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SHAKESPEARE, MEMORY AND POST-COLONIAL ADAPTATION

Andrew J. Power

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is a play that begins by remembering another canonical author from an earlier age (Chaucer), it dramatizes the (past) centre of Western cultural history (Athens) and it dramatizes the fringe, or the local, in the moment of performing the canonical in adaptation (Ovid, ‘Pyramus and Thisbe’) for an audience at the centre. In its focus on adaptation and revision, on language and translation, on the tension between the regional and the central, it dramatizes a number of the issues that are at the core of the study of Shakespearean adaptation. The patronization of, and the qualitative judgments offered to, the mechanicals’ performances raise issues for the attitude of the academy towards performance and adaptation at the ‘local’ level by non-metropolitan companies. Many of the same things can be said of its sister play, the collaborative The Two Noble Kinsmen, but that play also highlights something that is only briefly alluded to in the earlier Dream, the fact that Theseus is the ruler not just of a kingdom but of an empire, an empire that has colonized and subsumed the Amazon nation (for one) into its own political mass. So when Hippolyta responds to the critique of the mechanicals’ play she does so from the centre but not as the centre, she occupies a space at the centre of the empire as (imminent) wife to the emperor, but also still as foreign. Very few people can be argued to be of the centre anymore and the empire that Shakespeare was once a symbol of has crumbled, and is moreover in danger of dividing even further in the wake of the ‘Brexit’ referendum to leave the European Union (in which Scotland and Northern Ireland seem to wish to remain).

The Two Noble Kinsmen begins by remembering roughly the same opening situation as A Midsummer Night’s Dream, but it does so with an added request that Theseus colonize yet another realm (Thebes). The political duties of The King’s Men are apparent in Palamon and Arcite’s discussion of the competing loyalties to nation (under a tyrant king, Creon) and to honour (in response to a noble conqueror, Theseus). In their resolution of the discussion, Palamon determines that they must fight for Thebes against their sense of virtuous service:

Let’s to the King, who, were he
A quarter carrier of that honour which
His enemy come in, the blood we venture
Should be as for our health, which were not spent,
Rather laid out for purchase. But, alas,
Our hands advanced before our hearts, what will
The fall o’th’ stroke do damage?

(I.2.107–13)

They choose nobly to remain loyal to their nation while desiring to be conquered by an honourable enemy. This is the ultimate fantasy of the colonizer, that the conquered would yield (like the once ‘dreaded Amazonian’ Hippolyta – *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, I.1.78) willingly to the conquering force, as Theseus expresses it: ‘I wooed thee with my sword, / And won thy love doing thee injuries’ (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, I.1.16–17).

Both plays also contain a dramatic performance of questionable success. The mechanicals of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* perform an adaptation of something that they have very little understanding of, even in terms of the dramatic tradition that they vie to become a part of. However, there is an even more unusual disconnect between the rustics and what they play in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Their dance recreates something that is both recognizable and recognizably native, but at the same time something whose origins are most probably foreign and exotic, a Moorish dance. How much of this is recognizable to the critical and seemingly informed audience that they encounter in Athens is not easy to determine. In explaining some of the ways that adaptation works, Julie Sanders draws a theoretical line back through Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality, noting that the networks that might form part of the systems of meaning that any new text might operate in or come from are not all literary. How much must be recognizable for an audience to enjoy, or appreciate the work that they are presented is thus difficult to discern. In attempting to unravel some of the issues of power, control, ownership of text, nation, colonization, language and alienation that adhere to studies of Shakespeare in adaptation and in translation, this discussion will explore a number of different layers of Shakespeare’s colonial legacy. From the preceding beginning in the explicit colonialism in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* it moves to explore Shakespeare in a non-English context and a particular (and particularly problematic in terms of its treatment of intellectual disability) Spanish production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. From there it moves to a consideration of an actual and self-consciously English-colonial context in an adaptation of *Macbeth* in production in Dublin, before discussing another Dublin adaptation, again of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In this *Dream* the sensitive issue of disability is again revisited in that this production was by a cast constituted almost entirely of actors with intellectual disabilities. The critical discussion of these productions and adaptations, that develop parallel issues of language and difference, of power and authority, leads finally to a broader discussion of transcultural adaptations.

