

Arabesque: Shakespeare and Globalisation

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Shakespeare Comes to Arabia

On April Fool's Day 1607 the crew of the *Red Dragon* weighed anchor off the coast of southern England and set sail into global history – mercantile, cultural, and imperial. The flagship of the 3rd Voyage of the East India Company, the *Dragon* (as it was almost invariably known) was under the command of William Keeling, who inspired the trust of the Company and his crew through 'good command of his men abroad (whom they loved and respected for his kind useage of them)' (Minutes of the Court of the East India Company 1614). The *Dragon* was accompanied by the *Hector* under the command of William Hawkins and - nominally at least - by the *Consent*, although her commander, David Middleton, had for unexplained reasons left ahead of his companions and later rendezvous proved elusive.

Keeling's instructions were to lead his fleet to Bantam (the first English trading 'factory' to be established by the Company in the Far East at Java) by way of Socotra, Aden, and Surat, the principal port of the largely land-locked Mughal empire. The purpose of the voyage was threefold. To identify additional potential markets for English broadcloth (the Company was perennially optimistic that the inhabitants of the tropics could be persuaded to wear woollen clothes). To explore the prospect of short-circuiting extended trade routes to the South China seas by obtaining spices from the entrepots of Aden and Surat. And, ideally, to establish a 'triangular trade': selling broadcloth for cash around the ports of the Arabian sea; purchasing with the proceeds cotton cloth in Surat and the Coromandel coast of India for export to Java; exchanging there cotton for spices through the Company's Bantam factory, in the process boosting economic activity sufficiently to justify investment in defences against local and Dutch predation; returning finally to London laden with hopefully profitable cargoes of spices. The Third Voyage thus carried with it a vast array of

woollen commodities; a second in command, William Hawkins, with diplomatic credentials who was sufficiently fluent in Turkish, the *lingua franca* of the largely Islamic ruling classes of the region, to undertake trade negotiations; and sufficient firepower both to solace friend and deter foe.

Having missed the trade winds, progress proved painfully slow. By August the *Dragon* and *Hector* had reached only the West Coast of Africa where they found themselves becalmed off the coast of modern day Sierra Leone. Keeling's enlightened concern for the welfare of his crew was remarkably demonstrated during this enforced leisure. To maintain morale and keep his men from 'idleness and unlawful games' (Strachan & Penrose 1971) he encouraged theatrical entertainments and in the event the crew of the *Dragon* gave a landmark performance of *Hamlet* before an audience that included not only officers but a visiting African dignitary. As far as we are aware, this was the first performance of a Shakespeare play outside of Europe; the first performance of a Shakespeare play on board a ship; the first amateur performance of a Shakespeare play; and presumably (given that the visiting dignitary understood Portuguese but not English) the first performance of a Shakespeare play to be translated. Nor was the repertoire of the *Dragon* limited to a single text: a little later the crew provided a command performance of Shakespeare's *Richard II* while Keeling entertained his second in command Hawkins to dinner. (see Strachan & Penrose 1971; Keay 1991; Loomba 1997; Taylor 2001).

After further frustratingly slow progress, in late April 1608 the *Dragon* arrived off the shores of Socotra, a safe haven commanding entry to the Gulf of Aden. Then a desolate island noted principally for its strategic position (which had led to its brief occupation by the Portuguese in the early 1500s) and as a source of aloes, Socotra is now an integral part of the Arab Republic of Yemen, and a thriving Eco-tourism destination. Here during an extended stay Keeling learnt rudimentary Arabic and the theatrical talents of the *Dragon's* crew were again exercised with a reprise performance of *Hamlet*. Shakespeare thus entered the Arab world through performance enacted by servants of a nascent nautical empire, directed by officers of a capitalist enterprise engaged in bitter trade rivalry with European competitors, and before a local audience that was in all probability either uncomprehending or entirely absent.

The members of the 3rd Voyage took various paths from Socotra. The *Dragon* loaded nearly a ton of aloes and sailed direct to Bantam, encountering strong opposition from Dutch forces intent on preserving their trade monopoly. Keeling's perseverance however earned the respect of the Company's Directors and in 1615 he was reappointed as Commander of its 5th Voyage with plenipotentiary authority to implement far reaching reforms to the Company's by then extensive organisational presence of in the Far East, establishing an administrative regime that subsequently underpinned an indirect colonial rule. To the very end of his life Keeling retained his Shakespearean connections, retiring in 1617 to become Captain of Cowes Castle, a sinecure almost certainly in the gift of the Governor of the Isle of Wight, Shakespeare's patron the earl of Southampton.

Middleton had by the time Keeling set sail from Socotra already begun his return journey from Java, having purchased a cargo of cloves for £3,000 that would be sold on the London market for £36, 000. The stupendous profit margin was critical in persuading the largely risk averse directors of the East India Company to invest heavily in developing the Far East market. Middleton became one of their most influential officers in the venture.

After his departure from Socotra Hawkins followed his specific commission, setting sail for Surat in order to 'proceed to the Court of the Great Mogul at Agra, and there to present his credentials' to the Emperor Akbar as agent of the Company in the hope that trading privileges in Western India might be secured (cited in Strachan & Penrose 1971). The negotiations proved tortuous in the extreme but eventually led to a successful treaty. The Battle of Plessy which effectively established de facto English rule in India, was ostensibly fought to protect the terms of Hawkin's treaty.

