

The Imperial Design and Shakespeare

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Abstract

This paper discusses Shakespeare as a two-pronged author contributing to the establishment and expansion of the British Empire on the one hand, and the site of resistance on the other. He was used by the British Imperialists as the foremost representative of liberal humanism which was the watchword for the imperial expansion, but he also turned out to be the source of resistance for many of the anti-imperialist movements of the colonized peoples. He was and has been treated both as a Prospero and a Caliban. This paper further wants to recognize the fact that even Shakespeare was a tangential part of the poetic geography that according to John Gillies was formed in the ancient Greek time, which subsequently was adopted by the British intellectual leaders of the Renaissance, who held the strong belief that Britain must expand. The idealistic empire preceded the physical empire.

It may be asserted that Shakespeare worked within an imperial paradigm. The basis for saying so is that in Europe, starting with ancient Greece, the idea of the empire was pre-formulated before the establishment of an empire. That is, the empire was invented before it was actualized. The Greeks, followed by the Romans, read the map of the world from a moral premise. They imagined an empire with Athens as the centre implying that the lands away from the centre were the locations for barbarians, who were morally inferior and bestial. Such a constrained view of the empire has been called 'poetic geography' by Giambattista Vico, an eighteenth-century philosopher. My point is that poetic geography was not only created by the Greeks and the Romans in respect of their empires, but the English also pursued poetic geography before the English/British Empire took shape. In this pursuit, Shakespeare had been used as an agency to further the imperial cause. But Shakespeare had been at best a double-edged agency because while he was found useful in pushing the imperial agenda, he also became the site of resistance for the colonized.

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1. The Metaphorical Empire

Cleopatra [to Antony]: "If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

Antony: There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.

Cleopatra: I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.

Antony: Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth."

(Antony and Cleopatra, 1.1.14-7.)

Antony's utterance, "Thou must needs find out new heaven, [and] new earth" refers to the new geographical spaces that were being discovered by explorers before and during Shakespeare's time. The Norton Anthology of Shakespeare's works, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, et al., has a footnote saying that this line introduces the imperial theme of the play.¹ Though anachronistic to the time of the play's events, the idea of the empire was commonplace in Shakespeare's England. *Antony and Cleopatra* was written in 1606-7, but the year before, in 1606, Shakespeare had his tragic king, Macbeth pursue, achieve, and die for "the imperial theme" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.129).

Thus, Shakespeare worked within an imperial paradigm when the aspirations of the English geographers and explorers were in tune with the monarchical desire for an expansion of the English territories. Shakespeare was a child of his age, and though in the quotation above it is the empire of love that Antony is willing to give preference over the political empire, the desire for an empire, especially after the English victory over the Spanish Armada at Gravelines off the French coast in 1588, fired the imagination of the English men for global dominance.

Elaborating on this point, I will also show that as Shakespeare was working within an imperial paradigm, my essay is not so much about how Shakespeare has used the imperial trope in his plays as about how he himself has been used in the design.

¹ *The Norton Anthology: Based on the Oxford Edition: Tragedies*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine Eisaman Maus (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 857, fn. 5: "Alluding anachronistically to Revelation 21:1 ("I saw a new heaven, and a new earth") and to the discovery of the New World. This second meaning may connect to the imperial theme of the play—its sense of geographical expansiveness and European geographical expansion."

To understand the English monarchical ambition of an empire, one analogy perhaps will suffice. Akbar, the great emperor of Mughal India (reigning time: 1556-1605), and Elizabeth, the great queen of England (reigning time: 1558-1603) were contemporaries, and perhaps unknown to each other.² Both were very enlightened monarchs, but while Akbar did not feel it necessary to build up a fleet, Elizabeth signed a charter on the last day of the year 1600, permitting a group of London merchants to form a company called the East India Company. What happened after that is history, and my essay will deal with how in subsequent centuries Shakespeare was received in India (by India, I mean the subcontinent before the partition of 1947) in a mixed way—revered as an imperial metaphor, and also appropriated for India’s nationalistic cause. That is, Shakespeare in India, and also now in Bangladesh, has never been de-historicized. He has either been used as a representative imperial figure authenticating a seamless monolithic identity, which is English/British imperialism, or as a veritable ground to form the voice of resistance. This dualistic aspect of the use of Shakespeare, as I will show, however, does not remain unique to India only, but, as Werner Habicht and Coppe`lia Kahn report in their essays, “Shakespeare Celebrations in Times of War” and “Remembering Shakespeare Imperially” respectively, that “not only England but other countries, too, came to claim him as their national poet.”³

I have spoken above about the English desire for an empire. I will elaborate on this point later, but for now, it is necessary to realize that the Eurocentric imperial paradigm had been at work long before the English had achieved a vision of it. The Greeks, the Romans, the Spanish, and the Turkish had preceded the English in forming empires. But I will discuss briefly how the genesis of the empire was formed in ancient Greece, how it was adopted subsequently by the Romans, and how, finally, it came to the English.

