5 *Remembering Shakespeare in India: colonial and postcolonial memory*

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Texts and their readers exist in time, and as Shakespeare grows further and further away from us, 450 years after his birth, we may need to ask what the act of 'remembering' involves. It is obviously true that the operation of cultural memory works to destabilize our awareness of historical time, and the 'afterlives' of texts and artefacts negotiate multiple temporalities – as does the text or artefact itself in the instant of its making. For colonial readers, encountering Shakespeare both as literary master-text and as theatrical property, the experience was one that interrupted any prior sense of literary tradition and required an engagement with new forms of historicity. On the one hand Shakespeare was assured of a kind of perpetual life outside time and history, while on the other he was obviously the composite product of a historical process that left deposits of all kinds, some visible, some invisible, on the objects that passed through it. What resulted was an inevitable distortion, even a foreshortening, of the temporal perspective on a writer treated both as classic and as contemporary.

Walter Benjamin, commenting on the life of the artwork, placed it in the context of survival, through translation and adaptation, into later times. Adapting Aby Warburg's term, *Nachleben*, or afterlife, he said that:

> The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history, is credited with life … The philosopher's task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history. And, indeed, is not the continued life of works of art far easier to recognize than the continual life of animal species? The history of the great works of art tells us about their antecedents, their realization in the age of the artists, their potentially eternal afterlife in succeeding generations. Where this last manifests itself, it is called fame.[1]

[1] 'The Task of the Translator', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1977), 71.

Shakespeare's extraordinary fame as a dramatist in colonial India was achieved primarily in two contexts: as part of a new educational curriculum designed for the training of the native bourgeoisie, and as an inventor of plots and characters that could be freely adapted and repurposed for the use of the stage. Much has been written on both these aspects of influence and adaptation, from Shakespeare as a kind of 'mask of conquest' in the colonial curriculum (citing the title of Gauri Viswanathan's well-known book),[2] to re-appropriations of the plays in the popular theatre. The purpose of this paper is not to review these two traditions, but to reflect on memorial practice, particularly the *time* that Shakespeare inhabits in different forms of cultural appropriation. Three different kinds of time – the 'universal' time of the classic, the sedimented time of history, and the time of a reformed present – coincide in the perception of Shakespeare in India. I will suggest that this understanding of time has implications for the way in which the project of modernity itself is conceived, as for the fabrication of history. Looking at the cultures of memory that attach themselves to Shakespeare in the subcontinent over a period extending from the inception of colonial rule till after the demise of empire, and including two key dates, the Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1864 and the Quatercentenary of 1964, I will attempt to examine the nature of Shakespearean afterlives in relation to the 'time of the text'.

Shakespeare in the classroom

The first recorded performances of Shakespeare in India date from the late eighteenth century, and a translation of *The Tempest* into Bengali was produced by one Claude Monckton as early as 1809 at the Fort William College in Calcutta, established for the training of British colonial officers.[3] Shakespeare was prescribed for study as part of the literary curriculum of the Hindu College in Calcutta, in 1817 the first

[2] Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[3] See Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, *The Story of the Calcutta Theatres, 1753–1980* (Calcutta: KP Bagchi, 1982), 1–30; Amal Mitra, *Kolkatay Bideshi Rangalay* (Calcutta: Prakash Bhavan, 1967), *passim*; and Thomas Roebuck, *The Annals of the College of Fort William* (Calcutta: Hindustanee Press, 1819), 187.

secular institution of higher learning on the European model to be set up by the native gentry.[4] Students of the Hindu College acted scenes from the plays, following a practice already initiated by English-language schools such as Drummond's Dhurrumtollah Academy, where in 1822 the brilliant young Henry Louis Vivian Derozio achieved notice for his performance as Shylock, at the age of thirteen. Two years later Derozio wrote a prologue for a school play which declared:

> No mighty KEMBLE here stalks o'er the stage
> No SIDDONS all your feelings to engage
> But a small band of young aspirant boys
> In faintest miniature the hour employs.[5]

