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Interrogating The Spread Of Shakespeare

Harold Bloom can be impossibly gnomic. He writes, for example, in *How to Read and Why*: “If you wish to maintain that Shakespeare’s ascendancy was a product of colonialism, then who will bother to confute you?” (25). The words are simple enough, the syntax crystalline, but what is he saying? Does he mean that the notion is so right as to be not worth a further thought? Or is the thesis so obviously *wrong* as to be beneath comment? Too patently simplistic to be accurate? Just intrinsically uninteresting? Or perhaps deeply, utterly irrelevant to the agonistic halo that illuminates Bloom’s readings of Shakespeare?

I would argue that he means all of the above, and more. The question of how Shakespeare came to have and to sustain his position as the world’s first and most firmly established ‘globalising’ artist is so complex as to be beyond summative description. Colonialism is certainly part of the story, but a rather blunt instrument when one wants to go beyond crude notions of travelling culture and ideology, or to explore the presence of Shakespeare in situations untouched by colonial influence. The problem may well be that Shakespeare’s cultural ascendancy is served through practically every transaction with his texts, positive and negative; through the afterglow of his reputation, good and bad; and through his evident capacity to inspire artistic and scholarly endeavor in others, to be “the cause that wit is in other men” (*King Henry 4* Part 2: 1.2.9). Internationally, he has influenced artistic work in a range of media that can be anything from marvellous to banal. With Shakespeare any publicity is good publicity, as we see with many of today’s media brands and celebrities. His global presence builds inexorably, and its impact is enhanced especially by those who launch forceful strains of invective urging that his influence should be curbed, or that he is over-rated, or that he is incomprehensible to ordinary people.¹ His presence grows even where he is most despised or rejected—and that is not meant as a subversive, pseudo-theological statement! It goes without saying that there are vast fields of local, regional and national artistic experience and production untroubled by the presence of Shakespeare—thank heavens—but in the global world of art and letters, a Shakespearean vacuum, a pristine space un-touched by Shakespearean

¹ Two of the most notorious yet vivifying adverse judgments are those of Shaw (memorably collected in Edwin Dutton’s book *Shaw on Shakespeare*) and T.S. Eliot on *Hamlet* (see “Hamlet and His Problems” in *The Sacred Wood*). Shaw and Eliot both gained in critical prominence as a consequence of these *contretemps*, but perhaps the bigger ‘winner’ was Shakespeare. As early as 1905, Harold Berman in the *New York Times* was lamenting the loss to the age of a Carlylean-type ‘Hero-worship’ of Shakespeare: “The amazing frequency of the unfavorable criticisms upon the genius of Shakespeare which of late abound in various newspapers and periodicals is a fair criterion by which to estimate the actual dimensions of the mind of many a reader and critic in this prosaic

influence, is hard to find. This is not simply an empirical matter. The global artistic cosmopolis is in part defined by the presence of Shakespeare, so that the detection of a new Shakespearean tendril in the far-off reaches of some obscure sub-culture becomes more tautology than discovery. In this globalizing world, we are less and less surprised to find Shakespeare in odd places, and when we find him there, those places are by definition no longer odd. That's how it works, the fabrication of Shakespeare's cultural empire.

It is nevertheless salutary for Shakespeareans to consider that the overwhelming majority of people on the planet today have never heard of William Shakespeare, let alone seen one of his plays performed, or experienced a ballet, novel, film, painting, or opera derived from his work. The accumulated artistic abundance that lies outside the Shakespearean purview is immeasurably greater than the riches he manages to ensnare in his compact web of words. Nevertheless, when one considers the range and depth of his impact, which includes being studied by large numbers of university students in countries untouched by British political hegemony, and sometimes even by school children in such countries,² it is hardly surprising that Shakespeare is widely regarded as the world's most singularly influential artist.

