

# Shakespeare in the “Post”Colonies: What’s Shakespeare To Them, or They to Shakespeare

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## About the Seminar

Co-leader: Amrita Dhar (Ohio State University)

Co-leader: Amrita Sen (University of Calcutta)

**Seminar keywords: vernacular, local, multilingual, intersectional, indigenous, postcolonial, race, caste, pedagogy, influence**

This seminar investigates what Shakespeare has meant and now means in erstwhile colonial geographies (especially those under the British Empire), and how the various 21st-century Shakespeares worldwide impact current questions of indigenous rights, marginalised identities, and caste politics in “post”colonial spaces.

The violence of colonialism is such that there can be no truly *post*-colonial state, only a neo-colonial one. Whether under settler-colonialism (as in the US and Canada, Australia, New Zealand) or extractive colonialism (as in the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean, and the African continent), the most disenfranchised under colonial rule have only ever changed masters upon any political “post”colonialism.

Given the massive continued presence of Shakespeare everywhere that British colonial reach flourished, and the conviction among educators and theatre practitioners that the study of Shakespeare can and should inform the language(s) of resisting injustice, this seminar explores the reality of 21st-century Shakespeares in geographies of postcolonial inheritance, such as the Indian subcontinent, continental Africa, the Caribbean, Australasia, and indeed, North and South America. We ask what this presence of Shakespeare means for our world of strange mobilities and borders, estrangements and loyalties, distinct identities and shared commitments.

Here are some questions that we seek to address:

- When school and college syllabi in India or Uganda or the West Indies or Canada still have a compulsory Shakespeare component, what work does Shakespeare do today?
- What does a Dalit Shakespeare look like, or a Maori one, and how do these Shakespeares influence the “mainstream” currency of Shakespeare in the UK-US axis?
- Why is Shakespeare relevant, even important, in worldwide local, vernacular, and Indigenous registers?
- Why and how does Shakespeare’s language have the power to move even when removed from the original?
- What is the relationship between the local and the global, and how does Shakespeare help us parse that relationship?
- Who gets to do/own/perform/read/interpret/teach Shakespeare, and where, and how? And what do these engagements mean?

– What can our understanding of Shakespeare beyond English, and beyond the early modern, do for coalitional dialogue with race and ethnic studies, and with premodern critical race studies?

Engaging scholars of race, caste, gender, postcolonialism, adaptation, performance, multilingualism, disability, and indigeneity, this seminar raises questions about critical terminology and methodology (particularly the neo- and post-colonial); caste and class; pedagogy and curricula; linguistic belonging and otherness; centre and margin; past and present.

Seminarians are asked for short scholarly papers, critical responses, and engaged conversation. Participation from graduate students (at the candidacy level), scholars based in or working on areas outside the US-UK axis, and scholars working in one or more intersections of culture and identity as outlined above is especially welcome.

Seminar webpage: <https://u.osu.edu/dhar.24/amrita-dhar/shakespeare-in-the-postcolonies/>

### **Seminarians' Paper Abstracts**

**Rebekah Bale**  
**Hong Kong Shue Yan University**

#### **One Country, Two Shakespeares**

The past year has been the most tumultuous in Hong Kong's post-colonial history. Since the 1997 handover, the city has been engaged in a political, economic and cultural struggle to create its identity as an exemplar of the 'one country, two systems' formula. The Basic Law which serves as Hong Kong's mini-constitution guaranteed the city's autonomy for fifty years. In 2019, the attempt to pass an extradition bill allowing suspects to be sent to other countries, including Mainland China, resulted in large and latterly violent demonstrations at the perceived erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy.

This paper aims to examine what role Shakespeare plays in Hong Kong now. His presence remains in university courses, English-medium high schools and a thriving arts scene. It also figures as a form of social capital; familiarity with a type of Western-centric culture often distant from actual attendance at performances. His plays are also broadcast through the National Theatre in cinemas and other events sponsored by elements of soft power like the British Council. Though Britain's influence has waned as America's has grown, in both cultural and political fields, Shakespeare remains. Yet, Hong Kong is not a post colony. It was handed from one (declining or already obsolete depending on your viewpoint) empire to one that was rising (and continues to do so). In a liminal space where no liminality is allowed, what purpose can or does Shakespeare serve?