But as an iconoclastic leader of the Young Bengal group at the Hindu College, where he taught between 1828 and 1831, Derozio seems to have favoured Romantic poetry, and an early biographer comments that if he had 'devoted himself with as much ardour to the study of Shakespeare, Milton, and the old Dramatists, he would have had a deeper insight into human feelings'.[6] It was left to Derozio's successor, David Lester Richardson, to make Shakespeare central to literary studies in colonial India, to such an extent that no less a person than Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote to him, 'I may forget everything about India, but your reading of Shakespeare, *never*.'[7] This memory, which for Macaulay was capable of supplanting 'everything about India', is analogous in some ways to the 'shelf of a good European

[4] See 'A Sketch of the Origin, Rise, and Progress of the Hindoo College', reprinted from *The Calcutta Christian Observer* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, June–December 1832), in Sakti Sadhan Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *Derozio Remembered: Birth Bicentenary Celebration Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta: Derozio Commemoration Committee and School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, 2008), vol. I: 44.

[5] *Song of the Stormy Petrel: Complete Works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio*, ed. Abirlal Mukhopadhyay, Amar Dutta, Adhir Kumar, and Sakti Sadhan Mukhopadhyay (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2001), 269. See also Ananda Lal and Sukanta Chaudhuri (eds.), *Shakespeare on the Calcutta Stage: A Checklist* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 2001), 23–4.

[6] 'Henry Louis Vivian Derozio', in Thomas Philip Manuel, *Poetry of our Indian Poets* (Calcutta: D'Rozario & Co., 1861), reprinted in Mukhopadhyay (ed.), *Derozio Remembered*, 136.

[7] Quoted in Taraknath Sen (ed.),, *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume* (Calcutta: Presidency College, 1966), vii.

library' which, in his notorious Minute on Indian Education of 1835, he preferred to 'the whole native literature of India and Arabia'.[8]

Macaulay's Minute has been much discussed, but I would like to note here his signal employment of what we might call a trope of erasure, replacing the unwanted other with the cultural master-property of empire. To remember Shakespeare in colonial India was, as Macaulay's letter to Richardson suggests, founded upon a radical *forgetting*. Richardson's own teaching was famously linked to an impassioned reading of the plays, a declamatory practice for which we have further memorial testimony, and which became part of the pedagogic style of the college. In his classic work of social history, *Ramtanu Lahiri o tatkalin bangasamaj* (*Ramtanu Lahiri and the Bengali social world of his time*, 1904), the Brahmo scholar Sivanath Sastri wrote:

> No one had been known to read Shakespeare like him. As he read, he became almost intoxicated with passion, and he inflamed his students as well. Having heard Shakespeare read by him, his students were convinced that there was no poet to compare with Shakespeare, no literature to touch the English. They refused to look at anything native after that. Hatred of their own race became deeply entrenched in many of these youths. Liquor flowed freely among those who held such views.[9]

Swapan Chakravorty comments drily on this early link between Shakespeare and drunkenness, a conjunction that, through the century, binds the iconoclasm of Derozio's heirs, the Young Bengal group, as much to forms of wilful forgetting as to creative renewal.[10] It is worth remembering this link, since memory and forgetting are closely interdependent in colonial culture, and knowledge, as Sir Thomas Browne said, is made by oblivion.[11] The project of modernity, articulated with such power by the Young Bengal group, involved an effacement or obliteration of the past at the same time as its members sought to

[8] Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Speeches: with his Minute on Indian Education*, ed. G. M. Young (Oxford University Press, 1935), 349.

[9] Sivanath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri o tatkalin bangasamaj* [Ramtanu Lahiri and the Bengali Social World of his Time, 1904], ed. Baridbaran Ghosh (Calcutta: New Age Publishers, 2007), 113. My translation.

[10] Swapan Chakravorty, *Bangalir Ingreji Sahityacharcha* [The Study of English Literature in Bengal] (Calcutta: Anustup, 2006), 13–14.

[11] 'Knowledge is made by oblivion, and to purchase a clear and warrantable body of Truth, we must forget and part with much we know.' Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, 3rd edn (London: R. W. for Nath. Ekins, 1658), 'To the Reader', A2r.

seize the future. In the event, however, Shakespeare came to belong neither wholly to the future nor decisively to the past.

