

Ambassador Shakespeare: The Bard as Cultural Bridge

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“The Royal Shakespeare Company as a cultural bridge: European tours calling at Madrid (1984) and Barcelona (1989)”

Touring has been a highly effective means of reaching large number of audiences for the Royal Shakespeare Company (Adler 2001). Small-scale tours, regional tours, European tours, American tours and large-scale international tours have been part of the common activities of the company since its inception. Besides, the RSC can be considered as Shakespeare ambassador since their touring productions have served as cultural bridges in certain historical and political contexts. Whereas the American tours have been generally aimed at achieving commercial benefits, European tours have had a more cultural aim in mind. The RSC owned prestigious cultural products endorsed by international acclaim that wanted to export to continental Europe.

My research is framed in a project devoted to chart Shakespeare's entrance into Spanish culture through the channels of criticism and scholarship, translation, performance, adaptation and biography within the context of his immense and ongoing impact in Europe. Thus, the aim of this work is to explore the reception of the RSC productions in Europe and, particularly, in Spain in order to analyse the influence of these productions in the making up of the Shakespeare's European canon. I will focus on two RSC's productions included in the European tours due to their demonstrable excellence: *Much Ado About Nothing* directed by Terry Hands in 1982 calling at Paris, Berlin, Viena, Praga, Munich and Hamburg in 1984 and *Titus Andronicus* directed by Deborah Warner premiered at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1987 and touring to Madrid, Paris, Copenhagen and Aarhus in 1989.

This choice is justified by the fact that, as late as 1984, the RSC stepped Spanish soil for the first time when *Much Ado About Nothing* was premiered in the Tivoli Theatre in Barcelona. Madrid witnessed a RSC production for the first time in 1989 when *Titus Andronicus* was included in the Madrid Theatre Festival.

**Jill Marie Bradbury
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“Ambassador Bard: Bridging Deaf and Hearing Worlds”

Shakespeare’s plays let us journey to innumerable worlds, whether backwards through time, across geo-political boundaries, or within the diverse groups that compose our own society. Consider this letter written by Amos Draper in 1889, to a friend in England.

When our ship reached Liverpool this morning and from her deck were seen several of your number conversing in the crowd that stood upon those wonderful docks, it recalled that line of your greatest poet which says “One touch of nature makes the whole world kin;” for though you dwell here upon an island and we upon a continent beyond the seas, yet in all essentials our experiences are probably the same. If you have troubles we can sympathize with you, for we have the same troubles; or if you have joys, those joys are ours, and we rejoice with you (Murray 2007).

Draper, a noted orator and professor at Gallaudet, quoted *Troilus and Cressida* to express his response to seeing deaf people signing on the quay. He drew inspiration from Shakespeare in understanding his place in the deaf-world, a trans-national community with its own unique language and culture. Since at least the nineteenth century, Shakespeare has been a vehicle for deaf people to understand their lives and to develop unique forms of artistic and cultural expression. Shakespearean drama in ASL is also a bridge for hearing people to enter the deaf world. Shortly after its founding in 1967, the National Theatre of the Deaf performed excerpts from *Hamlet* for the NBC *Experiments in Television* show. This 1969 broadcast marked the first time that deaf actors both appeared in and used ASL on a television program. For many hearing people, it was their first introduction to sign language and deaf culture.

Since that broadcast, Shakespeare in ASL has continued to foster deaf-hearing interactions. My paper will examine several notable instances, such as Peter Cook’s performance in the title role of *Pericles* at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival in 1993, Monique Holt’s performance as Cordelia in the Shakespeare Theatre Company’s 1999 production of *King Lear*, and Howie Seago’s work with Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) from 2009 to 2014. Questions to be considered include: What can deaf artists, whether ASL users or not, bring to the interpretation, adaptation, staging, and performance of Shakespeare’s works? How can hearing people who don’t know ASL engage with deaf productions of Shakespeare’s plays? What new elements of Shakespeare’s timeless explorations of the human condition might appear if we reframe his works as being at heart visual rather than auditory?

