Week: 13. Module: E – Localizing Shakespeare

Unit: 32: Foreignization of Shakespeare

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The defamiliarization of Shakespeare when he is performed in the theatre traditions of other communities and cultures helps us to recognize the nuances and differences in Shakespeare. As they 'do' Shakespeare, these cultures and communities use their ideas and modes of expressions to make Shakespeare mean. In the process, they redefine our understanding of Shakespeare and with their understanding of the world, and in the process, Shakespeare becomes 'strange' but richer. In the same way, a Shakespeare performance, rooted in the Elizabethan conception of the world, also appear strange to the peoples of other cultures.

Literary language and expressions are closely connected with the history, culture, customs and climate of a place. What happens to Shakespeare's literary expressions when they appear in other languages and cultures is an interesting topic. This unit looks at the localisation of time, history, place, customs, and weather in Shakespeare, and how these might appear strange to people in other cultures.

Time

Shakespeare himself had overlooked the fact that he was portraying foreign peoples by giving them local habitations, though not names as in his works, they appeared in local dress and followed local customs. First, let us look at how time is described in Shakespeare's England, and also see how time is conceived elsewhere. The ancient Romans, for example, had no chiming clocks. But Shakespeare makes Brutus ask Cassius to tell him the time in terms of clock bells.

> Brutus: "Peace! Count the clock.
> Cassius: The clock has stricken three. (*JC* 2.1.193-94)

The Roman device to tell time was clepsydra, or water clock, which consisted of a bowl with markings of time. It was filled with water and when it emptied, a fixed amount of water was poured into it to mark an hour. Other cultures used varied instruments like sundials, water clocks, hourglasses, candles and shadows to measure time. The instruments and the manner of measuring time influenced how people perceived time in various cultures.

The European perception of time was based on the Greek and Latin view of history. Their historical sense is reflected in their inaccurate measurement of time. The Elizabethans cared about time as much as we do. By Shakespeare's time, the European perception of time had changed and he used different ways to measure time. He straddled the middle ages and the Industrial Revolution at the dawn of the modern age. The prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* speaks of "The two hours' traffic of our stage" as the duration of the play. *The Tempest* insists on counting the performance time as "three glasses" (5.1) or "three hours".

In *As You Like It*, Jacques divides man's life into seven ages mirroring the Biblical saying "The days of our years are threescore years and ten" (*Ps* 90:10). In *The Tempest*, Antonio distinguishes how time is measured when he says "They'll tell the clock to any business that / We say befits the hour" (2.1).

Time moved in a relaxed pace in a rural setting. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, meetings take place "tomorrow night", "by moonlight", by "the new moon" and at "midnight". In the city, one finds "dinner-time", "supper-time", and such set "hours" along with "four o'clock" and "six o'clock in the morning" in *The Merchant of Venice*. *Sonnet 18* seeks to capture the "eternal summer" of youth in poetry.

Elizabethans measured time using hourglass, sundial and clock. They also conceived of time differently depending on the instruments used. The metaphor of hourglasses often suggested death (run out); while clocks suggested eternity (the circular movement of the hour hand in the clock dial), and sundials suggested the ominous nature of time as time was marked by shadow if the sun shined.

Hourglass consisted of two conical glass bulbs joined at the middle with a tiny hole through which sand filled in one fell to the other. The amount of time it took to empty one bulb was marked as an hour. It was not exactly filled with sand, but with a powdered eggshell or marble dust. The sand hurried through the hole suggesting the steady and inevitable progress of time. Suggesting that the play was getting over, Gower, the narrator speaks of 'our sands are almost run' (Per. 5.2.1). The modern expression 'run out of time', relies on the hourglass metaphor. Shakespeare exploits hourglass-death symbolism.

> ere the Glasse that now begins to runne,
> Finish the processe of his sandy houre,
> These eyes that see thee now well coloured,
> Shall see thee withered, bloody, pale, and dead. (*1Hen6* 4.2.35-38)

Sundial marked hours of the day by the shadow its pointer would cast on the plate. It could show time only when the sun shined. In the English climate, it mattered. Time, as it appears on a sundial, was secretive and mysterious. 'Thou by thy dial's shady stealth may'st know, / Time's thievish progress to eternity' (Son. 77) speaks about the mysterious and secretive progression of time. Jacques speaks about a fool who used a pocket sundial:

> And then he drew a dial from his poke,
> And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
> Says very wisely, 'It is ten o'clock:
> Thus we may see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags:
> 'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
> And after one hour more 'twill be eleven;
> And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
> And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot;
> And thereby hangs a tale.' When I did hear
> The motley fool thus moral on the time,
> My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,
> That fools should be so deep-contemplative,
> And I did laugh sans intermission
> An hour by his dial. (AYLI 2.7.xx)