Energetically promoting Shakespeare to the title of greatest of all poets, Richardson increased the number of Shakespearean texts in the literature curriculum, wrote essays on Shakespeare that illustrated his practice of close and sympathetic reading (including one on 'Shylock' and another on 'Othello and Iago'), and produced the first English literature textbook in the world.[12] In the Preface to his *Selections from the British Poets*, Richardson reflected on the capacity of great poetry to inhabit the soul, never relaxing its hold upon the memory, and becoming, in his phrase, 'a portion of our minds'. He comments, 'Since the time of Shakespeare two centuries and a half, loaded heavily with literary productions, have passed away, and yet Lear and Hamlet and Macbeth and Othello are as fresh as ever!'[13] Shakespeare's capacity to transcend time allows his writings to serve as a source of present, that is, *modern* literary illumination. Richardson's anthology offers explicit recompense to the youth of Bengal for their 'loss of riches', the material impoverishment of colonial servitude:

> Let Milton and Shakespeare instruct the young natives of India how to appreciate the beauty which God has lavished upon the creation. He who is so taught has within his reach those sources of pure and serene delight that are wholly inexhaustible.[14]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a literature syllabus similar to the one Richardson had devised was being taught at the four government colleges that had been established in Bengal, and, in 1858, the official incorporation of the University of Calcutta standardized the pattern of examination for a rapidly growing network of institutions of western education.[15]

[12] For the Shakespeare essays, see David Lester Richardson, *Literary Leaves, or, Prose and Verse chiefly written in India*, vol. II (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1840). See also his *Selections from the British Poets from the time of Chaucer to the Present Day*, with biographical and critical notes by David Lester Richardson (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1840). On Richardson's *Selections*, see Michael Hancher, 'College English in India: The First Textbook', in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (Cambridge University Press online journal, available on CJO2014. doi:10.1017/S106015031400014X).

[13] Richardson, *Selections*, 6.

[14] Richardson, *Selections*, 16.

[15] For an account of the establishment of the English literature curriculum, see Rangana Banerji, *The Origins of English Studies in Bengal* (Calcutta: Pages & Chapters, 2012), 59–125.

Shakespeare's Tercentenary

The success of Richardson's literature course, with its institutionalization of Shakespeare worship, contributed to those imbalances of the colonial education system that have been widely noted (usually by way of a critique of Macaulay's Minute): not just the neglect of Sanskrit or Persian poetry and philosophy, but also the emphasis upon a humanities curriculum, to the exclusion of pure and applied sciences. Nevertheless, Richardson's pupils, among them the poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt and essayist Rajnarain Bose, recalled their master and his favourite poet with gratitude, and by the second half of the century there is a kind of literary memorialization of Shakespeare that leaves its cultural traces on a history of affect. In his autobiography, Rajnarain Bose remembered Richardson's style of teaching Shakespeare, his close and impassioned reading of the plays, and his links to contemporary theatre, where his advice on Shakespeare performance was sought by actors.[16] Unsurprisingly, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's five-act play *Sharmistha* (1859, translated into English as *Sermista*) was influenced by Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and written in blank verse. The play was staged in 1873 with women performers in lead roles, to general disapproval. Dutt's early poetry and drama show strong Shakespearean influence, and he was himself mercilessly lampooned by Dinabandhu Mitra in his popular Bengali farce *Sadhabar Ekadashi* [*The Married Woman's Widow-Rites*, 1866] as an educated drunkard (what else?) declaiming snatches of Milton and Shakespeare.[17]

Sadhabar Ekadashi was acted in 1866, two years after the Shakespeare Tercentenary, and it is at this point that we might pause to ask a question about colonial time. We have no evidence for any celebration of the Shakespeare Tercentenary in India, despite the fact that after Garrick's belated and rained-out Jubilee in 1769, the 1864 celebrations in Stratford were elaborate and substantial. The Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Chenevix Trench, delivering the sermon in Holy Trinity church, had asked his congregation to 'imagine this England of ours without her Shakespeare … the foremost poet whom the world has

[16] Rajnarain Bose, *Atmacharit* [My Life], in Naresh Jana (ed.), *Atmakatha* [Autobiographies] (Calcutta: Ananya Prakashan, 1981), vol. I, 12.