Desire precedes reality. The empire has a physical reality, of course. But the vision of it was formed earlier. For example, Elizabeth’s famous

² The first Englishman to meet a Mughal monarch was John Mildenhall, who reached Agra overland in 1603, met Akbar, and, concocting a fiction, told him that his queen was desirous of making friendship with the “Great Mogor.” “Power and Distant Display: Early English ‘Ambassadors’ in Moghul India,” Richmond Barbour, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1998, Vol. 61, No. 3/4 (1998), 343-68, Published by University of Pennsylvania Press; Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3817773>, 347.

³ Werner Habicht, “Shakespeare Celebrations in Times of War” in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No 4 (Winter, 2001), 441-455. This reference at page 441.

speech to her troops at Tilbury on the eve of the Battle of Armada concluded with—“we shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people,” and the imperial desire can be found latent there, though the English actually got to materialize their imperial dream with the subjugation of Ireland by the end of the sixteenth century and effecting the union with Scotland at a later time.⁴ These two moves resulted in the creation of (Great) Britain in 1707. The period afterwards saw the rapid expansion of British territories almost all over the globe and thus by the end of the eighteenth century, the British Empire became a reality.

2. The Greek View

The invented concept of the empire, as said earlier, was called ‘poetic geography’ by Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), an eighteenth-century Italian philosopher. I owe heavily to John Gillies for using the idea of poetic geography. In his excellent book, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (1994), Gillies expounds that from ancient times geography was never taken in a literal sense. A moral vision was always interpolated into a geographical description. The map was read morally by the ancient people. He brings up Vico for discussion because he has explained that the Greeks used the word *oikumene* in a symbolic sense. The word implied in its meaning both the house and the world. Oikumene was a flexible term used for the home in an expanding pattern. That is, as more information about new geographical lands was becoming available the meaning of the word extended to include those new spaces as forming the margins or the borderlands. Like the expanding frontier concept of America, oikumene had acknowledged the idea of something beginning at the centre and spreading outward toward the border. (Analogous to this is the image of the wheel, the inner cog, and the widening spheres.)

The Greeks had two other terms for defining this expanding pattern: *Hestia* and *Hermes*. Hestia was actually the Greek goddess of the hearth. She would keep the centre in control. And Hermes was the god of the voyage. That is, he would go out to the border. The centre-border dichotomy had made it possible for a moral interpretation to take shape. Athens was the *Hestia* or *Vesta* (the walled-in city), and beyond it, particularly beyond the Hercules’ Pillars at Gibraltar,

⁴ www.tudorhistory.org/./tilbury.html

the lands were labeled as *eschatia* or *end-zones*. Vico thought that the Greeks had imagined their known world in this moral pattern even before Herodotus, the fifth-century Greek historian had demarcated the Hellenic Empire as spreading from Sythia in the north to Ethiopia in the south, and from Asia in the east to Gibraltar in the west.⁵ Following Vico's suggestion Edith Hall, the British classicist and historian, has explained that the fifth-century Athenian politics had labeled all non-Hellenes as barbarians. This scheme gave two benefits to the Athenians. They were the superior race, and the others were comfortably denominated as forming one single race—the barbarians. Edward Said, as Gillies also notes (4), objected to the Eurocentric discourse, continuing from Aeschylus to T. E. Lawrence, as it interpreted the Orient in a vision of sameness.⁶ Aristotle's concept of 'natural servitude' as expounded in *Politics* also encouraged racial discrimination, implying that there was a master race and there was a slave race.⁷ The barbarians were deformed, lecherous, and carnivorous as how Shakespeare imaginatively describes them in *Othello*:

“And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.” (1.3.144-6).

And of course, Caliban has been portrayed as a near-cousin of the Anthropophagi.

The imperial discourse was initially developed based on racial differences, on the difference between 'us' and 'them', and Gillies gives ample examples from Greek and Roman myth and literature to develop the idea that cross-race marriages, called miscegenation, were thought to be bringing disaster for the partner belonging to the Hellenic race. Aeschylus' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Euripides's *Medea*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, and Shakespeare's *Othello* are some of the texts he discusses to explain the concept of blood pollution through miscegenation. For example, in *Metamorphosis*, which has the Tereus-Philomel myth retold, Procne, the Athenian princess, and Philomel's sister becomes infanticide because she has married Tereus, the Thracian slave-king. Similarly, in *Othello*, Othello must kill Desdemona, not because she is assumed to have sinned by adultery, but because Othello as 'the other' (the Moor)

⁵ John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the geography of difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5.

⁶ Gillies, 4.