Elizabeth Burow-Flak
Valparaiso University

“Cultural Mobility and National Identities in Chinese and Kurdish Romeo and Juliets”

The rise of global Shakespeares in the past decade, as exemplified by the World Shakespeare Festival and the MIT Global Shakespeare archive, has tended to reflect back on Anglophone culture. That is, such endeavors either highlight what Stephen Greenblatt refers to as the malleability of Shakespeare's plays to apply to a variety of cultural settings, or result in a sentiment of Shakespeare, Anglophone culture's greatest treasure, belonging to the world. However laudable these sentiments or in line with dominant critical practice, the field of global Shakespeares has reflected less on how stories original to non-European cultures *interact* with those of Shakespeare, in the process, transforming cultural masterpieces into new expressions that negotiate and meld cultural divides. This transformation is the lens through which this paper examines two tales of suicidal lovers and hence, so-called Romeo and Juliets: the pre-modern Chinese legend, Butterfly Lovers, and the Kurdish epic, *Mem u Zin*. National identities, with all their complexities, underlie each story, as does the intentional association in each case with Shakespeare.

Butterfly Lovers, recognized in the first half of the twentieth century as one of the Four Great Folktales of China, has undergone a particular renaissance in the past ten years. Nominated for recognition by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, the story has been memorialized particularly in the city of Ningbo, established in 2005 as a sister city of Verona, with each of the cities bearing statues of Romeo and Juliet's Chinese predecessors, Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. Cultural preservation has similarly motivated recent attention to Ahmad Khani's seventeenth-century Kurdish epic poem, *Mem u Zin*, and its folkloric source, Meme Alan, as Kurdish languages have become allowed and encouraged in schools and universities. Narratives of national identity have also found root in Khani's poem in allegorical readings of the Mem Alan character as synonymous with the Kurdish people, and his beloved, Zin Butan, as synonymous with a homeland. English language periodicals such as the *Kurdish Globe* and the *Kurdistan Tribune* have published studies of the epic poem, with the latter explicitly comparing the tragic lovers to Romeo and Juliet. Where translation and publication networks, as well as turmoil in Kurdistan and neighboring regions, have inhibited spread of these ideas, scholarly migrations of recent years, inspired by demand for higher education in English and government sponsorship of specific populations, have nonetheless sowed these connections.

The contested nature of these literary works and their languages, adaptations, and interpretations highlights Greenblatt's caution in his manifesto on cultural mobility against assuming that “settled, coherent, and perfectly integrated national or ethnic communities” once existed. Yet the film adaptations that this paper addresses, including Jingle Ma's 2008 wuxia film *Butterfly Lovers*

and the 1992 film, *Mem u Zin*, by Umit Elci enact a cultural ambassadorship that is not entirely like the tension that Greenblatt finds “between individual agency and structural restraint” as new cultures interact. Together with related musical adaptations, tourist sites, and even Chinese and Kurdish television series’ from the past decade, these works appear closer to a reinvention of cultural masterpieces rooted in the complex endeavor of forging peaceful understanding.

Sheila T. Cavanagh
Emory University

“The Curiosity of Nations: Communities of Shakespeare in the Twenty-first Century”

“Global Shakespeare” has become a common phrase in twenty first century academic discourse, but its meaning remains controversial and largely undefined. From a generic, common knowledge perspective, “global” tends to correspond with notions of “national,” but many countries and groups of people resist such homogenizing labels. Differences in language, ethnicity, religion, and other cultural markers continually undermine efforts to identify people or cultures according to political boundaries. Contested areas can be found throughout the world, as the news media continually emphasizes in discussions of locations as diverse as Israel, Quebec, Cyprus, and Kashmir. The term “global Shakespeare” implies that political boundaries provide useful parameters for situating the study and performance of Shakespeare, but today I suggest that conventional geography only partially encapsulates the distinctive and wide-ranging groups that are creating and responding to Shakespeare today. Shakespeare’s Globe is currently undertaking a two-year Hamlet tour of “all nations on earth” (<http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/theatre/whats-on/globe-theatre-on-tour/globe-to-globe-hamlet>). While this remarkable endeavor offers a significant opportunity to explore this classic play in a variety of distinctive settings, it inevitably falls short of the goal it implies, since “all nations on earth” are far less fixed and definitive than this phrase suggests. This Hamlet will be performed in an impressive range of locations, but any claim to reach “all nations” relies upon criteria that resist many potential audiences’ conceptualizations of identity and self. The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, for example, site of the American performance, clearly cannot reach or speak for all Americans. Nor would it claim to do so. This bastion of Shakespeare in the US Capitol marks an appropriate, but not definitive, “American” location, any more than the Bengaluru site (formerly Bangalore) represents all of India. National boundaries provide a means for Shakespeare’s Globe to demonstrate the geographical breadth of its Shakespearean undertaking, but they do not adequately represent the range of Shakespeare being studied and performed in the twenty-first century world. This paper will not, therefore, undertake an examination of Shakespeare in “all nations of the world,” but it will explore a range of significant Shakespeare endeavors in diverse realms, many of which do not fit neatly within definitions