Clocks also existed during Shakespeare's time, as seen by the phrase 'watch the clock' (*Son.* 57). Iachimo 'tells' the hours: 'One, two, three' (Cym. 2.2.51) when 'clock strikes. The Elizabethan clocks were not accurate. Clocks were always "a-repairing, ever out of frame, / And never going aright" (LLL. 3.1.190-91). Clock regulated city life with public clocks ringing out bells every hour. The pendulum began to regulate the clock only in 1656 and time marked by some clocks were notoriously long. Falstaff pretends to have fought 'a long hour by Shrewsbury clock' (*4H1* 5.4.145), a particularly slow clock. Clocks, though inaccurate, regulated shared time and activities. The modern phrase 'tell the time' comes from the counting (telling) the number of bells that marked the hour.

Both real-time as well as fictional time were marked. Shakespeare marks time by an hour, not by a minute or second, although he knew that an hour had sixty minutes. He did not have a clear idea about the length of a minute. Even in his sixtieth sonnet, which is about minutes, does not say how long a minute is. Puck speaks of the time in terms of minutes and to 'put a girdle about the earth in forty minutes' (*MND* 2.1.175-6). But, no instrument at that time could measure it. Shakespeare also conflates minute with the second: 'Now at the latest [last] minute of the hour / Grant us your loves' (LLL 5.2.782-3).

Modern man has instruments to measure time differently. Still, the perception of time depends on the human experience of the rotation of the earth and its relation to the sun. We define IST in terms of longitude, something discovered around Shakespeare's time. The discovery of longitude without accurate timepieces was mainly to help merchant ships to travel across the seas. Maria tells us how

Malvolio smiles "his face into more lines than is in the new map with the augmentation of the Indies" (TN 3.2.), referring to "A Chart of the World on Mercator's Projection". It was Edward Wright's projection of a globe engraved by English globe-maker Emery Molyneux in 1592, and published in the second edition of Richard Haklyut's *Principal Navigations* (1599).

In *The Tempest*, one sees Shakespeare's insistence on equating performing time and the storytime as three, as if he was insisting on keeping the unity of time which he had long ignored. He measures time in terms of unmeasured times, season, clock, and glasses. He marks it by the hour, half an hour, and minute, with hourly bells marking hours. Look at how time is measured to in *The Tempest*:

- Prospero: … What is the time o' the day?
  Ariel: Past the mid-season.
- Prospero: … and time / Goes upright with his carriage. How's the day?
  Ariel: On the sixth hour; at which time, my lord, / You said our work should cease.
- Prospero: At least two glasses. The time 'twixt six and now / Must ….
- Boatswain: … our ship-- / Which, but three glasses since we gave out split-- /
- Antonio: They'll tell the clock to any business that/ We say befits the hour.
- Miranda: He's safe for these three hours.
- Alonso… who three hours since / Were wreck'd upon this shore;
- Alonso: Your eld'st acquaintance cannot be three hours:
- Miranda: … and now farewell / Till half an hour hence
- Caliban: Within this half hour will he be asleep
- Ariel: Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell
- Prospero: The hour's now come; / The very minute bids thee ope thine ear;
- Prospero: … the minute of their plot / Is almost come.

It is deadlines that create dramatic tension in Shakespeare. Macbeth's "Tomorrow and Tomorrow" speech explains how yesterdays, todays and tomorrows are all for nothing and how recorded time will end in darkness. *The Tempest* sets deadline and meets it very diligently. Even Ariel is impatient to be released at the end of the day. Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* has only three months to repay his loan, and in *Julius Caesar*, "the Ides of March" marks a different time in terms of a deadline. Time plays villain in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Shakespeare easily moves between delineated time and eternal time in his metaphors. His deep reflections about the significance of time and its bearing on individual and society could be seen in his writings. These are conditioned by his understanding of time.

History

To understand how Shakespeare treats history, let us look at the religious wars during his time and the infamous Gunpowder Plot.

Life in Shakespeare's England was simple. It was structured as in any feudal society. Except on Church Sundays, Bear-baiting Thursdays they had theatre performances. Most people lived in their homes where father was the head and mother was homemaker. Children usually left home in late teens to prepare themselves for their adult life. Colour and fabric of one's dress revealed their social class and status. Women and actors wore make-up made of chalk, lead and powdered mouse bones. As water in London was notoriously contaminated and made people sick, they preferred to drink week beer. A penny could buy a loaf of bread or a ticket in the pit to watch a play.

Religion dominated personal and social life in the Middle Ages. Although continued so in Shakespeare's England also, it underwent many changes thanks to the reforms in the Church. Henry VIII (1509-47) broke ties with Rome and started his own Church of England. After the short and tumultuous reigns of Edward VI (1547-53) and Mary I (1552–58), the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) was long, peaceful and prosperous. Edward was a protestant king, Mary tried to impose Catholicism, and Elizabeth reiterated the Protestant faith, and persecuted the Catholics.