At a production of *Sueño de una Noche de Verano* (a Spanish language production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) in the Matadero in Madrid (Javier L. Patiño and Darío Facal, Metatarso, 2016) I found myself in the unusual position of not understanding very much of the text of a Shakespeare play for the first time in a number of years. It was a useful reminder of the difficulty that students have with plays in a language that is not familiar. I listened particularly hard for the line, ‘Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art translated’ (III.1.105), but it eluded me. In the end what stood out was the foreign nature of the fairies (exemplified by Emilio Gavira in the role of Puck) and the hilarious stupidity of the mechanicals (most extreme in the performance of Oscar de la Fuente as Flute). However, these were not entirely unproblematic performances given that Gavira’s dwarfism was played upon as part of his exotic appeal (he played as if regularly uncomfortable with the overly affectionate dandling, stroking and cradling that he received from Theseus) and that de la Fuente’s performance as Flute
seemed at times to emulate, insensitively, a person with an intellectual disability.8 Thus, in some ways, these performances seemed to recall the uncomfortable sexuality of the mad Daughter of The Two Noble Kinsmen. There were also sexual overtones to this adaptation more generally (Alejandro Sigüenza, who doubled as Oberon and Theseus, was particularly libidinous in both roles and for both sexes, and Katia Klein’s Helena was similarly lustful) playing as much, perhaps, with Madrid’s reputation as a sexually liberated city as with the eroticism of Shakespeare’s play. Like the ‘babion with long tail and eke long tool’ of The Two Noble Kinsmen (III.5.134), Bottom and the Indian Boy are, between them, the appealing (or desired) exotic and the feared monstrous of the cross-cultural encounter that is the essence of Said’s ‘other’. Indeed, Bottom (of the Mechanicals) and the Bavian (of the ‘Moorish’ dance) represent the rampant animalistic sexuality that is characteristic of the romantic entanglements of the two plays in terms of their desirability, but also in their disturbing and frightening difference. Lois Potter found that a production of The Two Noble Kinsmen at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) (dir. Barry Kyle, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, London, 1986) ‘connected the Daughter’s experience of the morris with her later obsession about Palamon’s sexual potency, emphasizing the sexuality of the dancers (especially the suggestively costumed Bavian) and their cavortings on their way home at the beginning of IV.1’.9 Thus, both plays offer, in performance, and in the performance of performance, an interesting light on what can be most appealing and what is often off-putting in foreign appropriations of the canonical.

This discussion uses A Midsummer Night’s Dream and even more so its sister play The Two Noble Kinsmen as a starting point to try to illuminate some of the ongoing issues in Shakespearean postcolonial adaptation, paying particular attention to the role that memory plays in the processes of adaptation and of interpretation. It begins from the position that The Two Noble Kinsmen dramatizes (as does A Midsummer Night’s Dream), what Julie Sanders refers to as, ‘a particular interest in margins: country settings and local, even regionalist, concerns’.10 This process is played out against the background of a larger empire (in the process of expansion), acknowledging that language is one of the key problems (and perhaps opportunities) of adaptation, and that foreignness and/or otherness involves both attraction and repulsion (often both at once).

**Empire**

‘erc’les vein, a tyrant’s vein’

(A Midsummer Night’s Dream, I.2.33)

When Theseus encounters the foreign Queens, the way that he finds to relate to them, to sympathize with their plight, is to remember Hercules’ reaction to seeing one of them at her wedding: ‘Hercules our kinsman – / Then weaker than your eyes – laid by his club. / He tumbled down upon his Nemean hide / And swore his sinews thawed’ (I.1.66–9). His first instinct when he encounters the foreign warriors, Palamon and Arcite, is to admire the animalistic in them: ‘I saw them in the war, / Like to a pair of lions smeared with prey, / Make lanes in troops aghast’ (I.4.17–19). However, as he has grown to admire them more and more he again thinks back upon something familiar to him and can only make sense of Palamon’s nobility by comparison again with the great Hercules: ‘Surely the gods / Would have him die a bachelor lest his race / Should show i’th world too godlike. His behaviour / So charmed me that, methought, Alcides was / To him a sow of lead’ (V.5.116–20). This is one of the most prominent features of cross-cultural encounters, and as such of adaptation, that in order to make the strange comprehensible, the stranger must imagine the encountered as something familiar. Theseus must
scan his memory for something that he imagines to be comparable to these newly encountered foreigners. Conversely, Palamon and Arcite are in the curious predicament that they wish to reject or to forget their own culture, or at least their kinsman, the tyrant Creon and their country’s recent history. Until word of Theseus’ invasion had reached them, they had determined to ‘leave his court that [they might] nothing share / Of his loud infamy’ (I.2.75–6) and to escape beyond ‘the echoes of his shames’ (I.2.80). The figures of Hercules (for Theseus) and of Creon (for Palamon and Arcite) loom large in the memories of both conqueror and conquered.