The East India Company returned to Socotra in 1834, annexing the island in order to protect trade routes to India, the jewel in the imperial crown.

Will and the World

In 1923 F.S. Boas recalled and celebrated this event in the accents of high

imperialism. 'At a time when our mercantile marine has been covering itself with glory on every sea, it is an act of *pietas* to reclaim for it the proud distinction of having been the pioneer in carrying Shakespearean drama into the uttermost ends of the earth' (Boas 1923, p. 95). In the 1980s the BBC broadcast a series of language programmes entitled 'The Story of English'. The series was announced in the *Radio Times* by means of a spectacular cover design showing a version of the Droeshout engraving of Shakespeare, with the familiar exaggeratedly domed forehead; and printed across the forehead, a map of the world. The caption read: 'From Will to the World: the great adventure which transformed the island speech of Shakespeare into the world English of 1,000 million'.

The effigy of this linguistic imperialism was therefore the head, and by implication the mind, of Shakespeare as a microcosm of 'the great Globe it selfe' (Shakespeare, 1623, p. 33). The linguistic achievements of that microcosmic globe-shaped brain have imprinted themselves on the global map, facilitating the universalisation of English around the world. This was only possible, however, because the Shakespearean mind was capable of conceiving and mapping such a global image. The world can know itself in Shakespeare because Shakespeare knew the world. Mary Thomas Crane (2000) traces this process from micro- to macrosom via the physiology of the brain:

Portraits of Shakespeare emphasize the large dome of his forehead, accentuated by a receding hairline; he must have had a brain ... And if Shakespeare's brain functioned as most normal brains do today, then the formation of a sentence ... probably involved activity first in the occipital, posterior superior parietal, and posterior inferior temporal lobes, central to the generation of mental images, and then in the perisylvian cortex (those regions of the brain located near the sylvian fissure, also called the lateral sulcus), where the images ... would be associated with appropriate words and formed into a grammatically acceptable sentence. The construction of the sentence would probably have involved the formation and linking of several 'mental spaces' or temporary areas of knowledge ... that could be mapped onto a more abstract conceptual space (pp. 14-15).

'What a forehead!', as A.L. Rowse exclaimed. 'What a brain!' (Rowse 1966, pp. 5-6).

Here the creative functioning of the spherical brain in that rounded skull produces a mental ‘mapping’ that aligns Will and world, Shakespeare and the globe (see Holderness 2001, pp. 141-3; Holderness and Loughrey 1991, pp.183-4).

The naming of the theatre most familiarly associated with Shakespeare’s dramatic work as the ‘Globe’ compounds this identification between mind and world, globe and skull. Between the microcosmic globe-shaped head and the thick rotundity of the planet lies the circular hollow of the Globe Theatre, the medium through which this global vision was able to print itself into universal consciousness. The ‘wooden O’ of the Globe took its shape from that of the world, even boasting a ‘heaven’ in its overhanging penthouse roof. But it functioned as an empty space, the *tabula rasa* on which images of the world could be printed; a vacant womb, impregnated by poetic genius to deliver a theatrical world. Over the stage of the Globe passed a phantasmagoric representation of the globe itself, ‘Asia of the one side’ as Sir Philip Sidney complained. ‘and Africa of the other’ (Sidney, 1966, p. 65). The round skull of the poet mapped the vast known world within this concentrated space of theatrical representation.

The successful Elizabethan theatres did more however than show the world its own features. The construction of purpose-built playhouses in liminal but accessible districts of London created the possibility of a ‘national theatre’, which then automatically became the site of an international cosmopolitan economy of cultural exchange. Foreign visitors gravitated towards these palaces of entertainment in the 1580s exactly as they do now. As we have shown elsewhere, the ‘tourism’ dimension of the Shakespeare industry has a history coterminous with the origins of the plays themselves (Holderness, 2001, pp. 133-6). Much of the most significant evidence in existence about the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres originates from the recorded observations of travellers. The only visual documentary record of an early Elizabethan public playhouse, the Swan, is the familiar sketch made by the Dutchman, Johannes de Witt. The recorded observations of tourists provide much more information about the theatres than any home-grown, native evidence: the Germans Samuel Kiechel, Thomas Platter, Paul Henzner; the Venetian Busino, who visited the Fortune in 1617; the French ambassador who took his wife to the Globe to see *Pericles* in 1607; the Spanish ambassador who went to the Fortune in 1621, and

afterwards banqueted with the players; and a stream of titled dignitaries who patronised the playhouses, such as Prince Lewis Frederick of Württemberg, Prince Otto of Hesse-Cassel, Prince Lewis of Anhalt-Cöthen and Duke Philip Julius of Stettin-Pomerania (Chambers, 1923, pp. 367-9).

An important consequence of the establishing from the 1570s of a centralised metropolitan theatrical profession occupying purpose-built theatres around London, was the provision of a specific cultural venue to which tourists might be drawn. As the theatre became incorporated, notwithstanding complex and pervasive conflicts of interest, into the new political and cultural hegemony of the metropolis, so the drama became a prestigious possession of the new national state; as Thomas Heywood testified: 'Playing is an ornament to the city, which strangers of all nations, repairing hither, report of in their countries, beholding them here with some admiration: for what variety of entertainment can there be in any city of Christendom, more than in London?' (Heywood, 1612, sig. F3). This partly explains why the Elizabethan drama, especially the plays of Shakespeare, was so strikingly international. Shakespeare's plays are always set elsewhere, in time or space, never (with one exception) in contemporary England (Turner, 1988, p. 1). But internationalism is paradoxically a way of defining, even of constituting, the nation, characterising Tudor England over against all the foreign languages and influences that penetrated and populated its cosmopolitan stage (Holderness, 1992, pp. 115-29).

