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Author(s): Saptarshi Roy

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"All the world's a stage":
Shakespeare, Liberties and *Impossible* Global Stage

---- Saptarshi Roy
Lecturer, Department of English,
Bankura Sammilani College, Bankura,
West Bengal, India.

Harold Bloom helpfully suggests that our continued interest in Shakespeare has something to do with Shakespeare's particular insight into what it means to be a human being: "Shakespeare not only invented the English language, but also created human nature as we know it today." As the world has just passed by his 450th birthday landmark, questions on his popularity, his acceptability in ultramodern society, his halo in a 'dying' age of arts and the like seem to be quite obvious. We now stand on the brink where topics on the demolition or preservation of the Bard's created worlds have become a bit close to equal. This paper tries to show some 'locale' (and some *locals*) that look impossible for any variety of stage-craft—Shakespeare being the farthest of them all. But the green can grow anywhere, we never know! And this again proves that famous thought of our Bard when he saw a stage everywhere.

"… Ay, every inch a king"

Even though, definitions of the term ideology have become all the time more challenging, its currency in many topical commentaries on 'the Bard' indicates a particularly

attractive development. Shakespearean studies have grown in a way that became homogenous to the study of social caption—of the customs in which individual people are emblazoned by society with roles, beliefs, identities and allegiances. The Bard explores the method in which he is drawn in; and if his standing as sage happened to be diminished, the status of his workings as illuminators of historical processes has variously been enhanced. The creator of Prospero and Jaques might smile, if a little wryly, to see that so much topical literary theory aspires to dissolve the conventional boundaries between verity and fiction, realism and daydream. The influences of Marx, Freud, Saussure, Althusser, Derrida, Barthes, Foucault and others have conspired to make many earlier certainties, facts or beliefs seem, at times, an 'insubstantial pageant', while disconcerting force has been conferred on the pronouncement that: "All the world is a stage.."

"...to split the ears of the groundlings"

The understanding, or rather *interpretation* (to use the sense in its critical premise) of the works of this genius was a lot unalike in his own days. The then-audience was a cross-section of London—Puritans only excepted—and what on earth its precincts might be, it possessed the utmost worth of regarding poetry as a normal resource of expression. Poetry, in its own term was far isolated from the lingo of commonplace tongue, and whilst it was delivered by actors, it was proclaimed in such an approach so as to call attention to, rather than to screen the rhetorical diplomacy in employment by the versifier. Robert Bridges accused those dejected beings (called 'the groundlings' at that time) for preventing the Bard from being a grand artiste. As a matter of fact, modern scholars owe them a huge debt of gratitude for demanding of Shakespeare poetry rather than realism, and for forestalling him

from lettering the scholastic dramas which were the pride of the Wits—the academic élite in the age of 'New Learning'.

"… Greek to me"

In present times, especially since the twentieth century, the increase of school and university edification generated such a communal that desires to make out Shakespeare affably performed. Plays that remained uncared for centuries have been revived and rejuvenated, while amateur dramatics transformed therefore—though not got hold of that great level of eighteenth century. It would be inoperative to make believe that the modern playgoer is an idyllic bystander of a Shakespeare play. Having premeditated that subject matter at school, he is to be expected to perceive the drama through the distorting mirror of the detractor. The modern stature has lost the delights of lack of knowledge—the joy, for example, of stimulation with the plot; and, as verse is 'creature from outer space' to him, he will hardly ever clutch the accurate connotation of the more knotty speeches, whether the performers hold forth them so as to communicate disposition rather that meaning or speak the lines as if they were prose. Both schemes, wanting the essential mix together of formality and artlessness, take life of the poetry.

"… Keep renewing the acquaintance"

The picture of the modernist monitor does not necessarily mean that the Bard posseses nothing *nuovo* to offer now; on the contrary, every new day is bringing with it more and more novel studies related to the poet of Avon. We now know him as a psychological mentor for the Elizabethans, and perhaps the more complex figure as an illegal food hoarder

or tax evader. His persona and creations are equally well under scanner for academicians as they were, while each day his relevancy is trying to reach out more globally from his native 'Globe' . In the present climate, when the entire world is celebrating the Bard's 450th year of arrival, we are enclosed by questions of our own subsistence that are forcing the desertion of the 'arts'; however this situation is not as much as necessary to make those anxious who are really aflame about the grand rhymester. Antithetically, the ever-changing construal of the Bard and his workings (generated out of immense labour by the acolytes) are not only transforming the scholarship but also opening new premise and places to land upon—places which were never explored or even thought of beforehand for any kind of activity concerning Shakespeare. The passionate populace in every niche and bend of the world are making an effort to accomplish a bit innovative with the Bard, manoeuvring his thoughts out of the vestiges; these are not merely activities or conduct to pay homage, but are new-fangled interpretations also. They breed in figure and volume as much as they sprout all over the planet with their space-specific exegesis.

