Week: 10. Module: C - Shakespeare Translations

Unit: 23: Political and National Appropriations of Shakespeare

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Shakespeare has been appropriated across the world according to political and national interests. In this section, we will look at the term appropriation, English appropriation of Shakespeare, Shakespeare appropriation in non-colonised spaces, colonial and postcolonial appropriations of Shakespeare and Shakespeare appropriations today.

Appropriation

Adaptation is the reworking of a text to local milieu and idioms. But appropriation is adaptation loaded. Appropriating Shakespeare involves understanding the world around, though Shakespearean categories of understanding.

Although both are reworkings, 'adaptation' is used more concerning film studies. It is different from 'appropriation' which is more associated with cultural studies. Linda Hutcheon acknowledges the origin of the term adaptation from film criticism, but expands applicability, challenges its derivative status, and regards it as a subgenre of "intertextuality". She thinks that adaptation can precede the knowledge of the original and may branch laterally into multiple versions instead of developing vertically (xii). For her, adaptation is "a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary" (9).

It was Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964) that drew attention to Shakespeare adaptations which make Shakespearean relevant through his modernizations. Appropriations are descriptions of political, aesthetic and ideological revisions of Shakespeare from ideological positions such as feminism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, multiculturalism, postcolonialism, posthumanism etc. (Novy, Women's Re-Visions; Cross-Cultural Performances; Transforming Shakespeare; Erickson; Aebischer, Esche and Wheale; Henderson). These define how his stakeholders produce Shakespeare for the present. Maderson puts appropriation in the artistic production/consumption binary as something against dispassionate and disinterested attitude and opposes the view that adaptation is an 'offshoot':

> Associated with abduction, adoption and theft, appropriation's central tenet is the desire for possession. It comprehends both the commandeering of the desired object and the process of making this object one's own, controlling it by possessing it. Appropriation is neither dispassionate nor disinterested; it has connotations of usurpation, of seizure for one's own uses. (Marsden 1)

Those who adopt Shakespeare do it for artistic reasons, like art for art's sake; while those who appropriate Shakespeare has more than reasons of art.

English Appropriation

Even before John Dryden and William Davenant adapted Shakespeare for the Restoration theatre, Shakespeare was adapted in his theatre, the Globe. In the theatre, continuous improvisation was a rule than an exception. Shakespeare himself adapted the works of his predecessors to create classics like *Hamlet*, and he, in turn, was adapted by the like of Fletcher.

The Shakespeare Jubilee (1769) straddled the victorious end of the Seven Years War with the French (1768) and the American rebellion (1770). The Seven Years War signified the successful international resistance to French cultural and political hegemony. Linguistic nationalism became strong across Europe with the end of the French control. The rise in the spirit of English nationalism and its militant imperialism helped it project English national identity as England was trying to impose its authority in the sea and across the world. As a part of it, England was trying to assert its language and nationalism across the world and especially with its rival and neighbour, France. The English theatres glorified the English victories against the French by staging spectacular productions of *Henry V: the Conquest of France*, and *King John*. Mrs Siddons's portrayal of Constance (*King John*), who was driven to madness and death because of the treachery of the French drew a lot of praise.

England insisted on portraying its language and its literature, signified by Shakespeare, as the best in the world. Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare received a fitting reply from English. Arthur Murphy said that "Shakespeare is a kind of established religion in poetry" (1753), and Joseph Warton derided the "nauseous cant of the French" against Shakespeare, (1756). The English competed to prove Shakespeare to be the greatest dramatist and poet in the whole world since the 1760s defending his works as "a part of the Kingdom's riches" (Campell, 1768), and that "England may justly boast of the honour of producing the greatest dramatic poet in the world", "the god of our idolatry" (David Garrick, 1769). These nationalistic and anti-French reiterations by the English conditioned the champions of English education across the world.

England had to find credible alternatives to celebrate its romantic nationalism in political, aesthetic, intellectual, and social discourses also. In the place of French absolutism England politically projected English spirit of liberty and mixed Constitution. They found in Shakespeare's great works a credible alternative to the French literature and celebrated him as an example of English literary freedom. The French who translated Shakespeare, meanwhile, did to in French terms. This can be seen not only in Ducis' makeover of Shakespeare from French translations but even from the preface of Le Tourneur who did the first complete French translation of Shakespeare (1776). Generally, he agrees with what Shakespeare's English editors from Rowe to Johnson had said about Shakespeare. However, when he comes to Pope's view that to judge "Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules, is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another," he changes" another" into "the strange and unnatural" one.