**Poushali Bhadury**  
**Middle Tennessee State University**

### **Reframing the Bard in Bengali Children's Literature: Dev Sahitya Kutir and the Postcolonial "World Classics" Canon**

This paper investigates the idea of the Western (children's) "classic," canonical text in India, delving into issues of adaptation and classic-remaking. I focus specifically on the Translation Series of "world classics" in Bengali, published from the 1950s onwards by Dev Sahitya Kutir (DSK), a prominent Kolkata children's publishing house. This series incorporates works by fifty-eight authors including Homer, Daniel Defoe, Maxim Gorky, Mary Shelley, Pearl. S. Buck, and Georgette Heyer, among others. The series also features two collections of short prose retellings of select tragedies and comedies by William Shakespeare. Adapted by Sudhindranath Raha, *Tragedy of Shakespeare* (1954) and *Shakespeare-er Comedy (Shakespeare's Comedy)*, (1959) bear distinct similarities to Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales of Shakespeare* (1807). Although labelled "translations," these are creative adaptations of the original tales, liberally altered to suit younger reading levels. The publishing house re-contextualised these adapted classics within the Bengali book market generally and DSK's own series offerings specifically, in ways that changed the import of the source texts themselves. Placing such a disparate range of authors with remarkably varying levels of cultural capital under the auspices of the same series also served to destabilise canonical hierarchies in cheeky ways. Here, Shakespeare's works occupy an equal space with Heyer's *Royal Escape*, for instance, with a biographical note serving to contextualise the contributions and canonical status of each English author.

The paper argues that the postcolonial children's world classic series is a great leveller—it stretches the bounds of the established Western canon of "great works/great authors" to present a rather subversive, "flattened" canon of world literature liberally adapted for a new Indian child readership. The effect is to re-frame the cultural impact of these varied texts and authors and make them part of a relatively level literary playing field, one where their canonical status is unexpectedly forged anew. Thus, the Translation series spoke to both local and global contexts of portable "literary value" and circulation. While it stressed its internationalism and the heightened reputations of the source text authors, the series also self-consciously positioned itself as a postcolonial Bengali publishing phenomenon. Moreover, the impulse to present world classics subtly framed within an Indian ethos places these texts within a contested literary landscape. These amalgamated postcolonial texts enabled DSK's child readership to observe the world with their feet planted on Indian soil, as it were.

**Koel Chatterjee**  
**Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance**

### **Black Skin, White Masks: *Izzat* as an appropriation of *Othello***

*Izzat* (Family Honour, 1968) was the first mainstream Hindi film to reference *Othello* and has so far escaped the attention of academics who have begun researching Bollywood Shakespeares as an important field of study within the Global Shakespeare arena. The film stars Dharmendra playing both versions of a fair and a dark hued twin which is an innovative take on a Shakespearean trope as well as an appropriation of Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*. As a mainstream film, *Izzat* does

not aspire to the pedagogical cultural capital of Shakespeare that better known Indian cinematic appropriations of *Othello* such as *Saptapadi* (1961), *Kaliyattam* (1997), *In Othello* (2003) or *Omkara* (2006) do, nor does it reference the performance traditions of *Othello* on stage or film in India or abroad. However, references to Shakespeare's play, which seem superficial at first glance, are embedded throughout the film. Through this paper, I will explore the ways in which Shakespearean tropes and, Shakespeare's *Othello*, has been used to explore postcolonial anxieties about identity in India. I will also explore *Izzat's* suggestion that the colonisers have been replaced in Indian society by the urban elite who value superficial white masks and practice a racism that is much more insidious by discriminating against other Indians based on colour, caste and class. Through this exploration, I will also examine how *Othello* impacts the Indian psyche and why the referencing of *Othello* in this film points towards the many ways in which *Othello* is adapted and appropriated in Indian mainstream media to this day.