There are very few empires left in the world and very few colonies. On the morning that the British exit from the European Union (Brexit) was announced, Irish radio (discussing the potentially catastrophic effects that might ensue) declared that, prior to the opening of the Irish stock exchange, markets in Japan and Hong Kong had already significantly fallen. On the other hand, that Scottish and Northern Irish politicians have been gaining popular feedback to assertions that it is better for these UK entities to remain in Europe than in the Kingdom is a sign of just how post- some former colonies of England now are. Memories are like monuments, and often stand awkwardly in the mind’s eye-line when one would most like to forget. Even as one grand political alliance (if not empire) fell, Irish eyes gazed across from one former colony to two others (Japan and Hong Kong) and across at two current members (Scotland and Northern Ireland) as if to try and gauge, or to imagine, what might now ensue. The 2016 celebrations of Shakespeare’s 400th Deathday stood in awkward relief with the 100th Anniversary of the birth, or at least conception, of the Irish Freestate. That 100 years later, as the UK leaves a political alliance to which Ireland remains integral, we shudder to be sundered from our erstwhile brutal conqueror says something of the political Stockholm Syndrome that is the postcolonial state. Two Irish productions of Shakespeare discussed below may be of particular interest here: one a professional, but decidedly fringe, production of Macbeth and the other an amateur production of an adaptation of A Midsummer Night’s Dream with a particularly interesting twist.

Shakespeare’s later, collaborative play, The Two Noble Kinsmen contains, alongside Palamon and Arcite’s will to disengage themselves from a culture that has become distasteful to them, an idealized memory of an Amazon nation. Emilia recalls the love of her childhood friend Flavina and insists, upon Hippolyta’s prompting, that she ‘shall never, like the maid Flavina, / Love any that’s called man’ (I.3.84–5). The recollection is most often engaged as raising issues of gender and sexuality, and there is certainly something of the savour of the lesbian romance to the breathlessness of Emilia’s retelling of this tale of perhaps not quite innocent love. However, there is also something of the political lament for a culture (an all-female culture) now lost to the (male) conqueror. The resistance that she displays to the idea of a husband is, in this context, as much a political resistance as it is one of sexual preference, for to force her to choose a husband is to force her to relinquish the traditions of her own people. There is something of this resistance, and also of the anguished childhood memory, in the first Irish Shakespearean adaptation that I will discuss.

Pan Pan theatre company’s MAC-BETH 7 (dir. Gavin Quinn, Project Arts Theatre, Dublin, 2004) declared itself ‘an unashamedly postcolonial interpretation of Shakespeare’s Mac Beth [sic.]’. Play notes suggested a focus on language that jars with the realities of studying Shakespeare in our time, let alone in a post-colonial context. Quoting Oscar Wilde, it declared ‘I am Irish by race but the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare’. Quinn’s innovation was to localize the play into an almost Beckettian Irish schoolroom where it seemed at times the play was recited (if not fully dramatized) on a daily basis. Thick Dublin accents (as opposed to those traditionally associated with Shakespearean performance in Ireland) jarred against the Shakespearean language in such a way that meaning became an extremely problematic experience. Macbeth’s schoolroom bully was played off against Lady Macbeth’s (aborted?)
teen pregnancy. Here, Shakespeare was a jarring and inappropriate symbol of a class, and one of a number of painful memories being played out on the stage. The additional layer of meaning so bluntly alluded to in the programme notes was that Shakespeare (language and all), as the ultimate symbol of Britishness, was one of the many traumatic events in the formative years of the Irish nation. That Shakespeare’s play is effectively about civil war and the shadow of a usurping tyrant makes it all the more resonant when wrested to that purpose. In this type of adaptation Shakespeare is re-appropriated as the thing with which to strike back against its own original use. Here, the dominance of Shakespeare in an Irish school curriculum in the seventies and early eighties (during which Quinn would have been at school) is played off against the fact that the Irish language was banned from schools for centuries (the eighteenth and nineteenth primarily) and only survived in hedgeschools. In this conflation, Shakespeare becomes the thing that displaces the true language of the nation. This is the danger that the spread of Shakespeare has been seen to pose in the colonial world, and it continues to be at issue in the spread of a westernized Global culture. Of course, in opposition to Wilde’s (and Quinn’s) assertion, we learn that not even ‘the English’ speak ‘the language of Shakespeare’ anymore. An adaptation such as this sidesteps one of the most contentious issues with Shakespearean adaptation (that is fidelity to the text), because it does remain faithful to the original in having the actors speak it to a great extent as it is (questions of edition aside). However, the context of the performance, so at odds with the words spoken, highlights the problems inherent in that text, and moreover highlights the problems that that text poses for a generation of postcolonial subjects educated in a language that is not their own – a cultural history that is that of their recent forefathers’ oppressors and murderers.

Following the Revolutions of 1989 as they have been popularly grouped (but that included revolutions in Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dismantling of the USSR in 1991, and the division of Czechoslovakia into two separate states in 1993), Eastern Europe (much of which is now more properly known as central Europe) became a site of intense interest for scholarship of Shakespearean appropriations. The Maastricht Treaty of 1993 turned the former EEC (European Economic Community) into the EU (European Union), so shaken in recent years by economic turmoil that has led, perhaps, to this moment of Brexit. In its wake, studies of European Shakespeares dominated Global Shakespeare scholarship. Now, after the Arab Spring, it must be expected that some of the most intense adaptation scholarship will come from countries affected (or yet to be affected) by that seeming wave of revolution that has most recently swept our globe.