"Bid me run, and I will strive with things impossible."

Here is a major question that seems looming large upon us: how on earth an enthusiast should bring Shakespeare to those people who are devilishly death-ridden? There are Lands that are torn apart by severe civil strife for decades, and the cause which may sound as silly as the possession of the salt-fields. Geographies those are so war-ridden that blood and bullet became everyday actuality even for the infants who die fast by starving or by some deadly disease in the arms of their parents. As a matter of fact, what is frequently harsh realism in a developing world, for many in Europe is Shakespeare's world of poetry

and metaphor. Life for citizens in these parts of the globe is nearer to the means all human beings have lived until recent times, even if somehow more severe and instantaneous. Diseases here are highly vituperative, wider in scope and more perilous, while beggars and the disabled are on the street, right in front of others. Thus Death is always at hand, and when people breathe their last, the funeral is least to mention. The grey and muffled Occidental hemisphere in comparison looks wrapped in cotton wool—by screens, walls and windows; they are tainted with identical hues as westerly thoughts and language—copiously constrained by euphemism and political correctness. The affairs of state are vicious in worlds 'on the rise' in matters of life or death, and despots like Robert Mugabe or Mobutu Sese Seko escalate and plummet like Shakespearean kings and lords. There are others who have begun their tenure fighting fit and afterwards, like Macbeth, became mistrustful autocrats. The tribalism of Montagues and Capulets is straight away decipherable, so is the authoritative enchantment like that of Prospero —domineering the spirits of air, earth, water. So, for a rejoin, Shakespeare needs no explanation, neither any context settling in these parts of the globe.

"The game is up."

Let us take here an alternative picture, rather a frame of alter-Shakespearean identity. Under an initiative from the Globe theatre, a troop from the newborn nation state South Sudan performed Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* following the good guidance of actor Francis Paulino Lugali, whose booming voice yelled in Juba Arabic at the very core of the Globe: "All these people have come from the newest country in the world, and this country is South Sudan!" (Bloomekatz). A sad pleasantry with reference to a British sovereign who says no to

forfeit an accolade to the Romans, *Cymbeline* contains a loving filament filled with con and trouncing running all the way through. In a significant reading of the entire state of affairs, Dominic Gorgory Lohore, who delivered a unassailable act as the conceited Cloten, weighed the tribute against the oil—which is at this moment craved by apiece nation—and the naive but uncontaminated romance to the spirit of an toddler national territory. "Petrol is there… but human beings are unique. They can do anything with the petrol, but the heart is the very important thing," Gorgory Lohore believed.

"What's past is prologue."

Not that people from developing nations come to London or Europe to give testimony to their love or interpretations of Shakespeare, but the Bard also reaches them equally well. The present century has seen a volley of strife—be it civil or international; these are under *watch* by UN 'Peace Keeping' programme. But one way or another, topics like Shakespeare still inspires a few dozen at least. To brood over his philosophy and act upon them are still in the veins of humanists who do really care for humanity itself and at large; the result is the performances at those places where one would generally expect the march of military boots if not gunshots. In war-torn Bosnia, U.S. College graduates brought Shakespeare, with the aim to fetch in concert Muslims and Catholics; the aim is one to rub out the scars of their country's blood-spattered civil hostilities. Former Dartmouth students with Professor Andrew Garrod steered the youthful Bosnian performers to dramatize Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, an account on the subject of vengeance and lenience. In excess of a decade after the finish of its civil war, Bosnia is now at a standstill divide between ethnicity and religion. With the multiethnic actors ranging from ages 14 to 24, productions and 'liberties' like such proffer one

of the few prospects for juvenile Bosniak Muslims and young Croat Catholics to draw closer simultaneously.

"…come to this great stage of fools."

A further classic example of this shifting phizog of Shakespeare is the performance of *King Lear* by a group of Syrian refugee brood in a place unbelievable and farthest even from imagination— the desert camp at Zaatari in Jordon. For those 100 children constituting the dramatis personae, it was their introductory brush with the loftier arts of Shakespeare— despite the fact that they were already "steep'd in" tragedy and heartbreak themselves. "People get opportunities in life, and you have to take advantage of them," Mr. Azzam, the father of a child-actor, have been found opining significantly. "She got a chance to act when she was young, so that could make it easier for her in the future" (Hubbard). The refugees who had fled the civil war in Syria had seen their homes destroyed, or had lost relatives. Many had difficulty in sleeping or jumped at strident sounds; be that as it may, in this secluded, treeless camp, an abode that appeared to be a lay of lack, insecurity and tedium. Parents and aid workers felt apprehensive that that Syria's war threatened to erupt a mislaid generation of children who are pockmarked by violent behaviour and let pass imperative years of schooling; issues as vital as that might be disadvantageous for them, and will go behind them into later life. The *King Lear* show, the winding up of a venture that took several months, was one endeavour to wrestle any such kind of peril.