circumscribed by political nationality. By doing so, it will examine how Shakespearean study and performance can use this drama in order to represent distinctive and diverse human experiences. I will be focusing include, largely on the World Shakespeare Project or WSP, which uses videoconferencing to link students, faculty, and arts practitioners on all continents, including several tribal populations in Asia and North America (and thanks to the National Science Foundation: Antarctica).

Leticia C. Garcia
University of California, Irvine

“Mexico’s Festival Internacional Cervantino and the Problem of Shakespeare”

Any capture or moment of a Shakespeare play and its performance carries a physical palimpsest of the history, ideas, bodies and books at its source. Theorizing this mapping as an organizing principle of an academic field of study is central to this study on global Shakespeare and Latin American Shakespeare. Working to reframe the study of global Shakespeare, I look specifically to the 2014 Festival Internacional Cervantino, a festival celebrating the richness of theatre, dance, music, and arts of Mexico and the rest of world, as a case study for presenting new inquiries and queries surrounding the merits of Shakespeare’s casual ‘global’ diffusion and as cultural ambassador, as a methodology for study and ongoing cultural project. That is, I argue that the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of Shakespeare’s worldwide currency is deserving of more careful attention and theorization, while recognizing the particular problems inherent in Shakespeare’s ‘global’ qualities—those I see as inherently problematic in Mexico, both historically and contemporaneously. In its very nature, this study is a political story—the historical record of scholarship on Shakespeare — centered on the figure, relevance, and presence of Shakespeare in Mexico

Carla Della Gatta
University of Southern California

“Shakespeare in Other Englishes: Hip-Hop Shakespeares and Twenty-First Century Translations in the United States”

Theatre history documents the genealogy and breadth of Shakespeare in linguistic and cultural translation, and in the last few decades, scholars have attended to the nuances of non-English and non-Western productions and adaptations. But recent translation-adaptations of Shakespeare into English have tended to gain more scholarly critique even in the face of positive reception and box-office success. Looking closely at the Q Brothers’ *Othello: The Remix* that premiered at the 2012 Globe to Globe and had subsequent international tours and Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s *Play On!* project that will

adapt the canon into contemporary English, this paper addresses both the intention of the adaptations and the reception by audiences, scholars, and international theaters. Does translating Shakespeare into modern English, musical or otherwise, extend the canon to wider audiences or does it imply that Shakespeare is so foreign that it must be translated? If Shakespeare can be used as a bridge to engage new theatergoers, do these translations also disengage a legacy of theatergoers? What is the consequence?

Emily Griffiths Jones
MIT

“Singaporean Shakespeare: Global Adaptation in the Classroom”

This paper will be a reflection on my recent experience teaching a course on “Global Shakespeare” to undergraduate students at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. Singapore prides itself on its multiethnic identity, and both my students and the adaptations we studied had roots in Chinese, Malay, Indian, and other Asian cultural heritage. In particular, I hope to invite discussion on three major questions raised by the class and by my students. First, what does it mean for Shakespeare to “still be Shakespeare” in cross-cultural adaptations in which language, character, and story are all altered to one degree or another? Second, why do global artists and directors choose Shakespeare as a medium or a framing device for their cultural and sociopolitical content (as in one stage production we saw, a mostly-Malay music-and-dance extravaganza that also contained the story of *Much Ado About Nothing*)? Third—and perhaps most important—what can Shakespeare mean for contemporary issues of global justice and power, involving race, caste, religion, etc? Do we turn to Shakespeare because he himself wanted to give underrepresented voices a chance to speak, and/or how do we use his works to create new meaning on the cultural concerns that matter for our time?