⁷ Gillies, 15.

must fulfill his role as a jealous husband—a common trait assigned to the barbarian.⁸

3. The Roman View

The poetic geography also worked as the basis of the Roman Empire. The transition of the poetic paradigm of the empire from the Herodotean *Polis*-centred Athenian geography to the Roman discourse of empire seems rather naturally consequential. Rome became the *medius mundi locus* (the centre of the world). Ovid relates a Roman proverb: 'The land of the other nations has a fixed boundary: the circuit of Rome is the circuit of the world'. Gillies, however, remarks that "[w]hat this and similar proverbs suggest is that Roman *imago mundi* [the image of the world] was as much a construction of poetry and rhetoric as of factual geography."¹⁰ He mentions J. Oliver Thompson as having observed that to keep their vision of imperial supremacy intact the Romans did not recognize the existence of China.

During the Roman Empire, the imperial poetics became bifurcated between an autochthonous (single-entity) view of empire and a pluralistic view. Augustus Caesar (the first Roman emperor) was a conservative imperialist, and, as Edward Gibbon has pointed out, he was keen on having the Roman Empire confined "within those limits which Nature seemed to have placed on its permanent bulwarks and boundaries: the Atlantic Ocean on the west; the Rhine and Danube on the north; the Euphrates on the east; and toward the south, the sandy deserts of Arabia and Africa."¹¹

The pluralistic view of the empire came from Alexander's travelling and voyaging temperament and in *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is Antony who represents this view. In the play, Caesar refers to his (Antony's) commanding all the following kings from the East: "He hath assembled / Bocchus the King of Libya, Archelaus / Of Cappadocia; Philadelphos King / Of Paphlagonia, the Thracian King Adallas, / King Manchus of Arabia, King of Pont, / Herod of

⁸ Gillies, 14-5), and Hugh Quarshie acknowledges this to be the embedded racial thrust in *Othello*. "Second thoughts about *Othello*," International Shakespeare Association Occasional Paper No. 7, 1999: "It might still be impossible to avoid the conclusion that Othello behaves as he does because he's black; but it might be possible to suggest that he does so not because of a genetic disposition towards gullibility and violent jealousy, but for compelling psychological, social and political reasons; that he behaves as he does because he is a black man responding to racism, not giving a pretext for it." 21.

⁹ Gillies, 10.

¹⁰ Gillies, 10.

¹¹ Gillies, 10.

Jewry, Mithridates King / Of Comagene, Polemon and Amyntas, / The Kings of Mede and Lycaonia; / *With a more larger list of sceptres*" (3.6.69-77).

Roman natural historians like Pliny, Pomponius Mela, and Gaius Julius Solinus have followed the Herodotean poetic geography when they referred to the distant (*terminus and finis*) places as being the habitats of barbarians and monsters (that is, the other) and where marvels and supernaturalism could be encountered. Conceiving Italy as superior to the exotic lands was commonplace in Roman geographic discourse.

4. The Biblical View

Gillies then is of the opinion that the Renaissance habit of "reading the classics in the light of the Bible" may show a convergence of the ancient other with the other of the Old Testament.¹² The source of the Biblical other is to be found in the episode recorded in Genesis, IX, 21-5. One day, Prophet Noah, after working in his vineyard, became drunk and fell to sleep with his body uncovered. Ham, Noah's youngest son, entered the tent and saw his father in that embarrassing position. But instead of covering his body, he came out of the tent. The implication is that he did something unbecoming (often guessed as incestuous homosexuality) to his father. Noah's other two sons, Shem and Japheth, however, covered their father's naked body without looking at him. When Noah woke up and realized what had happened to him, he cursed Canaan, Ham's youngest son, to become responsible for starting the slave generations. Thus, the Canaanites of the Old Testament are portrayed as promiscuously as the barbarians were. Gillies, therefore, argues that the imperial trope had converged the Aristotelian barbarian, the Biblical Canaanite, and the Renaissance exotic figures (the African and American other) together as representing the other.¹³

5. The English View

The Greek and Roman poetic geography can be seen as transported to England with the same imperial topoi in the sixteenth century when England was emerging as an imperial power, a status it definitely started to gain after the defeat of the Spanish Armada at Gravelines on 12 August 1588.

¹² Gillies, 18.

¹³ Gillies, 19.

Lesley B. Cormack in his essay, "Britannia Rules the Waves?: Images of Empire in Elizabethan England"¹⁴ argues that in Elizabeth's time there was an English Empire envisaged even before the English started their explorations and colonial conquest. Studying the images etched through engravings and illustrations on the title pages and frontispieces of travel books, atlases, and maps, he points out that the study of geography in England during Elizabeth's time had developed into an imperial view on the basis of three "underlying assumptions": the first was the belief that "the world could be measured, named, and therefore controlled"; the second belief was that the English were superior to other peoples and nations and thus had "the right . . . to exploit other areas of the globe,"¹⁵ and the third belief was that the study of geography gave the English a sense for self-definition.