Confronted by this global ubiquity and the sheer fecundity of his afterlife, scholars take refuge in bald references to the global 'Shakespeare industry', a trite phrase which elides the complexity of Shakespeare's historical and contemporary spread around the globe; or else they avoid the issue of just how Shakespeare achieved his global caché by emphasizing thick descriptions of particular Shakespearean events, practices or episodes. At the heart of Bloom's ambivalence about the ascription of Shakespeare's worldwide ascendancy to the machinations of colonialism is the implicit assumption that there is nothing intrinsically special about Shakespeare; just the happenstance of a world-historical process. For Bloom, this would be both abhorrent and inaccurate. As he sees things, it is the quality and content of Shakespeare's texts that matters, that is the force behind his global influence. If the spread of Shakespeare is seen as a consequence of the inherent power of the Shakespeare text moving easily within, around and against the sociopolitical trammels of colonial expansion, Bloom might be mollified; but if the argument is that Shakespeare is merely an inert item of ideological baggage thrust upon unsuspecting regions of the world to serve Conradian 'material

and mercenary age. And, if such platitudinous and shallow criticisms will produce any effect at all - - - we also are obliged to consider the moral effect of shattering one of humanity's greatest idols, a most potent factor in the education and molding of our minds and the inspiration to not a few of the thousands of our writers". Berman to the contrary, unadulterated hero-worship is cloying in the extreme and would probably lead to the eclipsing of Shakespeare's reputation, while controversy of all kinds is his life-blood.

² The Internet has made the teaching of Shakespeare possible world-wide even for modestly resourced education systems. See, for example, Iwona Filip's "World-wide William" project, posted by IATEFL Poland's Computer Special Interest Group: http://www.iatefl.org.pl/call/j_lesson10.htm#internetlessons.

interests' (see *Nostramo*), he would probably regard the assertion as either wrong or devoid of interest: hence his response, "who will bother to confute you?"

Shakespeare's Rivals?

There have been several recent attempts to argue that had history played itself out differently, another dramatist or author might have taken Shakespeare's spot in the global pantheon. None has been convincing. Would anyone today argue that Ben Jonson could have succeeded as the pre-eminent globalising artist of early modernity had he not been outshone by his famous contemporary? Plays such as *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), with its prescient emphasis on risky and exploitative 'projecting', or *Epicoene* (1609), rich with relevant gender comedy, obviously continue to go down well today with sophisticated metropolitan audiences; but could Jonson today take his success beyond those narrow confines? Could he impress 'foreign parts' and the developing world? I doubt it. He seems to be context-bound in a way that Shakespeare is not. Had the colonial power-play turned out differently, Jonathan Bate has proposed Lope de Vega for the role (335-340). Lope's prodigious output is estimated to be between 500 and 1800 pieces (Bate 338). Such works as *The Dog in the Manger* (*El perro del Hortelano*) (1613) and his best-known play, *Fuente Ovejuna* (1612-1614?), both produced in translation at Stratford-upon-Avon, in 2004 and 2008 respectively, seem to have gone down well with critics and audiences. *Fuente Ovejuna*, with its story of collective village revolt against oppression and mis-government, has the thematic potential to speak to the developing world, but it would take imaginative direction and re-contextualisation of a high order for the play to make a popular impact there. Recently Gary Taylor, buoyed and enthused by the task of editing his work afresh, punted Middleton as a suitable candidate (see Middleton 2007), largely on the basis of the playwright's preoccupation with power, sex and money. Both Lope and Middleton have undoubted merits, and Jonson is marvellous. But read them, imagine their texts as live theatre today, as film and television, and what hope have they of disturbing Shakespeare's current pre-eminence? Only academic directors, or heavily subsidized national theatres, can even hope to attempt productions. Yet Shakespeare somehow continues to reach a great and growing variety of people from different climes and backgrounds, far beyond theatre-going elites.

We could wonder what might have happened to the reputations of Jonson and Middleton had they been harnessed to the colonial enterprise in the way Shakespeare was. There is no doubt that colonial history plays a massive role in the dissemination of culture. The famous performances of *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar* off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1607 during the British East India Company's third voyage—while Shakespeare was in mid-career—were a foretaste of things to come. According to Gary Taylor, the performances had the twin purposes of occupying the crew in a period of dangerous lassitude, and entertaining local dignitaries; but he also speculates that they perhaps functioned as trial runs for entertainments that would serve a more directly diplomatic purpose when Captain Keeling's fleet reached India (230-31). The lack of any emollient and culturally