[17] Dinabandhu Mitra, 'Sadhabar Ekadashi' ['The Married Woman's Widow-Rites'] in *Dinabandhu Rachana-sangraha* [Collected Works] (Calcutta: Saksharata Prakashan, 1973), 177–181.

seen, we are almost bold to prophesy, it will ever see'.[18] As Richard Foulkes suggests, Trench was in effect responding to Carlyle's question in 'The Hero as Poet', delivered as a lecture on 12 May 1840:

> Consider now if they asked us, Will you give-up your Indian Empire or your Shakespeare, you English: never have had any Indian Empire, or never have had any Shakespeare? . . . should not we be forced to answer, Indian Empire or no Indian Empire, we cannot do without Shakespeare! Indian Empire will go, at any rate, some day; but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts forever with us.[19]

'Lasting forever' invokes Shakespeare's own conceit of immortality, as contrasted to time-bound colonial possessions, doomed to their ends in history. But in 1864 both Shakespeare and Indian Empire seemed secure enough, India having been officially transferred to the Crown in 1858, after the turmoil of the 1857 Revolt. Yet there are no records of special performances, lectures or commemorative events in Britain's principal colony. It may be, of course, that the records have not survived, though there is evidence of stage and other activity both before and after. But the enthusiasm generated around the Tercentenary in Britain and France, even in Germany despite the wars of unification, does not appear to have affected India. Was Shakespeare's age irrelevant, since he was so resolutely presented as being 'for all time'? The colonial project was itself an interruption of, perhaps an assault upon, notions of time and history. On the one hand it attempted new feats of historiography, while on the other it required the supersession of earlier kinds of temporal knowledge for what Christopher Prendergast, following Arjun Appadurai, calls Eurochronology.[20] Colonial India was subjected to a kind of 'invention of history', its natives derided for their persistent confusion of myths with truth, and requiring the intervention of British historical method as exemplified in John Clark Marshman's *History of India* (1867).

[18] Cited in Richard Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 75.

[19] Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 148.

[20] See Christopher Prendergast, 'The World Republic of Letters', in Christopher Prendergast and Benedict Anderson (ed.), *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), 6. The term is used by Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 30.

The time of the classic

In his brilliant indictment of 'allochronic' discourse, Johannes Fabian speaks of the 'denial of coevalness' produced by Western anthropology, so that the time of the other is specifically not the time of the self.[21] While his critique is restricted to anthropological practice, it is worth noting how the terms 'medieval' and 'modern' came to be used in British Indian historiography, so that the pre-colonial inevitably presented itself as medieval. Shakespeare could not be placed within that undifferentiated space of pre-modernity. Yet Shakespeare's time – contemporary with the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar – was in some respects both too near and too far. What strikes us most in accounts of early Shakespeare pedagogy in India is the emphasis upon the immediacy and accessibility of the Shakespearean text, an accessibility that was assured by liberal education on the Western model. 'Every home has its Shakespeare; everyone can open and read the original work,' wrote Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, greatest of nineteenth century Bengali novelists and first graduate of the newly founded University of Calcutta, in an essay on 'Shakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona' first published in 1875.[22] Not only does this astonishing assertion convert the few beneficiaries of colonial higher education to an undifferentiated 'everyone', the essay also projects a time independent of history, the time of the classic, to which each educated person has equal access. This time is significantly different from the time of modernity, or modernization, to which Shakespeare also belongs – or belonged, when he was first made part of the colonial curriculum.