Meanwhile, Germany waxed eloquent on their nationalistic expropriation of foreign writers like Shakespeare and claimed Shakespeare as "*unser Shakespeare*". English Romantic critics like Coleridge appropriated and used theories developed by German Romanticism and wrested the Shakespeare initiative from Germans asserting "our Shakespeare" in his Lectures on Shakespeare.

It was also a century of exporting Shakespeare when people like David Garrick marketed Shakespeare and patriotism together. Alderman John Boydell opened a Shakespeare Gallery (1780) to exhibit commissioned paintings of scenes from Shakespeare. But, Anglo-French rivalry made the French oppose Shakespeare so much that in 1822 a French audience prevented *Othello* from being performed accusing Shakespeare to be a "Wellington's lieutenant" (Borgerhoff 14).

Shakespeare did not give all his characters a local habitation and a name. It was only when he has elevated to the status of the best of English and in the world that many of Shakespeare's characters got proper names. Since Rowe's 1709 edition listed the characters in the plays. With their descriptions instead of personal names. Once Shakespeare was canonised, the later editors gave characters like the

"Bastard"—Edmund (Lear), Falconbridge (KJ), Don Juan (Ado)—and the "Clown"—Touchstone (AYLI), Pompey (MM), and Costard (LLL)—in many plays, befitting the newfound English status.

Texts were also amended appropriately to befit English character. An interesting example is the following lines from The Tempest:

> ……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, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
> Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
> Deservedly confined into this rock,
> Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

In the Folio editions, it is Miranda who rebukes Caliban so. It was so in all editions until 1732 when It was changed and attributed to Prospero in Theobald's edition (1733). Then, it remained attributed to Prospero for two centuries, as it did not look proper for an English lady to speak in such a rude manner. Attributing such rude lines to a lady was a blot in the English notions of feminine decency and decorum and to Shakespeare's greatness itself.

Subsequently, Shakespeare's characters came to be seen are real individuals. Johnson's *Note on The Death of Falstaff* set the trend. Later books were written about Shakespeare's characters. William Richardson's *Philosophical Analysis and Illustrations of Some Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* (1774), Maurice Morgan's and *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777), Thomas Whatley's *Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare* (1785), Edmund Burke's *Note on Timon of Athens* in Jonson's edition of Shakespeare, Joshua Reynolds *Observations on the Portrayal of Macbeth, Lear, and Others* were to culminate in the later works of Prof Dowden and AC Bradley by which time questions like the number of Lady Macbeth's children, and Hamlet's educational qualifications etc.. were seriously being discussed.

Although the British introduced in English education in India, Macauley's *Minutes on Indian Education* (1835) does not speak about Shakespeare at all, but Milton twice, it was Shakespeare, who got promoted in Indian education. This was because projecting Shakespeare was central to the construction of the English identity. Of course, Shakespeare meant and meant a lot; but, as Britain had appropriated Shakespeare, its imperial project made him become more than what he was.

Non-colonised spaces

The German appropriation of Shakespeare is a complicated one. It is a classic case of moving from national appropriation to political appropriation. The German Shakespeare Society was founded in 1864. It was the third birth centenary of Shakespeare and also the year of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis around whether Schleswig was Denmark's or it and Holstein belonged to German Confederation. AW Schlegel-Ludwig Tieck translation of Shakespeare made the Germans regarded Shakespeare as their own. Although the World War-I dented the German love for Shakespeare, his Germanness, the 'classic'

nature of Schlegel-Tieck translation, and history of Shakespeare on the German stage helped their claim to own Shakespeare. When it came to 1933 and eventually to World War II, these factors could be invoked again.

The Nazis (National Socialist German Workers Party) who appropriated Shakespeare saw him as a German through bonds of blood and as a propagandist of Nordic racial values (Symington 169). They read *Hamlet* as a story of Germany, and compared "the crime that … deprived Hamlet of his inheritance" to the Treaty of Versailles, and "Gertrude's betrayal [to] that of the spineless Weimar politicians" (190). Instead of banning him, they reinterpreted Shakespeare as a propaganda tool.

Hitler's minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels said in 1939 that Hitler had permitted staging of Shakespeare (172). Most of the propaganda budget went to theatres. It banned all classics except those by Moliere, Ibsen, Shaw who criticised the English government, and Shakespeare whose characters personified Germanic/Nordic values. Shakespeare's 37 plays were staged between 1933 and 1944 when Goebbels ordered the closure of theatres, However, it appears that they banned Shakespeare's historical plays, and prescribed Reich dramaturgy on him, leaving on the German stage Shakespeare's comedies. Even those numbers came down from 1034 (1932-33) to 1263 (1940-41) to 831 (1942-43).