The first statement about a possible English Empire was made by Sir Thomas Cromwell, King Henry VIII's Chief Minister, in the *Act in Restraint of Appeals* (1533) when he drafted the speech explaining why the English Church should secede from the Papal Church: "this realm of England is an empire."¹⁶

The greatest exponent of the English/British Empire was Dr. John Dee. He was an MA from Cambridge, "but also a mathematician, astronomer, geographer, and an occasional necromancer."¹⁷ He became an astrologer to Elizabeth and advised her on hydrographical and geographical matters. In his book *General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation* (1577) he "proposed that Elizabeth establish a Royal Navy to protect England from pirates, the English fishery from incursions, and to aid the establishment of a British maritime empire."¹⁸

Dee's book had an engraving on the title page which symbolizes his imperial spirit. It shows Elizabeth commanding the ship of state, called Europa. On the rudder of the ship is hanging the Royal coat of arms as a gesture that England had supremacy and, therefore, should claim the leadership of Europe. The illustrated title page of the book also contains Dee's prophetic claim that if Elizabeth ignores this opportunity of transforming England into a maritime power, then she will rue it forever. Cormack describes:

¹⁴ Lesley B. Cormack, "Britannia Rules the Waves?: Images of Empire in Elizabethan England," *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 4, Special Issue, 3, 10 (1998), 1-20.

¹⁵ Cormack, 2.

¹⁶ Cormack, 2.

¹⁷ Cormack, 2.

¹⁸ Cormack, 3.

“On the fortress to the left, Elizabeth holds out her right hand to grasp fortune’s forelock and the laurel wreath she holds—undoubtedly by founding her great Royal Navy. Britannia, kneeling on the shore, desires Elizabeth to seize her opportunity with a ‘fully-equipped expeditionary force’, as her scroll states. This navy is to be much more than a coast guard patrolling for pirates; rather it will begin the divinely sanctioned creation of an English Empire. God, Elizabeth, and St. Michael on the right fight back the darkness on the left and the naval force will soon capture the foreign ships at sea.”¹⁹

The second important figure in providing Elizabeth the incentive for an empire is Richard Hakluyt. He was a widely traveled man and published his travel narratives during 1598-1600, which became popular reading. His geographical descriptions recapitulate the English imperial hope:

“The rude Indian Canoa halleth [controls] those seas, the Portingals, the Sarcenes, and Moores travaile continually up and downe that reach from Japan to China, from China to Malacca, from Malacca to the Moluccaes: and shall an Englishman, better appointed than any of them all (that I say no more for our Navie) feare [fear] to saile in that Ocean: What seas at all doe want piracie: What Navigation is there voyde [void] of perill?”²⁰

That England had the right to foreign lands through ‘first discovery’ was further echoed in the works of another Englishman, John Wolfe by name, who translated a Dutch adventurer’s travel book into English in 1598. Jan Huygen Linschoten’s book *Discours [sic] of Voyages* of course spoke of the imperial aspirations of another European country, but Wolfe’s having engaged himself in a translation of this work may be seen as the indication that he hoped to reconstruct a similar imperial identity for England. He wrote: “I doo not doubt, but yet I doo most hartely[heartily] pray and wish, that this poore Translation may worke in our English Nation a further desire and increase of Honour over all Countreys of the World, and as it hath hitherto mightily advanced the Credite of the Realme by defending the same with our Wodden Walles . . .”²¹

¹⁹ Cormac, 3.

²⁰ Cormac, 5.

²¹ Cormac, 3.

So, for the English nation, a further increase in honour over other countries depended on how much initiative the Queen was willing to take. Wolfe also saw the likelihood of spreading Christianity along with the territorial expansion: "So it would employ the same in forraine [foreign] partes, as well for the dispersing and planting true Religion and Civill Conversation therein."²²

Another key figure with the imperial dream for the English nation was Christopher Saxton, who published his atlas in 1579. Sir Thomas Seckford, Master of Requests, acted as the patron on behalf of the government to fund the publication of the atlas, and the material was chosen from Caxton's own surveying. Thus, Caxton's atlas became a sure indication of the government's active interests in geographical explorations: "This atlas marks an important development in government interest in a visual representation of the country, providing as it does the first clear image of the entire span of England, county by county."²³

Caxton's atlas had on its frontispiece a message that England was a powerful nation and that using the knowledge of the geographical science it could become "a self-sufficient and omni-competent state' to be ruled over by 'a wise monarch'."²⁴

Another exemplary figure to give shape to the English poetic geography was Sir Walter Raleigh. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London for eleven years and during that time he wrote his classic *The History of the World*, which narrates the events from creation up to the birth of Christ yet had enormous implications for early modern England. The book was written to excite the interest of Henry, Prince of Wales, in imperial adventures in general and in supporting Raleigh's conquistadorial bid to find El Dorado in particular."²⁵ With the early death of Henry, however, Raleigh's hope for "a glorious English or even British Empire to rival Spain"²⁶ also perished. However, Raleigh, who is also known as "an English Columbus"²⁷ had some military success against the Spaniards in the New World. Jonathan Hart reports that Raleigh had "presented Guiana as a virgin land that, in a twist, the Virgin queen is to enter."²⁸

²² Cormac, 3.