distinctive diplomatic entertainment to present there had been an embarrassment on the second voyage. In embryo, these historic performances anticipated the role Shakespeare was to play much later in the work of the British Council during the twentieth century, as the British Empire morphed into the Commonwealth. They were also a first Shakespearean ‘stage’ on the major sea route which would eventually take him to South Africa, Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth century. Shakespeare caught this colonial carrier-wave because already in the economic expansion of the eighteenth century he had been shaped into the cultural icon of Britain, a process perhaps symbolized by David Garrick’s Stratford Jubilee of 1769—an event notable for eschewing the performance of any of his plays! The idea of Shakespeare on this occasion quite overwhelmed the substance of his art (see McNamara). He continued to spread round the globe in the wake of trade and political interaction, much of it callously instrumental and unfriendly, some of it underwritten by force. Civilizations engage each other, fracture and meld as much through conflict as cooperation—one of the sad facts of human history.

But does this mean that given a similar cultural boost, Jonson or Middleton could have performed the same function, filled the same global niche? I don’t believe so. Art is not a ubiquitously acceptable product like a can of baked beans, or some obviously useful piece of equipment, a commodity whose circulation across and into new territories and modes, geographical and technological, can be dismissed as if it were merely the hapless result of calculated promotion. At least in part the distinctive power lies with Shakespeare himself, his language, imagination, and spiritual universality—matters to which I return in the conclusion to this piece—rather than the material processes by which he developed his protean portability. We are familiar with the millions ventured, won and lost today by media promoters and producers (Jonsonian ‘projectors’ all) in the world of electronic popular culture. If only one could reliably anticipate human tastes, just think of the limitless wealth that might accrue to the brave (or foolhardy)! We know this isn’t so today, and it wasn’t so in Shakespeare’s time.

Going Beyond Europe

Sometimes Shakespeare’s unique mobility is loosely ascribed to historical positioning, his place on the vivid cusp of emerging modernity, with nourishing roots reaching back through revived classical learning to the matrix of western civilization in Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman culture, and forward to the new worlds looming into view through the advances of science and exploration. This almost tautological gesture really doesn’t work because these very energies were also available to his contemporaries. Nor will it do to harp on his supposedly essential ‘Englishness’. He wrote some plays that seem to convey a special kind of Englishness, culturally specific and time-bound (I’m thinking here of plays such as *The Merry Wives of Windsor* or *As You Like It*); but it also makes very good sense to regard Shakespeare as a European artist, firmly based in the scholarly heritage of European culture and the aftermath of a unified Latinate learning.³ Being English, British *and* European, his subsequent appropriation by different European

national cultures can hardly be regarded as exceptional, even if, as Hoenselaars and Pujante wryly remark, “from the British perspective, the Continent still seems rather isolated” (18).⁴ The sceptered isle was remarkably porous intellectually in Shakespeare’s time. If Shakespeare was truly European—and he was—it makes little cultural sense to talk of Shakespeare ‘spreading’ to Europe, except insofar as one is interested in the theatrical histories involved. When we talk of interrogating the spread of Shakespeare, then, it is primarily the challenge of responding to the cultural inflections his work inspires in performances beyond the European context that we mean.

Shakespeare’s place in Australia and New Zealand, which forms the focus of the essays which follow, has to be very different from his positioning in the European milieu. Shakespeare’s translation to Oceania, like his presence in large areas of Africa and North America, is a consequence of colonial conquest, the imposition of a foreign material culture and wholly different way of life on the indigenous inhabitants of these countries. Shakespeare arrives in these lands not as a distinctive but recognizable cultural energy within a more-or-less coherent intellectual matrix, as was the case in Europe, but as ‘other’, a symbol of the invading forces, significant in part because the invaders appeared to value him so highly. Of course, it is not just Shakespeare himself that is ‘other’: the entire theatrical tradition he brings with him, and the culture within which he makes sense, or claims meaning and value, is radically strange. The essays in this collection set out to explore the complex transitions that take place as a colonial cultural imposition undergoes reinterpretation along a bumpy and uneven road to some form of indigenization and contested acceptance in these utterly new environments. In different ways, the contributors situate their essays not simply as discrete local analyses of different Shakespearean phenomena in Australia and New Zealand, but as explorations of the meaning of Shakespeare’s global presence manifesting itself in these countries. In some cases the impression created is of a European artist vigorously transposed to new terrain and accepted with hardly a nod to local *realia*, a stance common enough in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. The panoply of nationalism carries the not-very-well-hidden insignia of colonialism triumphant. Subsequently, indigenous influences impinge and in some instances attempt to displace or at least ‘unsettle’—forgive the pun—the dominant invading culture. We are left with the challenge of adjudicating the value and meaning of Shakespeare in a contested artistic arena, where history is very much a living force.