It is, perhaps, in this light that Stephen Greenblatt chose a visit to Tehran as the subject of his afterword to the Shakespeare Association of America Collection, *Shakespeare in Our Time*. As has been characteristic of his work for much of his career, he began with an anecdote, a recollection that is not as clearly conscious of its own political history as one might expect from such a great scholar. Upon receipt of an invitation to act as keynote at a congress in Tehran, he found himself remembering an intended, but unrealized trip to Iran during his university days at Cambridge. He recalled the Persian wonders discovered in the British Museum, and he explains that he determined to accept the invitation despite difficulties over a visa and uncertainty over travel and, of course, fear for his own security: ‘For Shakespeare has served for more than four centuries now as a crucial link across the boundaries that divide cultures, ideologies, religions, nations, and all the other ways in which humans define and demarcate their identities’. It is difficult as an Irishman to stand, or even to remember standing, in the British Museum (awed all the same) and not ponder the violence that must have allowed for the acquisition of the artefacts on display. There is a cultural memory that many Irish share that makes it impossible to view British cultural institutions without recalling the violence done to our ancestors (on either side of the religious, political, cultural divide). In fact, the
Union Jack is a visual stimulus to fear among a certain strand of the Irish populace in much the same way that a balaclava or a burqa might subconsciously, subrationally inspire fear in others. Moreover, in spite of Greenblatt’s magnanimity and will to partake in the great conversations that are ongoing in Global Shakespeare studies, to refer to the British Museum without irony in such a piece, to portray a visit to the University of Tehran as if it were a visit to the ultimate fringe, is telling of his own cultural place (even quite simply as someone who would be invited to address the Iranian Shakespeare Congress or to write the afterword to a book entitled Shakespeare in Our Time). For, of course, to assert that Shakespeare unites us across ‘boundaries that divide cultures, ideologies, religions, nations, and all the other ways in which humans define and demarcate their identities’ is Bardolatry at its most naive. Shakespeare is a dividing line. To pretend that he is anything else is to ignore culture, ideology, religion, nation, and all the other things that are important to human beings. In fact, sometimes that is the very utility of Shakespeare. If we cannot recognize that then we might as well say that Ronald MacDonald brings us together, deliver MacDonald’s to Tehran, and leave it at that. In all honesty, Shakespeare very rarely serves the fringes, is never truly global (except perhaps in air miles and carbon footprint) because access to Shakespeare, even among the privileged, is limited by language. But there too there is opportunity for useful innovations in adaptation.

Nonetheless, Greenblatt’s impulse is a helpful one and the same volume contains a really interesting section on ‘Globalisation’ (pp. 159–75) that concludes with a useful exploration of Shakespearean scholarship in India by Jyotsna G. Singh20 that may help us get beyond the musical popularity of Bollywood appropriations.21 Moreover, there is some equally important work focusing on political Shakespeares in the Arab world. Three years before the Arab Spring, Critical Survey devoted a volume to ‘Arab Shakespeare’ (19:3, 2007). Of course, Britain is not the only empire ever to have conquered significant portions of the globe and, perhaps less obviously, the experience of the Shakespearean colonial legacy is not exclusive to England. For instance, Shakespeare also becomes part of the French colonial legacy. As Khalid Amine explains, following Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), Shakespeare in French translation along with Molière became the staple of an incipient Egyptian theatre. Here, Shakespeare was not Shakespeare, but Shakespeare filtered through French translation into Arabic adaptation. However, it was also something else. In Romeo and Juliet (trans. Najib al-Haddad) subtitled Martyrs of Love (Shuhada’ al-Gharam) audiences were reminded of Quays and Leila, a ‘well-known love story in the Arab literature of the Umayyad period (pp. 661–750)’.22 Shakespeare in this instance is a complicated cultural commodity (an imported (English) artefact of the western world), but not so much the thing itself as its echo through another western power (French), and in that a reminder of the conquered state of the producer.

Bottom’s translation anxiety, Mowbray’s fear of finding himself imprisoned within his own skull, is a fear of forgetting or of finding that there is nothing to remember. As if Hamlet’s table full of ‘trivial fond records’ were indeed ‘wipe[d] away’ (1.5.99) rendering the search for meaning fruitless, pointless. His memory wiped clean, what meaning can emerge? Or, what can we do in the absence of the original cultural referents? Hamlet imagines the scenario in order to prioritize action, to make the act of vengeance live all alone in his mind. Early cinematic adaptations took this as their cue card, and the best cinematic adaptations still are marked by the ability to use the medium to make a picture tell a thousand words. The success of adaptations like Throne of Blood (1957) and Ran (1985) are a mark of the capacity for this sort of approach to make the most of a loss of language. However, of course, Akira Kurosawa is not just replacing words with action, or stripping bare Shakespeare to its essential narrative. He is also engaging his audiences in an act of social memory, replacing pre-Christian Scotland and Britain with the Samurai wars of medieval Japan and replacing early modern theatrical convention with recognizable ones from
Japanese Noh theatre. For a Japanese audience, this makes the foreign history of Macbeth and of King Lear recognizable, as the Mechanicals’ rendition of Ovid relocates Pyramus and Thisbe to contemporary Athens (which, we may imagine, is strangely reminiscent of an early modern English town). For a western audience, this gives us a window into a foreign culture that we now have something from our own memories with which to compare and associate.