The system of correspondences between these various spherical objects is perfectly rounded, complete. The Shakespearean skull, working through the theatrical Globe, produces the great globe itself. And the people of the globe flock to the Globe to see and hear themselves represented.

Postcolonial Shakespeare

It was a beautiful model while it lasted. But this great chain of being, linking the smooth creative head, the fertile rotundity of the theatre and the unified perfection of the represented world, has been thoroughly fractured on the anvil of modern Shakespeare studies. The composite brain has been split into fissured subjectivities; the round theatre exposed as a symptomatic product of Tudor cultural nationalism; and the Shakespearean world-map torn up to reveal a globe ravaged by empire and its

legacy of poverty, disease and war. These changes have been brought about by developments in poststructuralist, Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic criticism. But it is specifically post-colonial analysis that has shown how, over the previous two centuries, Anglo-American criticism consolidated an imperial Shakespeare, one whose works testified to the superiority of the civilised races, and could be used to establish and maintain colonial authority (Loomba and Orkin, 1998, p. 1). The *Radio Times*' innocent view of the 'adventure' that turned English from a parochial island tongue into the 'world language of 1,000 million' masks a much more violent process involving subjugation of native peoples, extirpation or annexation of native cultures, and the imposition through administrative and educational systems of Anglocentric norms and ideologies.

The various forms of colonial response have been well studied and well documented. Subjugated cultures could engage in imitation and mimicry, assisting the domestication of a foreign power. Or native intellectuals could challenge colonial culture in favour of their own native literatures, initially by exposing the conscious or unconscious racist content of imperial fictions. When in 1975 Chinua Achebe declared that Joseph Conrad was 'a bloody racist', postcolonial criticism was born (Achebe, 1988, p. 8). Later trends extended these possibilities by for instance re-reading Shakespeare from a colonised viewpoint, and finding there comfort and support for the oppressed; or producing versions of Shakespeare that in some way merge imperial with native materials, constituting what has been called cultural 'hybridity'. Postcolonial criticism also re-evaluated the early modern period in which empire had its origins, and demonstrated that colonial discourse was no mere passive backdrop to Shakespearean drama but rather one of its key discursive contexts (Barker and Hulme, 1985, p. 198). In other words, these plays were immersed in the formation of empire before they became its tools, 'entangled from the beginning with the projects of nation-building, empire and colonization' (Neill, 1998, p. 168).

The final outcome of this now familiar process is an Anglophone culture (or set of cultures), which is, as Michael Neill (1998) phrases it, 'saturated with Shakespeare' (p. 184). Neill's conclusion is that this saturation is constitutive and inescapable. 'Our ways of thinking about such basic issues as nationality, gender and racial difference are inescapably inflected by his writing' (p. 184). Yet if the Shakespeare dispersed by

linguistic imperialism around the globe is also a Shakespeare wholly or partially 'hybridised' by contact with other languages and cultures, then is it still the same old imperial Shakespeare? Or is it possible, as Dennis Kennedy puts it, that 'almost from the start of his importance as the idealized English dramatist there have been other Shakespeares, Shakespeares not dependent on English and often at odds with it' (Kennedy, 1993, p. 2); that Shakespeare 'goes native' every time he crosses a geographic or national border, and 'may thus be construed as the repositioned product of a complex of social, cultural and political factors that variously combine under the pressure of colonial, postcolonial and more narrowly national imperatives' (Cartelli 1999, p. 1)?

Global Shakespeare

This question takes on particular force as the language of the 'postcolonial' is replaced by the language of 'globalisation'. Globalisation is a contested term. In the definitions of some social scientists, globalisation entails a subsumption of the nation into international political and economic structures, and a corresponding diminution of the power of the national state in favour of international governmental organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union or the World Trade Organisation, and transnational corporations. In economic terms, globalisation is defined as 'a process of emergence of global product markets and global organisation of production' (Perraton, 2001, p. 672). Free trade areas reduce the regulatory authority of the state over economic activities; and increased mobility of capital and labour, with corporations relocating production to cheaper locations, triggers the mass migration of workers across borders. Culturally globalisation is considered to produce homogenisation of both production and exchange. Electronic communications render borders easily permeable by global knowledge and information. As Liam Connell (2004) puts it,

These processes of political, economic, social and media convergence combine to paint a picture of a world in which traditional political structures are in decline, where the private sector has an increasingly influential role and where social, economic and hence cultural practice is increasingly homogenised (p. 80).

Globalisation is seen alternately as the beneficial universalisation of the capitalist system, and with it economic opportunity, liberal democracy and enlightenment values; or as the continuance of imperialism and colonialism by more subtle methods. As long ago as 1976 Raymond Williams anticipated this difficulty:

If imperialism, as normally defined in late 19th century England, is primarily a political system in which colonies are governed from an imperial centre, for economic but also for other reasons held to be important, then the subsequent grant of independence or self-government to these colonies can be described as ... 'the end of imperialism'. On the other hand if imperialism is understood primarily as an economic system of external investment and the penetration and control of markets and sources of raw materials, political changes in the status of colonies or former colonies will not greatly affect description of the continuing economic system as imperialist (Williams, 1976, pp. 159-60).