³ Compare Hoenselaars and Calvo (2008): “Shakespeare was born in Europe. As a European poet and playwright, his literary training and artistic materials came from a common European culture shared by most artists and thinkers of his time” (3).

⁴ Douglas Lanier makes a good point: “One consequence of Shakespeare’s post-imperial global notoriety is that his distinctive Britishness has become less pronounced, though it clearly remains a residual association which can be reactivated for political ends” (47).

Exploring The Postcolonial Impasse

The issue is not a simple one. It is easy to take a morally adverse view of colonial cultural chauvinism, and there are few today who would in the abstract advocate barging into other peoples' countries and turning everything upside down.⁵ In North America that is exactly what happened and the destruction is irrevocable, the first peoples being reduced to hapless marginality. In Australia and New Zealand, too, the culture of the conquerors remains, and will remain, dominant, the object of mingled acceptance and resistance by indigenous peoples. In the absence of substantive efforts at restitution, or of any real will to initiate change, art which addresses such situations runs the risk of becoming an inauthentic wringing-of-hands-in-the-corner, while the substance of social life continues unaffected. Writing of the New Zealand situation, Michael Neill observed in 1985 that "Pakeha [European] New Zealanders have not, by and large, found it easy to see themselves as colonial oppressors", urging that in order to be at home, "we need to examine the grounds of our claim" (45-46, 48). The trouble is that in very few cases round the world is the case for colonial insurgence other than insupportable. It relies ultimately on will, force and technological superiority, not right or justice. And alas, history cannot be replayed. The issue breeds an imponderable impasse, best coped with for most people—even indigenous people—by convenient forgetfulness. Shakespeare fans might be in an especially awkward position. Where the facts of colonialism are deplored, it is difficult to regard the rehearsal of an imported cultural repertoire, with Shakespeare at its pinnacle, in someone else's territory, as an entirely innocent activity. A mighty ideological reorientation is called for on all sides, and Shakespeare has come to play a controversial but fascinating role in this attempt. On the other hand, if few today openly justify colonial aggression, even fewer advocate dismantling the material inheritance of colonialism, or have the power to do so, and the moral disapproval generated by the postcolonial predicament mostly ends up in limbo, a psycho-cultural burden that finds frail compensatory political *agon* in the realm of art and culture. Artistic indigenization becomes the name of the game, a two-way process where colonialists and their descendents work to forge local identity—on their terms—and the indigenous inhabitants resist cultural usurpation and struggle to achieve cultural redefinition. Sometimes the two come together, achieving a tense harmony.

Viola's casual inquiry "What country, friends, is this?" from the second scene of *Twelfth Night*, becomes the probing question behind David Carnegie's sortie into the play's production history in Australia and New Zealand. By examining a broad range of productions from each country across time, Carnegie's approach deftly captures the gradual evolution of indigenous styles of Shakespearean production and reception in these territories. Holding fairly constant one variable in the analysis—the text—he explores the different ways in which inherited

⁵ But consider the invasion of Iraq in 2003! To be sure, 'regime change' is not colonization, but the devastation wrought—regardless of the rights and wrongs of the policy—is analogous.

metropolitan theatrical presumptions gradually stretch and yield to accommodate fresh local sources of artistic and political nutriment. As one might expect, the development is uneven and often surprising. Who would have suspected that that international icon of style and social propriety, Dame Edna Everage, possibly took her rise in Barry Humphries' efforts to entertain fellow thespians between stops on a rural tour of *Twelfth Night*, by satirizing those middle-class Australian ladies who rose to thank the company at the conclusion of each performance? Carnegie implies that the history of *Twelfth Night* not only proffers a strand in the complex shaping and revision of identity in these two countries, but in addition makes a solid contribution to the global history of Shakespearean production. None of the productions described seeks finally to sever the metropolitan umbilical and, indeed, Shakespeare would hardly be the appropriate vehicle to attempt such an operation. We see, in the twenty-first century productions which conclude his account, aspects of a confident local identity held in cooperative tension with wide-ranging local and global affiliations.