"Many a true world hath been spoken in jest."

Lear was written by the Bard in the immediate upshot of the Gunpowder Plot, a

'terrorist' plot with latent September 11 penalty. Nawar Bulbul, a Syrian actor (who as a director sliced into it bits of *Hamlet* too) had expressed it straight: "The show is to bring back laughter, joy and humanity" (Hubbard). Bulbul opted for *Lear* as he dreaded "a play about the bombs that fell on people's heads in Syria would not interest" kids who have grown to be world-weary by the bereavement and demolition. "I focused on the comparison between lying and telling the truth," Bulbul said. "Children should be playing with toys and learning science, arts and music". "When I first came here," he went on, "children were using the language of war ... tanks, bullets and bombs. That's changed now. To me, this is an achievement" (Taha) Here, we must silently listen and feel the voice of Bushra Nasr, 13, who played Lear's eldest daughter Goneril: "The play brought joy to all of us," while Weam Ammari, 12, who played ill-treated daughter Cordelia brightly rejoined: "My role was not easy at first because I had to speak classical Arabic... But now, everything is smooth and I have a lot of friends. It makes me feel much better. I do not feel lonely any more in this place" (Taha). Before we move on from Zaatari, a confident remark of Bulbul also calls for mention: "Performing Shakespeare's play in the heart of Zaatari is a different kind of a revolution against politics and society" (Taha).

"So shaken as we are, so wan with care."

It is not that folks in this modern century compellingly fashion acquaintances between the works of the Bard and the ongoing socio-political issues; to boot, these clamping are for no reason a new thing too. Shakespeare himself could have attended to stories of war and death from the English who had been skirmishing on the Continent in the 16th century, and as a consequence we obtain from him more than a few immortal lines related to mortality and

massacre. He has written extensively on the ravages of war, and both the aggressor and the opponent are poetically justified. At the blockade of Harfleur, the soldier Boy of *Henry V Part 1* (Act 3, Scene 2) desires to be far-flung from scuffle: "Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give / all my fame for a pot of ale, and safety". Henry's saunter throughout his camp on the eve of Agincourt (in concealing outfit) stirs up some justly current manifestations on warfare. The warrior Bates proposes that if the king had approached on his own to Agincourt, he would be securely ransomed "and a many poor men's lives saved" (Act 4, Scene 1). The uniformly distraught soldier Williams points that if the English cause is doubtful: "...the king himself hath / a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs, and / arms, and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join / together at the latter day, and cry all 'We died at / such a place'; some swearing, some crying for a / surgeon; some upon their wives, left poor behind / them; some upon the debts they owe; some upon their / children rawly left..." (Act 4, Scene 1).

"we owe God a death."

Death was eternally in attendance in the lives of Tudor men—the Plague that every now and then closed down the Globe Theatre, along with the highly contagious graveyards spilling over, amalgamated the entire mankind in the propinquity of demise. The pace with which sickness knocked down living beings in previous centuries was beyond doubt homicidal, and Shakespeare would unquestionably have witnessed ache and anguish in London life on a daily basis. Therefore identifying with death is to comprehend hostilities, which is in essence about the extermination of human existence more willingly than trouncing or defeat. As a precedent, Hamlet's soliloquy over pitiable Yorick's skull continues

to exist as a profoundly perturbing contemplation of death: "My gorge rises at / it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know / not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your / gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment / that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one / now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chapfall'n?" And as he got to his feet in the Elsinore churchyard: "I saw a bird alighted on the city walls of Tus / Grasping in its claws Kaika'us's head: / It was saying to that head, 'Shame! Shame! / Where now the sound of the bells and the boom of the drum?'" Do we not hear the jibe at our own devastative ways of politics while reading or reciting or performing such lines? Words like that do not need any specific geography to settle upon as politically prefect—they belong to every nook and corner of this planet irrespective of time and space.

"Appear thou in the likeness..."