Many incidents connected with Elizabethan politics are reflected in Shakespeare. However, many of these fail to convey their relevance in translations. Religious independence and Tudor dynasty (1485-1603) encouraged the modernist outlook of England and helped it become a major player in Europe. The English navy which Henry VIII established became a major force by the time of Elizabeth I. It defeated the mighty Spanish Armada (1588) that ruled the seas. England's explorations and maritime trade made it an imperial and colonial power.

Shakespeare's stories had local resonances. This also put Shakespeare in political trouble when the Earl of Essex Robert Devereux, who he had praised in *Henry V* in 1599 as "the General of our Gracious Empress" was executed for leading a rebellion against Elizabeth in February 1601. On the day before the disastrous rebellion, nobles like Charles Percy, Jocelyn Percy, and Mounteagle, offered Shakespeare and company "forty shillings more than their ordinary [fee]" to stage *Richard II,* a play about the deposition of a king at the Globe. In translation, such local resonance hardly gets translated.

One finds the same in his plays during the reign of James I who was also interested in demonology. He made Shakespeare and company the King's Men, got the Bible translated as the Authorised Version' (1611) and spent lavishly. James was a Scottish king. While England persecuted the Catholics, Scotland was persecuting the Protestants. Shakespeare's father had been imprisoned for being a Catholic. This nuanced religious climate in which he operated is difficult to be reproduced in translations. For example, the Porter in *Macbeth* (1606) refers to "an equivocator… who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven" (Mac. 2.3). This refers to a conspirator in the Gunpowder Plot (1605). Under Robert Catesby, they plotted against King James I and wanted to blow up the House of Lords during the State Opening of England's Parliament on 5 November 1605. The Jesuit priest Henry Garnet was convinced based on the evidence drawn from his book, *A Treatise of Equivocation*.

Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra and *The Tempest* are Jacobean plays. Shakespeare pandered to the king's interest in magic by turning the Scottish political legend into one of witchcraft and regicide in *Macbeth*. The Gunpowder Plot increased James's interest in magic and he became more interested in the other-worldly powers, something which he had already discussed in *Daemonology* (1597). His interest in magic must have also inspired Shakespeare to produce *The Tempest* with a magician at its centre.

Place

Shakespeare's places also get lost in adaptations. Shakespeare's London was a major European metropolis. From about 70,000 in 1500, its population quadrupled by 1600. The panoramic views of London, made since the 1550s projected it as a city of importance and subject of artistic interest. JC Visscher's *Londinium Florentissima Britanniae Urbs* (1616), Ralph Agas's *Civitas Londinium* (1633) and Wenceslaus Hollar's London from Southwark (1647) are most noted later ones and compared London with Rome and Jerusalem.

Hollar's detailed panoramic sketch of London (1647) shows the view of the city of London from the Globe. Shakespeare's London had many avenues for public entertainment. It shows the other side of London. Authorities feared crowds who gathered for public entertainment and therefore, kept theatres and playhouses outside of the city boundaries as a means of crowd control. At first, theatres were outside the north wall of the City, in Shoreditch. Later, the entertainment industry moved to the south Banks of River Thames. This movement is captured in Shakespeare's movement from The Theatre in Shoreditch to the Globe built in Southwark.

The Globe was built using the timbre of the dismantled The Theatre. The new theatre had a round shape and had the expression '*totus mundus agit*

histrionem' ('the whole world is a playhouse'). On 28 December 1598, the Chamberlain's Men dismantled and transported the lease-expired the Theatre and took it to the seedy Bankside. Southwark had bear-baiting rings, archery fields, brothels and bawdy entertainments. Later, in 1608, the

Chamberlain's Men also acquired the Blackfriars Theatre after the death of Elizabeth Russell, the Countess of Bedford who had been opposing a "common playhouse" on her doorstep (Laoutaris, 2015).

Shakespeare's plays, except the History Plays, are generally set outside London. Some plays by other dramatists were set in London, though. Jonson's *Everyman Out of His Humour* and the anonymous *London Prodigal* were fully set in London. *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage, The Fair Maid of Bristol* and *Thomas Lord Cromwell* were partly set in London. Because of the topical references in them, a full appreciation of the local allusions in these plays is difficult. The description of the lady of the "Errant Knight" in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* as stolen "from her friends in Turnbull Street" does not make any sense in translation, as its connotation to a brothel there and such other topographic references to the cityscape are lost. Plays like *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604), *Eastward Ho!* (1605-6), *The Fleer* (1606), and *Your Five Gallants* (1607) are also rich in allusions to London. Even the few topical allusions like the one to Burtonheath or Wincot in his *Taming of the Shrew* is also lost:

> Am not I Christopher Sly, old Sly's son of Burtonheath, by birth a pedlar, by education a cardmaker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker? Ask Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot, if she know me not: if she say I am not fourteen pence on the score for sheer ale, score me up for the lyingest knave in Christendom. (*Shr*. Induction)

They are no longer intelligible as they had been to his immediate audience. Even when his plays were set elsewhere, they could relate many aspects of life portrayed in them. In the ill-fated lovers in *Romeo and Juliet* of Italy, one could see a reflection of London street rowdies, family feuds, duels, murder, masked dance party, disobedient girl, manipulating clergy, unnatural suicide etc. What Shakespeare adapted are in turn adapted in his local versions.