From Carnegie's diachronic cross-section through the production history of a single play—and Shakespeare in performance must be at the heart of the spread of Shakespeare—we move to an examination of his place at the interface between dramatic art and civil society as seen in the case of the Melbourne Shakespeare Society. A student recently asked me why there was a South African Shakespeare society and no J.M. Coetzee society: a good question. Coetzee is the *raison d'être* for the most prolific single-author scholarly publishing efflorescence of the twentieth-first century. Conferences and colloquia abound, but will there ever be a Coetzee society? I rather doubt it. Apart from the rebarbative character of Coetzee's work, which might have some impact on the fortunes of such a society, this particular social form of intellectual concourse is on the decline. Furthermore, while there are many amateur and scholarly societies, local and international, devoted to particular authors—Milton, Wordsworth, Keats and Dickens spring to mind—these are mostly specialist gatherings for *aficionados*. In contrast, Shakespeare Societies worldwide comprise a very broad church, and there is often an inbuilt tension between scholarly expertise and authority on the one hand, and amateur enthusiasm and naiveté on the other—a very healthy state of affairs. Perhaps we could say that Shakespeare has laid claim to a non-specialist cultural importance other writers seemingly failed to achieve, even some kind of centrality. Ann Blake and Sue Tweg give a balanced account of the Melbourne enterprise, its hauteur, evasions and pomposities, set against the evidence the Society provides of solid civic interest in the life of the mind—as it used to be called—and the sharing of some innovative and enterprising scholarship, as well as sober enjoyment. It will be interesting to see whether formal cultural societies of this kind continue further into this century, or whether they will be supplanted by blogging, internet groups, and informal post-performance discussion in coffee shops. For all their stolidity and occasional preciousness, the committees and civic organizations which originated in the grand institutional enthusiasms of Victorian society gave intellectual life a social face, and we will be the poorer if they disappear entirely.

Alan Brissenden's essay "Dancing Shakespeare in Australia" explores the spread of Shakespeare across time in a sister art form. The vigour and panache of Australian and international choreographers interpreting Shakespeare in dance is truly wonderful. A question that surfaces with some cogency is that of indigeneity; even though the degree of cogency seems to be at issue. It is rare today to find anyone in formerly colonial territories questioning the view that Shakespearean-influenced work should reflect some kind of local or indigenous identity.⁶ The assumption is ubiquitous but, when you bluntly ask Why?, responses tend to dissipate in woolly nationalistic musings about belonging and relevance, utterly ignoring the power and quality of the art involved. Australian dance influenced by Shakespeare appears largely to have evaded this pervasive trend. Of the work of 23 choreographers who have produced a Shakespearean piece, Brissenden finds evidence of uniquely Australian influence in only three. Ballet in Australia is, of course, originally as 'colonial' and imported a form as theatre. Given the conscious artificiality of balletic language, and the complex international choreographic heritage, it is hardly surprising that the move towards indigenization should be less consistent than is the case with theatre. Could it be that ballet audiences are less nationalistic, more ready to conceive Shakespearean balletic performance as an international idiom not needing an explicitly local incarnation? Or is it that such audiences are composed mainly of people for whom the hurts of the colonial past are notional rather than real? The performance history suggests that both hypotheses may have some traction. We should not forget that in many ways the colonial legacy is looking more and more like a staging post on a journey towards an international civilization, however rudimentary and imperiled its current expression might be, which leaves the remnants of traditional societies feeling deeply embattled. This is a significant part of the "mighty ideological reorientation" to which I referred.