The number of productions of even *The Merchant of Venice* declined by two-third during the period. The Nazis had been using *The Merchant of Venice* to great effect as propaganda. It was broadcast first after the *Kristallnacht* program (1938). When it was first staged (1943) the Nazi actor Werner Krauss's Shylock was "something revoltingly alien and startlingly repulsive".

The Shakespeare appropriation by the Nazi theatre discouraged the modern translation by Hans Rothe and favoured Schlegel-Tieck translation. With anti-Semitic Wolfgang Keller controlling German Shakespeare Society as president (1939-43) and *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* as its sole editor (1939-1943) by edging out Jewish scholars, German academic integrity became suspect. The absence of attempts to counter the Nazi use Shakespeare for propaganda and academic readiness to read in Shakespeare the hallmarks of Nazi heroic age characterized German Shakespeare appropriation.

Responding to his contemporary political developments, Heiner Müller translated and adapted *Macbeth* emphasising the suffering of Scotland's peasants as *Macbeth After Shakespeare* (1971). His 9-page long postmodern response using Shakespeare was *Die Hamletmaschine* (1977) which was stopped by state censors. It draws parallels between *Hamlet* and an autocratic surveillance state, and makes his actor playing Hamlet say:

> I'm not Hamlet. I don't take part any more. My words have nothing to tell me anymore. My thoughts suck the blood out of the images. My drama doesn't happen anymore. Behind me, the set is put up. By people who aren't interested in my drama, for people to whom it means nothing. I'm not interested in it any more either. I won't play along any more. (Müller)

After a decade, both *Hamlet* and *Die Hamletmaschine* went to Germany. The Berlin Wall collapsed.

Colonial and postcolonial appropriation

The Tempest is the most appropriated Shakespeare play about colonial discourses. Its major revisions include John Dryden and William D'Avenant's *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Isle* () and Martiniquan writer Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969); Film adaptations include Herbert Beerbohm Tree's silent film *The Tempest* (1905), a Western starring Gregory Peck *Yellow Sky* (1948), a sci-fi *Forbidden Planet* (1956), Derek Jarman's queer *The Tempest* (1979), Hollywood film starring Helen Mirren as Prospera *The*

Tempest (2010); The BBC "short animated tales" version (1992), *The Tempest* from the TV series 'Wishbone' (1996); Cartoon strips like of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman: The Wake*; Poems like Robert Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos", and many opera, musical, ballet, dance, comic and song versions.

Browning's poetic adaptation focuses on *The Tempest*'s most poetic character Caliban's internal conflicts and fear of his god Setebos. The fear of god makes him not enjoy life, as "the best way to escape His Ire / Is, not to seem too happy". 'Caliban tries to show Setebos how wretched a creature he is and destroys instead displaying his enjoyment of the beauty of nature. Caliban can be read as a disabled lonely character; whose deformity is the exteriorisation of his mental anguish.

Aimé Césaire's 1969 play *Une Tempête* ("*A Tempest*") closely follows Shakespeare's play but portrays Prospero as a white master, Ariel as a mulatto and Caliban as a black slave. The white colonialist enslaves the black ruler of the island and the mulatto. Enslaved locals react differently. Caliban complains about his enslavement, rues for not having power enough to overthrow Prospero and wants a revolution. Ariel serves the colonial master against his will, and only requests for independence prefers non-violence. In the end, Prospero grants Ariel freedom but retains the control of both the island and of Caliban, unlike in Shakespeare.

In other plays also political elements are added to appropriate them locally. Commenting on the Bengali adaptations of Macbeth, a Bengali writer observed in *Navajivan* in 1887 how Macbeth's sin is graver than those of Bali in *Ramayana*; and of Abhimanyu, Drona, and Aswathama in *Mahabharata* (A. C. Sarkar 723). Bengali saw at least five Macbeth translations in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, after the 'Sepoy Mutiny' (1857): Haralal Ray's *Rudrapalnatak* (1874), Taraknath Mukherjee's *Macbeth* (1875), Nagendranath Bose's *Karnabir* (1885), Girish Chandra Ghose's *Macbeth* (1893) and Ashutosh Ghosh's *Macbeth* (1894). *Rudrapal* meant for the Kolkatta Hindu festivals prepares Hindus for nationalist revival by setting the play in the glorious Hindu past and referring to the Norwegian invaders as *yavana*, which locally designated Muslims as one finds in the works of Bankim Chandra, and explicitly mentioning the Norwegian prisoner as "Musalman".