Customs

Customs express culture and local festivals manifest these. Shakespeare's plays refer to many customs of his contemporary England. When they are taken across cultures, they might not be as effective as they were in local societies. Let us look at witchcraft in England.

The European witch hunts (1450 and 1750) has been controversial, the terrifying practice of putting t death nearly half of some 100,000 people (mostly women) who were tried for witchcraft. The most notorious royal witch-hunter of all time was King James I (Borman, 2014), Shakespeare's patron. Even in a small country like Scotland, 4,000 people were burned to death. This can be attributed to James VI of Scotland, who later became James I of England.

The violent death of Queen Mary ignited a fascination for magic in young James. Later, when Anne of Denmark who was betrothed to James in 1589 could not sail across the North Sea because of a tempest. James went to bring her. On their return, the royal ship was battered by storms and he barely escaped death. He blamed it on witches evil spells and ordered a witch hunt. On royal order, nearly 70 suspected witches were tied and executed at North Berwick. His obsession with witchcraft led him to write a treatise on witchcraft: *Daemonologie* (*Science of Demons*), which became very influential.

When Elizabeth I died in March 1603 leaving no direct heirs, James IV, king of Scotland and son of Mary Queen of Scots became the king of England as James I. After his ascension, he imposed harsher laws through his *The Witchcraft Act* of 1604 and promoted his book *Daemonologie*. Soon, similar other pamphlets also appeared. The interest in the subject increased, Marlowe's 1588 play *The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* was published in 1605 and Ben Jonson designed an 'antimasque' featuring witches. Shakespeare was not far behind.

He came out with *Macbeth* (1606). That was when Queen Anne's brother, the king of Denmark came to visit. *Macbeth* which alludes to his dangerous journey earlier in 1589: "Though his bark cannot be lost/Yet it shall be tempest-tossed" pandered to the king's obsession. It conveyed the idea that witchcraft was also a conspiracy against the king, especially as it was performed after the infamous

anti-state conspiracy, the gunpowder plot. Translations of *Macbeth* fail to evoke such contextual significance of the original. But translations can transplant these into new cultures effectively.

Many localised performances have adapted *Macbeth*. Utpal Dutt's *Jatra Macbeth* (1951) and Orson Welles's *Voodoo Macbeth* (1936), Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha* (1979) are examples. Alyque Padamsee's *Macbeth* (2006) adapted it in the background of Bengal's tantric tradition and portrays Lady Macbeth as a tantric and the witches as her instruments. His witches wear a garland of skulls and drink blood. They crown Macbeth after Duncan's murder but also dance around Macbeth's severed head.

Weather

Seasons influence culture. The symmetrical and regular summer-spring-autumn-winter cycle is not universal. It is felt so only by the people living in the temperate zone. Those living in the torrid and frigid zones have different experience and attitude to seasons as the sun shines on them differently.

Shakespeare imagined the whole world in terms of the English landscape. In England, regular seasons occurred at fixed times, defining not only people's food and clothing but also attitudes and celebrations. In places where this need not be true. Gloucester's "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York" (3R 1.1) contrasts summer with winter. It means a lot in the experience of the English people who live mostly cold climate without adequate sunlight, making winter harsh and summer pleasant. This hardly makes any sense to the people in the torrid zone. When the witches ask in Macbeth, "When shall we three meet again / In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" (Mac. 1.1.), they seem to equate all the three and this would sound strange to the people in the desert who crave for rain. For the rain-starved, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd, / It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath:" (*The Merchant of Venice*) might look strange. While some of such climate-related experience are common, some are unique to local culture.

Shakespeare changes the climate of the original to suit English climate. He situates *Romeo and Juliet* in the dog days of July. Shakespeare changes the cold winter of the source play and associates Juliet with July. Unlike Lodge's *Rosalind* which takes place in the pastoral climate, *As You Like It* has a typical English climate with harsh winds and cold season "foggy south puffing with wind and rain" (AYLI 3.5). Thunder, lightning, rain and hurricane set the mood in *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. These images which act as signifying images need not communicate in Tamil literature, defined by its unique *tinai* aesthetics where the season is an objective correlative for an emotion.

Localisation of Shakespeare is to be carefully balanced with his foreignization. Both have different requirements and necessities.