The RSC performance of The Two Noble Kinsmen of 1986 attempted to focus on the romance of the play. This was perhaps something beyond British cultural memory for most audience members, especially ‘the sense of a warrior society’: the director, Barry Kyle, opted not for the chivalric swords and steel that has now become so popular in the wake of Game of Thrones, but for imagery that was ‘largely Japanese’.22 Kyle here was responding (at the centre) to a particularly strong strand of Shakespeare adaptation and to studies of Shakespearean adaptation.

Language

Have I said, ‘thus let be’, and ‘there let be’,
And ‘then let be’, and no man understand me?
(The Two Noble Kinsmen, III.5.9–10)

Dublin is hardly the fringe and Quinn’s Mac Beth 7 showed a critical awareness that betrayed a certain privilege that is not shared in other regions that are performing and adapting Shakespeare. In fact, it is something of an absurdity to suggest that, whatever the experiences of previous generations of Irishmen, 1980s Dubliners (with access to a relatively sophisticated critical read on Shakespeare and living through a ‘Celtic Tiger’ economic boom) were oppressed by very much of anything more than the odd, overzealous English teacher. Quinn’s is sophisticated theatre. In fact, he is a brilliant adaptor and director, but it is not the theatre of the oppressed by any stretch of the imagination. A contemporaneous amateur production of an adaptation of A Midsummer Night’s Dream offers a view from a far less privileged perspective and is enlightening for it. By Moonlight (dir. Declan Drohan) featured a cast (almost) entirely made up of actors with Down’s Syndrome and of actors with other intellectual disabilities, working under the company name Quick Bright Things.23 Their ingenious director, Drohan integrated with the play as part of the chaos of the forest outside of Athens, doubling up as one of the fairy entourage and as functional prompter, aiding his company with the difficult task of remembering their lines. One of the most difficult issues that attaches to adaptation is language and this production made clear that this is not just a matter of translation. The greatest energy of this performance lay in performance of the anguish caused by the language that Athenians use to each other in the forest.

In the play Bottom finds himself ‘translated’.24 Like his other malapropisms that reveal a linguistic inaccuracy to be one of his foibles, he finds himself transformed. However, his mistake highlights another of his difficulties. Though a native speaker, Bottom lacks the ability to use language accurately. Curiously, this does not limit his capacity to earn the admiration of his peers and even to profit by his performances to a sophisticated and critical audience. This is one of the essential difficulties in being the other in another place and language. The issue arises with Mowbray who fears being lost without it:

The language I have learnt these forty years,
My native English, now I must forgo,
And now my tongue’s use is to me no more
Than an unstringèd viol or a harp,
Or like a cunning instrument cas’d up,
Or, being open, put into his hands
That knows no touch to tune the harmony.

(Richard II, I.3.153–9)

Caliban utters this frustration from the other side, having learned a language not fully enough to express himself eloquently but just enough to curse, to vent anger at someone whose language puts him at an intellectual disadvantage: ‘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!’ (The Tempest, 1.2.366–8). The Tempest is another play that Quick Bright Things and Declan Drohan produced with some success as Tempest! (2007). In this adaptation the play was transported to a mental space: ‘A young woman [Miranda] struggles to retrieve her memory. In dreams, flashes and fragments she offers us glimpses of a nightmare world where ritual and symbol seem to hold actual power.’

The Tempest is another play that Quick Bright Things and Declan Drohan produced with some success as Tempest! (2007). In this adaptation the play was transported to a mental space: ‘A young woman [Miranda] struggles to retrieve her memory. In dreams, flashes and fragments she offers us glimpses of a nightmare world where ritual and symbol seem to hold actual power.’

25 This is where these adaptations are at their most brave and most effective/affective. These moments of lingual tension, of translation anxiety we might say, play off uncomfortably against the intellectual disabilities of the actors. Dirk Delabastita and Ton Hoenselaars deal with a number of passages that might fall into this category, ‘examples [that] testify to the way in which early modern literature experienced multilingualism as a source of anxiety over disruption in inter-human communication’. However, in the same breath, they recognize the colonial impulse that followed hard upon this anxiety, ‘the way in which, with some ease, this same anxiety could be (and in the course of the centuries actually was) successfully transformed into linguistic self-assertion, both at home and in the expanding world’. At the Quick Bright Things production of By Moonlight there was no such colonial tension, rather the stated purpose of their work is to help with ‘skill building, discipline and teamwork’. Though ‘considered ancilliary’ they admit to welcoming ‘therapeutic or broader educational/learning outcomes’. This is primarily an experimental theatre troupe, but one that uses the context of care as part of its experiment.