In this definition what is now widely called 'globalisation' is nothing more than a protraction of economic imperialism beyond the demise of imperialism's political and military institutions. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, using a similar marxist terminology, explicitly define globalisation in this way:

Colonialism, the conquest and direct control of other peoples' lands, is a particular phase in the history of imperialism, which is now best understood as the globalisation of the capitalist mode of production, its penetration of previously non-capitalist regions of the world, and destruction of pre- or non-capitalist forms of social organisation (William and Chrisman, 1993, p. 2).

Is global Shakespeare then still imperial Shakespeare? Has the Shakespeare myth simply extended itself into what Bourdieu (1998, p. 38) called the 'justificatory myth' of globalisation?

Postcolonial *Hamlet*

Just as feminist criticism of Shakespeare initially targeted those plays that answered most readily to its preoccupations and priorities (*The Taming of the Shrew, Antony and Cleopatra*), so postcolonial criticism has naturally favoured plays with broader

horizons and a window onto the wider world (*The Tempest, Othello*). *Hamlet* will seem immediately resistant to global reading: resolutely Northern European, incandescently white, a story straight from the Scandinavian Viking roots of Englishness. A tale, one might almost say, using D.H. Lawrence's terminology, of 'The white races, having the arctic north behind them, the vast abstraction of ice and snow' (Lawrence 1982, p. 159).

Modern adaptations of *Hamlet* reinforce this perception of Eurocentric insularity. In John Updike's novelistic 'prequel' *Gertrude and Claudius* (2001), the physical whiteness of Horwendil (Old Hamlet) represents the dullness and conventionality of an insular warrior culture that stifles Gertrude, and exposes her to the seductions of Feng (Claudius). Feng is cosmopolitan and travelled, suave and courtly, a soldier of fortune rather than a pillar of the state. He is Heathcliff-dark against his brother's northern whiteness (like Othello, he woos Gertrude with tales of the dangers he had passed); associated with Mediterranean adventures and Provençal poetry; and an eloquently seductive hedonist beside the stiffly conventional husband. The Nordic whiteness of Scandinavian culture is contrasted, in very Lawrentian terms, with the dark vigour and energy of the South. Claudius is an outsider who trails with him an ambience of otherness, and as such proves irresistibly attractive to Gertrude.

Similarly, when Jacques Derrida wrote of *Hamlet*, he imagined the haunted castle of Elsinore as the 'old Europe', which Marx saw as haunted by the spectre of communism:

It is always nightfall along the 'ramparts' on the battlements of an old Europe at war. With itself and with the other (Derrida, 1994, p. 14).

For Derrida the scene is automatically Marx's 'Europe', not mediaeval Denmark or Jacobean England, since his parallel draws in part on Paul Valéry's 1919 essay 'La crise de l'esprit', which imagines a 'European Hamlet' surveying the continent in the immediate aftermath of the First World War:

Now, on an immense terrace of Elsinore, which stretches from Basel to Cologne, that touches on the sands of Nieuport, the lowlands of the Somme, the

chalky earth of Champagne, the granite earth of Alsace – the European Hamlet looks at thousand of spectres. But he is an intellectual Hamlet. He meditates on the life and death of truths. His ghosts are all the objects of our controversies; his remorse is all the titles of our glory ... If he seizes a skull, it is an illustrious skull – ‘Whose was it?’ – This one was *Lionardo* ... and this other skull is that of *Liebnitz* who dreamed of universal peace. And this one was *Kant qui genuit Hegel, qui genuit Marx, qui genuit* ... Hamlet does not know what to do with all these skulls. But if he abandons them! ... Will he cease to be himself? (Valery, 1957, quoted in Derrida, 1995, p. 5).

The vista from those displaced ‘battlements’ is the Europe of 1919, a waste land populated by millions of ghosts, littered with innumerable skulls. The Danish ‘prison’ of Hamlet becomes the fortress of European empire, picking over its dead white bones, perpetually at war with itself and with the other.

Hamlet is a play that seems to trade in whiteness, especially theatrically: ghosts, white faces in the darkness, the pallor of melancholy, the bleached candour of the exhumated skull. Classic monochrome film versions such as Olivier’s or Kozintsev’s reinforce this chiaroscuro reputation. And yet paradoxically this is the play of all plays that has the largest pretensions to universality, ‘directly valid for *all* relations within a particular situation, and at least indirectly valid for *all* relations of the same type’ (Hallward, 2001, p. xxi). It is understood to universalise the experiences of revenge, bereavement, alienation; to portray images of fundamental human emotions such as mother-love, father-hate, the desire not to be. Read as a classic formulation of the Freudian Oedipus complex, *Hamlet* can be viewed as a repository of universal human truth, transcending all boundaries of race, ethnicity and culture.