It was Sir William Jones who first instituted the comparison that Bankimchandra develops in this essay, recklessly inverting history to describe Kalidasa, a Sanskrit court poet of the fourth century CE, as 'the Shakespeare of India' in the Preface to his translation of *Sacontala, or the Fatal Ring* (1789).[23] The parallel is difficult to sustain, since Kalidasa wrote very few plays and is known principally for his long

[21] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 32.
[22] In Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Bankim Rachanavali* [Complete Works], vol. II, ed. J. C. Bagal (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 2004), 181. My translation.
[23] Kalidasa, *The Sacontala: or, the Fatal Ring*, trans. Sir William Jones, republished Jogendra Nath Ghose (Calcutta: Trübner & Co, 1875), iii.

narrative poems belonging to the golden age of Sanskrit poetry at the fabled court of Vikramaditya (usually identified with Chandragupta II, *c*.376–415 CE). Moreover, his plays bear the mark of a studied idealization of character on the lines recommended by that great manual of early Sanskrit theatre and the arts of performance, Bharata's *Natyashastra* (*c*. first century BCE). Nevertheless, the epithet 'Shakespeare of India' was repeated by the Sanskrit lexicographer Sir Monier Monier-Williams, and comparisons between Shakespeare and Kalidasa are standard to this day (attempted even by the well-known postcolonial theorist Harish Trivedi).[24] Parallels across periods and cultures – classic speaking to classic over the gulf of time – were not uncommon in late eighteenth century Europe, when Goethe greeted *Shakuntala* as the pinnacle of earthly and poetic perfection, but the anachronism of Jones's comparison appears studied and deliberate.[25] Kalidasa resembles Shakespeare, not the other way around. Not only is Shakespeare, as 'timeless' classic, the measure for all poets, he is co-opted into the Orientalist discovery of classical Sanskrit literature in late eighteenth-century Europe (later to be termed the Oriental Renaissance). The classic status of Kalidasa is deliberately affirmed in such a way as to resist and pre-empt Macaulay's own co-opting of 'Orientalist' knowledge when he dismissed all such comparisons in the following words: 'I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations.'[26] Jones and Monier-Williams were maintaining exactly what Macaulay held in such abhorrence, yet the parallel that Macaulay was to draw between Europe's rediscovery of the Greek and Latin classics, and India's discovery of English, is implicitly sustained. 'What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our tongue is to the people of India. The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity,' wrote Macaulay.[27] Paradoxically,

[24] See Harish Trivedi, 'Colonizing Love: *Romeo and Juliet* in Modern Indian Disseminations' and R. A. Malagi 'Toward a Terrestrial Divine Comedy: A Study of *The Winter's Tale* and *Shakuntalam*', in Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz (eds.), *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 74–91 and 123–40.

[25] See Dorothy Matilda Figueira, *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Sakuntala in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), on the European 'discovery' of Kalidasa.

[26] Macaulay, 'Minute', 349.

[27] Macaulay, 'Minute', 351.

therefore, the 'classical' perfection of Sanskrit must be claimed not by comparison to another classical language, but by invoking the 'classic' status of Shakespeare. Indeed, Richardson too asserted that

> The Indian students read our English poets, as English collegians read the poets of Greece or Rome, not only to familiarize their minds with beautiful images and pure and noble thoughts, but to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language in which the poetry is embodied.[28]

As in all accounts of the classic as opposed to the classical, what is at stake here is not antiquity but value, not time but money. At a time when courses on English literature are being initiated simultaneously in India and England, Shakespeare serves as an imperishable token of value in both, but for India, he also serves to *validate* what we might call a literary ideal.

Shakespeare and modernity

It is worth reflecting, then, on the forms of *folding*, or folded time that a renaissance – whether in Europe in the fifteenth century or in colonial India in the ninteenth – involves. The idea of a Bengal Renaissance was important to early and mid-ninteenth century writers and social reform movements, distant though it may have been from Macaulay's characteristically dismissive observations. Still, even for Macaulay (and William Bentinck, co-signatory to his 'Minute') any revival of arts and letters in India, on the model of that in fifteenth century Europe, could only be accomplished by borrowing, from not only a foreign but a modern literature. As a project of modernization this might seem more logical than looking back to classical antiquity, the method chosen by the Renaissance in Europe, a period also called Early Modern. What complicates the process is the *desire for the classic* (or perhaps, since desire is impossible to legislate, the tangled yearning for the classical as classic), exemplified in Bankimchandra's comparison of Shakuntala with Shakespeare's heroines Miranda and Desdemona (later taken forward by his friend Shrishchandra Majumdar in an essay called 'Miranda and Kapalakundala', 1880, and by

[28] Richardson, Preface, *Selections*, 16.