The difficulty that these actors must face in understanding the difficult language of Shakespeare’s text (let alone remembering their lines) then is partially bridged over in these cases by the capacity to identify so much the better with the problems of language itself and the translation anxiety that these plays dramatize. There is also potential in an overly-keen dramatic irony here, where the audience may come to understand quite differently from the actors the nature of their disabilities. This can be a virtue of the performance, the discomfort of this recognition becoming one of the elements that highlights their plight for us, or it can be that which turns a production into one more ill-considered act of patronization against an already under-represented group within our communities.

Hamlet at home and abroad

‘Remember me’

(Hamlet, I.5.91)

In April 2014, Shakespeare’s Globe commenced a two-year tour that would bring a production of Hamlet (dir. Dominic Dromgoole) to ‘every country in the world’. The performance (which I saw in the Canal Theatre in Madrid) played upon the idea that this was a travelling troupe. Their choice of Hamlet was a good one for a number of reasons. The Spanish woman who sat beside me mouthing whole speeches attested to how well known the text is internationally (or at least in Spain). Their set was thrown together out of a large travelling chest and shifted around
by the actors (who doubled up roles as much as was possible) as the play developed. There were also diverse groups of ethnicities being staged, rendering the production ‘global’ in its investigations of questions of raison d’être, belonging and essence. Moreover, this is of course a play in which a travelling troupe performs for the court. The performance worked particularly well when in the play scene, which was the major innovation of this production: this scene hinged on the economical doubling of Claudius and Gertrude with the Player King and Queen. We see them seated for the play before Hamlet draws a curtain all the way across the stage and when he draws the curtain again the scene is changed to the dumb show of The Mousetrap. It ends and he draws the curtain again before revealing a puzzled, if not yet perturbed court. Turn and turn again (in theatrics not too far removed from the traditional magician’s trick of sawing a woman in half) and we are shown The Murder of Gonzago, and then the angry reaction of the court and King. This is a travelling troupe which has (as troupes must in such situations) made a virtue of necessity. The effect was to shift our perspective as audience repeatedly. This is the essence of good adaptation and the great virtue of well-thought through local appropriation: at such moments, adaptation/appropriation can help to change your perspective, make you see the strange as familiar, and see anew what is long familiar. These, of course, are the players of the city, not the fringe. In the last number of years (and with the collaboration of King’s College English Department) they have developed a strong reputation for authenticity as much as for innovation. The travelling Globe to Globe Hamlet grew out of their ambitious invitation of thirty-five theatre companies from around the world to perform thirty-seven plays in thirty-seven languages during the World Shakespeare Festival of 2012.

However, bringing the ‘local’ to the [Globe’s] centre does not always work. A rather thoughtless example of this was the RSC Hamlet (dir. Simon Godwin, 2016) that used a mainly black cast in a misguided attempt to enliven Denmark with perceivedly tribal politics—to make the elective monarchy of Hamlet’s state easier for a modern audience to appreciate by recreating it as a west-African military junta. The idea purportedly developed after Ghanaian-descended Paapa Essiedu was cast in the lead role. What failed here (although perhaps not for everyone) was that this was not a local reading of the most canonical western text, rather it was a cut-and-paste mapping of imported exoticism to appeal to the all-White audience of wealthy and privileged Stratford-upon-Avon. There was an attempt at self-parody in the casting of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as white British tourists, exploring a postcolonial territory, but the joke was itself so half-aware as to be even more problematic. A nearly all white, all privileged audience in Stratford-upon-Avon (not the cheapest place in the world to visit) joined Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as tourists in a vaguely defined African world that had all the subtlety of a James Bond movie. A third slice of Hamlet that I saw in between these two Hamlets was Hijos de Shakespeare (dir. Juan Carlos Corazza). Had it limited itself to daughters, this production (an anthology, in performance, of speeches and scenes that deal with parenthood/childhood from Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, and King Lear) might have cohered beautifully. However, the temptation of the most canonical of speeches of Hamlet proved too much for Corazza and unbalanced what was otherwise an extremely innovative piece of adaptation. The explicit assertion was that we are all ‘hijos’ de Shakespeare (children of Shakespeare).