Amy L. Smith
Kalamazoo College

“ ‘Think of me as I am’: Juvenile Offenders Talk Back to Shakespeare’s *Othello*”

I teach a class on global Shakespeares at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. I first designed the class as a largely theoretical approach to what it means to adapt Shakespeare cross-culturally. We asked good and difficult questions about whether and how Shakespeare’s works could bridge cultures. (What does it mean to think of Shakespeare as a colonizing force? Many cultures, including our own, have written back to Shakespeare, addressing race, sexuality, gender and religion from their own cultural perspectives. What does this ‘writing back’

accomplish? What do exchanges between differently empowered cultures produce and reproduce?)

But it wasn't until I brought those questions closer to home (that rich and complex word I use for the city our college sits within), that my students asked variations of those questions which made them see what was really at stake in "our" culture as well. (How do different communities in the United States receive and write back to Shakespeare? How do issues of race and class, especially, affect access to Shakespeare? What could and does it mean to deny that access? What 'Shakespearean' themes might teenagers in the U.S. juvenile justice system respond to? Why use Shakespeare as a way to engage them with those themes?)

Our project took my students to the juvenile home school twice a week where they worked with 14-17 year olds on probation, teaching them *Othello* and helping them create their own responses to it. Even more transformative than the projects themselves, however, were the interactions fostered by the project between my educationally privileged college students and 9th graders whose educations and lives had been derailed by the juvenile justice system--a culture of its own. The proportion of white students in my class was about on par with the proportion of whites in the U.S., but African American men were vastly over represented in the juvenile home population. Initially, due in part to this, and in part to the racial dynamics of the play itself, my students tried to see the issues they encountered in black and white, but the reality of the socioeconomic, racial and cultural differences within my class helped us blur the racial and insider/outsider dichotomy we had assumed existed. All of us were required to examine our own positions with regard to Shakespeare's work and the questions and issues it raised in both classrooms. In the end, there was no "us" to be bridged with "them." How and why it took Shakespeare to get us to this realization will be at the heart of this analysis.

Alicia Tomasian

William Rainey Harper College

"Teaching *Henry V* to Vets"

As colleges continue to look more to pre-professional training, curriculum such as Shakespeare may be, in fact, more and more considered an indulgence of the elite and/or delusional liberal arts majors. It is also increasingly the case that those who serve in the military are socio-economically distant from most liberal arts students. Even at a community college filled with vets, I rarely have more than one or two in my Shakespeare classes, but I do often have one or two. On two occasions, I had the opportunity to teach *Henry V*, a play very much about the merits, justifications, fears, and bravery of battle, to very vocal veterans who chose to present on the play. Their responses proved Shakespeare a powerful social ambassador; both felt that the play could teach their classmates something about what it is like to face combat. Both felt that the value system

depicted in the play was one that was, in fact, foreign to most of their classmates but profoundly familiar to those returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both used *Henry V* as a way to educate their fellow students on what it means to go into battle. This paper strives to contemplate how Shakespeare can serve as a cultural ambassador between classes and experiences within an American college student body

Richardine Woodall
York University

“Djanet Sears’ *Harlem Duet*: or the Americanization of *Othello*”

This paper explores Shakespeare as a cultural ambassador bridging the often troubled cultural and racial divide in North America. In 1997, the Canadian playwright Djanet Sears released *Harlem Duet*, a prequel to Shakespeare’s *Othello*. As the title of Sears’ play intimates, she transplants Shakespeare’s play from Europe to Harlem, New York. In a 2004 interview, Sears was asked what her play tells us about “being American” or “being Canadian” to which she replied, “Winnie Mandela...said that Harlem was the Soweto of America. And it is...Harlem is almost mythological...It has an extraordinary history, a rich culture and my relationship to it is borderless...Harlem feels like another country, not exactly the USA, a country unto itself that I am part of as well.” Sears’ language is not only very telling, but it is also relevant to Shakespeare as cultural bridge. For Shakespeare to be both an ambassador and a bridge, he must also be to some extent borderless and thus also global. However, Sears’ reverence for Harlem, New York also reveals the extent to which the American perspective of race and racial relationships has dominated contemporary readings and, in the case of Sears’s play, adaptations of *Othello*. This paper, thus explores as well the homogenization of cultural divides that can result from the ambassador Shakespeare as a cultural bridge.

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