**Zainab Cheema**  
**American University**

### **Postcolonial Othello: Race and Passing in Iqbal Khan's 2015 RSC Production**

Postcolonial appropriations of Shakespeare often function as politically charged, at times ambivalent sites of deconstructing Eurocentrism and canonical whiteness. While appropriations by BIPOC directors can take radical forms of taking ownership, claiming agency, or even ethical reparation (Joubin 2015), Shakespeare's quintessential "race play" *Othello* poses unique challenges to ethically motivated translations onto the contemporary stage. As Ayanna Thompson, Keith Hamilton Cobb and others have highlighted, "faithful adaptations" of the play's semiotics of blackness often prevent BIPOC actors from ethically interpreting the titular role to accommodate more nuanced representations of minorities' subjectivity and citizenship within the European body politic. However, Iqbal Khan's critically acclaimed 2015 RSC production of *Othello* opened new perspectives on the ethics of appropriation by casting Tanzanian British actor Lucian Msamati as Iago. As Jyotsna Singh observed, "the casting choice raised some important issues about whether we can move beyond black-and-white ideas of racism as a motivator for Iago, and where the play stands on issues of 'race' today" (2019). Msamati's casting choice profoundly decenters the power hierarchies of Shakespeare's play, opening suggestive readings of *Othello* and Iago's relations in context to postcolonial histories of state violence, emigration, intra-colonial competition, intra-BIPOC power relations and more. Additionally, within context to *Othello* and Iago's relations, the casting centers the problem of racial passing—the performative simulation of racial identity in order for social mobility, power, and political belonging. In this essay, I critically read Khan's RSC production to examine the ways in which passing functions as a racial epistemology in Khan's ethics of appropriation. I argue that "passing" functions in the production to map the spaces of the local onto the global and "post"-colony onto the metropole in ways that materialize the contingent networks of violence structuring contemporary landscapes of power and capital.

**Erin Kelly**  
**Rutgers University**

### **“When I was at home, I was in a better place”: “Acclimatizing” Shakespeare**

Many have heard the apocryphal (but still widely-cited) story that Shakespeare is to blame for the profusion of non-native starlings across North America: allegedly, 19th century bird and Shakespeare enthusiast Eugene Schiefflin set out to introduce all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare to Central Park, and they since spread from there, quickly becoming nuisances and driving down native songbird populations. While it is true that Schiefflin was partly responsible for the introduction of starlings to North America, there is nothing to substantiate the Shakespeare connection, other than his professed enthusiasm for Shakespeare.

Despite its spurious nature, there's something telling about this connection between Shakespeare and the spread of non-native species to current (or former) British colonies. Brayton & Buckner's *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, for instance, has used this anecdote as an exemplar of anthropogenic ecological change. But it also belongs within our accounts of Shakespeare in the “post” colonies: notably, the introduction of starlings was not the result of the whim of a single eccentric individual, but part of a concerted program to “acclimatize” colonies, making them resemble their home country by introducing “beneficial” and “pleasing” species. These “Acclimatization Societies” existed across America, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere beginning in the 1870s and continued into the turn of the century, despite the growing awareness of the ecological destruction they wrought. Shakespeare, too, of course was also often forcibly imposed within colonial school curricula, as has been well documented, thanks to the beneficial influence he was thought to provide for England's colonial subjects. I'm interested in bringing together ecocritical and postcolonial accounts of Shakespeare's influence in order to think about the extent to which the representation of the natural world in plays such as the *Tempest* (perhaps in comparison to *As You Like It*) create a sense of “placelessness” or of ecological particularity as part of their participation in nascent globalization.

**Amir Khan**  
**Dalian Maritime University**

### **Ah Q and Hamlet: Materialism meets Modernity**

My thesis comes in two parts. The first is that Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q* remains a pregnantly subversive text; it remains “new” and “modern” enough for audiences to discern the thematization of a specifically non-Western aesthetic category: the possibility for historical reset. By reset I mean an understanding that one's symbolic order is set to come to a close and from there to wonder how or if any or all of it can or ought to be salvaged. The historical burden of such closure, moreover, is an aesthetic fact never faced by Western sensibilities in any serious capacity. The Western reactionary tendency is to deny the possible aleatory unfolding of history, hence denying the possibility of historical reset of any kind.

The second part of my thesis is to suppose that once, long ago, Hamlet was in the same position as Ah Q is now; yet the record of English speaking imperial domination and subjugation of the planet means Hamlet cannot be read as thematizing in any profound way the possibility of history as

aleatory. The entire critical tradition surrounding the play works tirelessly to deny any such possible reading. Yet a considerable body of evidence suggests that interpretation of the play is exhausted, ceaselessly running the gamut of interpretation between exploration of atemporal individual psyche on the one hand and the play of totalitarian historical forces on the other. No new interpretation can exit the magnetosphere created by these two interpretive poles. Yet juxtaposed against the true possibility of reset brought to bear in “third-world” stories like *Ah Q*, Hamlet’s worth may or may not be salvaged from its current ossified imperial status.