The players in Hamlet, though forced to travel, are ‘the tragedians of the city’ (Hamlet, II.2.316), they have court approval as ‘the best actors in the world’ (II.2.379), commonly play canonical material (in ‘Aeneas’ tale to Dido’ (II.2.426–7)) and are comfortable in adapting their repertory to political agenda (or at least in accepting Hamlet’s inserted ‘speech’ (II.2.518)). That is, unlike the mechanicals of A Midsummer Night’s Dream or the rustics of The Two Noble Kinsmen, they are the sanctioned and as such central players of the realm.
In the end, whether Theseus travels to the woods outside Athens or the mechanicals come to him, it is he and his cohort who will judge. If Stephen Greenblatt travels to the Iranian Shakespeare Congress, or Dublin plays back from a fringe against a symbol of the centre, whether the tyrant sees himself in the murderous king with a poisonous vial or in the ‘vile wall’ that divides us, if Footsborn brings its Indian Tempest to Shakespeare’s Globe theatre, it is the centre that inevitably acts as judge. 31 Dissenting fringe voices who, like Hippolyta, have made (or married) their way to the centre can offer alternative voices, new perspectives, calls for different criteria of assessment, but in the end it is the centre that will judge. That centre effectively is our publishing industry and our classrooms (interrelated as they are).

Changes in the critical milieux mean that production history (including from the colonial/postcolonial fringes) now matters a great deal to us as scholars of Shakespearean drama almost, it sometimes seems, as much as critical histories do. So, for instance, the Arden Third Series now includes a significant section on performance history and New Cambridge Shakespeare’s have an ‘on stage’ section. This comes, in part as a long effect of the ‘death of the author’ to the critical world. Now every reading matters and every production and adaptation is a reading worthy of scholarly examination. Two imminent publishing projects attest to the expansion of the area at the critical centre. The whole second half of The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy, is dedicated to adaptation with a ‘Part’ each on ‘Stage and Screen’, ‘European Responses’, and ‘The Wider World’. 32 On the other side of the British publishing centre, Cambridge University Press has published a similarly massive two-volume set entitled The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare, eds. Bruce R. Smith Katherine Rowe. The second volume, entitled The World’s Shakespeare, 1660–Present contains a number of books that promise to be of interest to scholars of Shakespeare adaptation, not least those edited by Ton Hoenselaars (‘International Encounters’) and by Dirk Delabastita (‘Translations’). The section editors for each of these are also jointly responsible for an edited collection, Ton Hoenselaars and Dirk Delabastita, eds. Multilingualism in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015). The Routledge series, Reproducing Shakespeare: New Studies in Adaptation and Appropriation (now Palgrave-Macmillan) is another testament to how important this sector of Shakespeare studies has become in the traditional publishing world. It refers to the ‘two decades of growing interest in the “after-life” of Shakespeare’. 33 The series currently runs to eight volumes. Another feature of this critical trend in the last number of years is the inclusion in the second part of many critical works of an ‘Afterlives’ section. Sometimes this makes excellent sense and adds a coherent part to a whole exploration of a topic (as in Katie Knowles’ Shakespeare’s Boys: A Cultural History), but at other times it seems like a commissioning editor’s instruction based in market trends.

There are also significant digital projects, the most significant of which for us is that run by Peter S. Donaldson (Director and Editor-in-Chief) and Alexa Huang (Co-Founder and Co-Director): the MIT Global Shakespeares Video and Performance Archive. 34 It currently houses collections from six regions of the globe (East and Southeast Asia, India, Brazil, Europe and the Arab World) and is a growing resource for a digital age, not quite such that one might say, ‘they have all the world in their chamber’ (The Two Noble Kinsmen, 2.1.26), but certainly it is developing into a really useful resource. The Literary Encyclopedia is also developing an
extremely useful set of reviews of Shakespearean adaptation (mostly film at this point). Smaller, regional, blogs and websites also prove to be invaluable local resources, like ‘Shakespeare in Ireland’ run by Derek Dunne, Emily O’Brien, and Edel Semple. At one level we might, with Rory Loughnane in this volume (Ch., pp. 000–000), think of these growing resources as memory banks retaining particular performances and readings / interpretations of performances from a truly global Shakespeare. The more broad, and global, this memory bank becomes the more truly transcultural Shakespeare will actually become.

Notes

1 Working outward from Theseus’ use of the word (5.1.17), Sonia Massai tangles helpfully with the term ‘local’ in the introduction to her edited collection World-Wide Shakespeares: Local Appropriations in Film and Performance (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1–6.

2 This is also a dramatization of something past and, as is common to the romance tradition, it is in part a lament for a past empire.

3 Willy Maley, in observing how Shakespeare has been wrested to a number of political agenda, notes ‘Shakespeare was certainly taught as a Tory for a long time, as a great symbol of Empire and Englishness’. See ‘Recent Issues in Shakespeare Studies: From Margins to Centre’, in Andrew Hiscock and Stephen Longstaffe (eds.), The Shakespeare Handbook (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 190–205 (p. 191). Maley refers in this essay to the idea of a Black Hamlet. I shall return to this a little later in this chapter.


