Introduction 4). Writing in a non-colonial language may therefore be integrated into a sort of theatrical return-to-roots movement or what Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka has called the "quest for racial self-retrieval", an attempt to recover "an Af-

rican cultural personality,” but, crucially, without activating the impulse to reconstruct national identity through Neo-Tarzanist myth-making whereby “the ‘difference’ inscribed in traditional aesthetics is translated as a simple functionalism derivative of the mechanisms of the primitive mind” (Crow and Banfield, Introduction 6, 10; Price 26). For South African playwrights who wish through their work to achieve conformity and socio-cultural advancement, resistance and subversion, or something else altogether, they have at their disposal the tools of English and other South African languages, Western and indigenous theatrical practices, and Western and South African “cultural texts,” described by Christopher Balme as carriers of cultural meaning that are “only fully comprehensible within the culture that produces and uses it” (4, italics mine). Whatever combination of these resources and codes South African playwrights deploy to create a theatrically syncretic product will almost inevitably be read in terms of political choices. For example, Christopher Balme suggests that the integration of cultural texts considered particularly ‘African,’ like song, dance, masking, oral stories and the like into “the framework of a [Western] theatrical text” from which colonialism denied their appropriateness “involves a process of cultural and aesthetic semiotic recoding which ultimately questions the basis of normative Western drama” (4).

Welcome Msomi’s *uMabatha*, then, raises a host of questions based on its syncretic makeup and

background: it is an adaptation of a culturally exalted English text, written and performed in isiZulu, and staged both in South Africa and most famously in London, the British colonial metropole. Even more strangely, it is a collaboration among black and white South African artists whose contributions to the project have remained contested. Some backstory may be necessary here: when Welcome Msoni chose not to apply to the University of Natal through the Minister of the Interior, he channeled his artistry into the creation, in 1965, of his own company, the Black Theatre Company based in Durban. One of his original plays, *Qondeni*, ran at the University of Natal, where Elizabeth Sneddon, the contemporary head of the Department of Speech and Drama into which Msoni had once hoped to gain entry, saw it and apparently lamented its “‘detrimental’ portrayal of Zulu people” (Wright, “Zulu Play or Shakespeare Translation?” 112). The concept of *uMabatha*, a version of *Macbeth* based on “‘the tribal history of the Zulu,’” was to be a positive alternative to this ‘detrimental’ portrayal, suggested by Sneddon to Msoni after, according to Sneddon, it had been previously suggested to her by P. P. Breytenbach in a meeting with the Performing Arts Council (Wright, “Zulu Play or Shakespeare Translation?” 111-12). Msoni tells the story differently: according to Msoni, Sneddon had not proposed a Zulu version of *Macbeth*, but recommended only that he “‘do something Shakespearean,’” at which point he decided that “out of all the plays of Shakespeare,

the one that would fit in well with the Zulu history would be *Macbeth*" (Msomi, "Why *Macbeth*?" 75). The original production's director, Pieter Scholtz, offers a third narrative: according to Scholtz, he had told Sneddon previously that he "would like to do a production of *Macbeth* using the African Tribal experience in place of the clan system that is evident in the play," and, after the concept for the whole production had been planned out, the two professors recruited Msomi as an 'assistant' (Scholtz 40).

The debates over the roles that Sneddon, Scholtz, and Msomi played in the production of *uMabatha* have raised problems for critics and scholars attempting to determine just what the play was intended to do. Analysis of the production therefore usually falls along dichotomous lines, depending in part on the perceived relative responsibilities of its black and white originators. Was it an effort headlined by a Zulu playwright to stage a return to roots in terms like those described by Wole Soyinka through the unexpected use of Shakespeare? Or was it an exploitation of Zulu culture orchestrated by and for a primarily white community? Was it "syncretic theatre," a conscious use of Western and Zulu cultural texts to produce something new and meaningful, or was it syncretic theatre's more dangerous counterpart, "theatrical exoticism," which by nature "pays no heed to the original textuality of the elements it appropriates," but merely "recode[s] and semanticize[s] [them] in an en-

tirely Western aesthetic and ideological frame”)? (Balme 5). Was this a production of Zulu culture through the medium of Shakespeare, or Shakespeare through the medium of Zulu culture?