²³ Cormac, 5.

²⁴ Cormac, 7.

²⁵ Cormac, 9.

²⁶ Cormac, 8.

²⁷ Jonathan Hart, *Columbus, Shakespeare and the Interpretation of the New World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 36.

²⁸ Hart, 37.

Cormack stresses that all these books with “underlying imperial themes”²⁹ were avidly read by students, many of whom later on “went on to public careers of one type or another.”³⁰ The Elizabethan commonplace books were full of imperial aspirations, and one such book was owned by Sir Julius Caesar, who made his entries under the heading of “The Singularities of England.”³¹

Based on the remarks by the English geographers culled above, we can agree with Cormack about the English poetic geography preceding the English/British Empire:

But in order to conquer the world in this way, the English first needed a vision of themselves as an imperial nation. This self-image as an independent and omniscient country, as well as one with the potential to control other countries and regions of the world, had to precede the acquisition of an empire and so the English needed an imperial ideology before they could begin to construct an empire in deed. The creation of this ideology of empire was aided by the study of geography.³²

So when Shakespeare was dealing with the world map in his plays, he could not but be inspired by the imperialistic notions of the English geographers, and, secondly, he could not have avoided the Greek and Roman way of moralizing geography, and, thirdly, as J. D. Rogers noted in 1916, he had laid all his scenes within the known world: “Shakespeare’s scenes are almost always laid inside what the ancients called the civilized world, the Christian Christendom, and the geographers’ Europe’.”³³ He (Rogers) further said that even the island in *The Tempest* is a piece of Italy transformed into a New World landscape for a day or two.³⁴

6. The Imperial Design: Shakespeare in India

In the remaining part of the essay, I am going to discuss how Shakespeare has been considered an imperial agency as well as an appropriated figure in modern times.

²⁹ Cormac, 8.

³⁰ Cormac, 8.

³¹ Cormac, 9.

³² Cormac, 10.

³³ Gillies, 4.

³⁴ Gillies, 4.

In the early part of the British regime in India, immediately after the Fort William College was founded in Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1800, English officers who had newly arrived in India were supposed to learn the Indian languages at this college. With this aim, Indian classics like *Bhagavadgita* and *Sacontala* (i.e. *Abhijnananashakuntalam*) were translated into English, and this trend continued until the beginning of the 19th century. A painting of the time shows William Carey, the founding father of English missions in India, being taught an Indian language “by an intense-looking local pandit by the name of Mrityunjaya.”³⁵

All this, however, instantly changed with Lord Macaulay’s submitting the ‘Minute on Indian Education’ to the Governor-General on 2 February 1835, in which he, by way of advising the British to rule India effectively, said that England needed to create “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect.”³⁶

Accordingly, to propagate English learning through institutionalized efforts three universities were soon established, all in 1857, at Calcutta (Kolkata), Bombay (Mumbai), and Madras (Chennai) respectively.

Macaulay’s policy, however, has produced two permanently debilitating tendencies for the English-educated people of India. First, it is basically a “downward filtration” policy in which an elitist “small group of Indians with British style education supposedly spread enlightenment to the masses.”³⁷ For this, the English-educated class in India has become isolated from the mass people. Second, this group suffers from what Trivedi has called “the colonial double-bind, that is, the tension between allegiance and resistance toward English largely, and toward Shakespeare in particular.”³⁸

Shakespeare’s introduction to the pedagogy of English Departments at Indian universities appeared to have solved a problem facing British policymakers. Before even the universities started operating, the missionaries had already begun their job of proselytizing the local people in many parts of India, and the language they used was English. The policymakers thought for a while that

³⁵ Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English literature and India* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 10.

³⁶ Trivedi, 11.

³⁷ Philip G. Altbach, “Education and Neocolonialism” in *The post-colonial studies reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. Pp. 452-56. This reference at page 453.