With Emma Cox's piece "Performing Shakespeare and Aboriginality in Australia" we look more strenuously and fixedly at issues of indigenization and cultural imposition. Her article investigates a thoughtful politics of contestation and resistance, articulating a variety of strategies for presenting the dispossessed in Australian Shakespeare. The dominant discourse of reconciliation and assimilation is both served and challenged in some of these productions, though Cox's focus is as much on the calibre of Shakespearean performance that results, as it is on questioning the all-smothering hegemony of Australian modernity. Of compelling interest is the intelligent variety of the responses engendered by some of these productions in different reviewers, a sure indication that a live cultural nerve has been touched. Casting strategies vary widely. When it comes to all-aboriginal productions, the paradox of indigenous achievement being measured against the imperial gold standard of Shakespeare surfaces ineluctably,

⁶ I was intrigued to read the conclusion to a recent review of Geoffrey Hyland's 2009 production of *As You Like It* at Maynardville, Cape Town, by Simon van Schalkwyk: "I await, with baited breath, a Shakespeare [production] aware of its otherness to its audience". For generations now the emphasis has been quite opposite.

with all its irresolvable ambiguity. Can the element of protest in such a context be other than tame? Can it engage real elements of political activism? I suppose such issues turn on how skilled audiences are at making meaning from metaphor, and how ready they are to move forward on the insights generated.

In her “Māori take on Shakespeare”, Julie McDougall offers a fascinating view of the late Don Selwyn’s film *Te Tangata Whai Rawa o Weniti, the Māori Merchant of Venice* (2002), adapted from a text by Pei Te Hurinui Jones. She prefaces her article with a brief account of earlier Māori engagements with Shakespeare, but the essence of her reading centres on the Māori ethics of revenge as these are played out in this re-working of *The Merchant of Venice*. The world presented is entirely Māori in landscape, milieu and informing cultural assumptions. So are the actors. The focalising presence in the film is Hairoka, the Shylock figure, and the text is pruned to eliminate any complexity which might qualify his ethical claim to a just revenge. In place of the Christian/Pākehā emphasis on mercy and forgiveness, Māori value social equilibrium, expressed as mana (or prestige), above all. If mana seems irretrievably compromised, and someone or something is deemed responsible for this state of affairs, the situation sparks the urgent need for utu, or revenge, to restore mana. This premium placed on social balance, on maintaining group cohesion, is characteristic of many small-scale tribal societies. We can compare, for instance, J.H. Soga’s account of the ethical system of the Xhosa people in South Africa:

Any punishment for disturbing the balance of tribal life is of a constructive or corrective character; to restore what has been lost to stability by the action of any individual or individuals - - - this idea is ingrained in the fibre of the people. The ethical question scarcely counts, restoration is the principle thing. (44)

While tribal societies are distinct, each having its own mores and values, the passion for maintaining group cohesion, often dubbed ‘unity’ in modern political rhetoric, is ubiquitous. The downside of this ethical disposition is that when strategies for maintaining ethical equilibrium prove ineffectual the social system reaches a tipping point, and on the other side lies bloody vengeance: massacres, the smelling out of ‘witches’, compensatory retribution of different kinds. To issue a thundering generalization, the world appears to be on a bumpy trajectory moving from cohesive small-scale societies via the nation-state to the fragmented, eclectic, individualistic world of global modernity. In the process, one of the destabilising factors may well be the uncertain transfer of small-scale ethical thinking to the new arena. (This would be one way of looking at the horrendous 1994 genocide involving the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda.) Don Selwyn had been deeply impressed by a tenuous historical connection established in anthropological lore between Māori and Jew, thereby adding global historical authority to his directorial focus on Hairoka’s sense of mana deeply disturbed. Selwyn’s film ends with Hairoka intimating that his search for a satisfactory revenge is to continue. In Shakespeare’s play, by contrast, the last Act focuses on