Although the show’s producers say little about what they were trying to do beyond acting on the exciting parallels that they noticed between ‘Zulu tribal history’ and *Macbeth*, the show’s production materials offer more explicit evidence about the show’s intentions: according to the program for the show’s premiere at the University of Natal’s Open Air Theatre, *uMabatha* was meant to be viewed as “‘a Zulu drama on the theme of *Macbeth*’”—not merely an adaptation of *Macbeth*, but “‘a dramatization of a fierce and momentous epoch in South African history which uses the plotline and conventions of Shakespeare’s play to give greater resonance to its fable of authority, assassination and treachery’” (qtd. in Wright, “Zulu Play or Shakespeare Translation?” 105). When the play ran in London at the World Theatre Season at the invitation of Peter Daubeny in 1972, the program defined this ‘momentous epoch’ more narrowly as the rise and fall of Shaka, the icon held responsible for the consolidation of the Zulu kingdom in the early nineteenth century—and, according to Mervyn McMurtry, a mere marketing ploy for the performance (McMurtry 313).

There are good reasons to think so. What the play claims to be portraying by casting itself as a sus-

tained allusion to Shaka and a ‘fierce and momentous epoch in South African history’ is, in part, the history of the mfecane, the reconfiguration of Nguni-language tribes in southeastern South Africa through territorial warfare waged by the paramount chieftaincies of the Mabhudu, Ndwandwe, Mthethwa, and Qwabe (Buthelezi 23). It was into this fray that Shaka eventually led the minor Zulu clan, consolidating other clans into the Zulu Kingdom—for this, he was gradually immortalized as the greatest representative of Zulu strength and obstinacy, entering into popular imagination as something like a Zulu Caesar, thanks especially to the publication of E. A. Ritter’s popular and mostly invented biography *Shaka Zulu* in 1955 (Wylie 82-86). One event passed down through literary records that has contributed to Shaka’s mythology is his assassination through the political mechanisms of his half-brother Dingane, who was himself overthrown by another half-brother, Mpande, with the aid of Boer forces (Laband 87-96). Were this narrative to be imposed onto that of *Macbeth*, *Macbeth* himself would most closely resemble Dingane, the assassinator overthrown with foreign aid, but *uMabatha* draws the explicit connection between *Macbeth* and *Shaka*, likely for the sake of the sheer power of the Shaka myth, which was invoked by Mangosuthu Buthelezi as a nationalist symbol for the Inkatha movement for tribal autonomy (Quince 55-56).

The play's claims to cultural and historical authenticity were countered, to some degree, by the observation of viewers that it followed the Shakespearean plot almost exactly. In fact, the production is surprisingly quickly locatable on the spectrum of dramatic adaptation defined by Michael Etherton, in which dramatists can make five general adaptive moves:

- 1) the changing of proper nouns (characters, places, titles);
 - 2) the changing of period or setting;
 - 3) the changing of the framework or context;
 - 4) the changing of the story itself;
 - 5) and the changing of themes or final 'points.'
- (Etherton 102-03)

uMabatha translates language and imagery, but not plot: Elizabeth Sneddon affirmed Pieter Scholtz's claim that in preparing the play he "took the European images and found equivalents for them in the Zulu experience of animal images," then asked Welcome Msomi to produce an isiZulu-language text (qtd. in Wright, "Zulu Play or Shakespeare Translation?" 114). And according to Scholtz, the first equivalent he looked for was for *Macbeth*'s three witches: in his first discussion with Sneddon about the possibility of producing a South African *Macbeth*, he says, "We talked about it and I discussed the witches. We would use sangomas" (40). Msomi also claims that the translation of the witches were the first part of his pitch to Sneddon:

upon making up the name *uMabatha* on the spot in conversation with Sneddon, Msomi says that “I went on to tell how the play was going to open with music and dances of the diviners instead of the witches” (“Why *Macbeth*?” 75).

The translation of the witches also played a key part in working with the acting troupe for the production, according to Scholtz, who says that they began rehearsals using the English Shakespearian text, a process which Scholtz has said put him “in despair” because “the cast couldn’t cope with the blank verse,” and even his attempts to explain “what the language was about” failed to improve their performances. So, during the next day’s rehearsal he directed the actors to “‘try the opening witches’ scene, ‘When shall we three meet again,’ but, I said, ‘you do it for me as three sangomas coming together and you do it in Zulu.’ . . . Well, it was an absolute revelation and a miracle” (Scholtz 40-41). The choice to write the play in isiZulu was, according to Scholtz’s narrative, not a cultural statement or reclamation, but a solution to the problem of English illiteracy, while the *sangomas* became the test case for transposition into the Zulu idiom.