Karnabir is consciously located within Bengali Hindu mythology and culture, as opposed to the minority Muslim culture, which is seen as foreign. Its title recalls the illegitimate talented complex anti-hero in *Mahabharata*, who allies with evil forces. *Karnabir* highlights the religious and political angle in the combat between Jabanraj (*Jaban* is a local word to refer to Muslims) of Nisagarh and the Hindu king of Jaipur. Lady Macbeth is named Malina (dirty). Banquo, Macduff, Malcolm, Donalbain, Duncan, Lennox, Cathness and Angus represent well as Bijoy (victory), Sudhi (pure), Debi (goddess), Kesari (hero), Ananda (happiness), Shaktidhar (powerful), Mrityunjoy (immortal), Nayanpal (nurturer of eyes). Witches are represented by *bhairavis*, female devotees of Siva and Kali.

Postcolonial approaches open up Shakespeare's works to alternative histories. These have given rise to discourses on nation, race, gender and class in a multicultural context, the hallmark the postcolonial condition. The trajectories of Shakespearean and postcolonial studies are closely linked and therefore, one can see all these mapped on to Shakespeare studies.

Postcolonial use of Shakespeare brings Shakespeare to the centre of social and ideological approaches to colonial and postcolonial histories of Latin America, Asian, African and the Caribbean peoples and map him using local cultures and discourse traditions and address their issue like identity, nationality, race, slavery, trade, class, gender etc. Without invalidating old readings, it uses alternative frameworks to read but uses interrogates traditional notions of values and culture from a more inclusive approach.

It was the synergy of the efforts to decolonize in the colonized east and the struggle for racial and gender equality in the west, and the quest for identity in the settler colonies like Australia, Canada and New Zealand which led to a struggle to appropriate Shakespeare, a cultural capital. This approach has displaced the canonical Bard by using theoretical paradigms and trajectories of Marxist, feminist, queer, race, ecological, posthuman studies.

Shakespeare Today

A culturally sensitive matrix to distinguish adaptation and appropriation could be shown from an anecdote. Maya Angelou who refrained from speaking at the age of seven to twelve decided to render Portia's "Quality of Mercy" speech from *The Merchant of Venice* at her congregation in Arkansas. Many years later, in 1985 in a speech titled "Journey to the Heartland" at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, she described Shakespeare as a black woman as he spoke the thoughts of a black woman like her:

> . . . at twelve-and-a-half, I had my voice back, and I decided I would render a rendition. In the CME Church in Stamps, Arkansas, I decided that I would render Portia's speech from The Merchant of Venice. … But then, mama asked me, "Sister, what are you planning to render?" So I told her, "A piece from Shakespeare, Mama… Mama said, "Sister, you will render a piece of Mister Langston Hughes, Mister County Cullen, Mister James Weldon Johnson, or Mister Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Yes ma'am, little mistress, you will."
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> Well, I did. But years later, when I physically and psychologically left that country, that condition, which is Stamps, Arkansas, a condition I warrant, regrettably, that a number of people in this very room abide today, I found myself, and still find myself, whenever I like stepping back into Shakespeare. Whenever I like, I pull to me. He wrote it for me. "When in disgrace with a fortune in [sic] men's eyes / I all alone beweep my outcast state. …." Of course he wrote it for me; that is a condition of the black woman. Of course, he was a black woman. I understand that. Nobody else understands it, but I know that William Shakespeare was a black woman. (Angelou 28)

Margaret Garber, referring to this finds the sentimental "Angelou's appropriation of Shakespeare as a black woman 'acceptable' because it "is only a figure, an allegory, a 'transcendent' truth". Garber points out how this "pre-emptive strike at the race-class-gender crowd" was based on the girl Angelou's congregation address based on what was "spoken by one of the few Shakespeare characters to openly disparage a black man for his race and colour" (Garber 117), referring to Portia's comment on the race and colour of the Prince of Morocco: "Let all of his complexions choose me so" (*MV* 2.7).

After her implicit disapproval of Angelou's wrong appropriation of Shakespeare, Garber hypothesizes "what would happen if it were discovered that Shakespeare was a black woman, not through a ventriloquizing voice lamenting an archetypal outcast state, but through some diligent feat of archival research?" (117).

Garber focusses on the fictional character Portia's antecedent while Angelou was only referring to Sonnet 29 when she, as a recovering raped child, recited Portia's "Quality of Mercy" speech at the church. Speaking at Randolph College in 2013, she again narrated how she struggled as a child with poverty, persecution and adversity and how Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 and his works spoke to her own experience: "I didn't care what they told me, … I was convinced that he was a little black girl" (Curtis).

What we make out of Shakespeare is, like the real-remembered-ventriloquized versions of Angelou, swing like a pendulum from being adaptation, appropriation, and being appropriate. Political and

national appropriations of Shakespeare are readings form local contexts like Angelou's and interpretations from away, as Garber's is.

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