5 Such that it was for some time considered an irrelevant addition to the play.


Let me say at the outset that my claims about the collision of the domestic and the foreign owe more to the late Edward Said’s definition of ‘Orientalism’ than to more recent arguments of contemporary postcolonial criticism. That is to say, I am more interested here in the morris dance and the Moorishness that informs it as indices to anxieties within early modern England, rather than in uncovering the material conditions of Moorishness and Moorish dancers in England.

(pp. 85–6)


8 I say more about theatre by actors with disabilities below.


11 In some sense the Thebans are not as foreign as the play’s rhetoric sometimes makes them seem, for they are (unlike Hyppolita and Emilia) also Hellenic.

12 Curiously, it is Creon’s refusal of remembrance rites to the defeated party of a civil war at Thebes that is the main tyranny that Palamon and Arcite would rather forget. Those rites (including cremation) are clearly not intended to be Christian (I.1.43–50) though the Queens do wish to ‘chapel’ (I.1.50) their husbands’ remains.
36 explanation of what it is to ‘write back to the centre’ (p. 6).
37 Routledge, 1989, 2002) in the field of post-colonial literary study. See especially, pp. 6–7 for an
38 Spectre
39 Dead celebrations that are a part of the opening sequence of
40 (some of which was filmed on the former British colony of Jamaica) or of the Mexican Day of the
41 cloak’ which included a large skull on the back (perhaps to suggest that death was always following
42 the latter perhaps influenced to some extent by the former. Particularly Hamlet’s rather colourful ‘inky
43 Artscentre.ie/archive/archive-p-detail/114-tempest [accessed October 10, 2016].
44 Artscentre.ie/archive/archive-p-detail/1005-macbeth-7 [accessed 7th October 2016].
47 (eds.), Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection, The Arden Shakespeare
49 Greenblatt, p. 346.
51 Association of America Collection, Dympna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett (eds.), The Arden Shakespeare
53 Not to diminish their worth, but the popularity of the subgenre is in danger of eclipsing India’s other
54 engagements with Shakespeare. For a useful exploration of Shakespeare in Bollywood, see Craig
55 Dionne and Parmita Kapadia (eds.), Bollywood Shakespeares, Reproducing Shakespeare: New Studies in
57 Khalid Amine, ‘Shakespeare’s Tragedies in North Africa and the Arab World’, in The Oxford Handbook of
58 Potter, p. 81.
59 Drohan provided an interesting biog of the company entitled ‘By Moonlight: In the Light of Day’ for
60 Frontline: The Irish Voice of Intellectual Disability, 63 (June 12, 2005). http://frontline-ireland.com/by-
61 moonlight-in-the-light-of-day/ [accessed October 10, 2016].
62 Although the in-play reality makes a literal reading of this impossible.
64 artscentre.ie/archive/archive-p-detail/114-tempest [accessed October 10, 2016].
65 Dirk Delabastita and Ton Hoenselaars, ‘“If But as Well I Other Accents Borrow That can My Speech
66 Diffuse”: Multilingual Perspectives on English Renaissance Drama’, in Dirk Delabastita and Ton
67 Hoenselaars (eds.), Multilingualism in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (Amsterdam: John
68 Benjamins, 2015), pp. 1–16 (p. 7).
69 Declan Drohan, ‘By Moonlight: In the Light of Day’, Frontline: The Irish Voice of Intellectual Disability,
72 In fact the production had some of the savour of both Live and Let Die (1973) and of Spectre (2015),
73 the latter perhaps influenced to some extent by the former. Particularly Hamlet’s rather colourful ‘inky
74 cloak’ which included a large skull on the back (perhaps to suggest that death was always following
75 him) was suggestive of costumes worn by the voodoo practising villain Baron Samedì in Live and Let
76 Die (some of which was filmed on the former British colony of Jamaica) or of the Mexican Day of the
77 Dead celebrations that are a part of the opening sequence of Spectre.
78 Juan Carlos Corazza (dir.), Hijos de Shakespeare, Teatro de la Reunion (Conde Duque, Madrid), 2015.
79 I use the term ‘plays back’ in playful acknowledgement of the importance of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth
80 Griffiths, Helen Tiffin’s The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London:
81 Routledge, 1989, 2002) in the field of post-colonial literary study. See especially, pp. 6–7 for an
82 explanation of what it is to ‘write back to the centre’ (p. 6).
83 Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy (Oxford:
84 Oxford University Press, 2016).
85 Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe (ser. eds.), series note, in Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation,
86 eds. Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin, Reproducing Shakespeare: New Studies in Adaptation and
87 Appropriation (New Y ork: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. ii. The note is reproduced in each volume of
88 the series.
89 http://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/ [accessed October 10, 2016].
90 www.litencyc.com [accessed October 10, 2016].
91 https://shakespeareinireland.wordpress.com [accessed October 10, 2016].
92 Downloaded By: 10.3.98.93 At: 21:46 19 May 2019; For: 9781315745947, chapter3, 10.4324/9781315745947.ch3
93 Shakespeare, memory and post-colonial adaptation
94 45