Pieter Scholtz, then, did not view *uMabatha* as an original Zulu play, but as “‘a Zulu version of *Macbeth*’”—and viewers of the play’s London run seemed to agree, treating it in reviews primarily as *Macbeth* dressed up in Zulu clothes. This meant that the Zulu cultural texts included in the pro-

duction were, for most audiences, largely matters of spectacle. For newspaper reviewers, for example, aspects of the production like dancing and drumming were interpreted as “instinctive” South African forms of expression that allowed the audience to glimpse true tribal culture, while for some academic scholars like Kate McLuskie, who attended the play’s Globe revival in 1997, these cultural texts were gimmicks that catered to crude audience desire for exotic display while distracting from any attempt that might have been made to give “a more discerning audience an insight into the real social and political relations of contemporary South Africa” (McLuskie 155). Both kinds of responses, as Laurence Wright has pointed out, frequently mistook the Zulu cultural and performance idioms on which *uMabatha* drew (but with different intentions, executions, and results than the idioms enacted in their local contexts). And one thing that both responses tended to take for granted was the translation of the witches into *sangomas*—because *sangomas* are not witches.

Sangomas are, rather, practitioners of a particular form of South African traditional healing often referred to in English as divination. *Sangomas* are specifically selected by ancestral spirits, *amadlozi*, to undergo training to become *sangomas*; they have the special ability to communicate with the ancestors, primarily their own paternal ancestors, in order to carry out consultations with clients that may involve determining the source of a per-

son's illness or misfortune and advising treatment or divining the unknown by casting and reading bones that are manipulated by the *amadlozi* to reveal a message. They also frequently have extensive knowledge of *umuthi wokwelapha*, the herbal medicines used for healing that are also made and distributed by *inyangas* ['herbal doctors']. The practice of what we might think of as witchcraft falls under the different umbrella of practices labeled in isiZulu as *abathakathi*. The form of sorcery that perhaps most closely resembles popular Western conceptions of witchcraft is what Zulu social scientist Harriet Ngubane terms "night-sorcery": this type of sorcery is practiced by an evil being who may have familiars like baboons; he may also resurrect corpses to do his bidding and prepare *umuthi wokubulala*, medicine used for harming, which he scatters in the pathway of victims (31-34). But this kind of sorcerer, Ngubane stresses, is usually a man: while women can be sorcerers, she found during her research in the Nyuswa Reserve that women were most commonly accused of "day-sorcery" born out of personal animosity or jealousy and acted upon by poisoning the victim's food, placing dangerous medicines in their path, or stealing portions of the victim's sacrificial animals (35). *Sangomas*, in contrast, were rarely suspected of sorcery, despite their knowledge of medicinal preparation; Ngubane suggests that this is because "the spirits which possess the diviners expect of them a high moral code" (34).

The relationship of *sangomas* to such witches is in fact partially antagonistic. During the period of the Zulu kingdom, the time in which *uMabatha* claims to be set, *sangomas* played a crucial role in witch trials: if someone raised an accusation of witchcraft, the chief and his head *sangoma* would preside over a hearing called an *umhlahlo*, at which the *sangoma* would ‘sniff out’ the alleged witches (Flint and Parle 312-22). *Sangomas* were thus sometimes closely associated with the chief as “arbitrators of justice [who] represented the existence of a judicial and political system that threatened to interfere with the implementation of white rule” (Flint and Parle 314). Moreover, early colonists and missionaries sometimes mistook the practices of diviners as witchcraft—a significant mistake, given the commonly held notion that African belief in and practice of witchcraft demonstrated “‘primitive’ or ‘pre-logical’ thinking” (Moore and Sanders 2). Attempts to wipe out South African superstition led to the outlawing of traditional healing practices throughout Natal and Zululand during the nineteenth century, although in the 1880s, once anti-witchcraft measures had proved unsuccessful, colonial officials in the region issued a Code of Native Law that licensed at least “those African healers who posed the least threat to the colonial state and most closely resembled biomedical practitioners”—primarily *inyangas*, who could then commercialize and professionalize their occupation (Flint and Parle 315).