Hamlet Black and White

In a fascinating document prefiguring Shakespearean globalisation, the psychoanalytic study by Wulf Sachs of the African John Chavafambira, the tragedy of Hamlet is represented as the tragedy of every race, colour and creed: ‘I discovered’, says Sachs in *Black Hamlet*, ‘that the manifestations of insanity, in its form, content, origin, and causation, are identical in both natives and Europeans’ (Sachs, 1937, p. 11). John believed that his father, who was an ‘*nganga*’ or healer, was murdered by

his own brother. John has dreams in which he sleeps with his mother (p. 179). Like Hamlet, John possesses a conscious desire to revenge a father's murder, and in both cases the murderer is the uncle (p. 180).

Claudius has committed in Hamlet's eyes two crimes: the killing of Hamlet's father and his marrying Hamlet's mother – crimes which the psychoanalyst has proved to exist in the fantasies of childhood. Thus the reality has fulfilled Hamlet's forbidden and successfully repressed desires, and this is the cause of his tragic fate.

Now, the situation which occurs in Hamlet is common to all humanity, and this is the primary reason why Shakespeare's tragedy appeals to men of all races and nations. In Hamlet, Shakespeare, with the intuition of genius, penetrated the depths of man's innermost conflicts and illustrated in an unprecedented and unexcelled manner the tragic outcome of such conflicts (p. 177).

Shakespeare's tragedy then, despite apparent cultural differences, is truly global, 'common to all humanity' (p. 177):

Hamletism is a universal phenomenon .. (p. 176).

Sachs's work has naturally been viewed from very different perspectives. To argue in the 1930s that black and white psychology were indistinguishable was an extraordinarily liberal gesture; as Saul Dubow puts it 'greatly in advance of its time' (Dubow, 1993, p. 520). On the other hand his work can be accused of reproducing the native African in the image of white imperialism, 'colonisation by other means' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 170), subjecting the colonised to what Bourdieu called 'the imperialism of the universal' (Bourdieu 1998: 19). Shakespeare forms a robust template to which any clinical observations can readily be assimilated, and the black man is seen not for what he himself is, but as an honorary white man. 'Prone to see Oedipus everywhere they look', in Diana Fuss's words, 'Western ethnologists are impelled to find their own psychosexual pathologies duplicated in their objects of study' (1994, p. 33). The whiteness of *Hamlet* is that abstract whiteness that goes beyond skin colour, and renders white supremacy a natural condition of existence, 'the invisibility that fuels white hegemony' (Hall, 1998, p. 81).

Sachs' *Black Hamlet* was produced by eliding the differences between European psychoanalysis and the mental operations of an African. Shakespeare and the English language form the common currency, the lingua franca that bridges the gap, sutures the divide. In Shakespeare blackness and whiteness meet and harmonise, ebony and ivory. And yet for many native English speakers the language of Shakespeare is no more a natural form of speech than it was to a speaker of John Chavafambira's tribal dialect. In contradistinction to 'black Hamlet' we can pose 'white Hamlet' the bizarre and obscene parody published by Richard Curtis and known as the '*Skinhead Hamlet*'. Here the ancestral whiteness of the old Scandinavian tale is thrown violently back at Shakespeare in a grotesque echo of a lost white supremacy.

The 'skinhead' is a prototype of disaffected youth culture that developed initially in the 1960s and saw resurgence in the 1970s, centred particularly around the young white working class male. Where the earlier 'Mods' affected a flamboyant style, Skinheads adopted the shaved heads and steel toecaps of East End dockers. Though initially Skinheads fraternised with West Indians, sharing their music and dance, in a context of high unemployment and immigration their culture became increasingly associated with racism, neo-Nazism and street violence. Skinhead culture overlaps with the cultures of football and of militarism.

Richard Curtis's *Skinhead Hamlet* is a brief parody of Shakespeare's play consisting of some 600 words, 44 of which are variants on 'fuck'. It is not an instance of working-class writing, and can hardly be described as 'Skinhead Literature', which might seem a contradiction in terms (though see Allen 1994). At one level *Skinhead Hamlet* is a travesty, a grotesque imitation producing irony by improbably juxtaposing alien contexts (like the famous Monty Python football match between the Great Philosophers and the Long John Silver Imitators). 'Our hope was' says a prefatory note, 'to achieve something like the effect of the New English Bible'; in other words to facilitate a parodic subversion of linguistic power by contemporary banality. On the other hand if one considers *Hamlet* as a quintessentially 'white' drama, then the juxtaposition of white extremism with the world's greatest Nordic masterpiece is productive of more than comedy.

Hamlet may seem from a global perspective firmly attached to Northern Europe and Caucasian ethnicity. Yet from the Skinhead viewpoint invoked by Richard Curtis, *Hamlet* is written in what is virtually a foreign language that needs to be retranslated into demotic Skinhead idiom:

HAMLET: (Alone) To fuck or be fucked.

[Enter OPHELIA.]

OPHELIA: My Lord!

HAMLET: Fuck off to a nunnery!

[They exit in different directions.]

Shakespearean rhetoric appears in this context an alien imposition to be robustly challenged and rudely rejected:

[Enter PLAYERS and all COURT.]

I PLAYER: Full thirty times hath Phoebus cart...

CLAUDIUS: I'll be fucked if I watch any more of this crap.

[Exeunt.]

Saxo Grammaticus' saga of Danish history, refurbished and updated by Shakespeare's Tudor English nationalism, has by the 20th century come to be perceived as the exclusive preserve of a middle-class culture far removed from the earthy demotic of Skinhead vulgarity.