**Vijeta Kumar**  
**St Joseph’s College**

### **Who Owns Shakespeare?**

I first took an interest in Shakespeare when I had to teach *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in an undergraduate class for science students. I had never read or taught Shakespeare before. If, like me, you go to a state-board run school in India, chances are you never have to know who or what Shakespeare is until you become serious about a career in English literature.

I was learning to write then and the BBC documentary of the man who didn’t have access to consistent learning, who went against odds to teach himself to read and write intrigued me. That he was a glovemaker’s son only continued to make me curious about how he arrived at writing more than what he wrote. I enjoyed *The Merry Wives of Windsor* immensely. Having grown up watching Tamizh, Hindi, and Kannada comedy films, I saw the chaos in the play as familiar and endearing. With little to no background about the Elizabethan age, about Aristotelian theories on tragedy/comedy, I was still able to share with the class my enthusiasm for the man who wrote passionate comedy.

A few years later, I was teaching *Romeo and Juliet* in an undergraduate English class. The class was smart and equipped to deal with more than what I was able to teach. I found it difficult to go beyond my fascination with how Shakespeare arrived at writing and they were getting impatient. They wanted more theory, less narrative. I froze in class one morning when a very intelligent young boy asked me a question about the spectator’s role in contributing to the tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*. I answered however I could but both the boy and I knew that I hadn’t understood the question, and worse, that I had pretended to know what I was talking about.

I longed for him to bunk my classes. But this boy returned, never missing a single class and I grew more and more afraid. I didn’t want to rely on guides and YouTube videos. I wanted to feel what I was reading and then take it to class. I needed more time to situate that with Shakespeare, it was unbelievable how I had become an English teacher with no complex knowledge of Shakespeare. Whispers about reservation candidates becoming teachers and not knowing how to teach Shakespeare were boldly gathering momentum.

I came to dread these classes. I saw no point in going further. Through what the students had been taught by other teachers, and what they were able to learn on their own, it became clear to me that Shakespeare had become more accessible to them in a way that he was not accessible to me. I felt removed in the classroom and began to reassess my abilities as a teacher.

Many of the challenges about being a Dalit teacher in Indian academia today is this gap between what the students expect out of her in the classroom and how these expectations limit the teacher's role in bringing someone like Shakespeare closer to Dalit and Banhujan students. This is something I'd like to examine in this paper.

**Bi-qi Beatrice Lei**  
**National Taiwan University**

### **Empress Americana: Tamora in Yamanote Jijosha's *Titus Andronicus***

While Japan narrowly escaped being formally colonized, its encounters with Western powers since the mid-nineteenth century were far from being peaceful or equal. In 1853, the armed American "Black Ships" forced Japan to open, causing rapid and radical changes in all areas. Under the banner of "civilization and enlightenment," Western ideas, practices, and lifestyles soon gained momentum and became increasingly naturalized and internalized. Meanwhile, there has been profound ambivalence toward the West, especially the United States, manifested in both an obsession with American consumer culture and large-scale anti-American protests and boycotts.

Yamanote Jijosha's *Titus Andronicus* can be seen as an anti-American allegory, with Rome serving as a mirror of Japan.<sup>1</sup> In contrast with the kimono-clad and honor-bound Romans, the depraved and deceptive Goths wear Western dress. Tamora's sexy and sexualized body is a focal point, an object of fascination and repulsion, signifying unbridled desire and cruelty. Under her power, the quintessential Japan-ness embodied by Lavinia is ravished, silenced, mutilated, and sacrificed.

Global surveys continue to list Japan as one of the most pro-American countries. Yet, as this production powerfully shows, dejection, distrust and disgust are also deeply rooted in the Japanese psyche.

**Kirsten N. Mendoza**  
**University of Dayton**

### **Rehearsing and Adapting Shakespeare in the Philippines**

The American colonial education of the early twentieth-century standardized Shakespeare as a required curricular component in Philippine schools meant to aid in the process of English language acquisition. Although Shakespeare comprised a central component to the colonial curriculum of the Philippines, translations of his work in Philippine languages such as Tagalog and Bikolano were already in circulation from the incipient stages of American colonial government and education on the archipelago. This paper will look at the ways that the Philippine reception of Shakespeare has been informed by prior Spanish colonial practices and ideologies as well as resistance to that cultural colonial imposition. Specifically, I look at the ways that access to Shakespeare, on the one hand, encouraged Philippine students to view themselves and their people through an American gaze, one