Sangomas continued to cause concern for the colonial and eventually apartheid establishments due to their role in witch trials: colonial attempts to eradicate widespread belief in witchcraft often involved punishing those who raised witchcraft accusations, including the *sangomas* responsible for ‘sniffing’ witches out. The same measures were behind the Suppression of Witchcraft Act No. 3 of 1957, amended in 1970, which “consolidated earlier colonial laws into unified legislation for the whole country” and instituted potential fines, imprisonment, or whippings for individuals who accused others of witchcraft (Niehaus 186). The Act targeted *sangomas* as well, legislating a possible fine of R200 or two years of imprisonment for “those who claim to possess the powers of divination” (Niehaus 186). After the end of the apartheid state, the handling of witchcraft and traditional healing practices remained a matter of importance for at least two primary reasons: the first is that the last decade of apartheid government had witnessed over 389 witchcraft-related killings in South Africa, and the new South African government was unsure how to discourage such violence; and second, the occurrence of HIV/AIDS in South Africa was sometimes attributed by locals to the practice of witchcraft, which could lead to individuals with symptoms of the disease consulting *sangomas* rather than or prior to biomedical practitioners (Ashforth 211-12). One response to both of these issues has been the attempted regulation and registration of traditional healers, including

sangomas, combined with collaboration between traditional medicine and biomedicine in combatting HIV/AIDS (Mbatha et al.; Harrison).

Sangomas have thus occupied a number of roles in relation to the South African government, in a trajectory that we might call the inverse of Shakespeare's: whereas Shakespeare was a marker of civilizing high culture, divination practices were viewed by colonial powers as evidence of the need for civilizing forces. Yoking the two together on stage could potentially destabilize the cultural hierarchy that has historically existed between them, but is that what happened in *uMabatha*? The convoluted reception of the play, as well as the text itself, suggest perhaps not. First, many contemporary reviews interpreted the *sangomas* as witches: Carole Woddis, for example, glosses the word *sangomas* as "witches," while Ben Brantley similarly refers to the figures as an "athletic trio of witches." For viewers like Greg Doran, the presence of what he perceived to be witches were crucial to *uMabatha*'s success; Doran, having seen the play in Johannesburg in 1995, expressed his pleasure at watching *Macbeth* "in this context, in a society with a real relationship to witchcraft," in contrast to British productions which, precisely because of the death of witchcraft as a matter of "mass popular interest" in the British Isles and America after the 1950s, were doomed to "fail" (qtd. in McLuskie 164). Even The Globe Theatre's own summary of a 2001 revival refers, in its explanation of the

show's ritual character, to "the three witches," who "moved simultaneously, chanting in musical phrases of three, a symbolic number in magic and mysticism" (Jeynes and Ryan 9).

Most other reviewers glossed the sangomas as witch doctors: Greg Evans, for example, confidently asserted in his review of the 1997 production that in *uMabatha* "the bard's witches become witch doctors," and Celesta Billeci wrote in the same year that the play shifts "the three cauldron-tending witches to prescient, dancing witch doctors." The term 'witch doctor,' however, is also disliked by working *sangomas* due to its contemporary association with harmful forms of sorcery or black magic and *umuthi* (Fihlani; Sly)—tourism sites for the communities of Eshowe and KwaNyuswa even advise potential visitors that sangomas are not and should not be called witch doctors ("Zulu Medicine & Healers"). The frequent Western interpretation of the *sangomas* as witch doctors in particular may have been colored by the lingering influence of Orson Welles's famous "Voodoo Macbeth" of 1936, a production structured around the curses of a male witch doctor and similarly hailed for its spectacle of dark magical exoticism and criticized for its supposed Shakespearean illiteracy—Welles himself claimed that his black actors lacked "any special intellectual intoxication," but that they brought to their performances instead a native spiritual connection to tragedy and to magic (Rippy 88).