Postcolonial criticism operates within a framework consisting of a unified imperial culture and a fragmented diaspora of colonial outposts. 'Shakespeare' is assumed to be an integrated ideological commodity before its exportation to the rest of the globe. Yet *Skinhead Hamlet* discloses a relationship of contestation between the imperial culture and its own unwelcome bad conscience, the white supremacist fantasies of the working-class youth it has dispossessed. Imperial Shakespeare is challenged from within by his own white shadow. In a globalised world where power has shifted from the old imperial centres to international capital and global bureaucracy, Shakespeare can be more 'foreign' on the Isle of Dogs than in Delhi or Cairo. The point is made

eloquently by Egyptian writer Adhaf Soueif, whose *Mezzaterra* (2004) movingly celebrates the achievements of cultural globalisation.

Growing up Egyptian in the Sixties meant growing up Muslim/Christian/Egyptian/Arab/African/Mediterranean/Non-Aligned/Socialist but happy with small-scale capitalism. On top of that if you were urban/professional the chances were that you spoke English and/or French and danced to the Stones as readily as to Abd el-Hakeem... In Cairo on any one night you could go to see an Arabic, English, French, Italian or Russian film. One week the Russian *Hamlet* was playing at Cinema Odeon, Christopher Plummer's *Hamlet* at Cinema Qasr el-Nil, and Karam Mutawi's *Hamlet* at the Egyptian National Theatre.

The fragility of this increasingly threatened world was savagely emphasised on March 19th 2005 when a bomb exploded during the second Act of an amateur performance of Twelfth Night mounted by the Doha Players killing the Director. No doubt the primary motive was to attack a target frequented by Westerners on the eve of the 2nd anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. It is at least possible however that there was a symbolic significance attached to the assault on 'Western culture'. The suicide bomber was identified as a 39 year old Egyptian.

Arabia Comes to Shakespeare

Sulayman Al-Bassam's *The Al-Hamlet Summit* was first performed as part of the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival, in August 2002, where it was awarded the Fringe First Award for excellence and innovation in writing and directing. It was subsequently presented at the 14th Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre, in September 2002, where it won Best Performance and Best Director Awards. The work had previously been through various adaptations of the Shakespeare text, from 2001 onwards, performed by the Zaoum Theatre Company: *Hamlet in Kuwait*, performed in Kuwait, and *The Arab League Hamlet*, performed at a festival in Tunisia. The earlier versions were both adaptations of the Shakespeare text. *Al-Hamlet* by contrast jettisons Shakespeare's language and rewrites *Hamlet* into modern English with a strongly Arabic flavour, producing what the author called a 'cross-cultural construction' (Al-Bassam 2003). Al-Bassam produced and

performed versions in both Arabic and English (both texts available at Al-Bassam 2002).

Al-Bassam's play maps a Middle Eastern political tragedy onto the template of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The key characters carry Shakespearean names, and occupy parallel situations within their own modern Middle Eastern world. Hamlet's father, the old ruler, has been poisoned, and his position usurped by Claudius his brother, a dictator with more than a passing resemblance to Saddam Hussein. Gertrude and Ophelia, Polonius and Laertes all play roles comparable to those of their Shakespearean namesakes, but redomesticated into an Islamic Arab context. The regime is threatened, as Denmark is threatened at the beginning of *Hamlet*, by Fortinbras's troops lining the borders, and internally by the 'People's Liberation Brigade', which has been distributing leaflets claiming Old Hamlet was assassinated. Where Claudius in Shakespeare's play resolves the Norwegian threat by diplomacy, Claudius in *Al-Hamlet* responds with violence and atrocity:

POLONIUS: I've got 300 men working round the clock gathering up the leaflets. CLAUDIUS: Forget the leaflets, burn the townships, all of them – I want them all burnt by dawn.

Fortinbras's army is backed by the West, 'armed with millions of dollars of foreign equipment'. Behind the suggestions of foreign intervention lies the West's greed for Arab oil (Claudius is obsessively concerned to protect the pipelines from sabotage).

In a scene which is the equivalent of *Hamlet* 3.3, instead of praying for forgiveness, Claudius voices what is virtually a religion of oil and dollars:

Oh God: Petro dollars. Teach me the meaning of petro dollars. I have no other God than you, I am created in your image, I seek guidance from you the All Seeing, the All Knowing Master of Worlds, Prosperity and Order ... This for the MD of Crude Futures: all of Heaven's gifts down to the cracks of their arses and I, the poor, sluttish Arab, forgoing billions to worship you ... Is it not charm, is

it not consummate charm to slouch on silk cushions and fuck and be fucked by all the flesh dollars can buy? ... In front of your beneficence I am a naked mortal, full of awe: my ugliness is not unbearable, surely it is not? My nose is not so hooked is it, my eyes so diabolical as when you offered me your Washington virgins and CIA opium.

At the end of the play Fortinbras clearly intends to sustain this policy: 'It won't be easy, terrorism is not yet defeated, but the pipeline will be completed within a year'.

The West appears in the play in the shadowy persona of the Arms Dealer, who spoke English in the Arabic version. The Arms Dealer converses with Hamlet, Ophelia, Claudius and finally Fortinbras. He will provide weapons to anyone prepared to pay, even if he is arming opponents. He remains in place at the end:

As the lights begin to fade, the Arms Dealer enters and walks downstage incredibly slowly.