As a consequence, a playing of the crowd scenes of *Julius Caesar* (even!) in Africa becomes effortless and without rehearsal; the vindication is that the mass knew all about uncomplicated people tricked by 'tricky' politicians. Now more than ever, people turn out to be really interested in finding the postcolonial or late-late modernistic flavour while watching pieces like *The Tempest* or thinking about *Othello* as a testimony of the fear of the Arab—that very 'Arabia' for the Bard. Prospero in *The Tempest* is full of both the self-satisfaction and brutality of any modern-day terrorist and the clandestine bigotry of some 'white' house. He orders Ariel to demolish the arrogating Alonso's vessel resulting massive destruction; whilst shrewdly controlling Caliban—the 'terrorist'. Folks, especially those who were hit hard as a result of some stubborn occidental 'developmental steps', can easily make out the method used upon Caliban—at the outset naively nurtured by Prospero and then fated to

slavery after misbehaving with Prospero's daughter; the colonial slave who turns not in favour of the fruits of civilisation that were tendered to him. Singing on a graver note, *Othello* represents a palpable catastrophic account for the western world regarding the bothersome Middle East. Othello is a Muslim in the service of Venice—by neighbour to the Ottoman Empire—and is sent to Cyprus to mêlée the Turkish flotilla. He looks a mercenary whose self-hatred sullies the play and in due course leads to his own fatality. Racially battered by both Iago and Roderigo, he subsists in a world where there are men whose heads supposedly hang beneath their shoulders. Yet, till 1998 the widely read texts on this first-rate 'coloured' tragedy enclosed nuances on Othello as the 'nigger'. Thus, to perform dramas as such, enthusiasts feel it never hard to locate urgings for adaptations, liberties or interpretations.

"To change true rules for old inventions."

As a matter of historical fact, the changing facade of playing Shakespeare, that people talk about widely today, were actually shifting from the days of James I and Charles I. At the time of Restoration two theatres—and between 1682 and 1695 only one—were ample to gratify the public demand. A generation earlier, a smaller populace had required no less than six. Shakespeare, becoming less popular then than Beamount and Fletcher, was recurrently altered to suit the taste of the times. Side by side, Actresses, now becoming visible for the first time, had to be provided for. At the end of *King Lear* Cordelia was made to live happily ever after as Edgar's wife, Miranda was given a sister, and Lady Macduff had her part enlarged. It is significant that the age which was most critical of his faults (1660-1800), was the one when most liberties were taken with the staging of his plays. Yet the period from

1660 to 1890 was an age of great acting when Betterton, Garrick, Kemble and many others appeared in adapted versions of the plays of the Bard. Shakespeare's plays were staged with elaborate scenery, and with savage cuts to make room for it. Those who really appreciated Shakespeare usually stayed away from the theatre, and we had the comic spectacle of Thomas Hardy in the front row of the gallery with his eyes glued not to the stage but to a text of the play.

"If you can look into the seeds of time..."

Now a days, while performing in a Syrian refugee camp or in newly created South Sudan, liberties are taken not to critique the Bard or to suit the popular taste, but for contextualizing with the complex cultural space—with perhaps an opaque aim of sharing some fundamental philosophy with a number of distressed denizens. Shakespeare can still be used to remind ourselves of an earlier, "safer" (if nonexistent) world; a reassurance of our own ultimate survival. All those bones of contention present in Shakespeare's era, and which crowd in his theatrics—class discrimination, racial and bias, civil disobedience, eroticism, prejudice against women and their much debated role in society—are still pivotal and appear to be blighted subjects in today's dysfunctional global society. Critics cry loud about the difficulties with reading him, and it might bear out really onerous if one goes over one of his plays for the first time—trying to make sense of it. But that does not necessarily mean he will be what Geoffrey Chaucer is now; a brilliant author whose works can be read intelligently in the original barely by the minority. After all, Shakespeare wrote his plays to be performed, not to be read in miserable isolation. The more plays that are enjoyed in this way—and enjoyment should be the keyword—the clearer a picture emerges of the universal and

relevant situations which Shakespeare wrote about.

"But this denoted a foregone conclusion."

As our language changes, older forms of English become further knotty. This is why Shakespeare's place will be increasingly hard to defend. A taxing toil is to maintain that he remains at the very core of the Anglophone literature and culture, because his works have demurred in comparative esteem. Not that they are prostrated by the ravages of time, but all the time more subject to it. People know his reputation more than his words, and thus it embarks on to appear as though Shakespeare can never be beaten, even in this tech-savvy century—though he is the most un-digitalized of all writers. Conformist censors may extol him for the messages of nationalism, piety, harmony, unity and reconciliation which he proclaims to them. Middle-of-the-road critics may clap his 'infinite variety', density and ambiguity. Left-wing critics may speak well of him for the views about ideological obfuscation which he smuggles. And within many recent commentaries, whether they advertize themselves as semiotic or deconstructional or materialistic, we may detect not only the reductively skeptical tones of a Thersites of *Troilus and Cressida*, but also the considerate tones of a Launce (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), voicing concern for the small fry. On his 450th year of arrival, when the world is crying foul to Humanities, the Bard still breathes within us and none can take his share of reverence at any rate.

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