³⁸ Trivedi, 25.

probably the religious way was the best method for spreading the learning of English among the Indians. But it soon became clear to them that it would create unwarranted religious conflicts between the converting and the converted people on the one hand and between the imported religion, Christianity, and the indigenous religions of India. They then came up with the idea of imparting the humanistic and secular ideas that the English literary texts were so full of and thought that it was to be done by setting up Departments of English Studies in the universities newly set up. They, perhaps rightly, thought that secular education would be more functional in motivating the minds of the Indians.³⁹

Obviously, as a natural choice, Shakespeare, being the foremost English writer, became also an iconic literary figure in the pedagogy and the syllabus. At this juncture, one remark by Thomas Carlyle, made in his lecture "The Hero as Poet" (1840), can be quoted for its relevance. He asked his countrymen to choose between India and Shakespeare and claimed that the Indian Empire might one day go away, but Shakespeare would stay:

"Consider now, if they [Trivedi supplies the noun: 'foreign nations'] asked us, Will you give up your Indian Empire or your Shakespeare, you English; never have had any Indian Empire, or never have had any Shakespeare? Really it was grave question. Official persons would doubtless answer in official language: but we, for our parts, should not we be forced to answer; Indian Empire or no Indian Empire; we cannot do without Shakespeare! Indian Empire will go at any rate, some day; but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts forever with us; we cannot give-up our Shakespeare!"⁴⁰

Carlyle's views reflect the eternal double-bind that the Indian educated people had to go through about Shakespeare.

I will now refer to certain responses, both welcoming and resistant, to Shakespeare, as recorded by Harish Trivedi, in his book, *Colonial Transactions* (1993).

³⁹ Gauri Viswanathan, "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India" in *The post-colonial studies reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. Pp. 431-37. This reference at page 431.

⁴⁰ Trivedi, 12.

⁴¹ Trivedi, 23.

An Indian echo of Carlyle's view is to be found in the Preface by Professor C. D. Narasimhaiah, the editor of *Shakespeare Came to India* (1966), a quatercentenary commemorative volume:

"The title is not so fanciful as it appears to be when we remember that of many things that came to India from England few in the long run are really as important as Shakespeare. For the England of trade, commerce, imperialism and the penal code has not endured but the imperishable Empire of Shakespeare will always be with us."⁴¹

And like Narasimhaiah, William Miller, who taught Shakespeare in south India, had taken him as a moral yardstick. He said, "If the Indian student but heeded the lessons Shakespeare had to offer, he would have gained a master plan by which to lead his whole life."⁴² The title of his collected edition, *Shakespeare's Chart of Life* (1905) clearly reflects the way he wanted to use Shakespeare as a pedagogical device to build the moral character of his colonized students.

Among the resistance group, on the other hand, we find Smarajit Dutt, who published his commentaries between 1921 and 1930 on *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, each sub-titled as *An Oriental Study*, showing that many passages in Sanskrit poetry could match and excel many similar passages of Shakespeare. In one of his prefaces, he quotes a Sanskrit couplet that goes like this: "Slavery enforced by brute force is degrading enough, Your Majesty! / But slavery of the mind is truly a hundred times more deplorable."⁴³ The couplet anticipates the Nigerian writer Ngugi Wa Thiongo's famous utterance: "The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation."⁴⁴

Similarly, Ranjee G. Shahani in his book, *Shakespeare Through Eastern Eyes* (1932) points out that Hamlet had a certain lack of depth, and that Shakespeare couldn't be called a thinker. J. Middleton Murry wrote in his introduction to the book: "There is little in this book with which I agree . . . That truth on the one

⁴² Trivedi, 14.

⁴³ Trivedi, 14.

⁴⁴ <https://www.uibk.ac.at/anglistik/staff/davis/decolonising-the-mind.pdf>, 9.

side of Alps is falsehood on the other comforts me greatly.”⁴⁵ A *TLS* reviewer called it a book of protest.

Even in translation, Shakespeare was manipulated to produce the voice of protest. For example, Munshi Ratna Chand, in his translation of *The Comedy of Errors* (1882), sarcastically identifies England as a very tiny country that couldn't be found on the body of Nell.⁴⁶ Now, Nell is Adrian's large-bodied kitchen maid, and so the humour in dwarfing England cannot be lost on us-- the non-English.

On the other hand, Lala Sitaram (1861-1937) was what Macaulay would have liked to see. He translated Shakespeare's six plays in Urdu and fourteen in Hindi. In his preface, he said that the idlers of India had better read Shakespeare to learn “the tenderness of Cordelia, the fortitude of Edgar, the fidelity of Kent and the heroism of Henry V.”⁴⁷

Jayavijaya Narayana Singh Sharma, who had translated Charles Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* in 1912 had compared Shakespeare with Kalidasa and said that the latter was much older, and so more prestigious.⁴⁸

7. Shakespeare in the two tercentenary volumes: Valorization and Resistance

Worldwide, however, the debate whether Shakespeare was a global phenomenon serving the “autochthonous identity”⁴⁹ of the English or a figure to be nationally appropriated came to a head when in 1864 and 1916 respectively, the tercentenaries of Shakespeare's birth and death were observed. Habicht and Kahn, whose two essays I have mentioned earlier, have taken up the issue, and while Habicht emphasizes the point that in spite of the strenuous relationship between Germany and England in the 1860s, it is Germany whose celebration of Shakespeare's tercentenary of birth bespeaks their love for the Bard, while Kahn notes that the commemorative volume on the tercentenary of death, entitled *A Homage to Shakespeare* (1916) evokes the

⁴⁵ Trivedi, 15.