Just as in *Hamlet* Claudius recognises that the real enemy of his regime lies within, so Claudius and Polonius in *Al-Hamlet* are vigilant against signs of domestic subversion. Opposition and dissent are read as fundamentalist terrorism. Polonius sees in Hamlet's letters to Ophelia the 'apocalyptic imagery', the 'yearning for violent and comprehensive change to the world order' which are naturally linked with 'terrorist activities'. Both Hamlet and Ophelia become Islamicised, adopting traditional Muslim costume; and both become 'terrorists'. Ophelia dies as a suicide bomber; Hamlet shoots Polonius, and at the end of the play is seen leading the liberation army.

CLAUDIUS: Just two hours ago, our forces began an attack on terrorist positions belonging to Hamlet and his army. These continue as I speak. This conflict began when Hamlet laid siege to our democracy, our values and our people through a brutal series of kidnappings and terrorist bombings that have killed many innocent victims and shocked the world community.

The equation between Islamic fundamentalist and terrorist militant is one that Hamlet internalises. This is the equivalent of Hamlet's revenge:

I will clean this land, I will make it pure, I understand, I do understand, but I will cleanse it for you, I will prepare it for your return, even if it costs me my life, I will clean it, I will purge it, blood will flow, I will make blood flow in torrents, I swear in my father's name, I swear in the name of Allah.

The fantasy of a vindictive bloodbath is explicitly expressed in the language of the Koran:

I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammad is his messenger ... I, Hamlet, son of Hamlet, son of Hamlet am the rightful heir to the throne of this nation. My rule will crush the fingers of thieving bureaucrats, neutralize the hypocrites, tame the fires of debauchery that engulf our cities and return our noble people to the path of God. Our enemies comprehend only the language of blood for this, the time for the pen has passed and we enter the era of the sword. We crack the skull of falsehood against a rock and lo! Only the Truth remains. Let it be so and may God raise the profile of his martyrs!

Hamlet and Globalisation

The writing of *Al-Hamlet* began with the experience of globalisation:

I was in Cairo with an exiled Iraqi theatre director and a Palestinian theatre troupe from Ramallah drinking coffee in the bazaar when a boy came running past us, chanting: '*Al-Kull murtabit / Am-reeca qarabit*' ('Everything is linked/ America just got closer ...'). It was September the 11th and news from New York was just beginning to stream across the television screens. In all the confusion of that night, I remember the words of one of the Palestinian actors:

‘The hell in New York today will bring hell to Ramallah tomorrow’ (Al-Bassam 2003).

9/11 is the supreme instance of globalisation, viewed here from a range of different perspectives. The boy’s chant seems to celebrate with a certain triumphalism the shrinking globe and the ease with which Islamic terrorism can reach to the very heart of America’s political and economic institutions. The Palestinian actor thinks ruefully of the consequences, immediate reprisal not from America but from Israel, and against the Palestinians. Global events know no barriers of time and space.

In an article on 9/11 British Prime Minister Tony Blair (2002) echoed these sentiments exactly. 9/11 ‘brought home the true meaning of globalisation’.

In this globalised world, once chaos and strife have got a grip on a region or a country, trouble is soon exported ... It was, after all, a dismal camp in the foothills of Afghanistan that gave birth to the murderous assault on the sparkling heart of New York’s financial centre (p. 119).

This is the negative side of globalisation. But globalisation also provides the potential solution to such problems. Blair reflects that the West can ‘use the power of community to bring the benefits of globalisation to all’ (p. 121) in the form of truly universal values:

... values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and a pluralist society ...

Values that are ‘universal and worthy of respect in every culture’ (p. 122). The vehicle for disseminating these values globally is economic penetration: increased trade flows, and greater involvement of the private sector in public finance (p. 121).

Al-Bassam clearly intended the *Al-Hamlet* as an intervention into this fraught conversation:

The globalisation of politics is deceptive. Every Arab knows that George Bush said 'either you are with us or you are against us' and everyone in the West now

knows that Saddam is bad. This is globalisation of politics, but it does very little to increase dialogue between cultures. All it does it promote vacuous 'world views'. This is where culture and theatre become vital. They permit complexity and difference and they permit the weak to be other than pitied and the cruel to be other than hated. Theatre challenges the accepted world views and breaks the mirrors of authority. Shakespeare understood that power very well (Dent 2003).

Globalisation is not only inevitable but desirable, since it is the only route to mutual understanding and a stable world. Everything really is linked, as the Arab boy recognised. The problem is how to develop those links without conflict and violence; without the supremacy of the West; without the suppression of alternative cultures and consequent global homogenisation. In this process theatre has a critical role to play:

The events of 9-11 and the political fallout since have drawn to light the inextricable intertwining of the fates of Arab peoples and those of the West. Everything is linked and the much-touted 'clash of civilizations' simplifies and tries to obscure what is a complex series of overlapping and interpenetrating cultural realities that are tied together in fatal symbiosis (Al-Bassam 2003).

This is quite a different approach from Tony Blair's vision of a universalisation of enlightenment values of liberal democracy via the spread of free-market capitalism. Though he does not speak for Islamic fundamentalism or terrorist violence, Al-Bassam shows them as the inevitable consequences of an alliance between native Arab totalitarianism and the economic machinations of the West. In Shakespeare Hamlet is driven reluctantly towards revenge, and in Al-Hamlet Hamlet and Ophelia seem to have no option but the bloody and suicidal course they undertake.