Rabindranath Tagore in his essay 'Shakuntala', 1902).[29] During the crucial years around 1864, Bankimchandra, whose sense of history was acute and unerring, had Shakespeare very much on his mind. His novel *Kapalakundala* (published 1866), set around the turn of the sixteenth century, when Portuguese ships carried on a flourishing trade in slaves from Bengal, drew the first part of its plot from *The Tempest*. In his own words: 'While writing *Kapalakundala* the author I most read was Shakespeare.'[30]

Bankimchandra was under no misconception regarding Shakespeare's time or his own: for him Bengal's 'Renaissance', which he placed in fifteenth-century Nabadvip, was already long past. He knew himself to inhabit the 'time-lagged' moment of colonial modernity and, like several contemporaries including Michael Madhusudan Dutt, he was untiring in his efforts to create a modern Bengali literature by subjecting indigenous materials to the impact of new genres and the thought-systems of the European enlightenment. But of all the authors who formed part of the colonial curriculum, it was Shakespeare who haunted Bankimchandra's imagination and became an unstated presence in his novels. In his late novella *Rajani* (1877), a young man called Amarnath leafs through a picture-book containing portraits of Shakespearean characters, and comments that painting cannot capture the nuances conveyed by speech or action. Perhaps recalling Lessing, whom he may have read, Bankimchandra suggests that visual representation is relatively static and incomplete compared with the complexity of Shakespearean characterization.[31] In many ways,

[29] Shrishchandra Majumdar, 'Miranda o Kapalakundala', *Bangadarsan*, Shravan 1287/ July–August 1880; see also Kshirodbihari Chattopadhyay, 'Kapalakundala o Miranda', *Bharatvarsha*, Agrahayan 1325/ November–December 1918; and Rabindranath Tagore, '*Shakuntala*', in *Rabindra Rachanavali* [Complete Works] (Calcutta: Vishvabharati, 1942), vol. 5, 521–37, and trans. Sukanta Chaudhuri, in Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri, Oxford Tagore Translations (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 237–51.

[30] As cited in J. K. Chakravarti (ed.), Kapalakundala (Calcutta: Shridhar Prakashani, 1967), 7. On Bankimchandra's debts to Shakespeare, see Supriya Chaudhuri, 'The Absence of Caliban: Shakespeare and Colonial Modernity', in R. S. White, Christa Jansohn and Richard Fotheringham (eds.), *Shakespeare's World/ World Shakespeares* (University of Delaware Press, 2008), 223–36.

[31] In Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Bankim Rachanavali* [Complete Works], vol. I, ed. J. C. Bagal (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 2003), 457. It is not impossible that Bankimchandra knew Lessing's *Laocoön: or the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766): for an English translation, see Gotthold Ephraim Lessing,

Bankimchandra's 'memory' of Shakespeare (providing, among much else, chapter epigraphs for his novels) functions as a site from which he draws material for a major social and historical project, the renewal of Bengali literature and the rewriting of national history. That task was completed by his younger contemporary Rabindranath Tagore, who stands in a more critical relation to Shakespeare, though as a boy of thirteen he was asked by his tutor to render *Macbeth* into Bengali verse. In his *Reminiscences*, published in 1912, Tagore speaks of the tremendous impact produced on the relatively narrow and staid social world of his youth by the passion and colour of Shakespearean drama, which he viewed not so much as classic or romantic, but as a form of modern baroque, marked by the 'working out of extravagantly vehement feelings to an inevitable conflagration'.[32]

Shakespeare and nineteenth-century theatre

It was this baroque extravagance that Shakespeare brought to the 'rebirth' of Indian theatre in the nineteenth century, offering new possibilities for the representation of emotion and event. On stage, Shakespeare has a formative role in three early traditions: performance in English on colonial stages, especially in Bombay and Calcutta during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, modern vernacular theatre, drawing on new dramatic writing as well as on Shakespeare in translation, and Parsi theatre, the first professional popular theatre in India. A yawning gulf separates all of these from the classical Sanskrit drama, and nineteenth-century theatre is largely a new creation, however much it might have been influenced by Bharata's *Natyashastra* and by popular performance styles. As Aniket Jaaware and Urmila Bhirdikar show in their discussion of Shakespeare in Maharashtra, Shakespeare formed the basis for a theorization of tragedy, unknown to classical Sanskrit dramatists, and even where the nine *rasas* were invoked, a complex understanding of the 'pleasure' of tragedy, the structure of plots, and the nature of evil (or the role of the villain)

Laocoön, Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm, ed. W. A. Steel (London: Dent, 1930), 1–110.