Certain reviewers of *uMabatha* likewise felt that what the cast brought to *Macbeth* was an ‘essence,’ a readable Africanness defined by violence and superstition in which the Shakespearean language was unnecessary, because the supposedly universal thematic content was somehow still uniquely applicable to Africa. Ian Forsythe, reviewing the play’s first run in the Maynardville Open-Air Shakespearean Theatre in Cape Town in 1974, assured audiences that “[i]t is unnecessary to be able to understand Zulu,” while a reviewer for *The Argus* commented that “[a]mbition, revenge, blood, courage, nobility, a strong belief in hierarchical society and traditional values . . . —these fit themselves naturally into noble Zulu folklore”; the *sangomas* are therefore “very credible, crouching half-naked over their pot” (qtd. in Distiller, “Zulu *Macbeth*” 161-62). Their ‘credibility’ here relates not to how authentic the characters are as *sangomas*, but to how credible they are as strange and exotic figures of superstition. In fact, although *uMabatha* incorporates within its action details that are associated with the actual divination practices of *sangomas*—bone-casting, ancestral communication, ritual singing and dancing—audiences seem still to have read the characters as witches roughly synonymous with the Scottish weird sisters of Shakespeare’s original play. The Zulu production’s text, despite its incorporation of actual divination images, encourages rather than discourages this conflation with witchcraft through its close adherence to the plot and character interactions of *Macbeth*:

as a result, Mabatha and Bhangane encounter the *sangomas* and, like Macbeth and Banquo, immediately hold them in contempt: Bhangane tells them in the English translation that “[y]ou are less than dirt,” while Mabatha frequently refers to them as serpents (1.3). While *sangomas* can have special associations with snakes, particularly in visions through which the ancestors communicate with them, snakes, particularly the mamba, can also be the familiars of the more malevolent *abathakathi*, and Mabatha’s negative use of the snake image points more nearly to the latter (Ngubane 87; Jolles and Jolles 235).

Mabatha and Bhangane’s immediate distrust seems unusual, given the generally respected occupation of *sangomas*, but there are other places within the text of *uMabatha* that suggest an affiliation or identification of the characters with the more malevolent *abathakathi*. In Act 4 Scene 1, as the *sangomas* prepare to meet Mabatha again, they mark the time by the sounds of the jackal, the “Tokoloshe,” and the “evil bird,” all of which are types of familiars: the *tokoloshe* or *Thikoloshe*, for example, is “a small hairy being with prominent sex organs, which has attributes of making itself invisible” (Ngubane 34). Later, once Mabatha has experienced a vision of ancestral spirits through the *umuthi* of the *sangomas*, he shouts at the *sangomas* “what witchcraft is this!” The effect of these associations and accusations is to imply, as is implied in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, that Mabatha’s

downfall is not only foretold but also possibly orchestrated by the craft of the ‘witches.’ The *sangoma*’s occupation and social roles are thus erased and replaced with stark implications of witchcraft due to the need for *uMabatha*’s plot and character interactions to follow those of *Macbeth*.

So, in a production that clearly attempted to stick as close to Shakespeare as possible (which, as has been observed, meant not inserting the kind of discernible political messages that appeared in more syncretic adaptations of Shakespeare or in collaborative workshop protest theatre), what happened to the witches in their translation into sangomas, and what happened to sangomas in their translation into Shakespeare? I suggest that, for Western audiences, Shakespeare’s witches became signifying spaces into which an image of African superstition could be distilled, regardless of the exact title or occupation of the rewritten figure (in this case, the *sangomas*). As Zulu cultural markers they were delivered to audiences without cultural context, leading a Western audience especially with working knowledge of *Macbeth*, but not of Zulu culture, to make false equivalences between the two; the *sangomas* could thus read to global audiences at the most superficial level as the embodiment of homogenized superstition, and their manifold social roles—as arbitrators of justice, as subjects of a colonial justice system, as healers—remained mostly invisible.

Furthermore, because the producers of *uMabatha* wished to create, first and foremost, a Shakespearean production, and therefore held the major framework of *Macbeth* firmly in place without negotiating its potential relationships to Zulu culture besides rather shallow, image-based parallels, the displays of Zulu culture like divination practice presented on stage were primarily understood by uninformed viewers in terms of the Shakespearean plot. The overstated Zulu sameness to Shakespeare, explained by viewers and producers alike as a similarity based on violence, superstition, etc., was therefore actually a perceived sameness to the medieval Scotland described by Shakespeare—not to the English culture that produced the high culture of Shakespearean theater. The dominating presence of Shakespeare in this production subsumed and manipulated cultural specificities like *ubungoma* practice to present something admired, understood, and re-projected by Western audiences as purely Other, in the same moment that Shakespeare's universal transcendence was reaffirmed.

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