the relation between Lorenzo and Jessica. Jessica has broken away from her father's house and, in the famous moonlight nocturne of the opening scene, the young people situate their relationship in a long tradition of lovers who have transgressed not only parental but tribal or national jurisdictions and restraints. Traditional identity has been sacrificed to a splendid new cross-cultural relationship, for which authoritative warranty must be found. Lorenzo cites Troilus and Cressida, Jessica responds with Pyramis and Thisbe, Lorenzo adds Dido and Aeneas, Jessica comes back with Medea, whose enchanted herbs renew old Aeson (5.1.1-24). The examples are powerful in their cumulative effect. Troilus and Cressida belong to opposing sides in a devastating war; the love of Pyramis and Thisbe is thwarted by parental edict; that between Dido and Aeneas bridges opposing nationalities, Phoenician/Carthaginian and Trojan (or—proleptically, if we look to Aeneas's future—Roman), an opposition which anticipates the modern Semitic/Italian pairing of Jessica and Lorenzo; and the catalogue reaches its climax with Medea who, we remember from Ovid, decided to “leave my sister and my brother, my father and my gods, even my native land, and sail away across the seas? And why not? My father is cruel, my land a barbarous one - - -” (cf. Edgcombe; Ovid 169). What stunning classical authority for entry into a wider world order! Mixed marriages may be disallowed in Venice, but they apparently thrive in Belmont, a place whose wealth and ease derive from the burgeoning mercantilist economics of globalizing proto-capitalism. Later in the Act, Lorenzo deliberately sets their love beyond culture, claiming they meet as beings in an open universe, responsive (as the animals are) to the music of the spheres (5.1.54-83). It is a claim to radical freedom. And from this perspective Shylock is roundly rebuked:

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils,
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted: —mark the music. (5.1.84-88)

One implication might be that the zero-sum game played out in small-scale societies cannot easily be assimilated to the universalizing ethics that global society is beginning to demand. Here, then, is the emergent (but ‘eternal’) music such societies fail to “mark”. Of course Shakespeare doesn't leave us with this viewpoint as some kind of summative position. His plays perform the conflicts, and leave audiences to decide. Given current international directorial trends, today's audiences are just as likely to leave feeling mighty sorry for Shylock, and rightly so.⁷ But, ironically, more and more such audiences tend in real life to vote for the values of Belmont.

⁷ See for instance my account of Roy Sargeant's 2008 production of *The Merchant of Venice* at Maynardville, Cape Town: “Introduction: South African Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century” (3-5).

With Rosemary Gaby's inquiry into the emergence of Australian open-air Shakespeare we meet one of the purest forms of local influence on the production and reception of Shakespeare, the impact of different topography, flora and fauna, climate and even weather, combining with the impulse to take Shakespeare out-of-doors. She indicates the factors which at first inhibited and then encouraged an innovative theatrical response to this 'new' Australian environment. While the prevailing theatrical style favoured Elizabethan costume and staging it was, of course, difficult to make specifically Australian landscape a compelling feature of outdoor theatre. But the weather was certainly conducive, particularly in Western Australia, which has a strong tradition of open-air Shakespearean performance. Early academic emphasis there was more on the recovery and simulation of historical theatrical conditions in order to explore their dramatic potential. This was certainly the case in work which grew up around the remarkable New Fortune Theatre at the University of Western Australia, which opened in 1964, based on the dimensions of the original Fortune theatre in Elizabethan London. Such academically-motivated, purist experiments have since been joined by everything from informal 'picnic-style' work in public parks to the earnestness of Ozact, which styles itself "Australia's leading environmental Shakespeare Company", taking a fairly conservative Shakespeare to truly spectacular locations.⁸ Open-air Shakespeare in Australia has established itself comfortably in a wide range of guises, from amateur to professional, from conservative to avant-garde, from costly spectacle to low-budget productions courting artistic intensity, from fixed venues to impromptu spatial appropriations. In all, the impression created is of a tradition taking root which pleases theatre people and audiences alike. The contingency of outdoor performance, dicing with weather, heckling Kookaburras, and diverse audiences—the sheer freedom and motility of things in open-air theatre—adds up to a set of potentials, not excluding financial profitability, that attract enduring loyalty.

Conclusion – Why Shakespeare Continues To Spread

It is too easy to ascribe Shakespeare's presence in Australia and New Zealand simply to colonization, except in a very trite sense.⁹ The trouble with the venerable Marxian analytical construct of base and superstructure, quite apart from its being philosophically crude, is that culture inevitably achieves a radical degree of emancipation from its material substrate, involving diversity of choice, taste, aesthetic judgment, philosophical outlook and a whole range of contingent human issues which undermine dependency on or determination by an economic

⁸ If the photographs on Ozact's website promoting their first production, *The Tempest* staged at Loch Ard Gorge, are anything to go by, their ambitions can on occasion be realized spectacularly.