[32] Rabindranath Tagore, *Jivansmriti* [My Reminiscences], in *Rabindra Rachanavali* [Complete Works] (Calcutta: Vishvabharati, 1954), vol. XVII, 374–5.

emerges both from Marathi theatre in the later nineteenth century and from contemporary scholarship.[33] In fact, the tragedies had a durable popularity on stage; the first Shakespeare play to be translated into Marathi was *Othello*, by Mahadevshastri Kolhatkar in 1867.

In Bengal, Shakespeare, described by Tagore as 'represent[ing] for us the ideal of drama',[34] served as the agent of theatrical modernity for the colonial bourgeoisie. He cast a long shadow on the new Bengali theatre (initiated in 1872 with the founding of the National Theatre, after an abortive beginning in 1795 through a short-lived venture by the Russian impresario Herasim Lebedeff). Its middle-class audience, able to draw upon its own memories of the Shakespearean text from classroom or study, was frequently critical of the quality of adaptation. In 1854, the editor of the *Hindu Patriot* comments: 'Nothing will give us greater pleasure than to behold Shakespeare springing into new life under the histrionic talent of our educated countrymen, but we cannot calmly look on while the old gentleman is being murdered or mangled.'[35] Yet close adherence to the original (as in Girish Chandra Ghosh's staging of his translation of *Macbeth* in 1893 at the Minerva Theatre, in 'authentic' Scottish costume and using English stage conventions) was not necessarily well received, and more thoroughgoing adaptation of names, places and costumes usually fared better. Early Shakespeare translation was compelled to negotiate, implicitly if not explicitly, with both genre and substance – moral, philosophical and dramaturgic – of the Shakespearean text. One recourse was 'to recast the dramatic form into narrative and to assign it to a new and pseudo-Sanskritic subgenre' (as in Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar's choice of the term *vilasa* to categorize his narrative rendering of *The Comedy of Errors*, *Bhranti-vilasa*).[36] Even where

[33] See Aniket Jaaware and Urmila Bhirdikar, 'Shakespeare in Maharashtra, 1892–1927: A Note on a Trend in Marathi Theatre and Theatre Criticism', in Tom Bishop, Alexander Huang, Graham Bradshaw, and Sukanta Chaudhuri (eds.), *The Shakespearian International Yearbook*, 12 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 43–52.

[34] Rabindranath Tagore, Introduction to *Malini*, in *Rabindra Rachanavali* [Complete Works] (Calcutta: Vishvabharati, 1940), vol. IV, 136.

[35] Quoted by Sarottama Majumdar, 'That Sublime 'Old Gentleman': Shakespeare's Plays in Calcutta, 1775–1930', in Trivedi and Bartholomeusz (eds.), *India's Shakespeare*, 266–7.

[36] See Sisir Kumar Das, 'Shakespeare in Indian Languages', in Trivedi and Bartholomeusz (eds.), *India's Shakespeare*, 54.

the Sanskrit term for formal drama, *nataka*, is used, the problem of genre remains, especially since tragedy was not recognized by classical Sanskrit dramatists. On stage, there was little evidence of interest in the specifically historical and philosophical dimensions of Shakespearean drama: indeed the history plays were the least translated, only *Henry V* and *Richard II* being translated into Hindi and none into Bengali before 1962.