⁴⁶ Trivedi, 41.

⁴⁷ Trivedi, 18.

⁴⁸ Trivedi, 18.

⁴⁹ Coppelia Kahn, “Remembering Shakespeare Imperially: the 1916 Tercentenary” in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No 4 (Winter, 2001), pp. 456-478. This reference at page 456.

autochthonous view no doubt, but it has also accommodated strong non-English nationalistic appropriations. While Habicht speaks only about German and American appropriations, Kahn records other appropriating voices from Asia and Africa.

The political situation in the 1860s was like this: Germany and Denmark were at war on the question of Schleswig and Holstein, the two German-speaking provinces, that Denmark annexed violating the international treaties under their new king Christian IX. Prussia, under Bismarck, claimed them for Germany. Britain was officially neutral but wanted to aid Denmark militarily. And the people of England took up an anti-German stand. Against such a backdrop, arrived a delegation from Frankfurt to join in the 1864 Shakespeare tercentenary festival at Stratford. The spokesman of that delegation referred to “this cold and critical age”⁵⁰ in which Shakespeare was the greatest bond. One German Frankfurt professor, a member of that delegation said, “We almost grudge you the accident of his birth. With us he is the national poet. Shakespeare’s writings first roused the Germans to a consciousness of their powers and made us enter the lists with you in a race of literary emulation.”⁵¹ The official message reiterated the fact that Anglo-Saxons who conquered Britain came from German territory, and with their “old Teutonic virtues gained their footing as emancipators and expellers of Latin corruption”⁵² and thus prepared the ground for Shakespeare.

In Germany, with Schlegel-Tieck’s translation (1825-33) Shakespeare was rediscovered and he became the third classic after Goethe and Schiller.⁵³ “The German attacks were mainly directed against contemporary Englishmen, who were no longer worthy of Shakespeare. Professor Joseph Kohler had exclaimed in 1915: ‘We know they do not understand Shakespeare, . . . We, by contrast, have grasped the giant and made him ours.’”⁵⁴ The German slogan was “Deutschland is Hamlet” and “England is Iago.”⁵⁵

America, which hadn’t entered the war by 1916, had a more neutral ground to celebrate Shakespeare, and the *New York Times* from February to April 1916 in its Sunday editions “offered readers a series of lavishly illustrated Shakespeare

⁵⁰ Habicht, 441.

⁵¹ Habicht, 443.

⁵² Habicht, 443.

⁵³ Habicht, 448.

⁵⁴ Habicht, 452.

⁵⁵ Habicht, 453.

supplements that covered every aspect of the author's life and work, including its reception in Germany, France, and Russia,"⁵⁶ and as "as a world conqueror, Shakespeare makes all military heroes seem insignificant."⁵⁷

About *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare* Kahn says that it is characterized by what Ania Loomba has called "complex reciprocity." This paradox is obvious in the sense that the volume was edited by Sir Israel Gollancz who was the first Jewish professor of English literature in England, at Kings College, London, and Honorary Secretary of the Shakespeare Tercentenary Committee, but the volume, as Sir Walter Raleigh, the holder of the first chair in English Literature at Oxford, claims forges the "historical link between Tudor England, colonization, Shakespeare, and the British Empire."⁵⁸ The book uses Shakespeare "as a signifier of autochthonous English identity"⁵⁹ with the hope that he would be an icon of unity in the face of the "bloody divisions of the Great War."⁶⁰

That Shakespeare had become synonymous with the British Empire is the subject matter of a poem, "Dream Imperial," by William Pember Reeves, written as late as 1916 and is included in the *Homage*. In this poem, as Kahn says, Reeves makes Shakespeare both spokesman and inspiration for the "warring, trading, reading race" that "won the sea for wise Elizabeth," then "Moved surely outward to imperial space."⁶¹ In *Homage* again, Kahn sees a comment by Sir Walter Raleigh bearing on the same theme that Shakespeare became the spokesman of "the English race."⁶² Thus, Kahn says that the anthology *Homage* aims at "folding Shakespeare into the racialized discourse of empire."⁶³

Kahn then speaks about the paradox that characterizes the volume: "Shakespeare is the quintessential English poet, and yet he speaks to all people, of all times and nations."⁶⁴ She quotes from Israel Zangwill's sonnet "The Two Empires," which contains this duality: "If e'er I doubt of England, I recall / Gentle Will Shakespeare, her authentic son."⁶⁵

⁵⁶ Habischt, 454.