⁹ To be sure, if the British had never occupied the two territories Shakespeare's arrival, whenever and however it might have happened, would have been more radically contingent. Is this supposition of any interest?

or political foundation.¹⁰ There are better ways of supplying reasons for the international spread of Shakespeare and, building on Hazlitt and Keats, Jonathan Bate has made a helpful start when he seeks the grounds for Shakespeare's global success in two characteristics his plays realize in performance: "performativity" and "aspectuality" (323-335). Shakespeare's characters live out their struggles and crises before us in the mind (for readers) or on the stage (for spectators), not as allegories or character types, and not as representatives of abstract viewpoints, but as arrays of radically underdetermined figures interacting with their fellows. Their identities emerge or are shaped only through their 'playing' and, as Bate puts it:

- - - a vacuum is created in the space which belongs to motive: spectators and readers rush in to fill that vacuum, thus performing their own versions of the play. (332)

At the same time, readers or spectators are invited to follow the action from multiple perspectives, focusing on various characters' perceptions and judgments, without a unifying authorial standpoint. Narrative and moral authority is dispersed among the different characters and groups of characters, and the reader/spectator is impelled to respond and adjudicate. Shakespeare allows no-one to transcend this radical aspectuality. Counter positions are sustained, not excluded, no matter where one's personal preferences might lie. There is rough closure but no conclusion.

Two other features of Shakespeare's art help to explain his global power and spread. Somewhat mischievously, I introduced them early on in the hope that their extravagant, heretical novelty in this day and age might give the reader pause: 'spiritual universality' and 'centrality'. We are supposed to know, are we not, that historicity rules absolutely, that there is no human universality? Everything is socially and culturally determined, and universality a delusion. As for 'spiritual', well, there is no such thing, except in some vague metaphorical sense. With regard to 'centrality' we know that individual 'subjects' and social systems are radically decentred. Things fell apart early in the twentieth century because the centre could not hold (Yeats, "The Second Coming"), and we have been whirling "Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear/ in fractured atoms" with De Bailhache, Fresca and Mrs Cammel ever since (T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion"). Not for a moment do I wish to cast doubt on the actuality of the postmodern predicament in those regions and pockets of the modern world where this is a felt cultural reality. Nor would I wish to deny that the dizzying repertoire of co-extant social and cultural systems round the world supports profoundly distinctive life-worlds.¹¹ Yet there is only one human race, and biologically each one of us is pre-cultural. Therein lies our centre,

¹⁰ This would be the case even if such a base could be adequately defined without implicating significant elements of the supposedly wholly dependent superstructure: Raymond Williams' discussion remains useful (see "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory").

¹¹ Compare Castoriadis (1997): "- - - to know, as we must, that our *Lebenswelt* is but one among an indefinite number of others is to recognize that there is a multiplicity of 'first-person' collective

the basis of universality, and there, also, is the possibility of an extraordinary spiritual freedom. Shakespeare is amazing because, using the materials of his time and culture, he created works that are astonishingly beyond the range of what his contemporaries could produce, perhaps even beyond much of what has subsequently been produced in dramatic art. In viewing or reading his plays we follow his mind as it shapes, reshapes, distorts, plays with, illuminates, denigrates and magnifies the cultural materials he inherited, with a zest and freedom we can hardly comprehend. It is Shakespeare's example of a human being creating so freely and uninhibitedly from the materials of his inherited cultural repertoire that excites our instinctive admiration. And in pondering and experiencing his achievement we discover some pale reflection of a similarly radical creativity in ourselves. Other important artists similarly have this effect. That is why they are important. But few do it as exuberantly and well as Shakespeare, which may be why his influence continues to spread.¹²

'experiences' among which there is, at first glance, no privileged one; at second glance, the only 'privileged' one – philosophically and, I would add, politically—is the one which made itself capable of *recognizing* and *accepting* this very multiplicity of human worlds, thereby breaking as far as possible the closure of its own world" (325).

¹² A fuller discussion of the position outlined in this conclusion may be found in my essay "Inventing the Human: Brontosaurus Bloom and 'the Shakespeare in us'".

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