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<sup>1</sup> Dir. Yasuda Masahiro, *Titus Andronicus*, premiered in the Sibiu International Theatre Festival in 2009. A clip from the 2010 performance in Tokyo is at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLbbrVnBkFQ&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLbbrVnBkFQ&feature=emb_logo).

in which divisions of race and religion were magnified to validate American imperial hostilities against non-Christian groups in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, just as the Philippine people adapted Christianity by infusing Catholicism with their cultural practices, Shakespeare's works have been used since their earliest translation to Tagalog as a means to speak to the contentions of a particular time for the hope of a more just future.

**Nicholas F. Radel**  
**Furman University**

### **Citizen Othello: Claudia Rankine as Shakespeare's Future**

My essay engages directly, I hope, two aspects of the topic of the seminar expressed by its title. First, it relies on a reading of Shakespeare's *Othello* in relation to Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*, a work written, clearly, in a post British colony, the United States. Second, although the two works were written almost exactly 410 years apart, my essay brings them together in the kind of mutual dialogue implied by the seminar's "post colon" title: What, it asks, is Shakespeare to Rankine, or Rankine to him?

I argue that the two works come together around the concept of the "Citizen." Although Shakespeare's play doesn't explicitly depend on this term to shape its analysis of Othello, the concept of citizenship as John Michael Archer and others have helped us understand it in early modern England gives us much to think about in terms of *Othello*. And it helps us, specifically, separate our analysis of the play from the "racial" terms of post-slavery, identity configurations that dominate recent discussion. I argue as well that Rankine also explores racial difference without a necessary dependence on identity. I don't imply that Shakespeare influenced Rankine. Rather, I re-think *Othello* in terms of Rankine's brilliant deployment of the idea of citizenship.

The theoretical underpinnings of my essay are various, but for ease of understanding I would reference the kind of "homohistory" theorized by Madhavi Menon and Jonathan Goldberg. I attempt to see two different works from two different periods as participating in the same history, albeit one that is slightly different from our usual conceptions of it.

**Abhishek Sarkar**  
**Jadavpur University**

### **Miranda and Kapalkundala: Absence of the Colonial Allegory in Four Bengali Comparative Essays**

My paper will examine four Bengali essays published in periodicals in the long nineteenth century, which compare Miranda intensively with the eponymous heroine of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's 1866 novel *Kapalkundala*. These essays ignore invariably the possibility of reading *The Tempest* as an allegory of the colonial project. They are also not bothered about the character of Caliban. This tendency is consistent with Bankim Chandra's own 1875 essay comparing Shakuntala (eponymous heroine of the best-known classical Sanskrit play) with Miranda and Desdemona, and Rabindranath Tagore's 1902 essay comparing *Shakuntala* with *The Tempest*.

The four essays in question (Shrish Chandra Majumder, 1880; anonymous, 1889; Sudhindranath Tagore, 1891; Kshirode Bihari Chattopadhyay, 1918) discuss how Shakespeare's and Bankim's texts address the condition of a young woman brought up outside human society. They are especially concerned with what they mark as the inherent feminine kindness and the pristine form of sexual innocence represented in the heroines of these texts. All four essays consider the characters of Miranda and Kapalkundala to be similar literary achievements. In addition, Shrish Chandra's essay finds Kapalkundala to be more difficult to understand than Miranda, while Kshirode Bihari's essay claims that Kapalkundala was designed deliberately as a comment on the psychological discrepancies in Miranda. The elision of the political context enables these essays to create a universalist space where Shakespeare and Bankim may be treated as coequal artists, without undue deference to Shakespeare's (colonially propagated) canonicity. These essays thus refuse to be defined by a colonial relationship of cultural subordination. However, the paradigm of universalism evoked by them is posited on the fetishization of feminine innocence. These essays, my paper will argue, naturalize and replicate a patriarchal vision that they attribute to *The Tempest* and *Kapalkundala*.