⁵⁷ Habischt, 454.

⁵⁸ Kahn, 457.

⁵⁹ Kahn, 457.

⁶⁰ Kahn, 457.

⁶¹ Kahn, 462.

⁶² Kahn, 465.

⁶³ Kahn, 465.

⁶⁴ Kahn, 460.

⁶⁵ Kahn, 460.

Kahn then enlists the resistance group. First is Douglas Hyde. He was an Irish poet and revolutionary. His lifelong mission was to reinstate Gaelic (Irish language) as the national language of Ireland. In his poem, "How it fared with a Gael at Stratford-on-Avon," he speaks about "a Gael's" change of heart from hating the English into forgiving them because of Shakespeare.⁶⁶

The second figure Kahn mentions is "the distinguished American scholar Charles Mills Gayley, professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, for some thirty years."⁶⁷ In his poem, titled "Heart of the Race," Gayley claims that "Shakespeare isn't simply an English-speaking poet but rather an Anglo-Saxon one, committed to the ancient virtues of law and freedom. In his book, *Shakespeare and the Founders of Liberty in America* (1917) Gayley elaborates on the idea that "the blood of America," which is Anglo-Saxon beats in the same "Heart of the Race" as England's.⁶⁸

The third contributor belonging to Kahn's resistance group is Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, a South African, a renowned black journalist, and an activist for native rights. He edited several newspapers and was one of the founding members of the African Native National Congress (later the African National Congress). The credit for writing the first novel in English by a black African goes to him and he also translated four plays by Shakespeare into his native language, Setswana. In the volume, however, his contribution, "A South African's Homage" goes without his name and is published side by side on facing pages both in Setswana and English. The English version is the following:

"I had but a vague idea of Shakespeare until about 1896 when, at the age of 18, I was attracted by the Press remarks in the Kimberley paper, and went to see *Hamlet* in the Kimberley Theatre. The performance made me curious to know more about Shakespeare and his works. Intelligence in Africa is still carried from mouth to mouth by means of conversations after working hours, and, reading a number of Shakespeare's works, I always had a fresh story to tell. I first read *The Merchant of Venice*. The characters were so realistic that I was asked more than once to which of certain

⁶⁶ Kahn, 466.

⁶⁷ Kahn, 466.

⁶⁸ Kahn, 469.

speculators, then operating around Kimberley, Shakespeare referred as Shylock. All this gave me an appetite for more Shakespeare, and I found that many of the current quotations used by educated natives to embellish their speeches, which I had always taken for English proverbs, were culled from Shakespeare's works.⁶⁹

Platzee thus “engages” Shakespeare not to uphold the English-speaking tradition, but to “preserve and/or reinvent his own culture.”⁷⁰

Like Hyde and Platzee, the Asian scholar, namely Maung Tin, the founder of the academic study of Burmese literature in his native country, offers another example of “complex reciprocity.” In his essay, he assesses Shakespeare not in terms of Western apotheosizing but in terms of how Shakespeare can be useful in “the development of Burmese literature.”⁷¹

Thus Hyde, Plaatje, and Tin write about Shakespeare in a way that he becomes more relevant to their respective cultures than to Shakespeare’s own English culture. What happens, as a result, is that these three writers do not take Shakespeare in binary opposition to their own cultures, a concept which is called hybridity by Ania Loomba or Martin Orkin, in which the local scholars of Shakespeare become segregated from their own cultures, but rather they appropriate him, as much as we found Trivedi reporting of some Indian scholars doing.⁷² In hybridity the relationship between the dominant culture and the local culture is determined by an either/or situation, that is, one touch of Shakespeare is thought of as spoiling the “originary bond between the natives and their own cultures.”⁷³ What Kahn appreciates about the three scholars is that they have come out of the web of hybridity and are not scared of using Shakespeare to make interventions in their own cultures.

Kahn’s concluding remarks about the *Homage* are that it shows Shakespeare both as a signifier of “the Anglo-Saxon race,” once again proving the “unbridgeable gap” between the colonizer and the colonized, and Shakespeare being used and transformed by the colonized “in ways never intended by the colonizer.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Kahn, 471.

⁷⁰ Kahn, 472.

⁷¹ Kahn, 477.

⁷² Kahn, 467.

⁷³ Kahn, 469.

⁷⁴ Kahn, 478.

8. Conclusion

In this essay, I have swept across a large terrestrial as well as an idealistic map, beginning with the Greek civilization down to the postcolonial world, in order to see how Shakespeare has figured as a representational phenomenon in sustaining the imperial view as well as resisting it. In arguing the point, I have generously taken help from scholars, and that there is an amazingly large amount of scholarship done on this theme is further proof of the appropriateness of my query that I am not alone in feeling this way about Shakespeare that he is both English and global.

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