Mezzaterra

Liam Connell (2004) distinguished between texts as 'objects of globalisation', texts which may contain an implicit critique of global power relations, but are circulated through the very economic and cultural systems that support and maintain the existing

global powers; and narratives ‘capable of signifying globalisation’, texts that manage to get underneath the mythology of new universalism and reveal the contradictions that lie at its heart (p. 80). *Al-Hamlet* belongs to the latter rather than the former category.

Al-Bassam spoke of divergent reactions to the play:

For some *The Al-Hamlet Summit* was the work of a Westernised traitor that falsely approximated between Islam and the propagation of violence. For others, and I’m happy to say the majority and particularly the young, *The Al-Hamlet Summit* gave vital and much-needed expression to today’s Arab concerns and presented them to the West in a sophisticated and human form (Al-Bassam 2003).

The ‘hybridity’ of the piece, what Al-Bassam called its ‘cultural symbiosis’ was clearly designed to form a ground of dialogue between East and West. The move from the earlier versions, which were adaptations of the Shakespeare text, to a more contemporary form which allowed for the fuller expression of Arab experience was clearly critical in this process.

The script was written from a contemporary Arab perspective. It carries many concerns and issues of today’s Arab world and its relationship to the West. At the same time, it addresses these concerns to an English-speaking audience. The cross-cultural construction of the piece creates a sense of implication in the affairs of the other (Dent 2003).

‘Everything is linked’ in the globalised world, either through violence or through an acceptance of reciprocal ‘implication’. *The Al-Hamlet* summit opens a conversation over the ground of our reconciliation.

Globalisations

The *Red Dragon* touched the shores of Socotra early in the first global age, at the incipience of modernity. From the 16th century onwards, travel and commercial traffic were opening the world up to a familiar pattern of conquest and counter-conquest, colonisation and resistance. The East India Company was not only ‘discovering’ and

encountering the wider world, but mapping and charting its geopolitical contours, and in the process beginning to delineate a global consciousness.

This awareness of the globe in terms of extent and diversity is one of the core meanings of 'globalisation'. The *Red Dragon*'s Shakespearean experiments introduce another definition of globalisation, which has to do with colonisation and empire, the exploration of ideas and manners – in short of culture – worldwide from powerful metropolitan centres. In this paradigm Shakespeare is a potentially global commodity to be broadcast and disseminated to a passive or subjugated global population, Will to the world.

By the 21st century Shakespeare has become, as the examples discussed here clearly demonstrate, a vehicle of global communication, a repository of universal themes that facilitates multi-cultural diffusion from a plurality of centres. Shakespeare belongs wholly to the flux of global culture, and is no longer the property of any one national constituency. Shakespeare is irreversibly part of that 'process by which a number of historical world societies were brought together into one global system' (Modelski 2000, p. 149).

These three meanings of globalisation – global consciousness, cultural imperialism, universal communication – are historically linked, but distinguishable, and frequently in conflict one with another. Universal features of human existence common throughout the globe (such as love, or death) have no necessary relationship with the globe as a context or concept; and many products of globalisation (such as Coca-Cola) have no credible claim to universality. If Shakespeare has in fact survived the experience of empire in such a way as to import a potential universality of interest into a genuinely global consciousness, then this represents a remarkable transformation that should prompt us to look again at the map on the forehead on the cover of the *Radio Times*. If Shakespeare is now, to use Thomas Cartelli's useful term, 'repositioned' beyond national boundaries and colonial authority, then he inhabits a genuinely non-national and multi-cultural global universe. And this is something new.

Al-Hamlet is a representative product of multicultural communication in a global frame. It occupies one of innumerable local sites that have no territorial linkage, yet reflect specifically on global events, defined as events that implicate humankind as a whole. This is the ultimate globalization of Shakespeare; but it is also the ultimate localization of Shakespeare, since it implies an infinite multiplicity of local/global Shakespeares. The term 'glocalization' was specifically coined to address this condition:

Glocalization is marked by the development of diverse, overlapping fields of global-local linkages ... [creating] a condition of globalized panlocality.... This condition of glocalization... represents a shift from a more territorialized learning process bound up with the nation-state society to one more fluid and translocal. Culture has become a much more mobile, human software employed to mix elements from diverse contexts. With cultural forms and practices more separate from geographic, institutional, and ascriptive embeddedness, we are witnessing what Jan Nederveen Pieterse refers to as postmodern 'hybridization'. (Gabardi 2000, pp. 33-34)

This is not then an inevitable movement towards the universalisation of culture in a wholly homogenised world. Globalizations can also work against each other, as *Al-Hamlet* speaks so strongly against international capitalism. All that links these phenomena together in a global age is their common subordination of national considerations, and their shared reference to the globe, especially as the planet. *Al-Hamlet* belongs to the 'Global Age' (see Albrow 1996), but it sits uneasily beside the rhetoric of Tony Blair's Third Way globalization. Even the globe has no universal or univocal interpretation (see Featherstone 1995).

Between 1607, when Shakespeare's lines echoed emptily from the deck of the *Red Dragon* around the Arab world, and 2001, when Al-Bassam's adaptation found a common acceptance across both East and West, empires rose and fell. But one thing changed. In 1607 Shakespeare was virtually talking to himself. In 2001 Shakespeare was the substance of a global conversation.

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