**Nidhi Verma**  
**Lingaya's Vidyapeeth**

### ***Macbeth* in Jammu-upon-Tawi: A Postcolonial Journey from Stratford-upon-Avon**

Shakespeare has been and is being appropriated in postcolonial nations and societies and interpretations of his works provide a reminder that the present continues to hold a piece of the past and that the postcolonial world contains the colonial in many senses. This paper proposes to introduce Shiv Mehta's Dogri translation of *Macbeth*. Dogri is the language of the Dogras, who live in Jammu, which is situated in the foothills of the lower Himalayas in the north. The languages and culture of the Jammu region are different, though related to, Kashmir. The paper is an attempt to study the intricacies of adapting a play into a language so different and a culture as isolated as that of the Scots. The Dogras, like the Highlanders, are a martial race and the machinations of power and its reversals are as much a part of their culture as that of the Lords surrounding King Duncan. Shiv Mehta's adaptation exhibits all the complexities and challenges of rendering a piece of literature from one culture to another.

The conflict between the *bhasa*, i.e. indigenous language literatures and English, the colonial imposition, is, in many ways negotiated through translations. Shiv Mehta's adaptation of *Macbeth* provides fascinating insights into the creative process of the playwright as well as the translator by juxtaposing Shakespeare's reworking of the story with Mehta's interpretation in terms of indigenous culture. Shakespeare's continued relevance in older cultures can be ascribed to his adaptation of folk themes to suit Elizabethan England. The very act of translating Shakespeare can become the act of reappropriating the older folk forms which resonate strongly with indigenous beliefs. The cultural adaptation of drama lends itself to a certain degree of localisation in performative interpretation. One of the creative acts of the translator has been to replace the three witches in the original play with *jadu jariyan*, a form of the spirit world that predicts the future for the Dogra people. The paper proposes to study how the cultural specificities of the target culture inform the translated version.

Sandra Young  
University of Cape Town

### Oceanic imaginaries: the radical potential of an underwater mnemonic archive

Cultural theory in recent years has begun to complicate the binaries that shaped earlier iterations of postcolonial thought, through methodologies that attend to the hermeneutics of the ocean. The temporal and geographical delineations affirmed by familiar dichotomies, such as centre/periphery, colony/metropole, and even colonizer/colonized, have not been able to account for the irreducible forms of imperialism and resistance that continue to impact lived experience across an uneven world, or the forms of implicatedness and entanglement that emerge in the aftermath of colonialism. A temporal structure that treats the event of colonial conquest as defining of the *post*-colonial future may seem to authorize the forgetting of histories of violence, paradoxically, through its linearity. In addressing questions of power within early modern imaginaries, Postcolonial Shakespeare studies has been well positioned to complicate these teleologies, and to venture beyond familiar historicist modes to probe the haunting aftermath of violent histories. However, it may require going still further, if we are to find an answer to Saidiya Hartman's question: "What are the stories one tells in dark times?"<sup>2</sup> It is a question for historiography as well as for the work of the literary imagination. How might theater practice help to engage the past so that its shadowy, submerged figures might be welcomed into this moment, with the breath of the living?

Recent explorations of oceanic imaginaries have begun to develop methodologies with which to trace the legacies of histories of dispossession. Isabel Hofmeyr's recent conceptualization of "hydrocolonialism" shifts our view "offshore and underwater" to venture beyond the delimitations of (post)colonialism's national and temporal boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Treating the oceans themselves as "creolized" entities brings into view the structures of violence that permeate the oceans and the cultural imaginaries they have generated, Hofmeyr proposes. From a "creolized sea" a more complicated sociality emerges, one that might acknowledge the mythologies of ancient communities and the sustaining waters that have resisted land-based systems of governance. An oceanic imaginary might awaken, too, the spirits of enslaved ancestors and their submerged archive. Jessica Lehman identifies the "radical potential" in the "ocean as method," particularly for postcolonial cultural theorists interested in accounting for "loss, wreck, violence, and waste, rather than the smooth ascendancy of imperial knowledge and power."<sup>4</sup> This paper begins to explore what an oceanic imaginary might offer as Shakespearean scholars alert to the theater's capacity to confront histories of violence, enslavement and dispossession probe the theater's capacity to animate the archive of history and allow us to sense what has been hidden from view.

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<sup>2</sup> See "Venus in Two Acts," *small axe* 26 (June 2008): 1–14, esp. 14.

<sup>3</sup> See "Hydrocoloniality," Keynote address, "Cosmopolitan Cultures and Oceanic Thought' Conference, jointly hosted by the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa (at the University of the Witwatersrand) and Jamia Millia University (December 2020).

<sup>4</sup> "Blue History," *The New Inquiry* (February 6, 2017). <https://thenewinquiry.com/blue-history/>