Most successful, of course, was the use of Shakespearean plots and characters by the Parsi theatre (performing in Gujarati, Urdu and Hindustani/Hindi), many of whose principals were well acquainted with Western stage techniques, using them to create a flamboyant stage spectacle, with dazzling props and costumes complemented by extravagant acting styles, music and dance. It was this Parsi theatre, flourishing in the second half of the nineteenth century right up to the first quarter of the twentieth, and extending its reach from India's western coast to Mandalay, Bangkok, Java and even southern Africa, which 'translated' the passion and violence of Shakespearean drama to create a new urban theatre of the masses. That this commercial theatre gave birth, at a certain remove, both to the Marathi *sangeet-natak* (a form of opera) and to the Bombay film is now recognized, though its texts, critically disdained in their time and not always written down, have largely not survived. If the Parsi theatre made Shakespeare popular (its greatest figure Agha Hashr Kashmiri (1879–1935) was awarded the title 'Indian Shakespeare' at a reception in Delhi) it did so by a policy of thoroughgoing adaptation, frequently converting his tragedies into comedies and adding sensational and extravagant action and music.[37]

The ghost of Shakespeare is everywhere in the theatre of the nineteenth century. At least six hundred translations of the plays were produced in different Indian languages, the greatest number in Bengali, followed by Marathi, Tamil and Hindi. Many more were adapted in prose versions, some based on Lamb's *Tales*, and aesthetic and metrical experimentation drew upon Shakespearean genres. But whether

[37] See Javed Malick, 'Appropriating Shakespeare Freely: Parsi Theater's First Urdu Play *Khurshid*' and Rajiva Verma, 'Shakespeare in Hindi Cinema', in Trivedi and Bartholomeusz (eds.), *India's Shakespeare*, 92–105 and 269–90; and Rajiva Verma, 'Shakespeare in Indian Cinema: Appropriation, Assimilation, and Engagement, in *The Shakespearian International Yearbook,* XII: 83–96.

or not his texts are directly translated or adapted, it is his dramatic 'example' that operates behind the new vernacular drama, and even behind some forms of fiction. Moreover, Shakespeare remained central to the university literature curriculum up to Independence and thereafter, though there was little or no academic recognition of the process of 'Indianization' by which he had been publicly assimilated. Indeed, pedagogy might appear to overcompensate for creative licence by excessive attention to the niceties of Shakespearean text, as exemplified in the meticulously annotated editions of Shakespeare produced by H. M. Percival, Professor of English at the Presidency College in Calcutta from 1880. Exceptional, as always, was Rabindranath Tagore's brief but pointed critique of *The Tempest* as a play of power in his essay on Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* (1902).

The Shakespeare Quatercentenary

Let us move forward to 1964, the Shakespeare Quatercentenary, an event celebrated in India by way of both academic tribute and stage festivity, in marked contrast to the 'silence' of 1864. It might seem, indeed, that the time was now ripe for the emergence of a political, re-historicized Shakespeare in the era of decolonization, after fifty years or so of relative neglect of his plays during a period of intense nationalist agitation in the first half of the twentieth century. In many respects 1964, marked by the death of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on 28 May, increased tension on India's borders with China and Pakistan, economic recession, and a split in the Communist Party of India, was a critical year for the Indian state. In this climate of gloom and apprehension, the Shakespeare Quatercentenary turned out to be an intensely *memorial* event. It drew, among much else, a special number on Shakespeare in Indian languages brought out by the Sahitya Akademi journal *Indian Literature*, as well as a catalogue of translations (with 670 listed items) published by the National Library of India. Other kinds of tribute were also forthcoming. A commercial company, Indian Oxygen Limited, brought out a special number of *Oxygen News*, while a scholarly *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume* was edited by Taraknath Sen and published in 1966 from Presidency College, Calcutta, formerly the Hindu College where Derozio and Richardson had taught. There were numerous collections of critical essays, including

Shakespeare: A Book of Homage from Jadavpur University and the suggestively titled *Shakespeare Came to India*, edited by C. D. Narasimhaiah. Each of these publications sought to review a long history of transactions with Shakespeare on the Indian subcontinent, in effect laying claim to a Shakespearean inheritance. The tone was generally respectful, and the difficulty of negotiating a colonial legacy was eased by a strong claim for Shakespeare's universality. 'For the England of trade, commerce, imperialism and the penal code has not endured but the imperishable Empire of Shakespeare will always be with us', Narasimhaiah wrote approvingly.[38]

Of these books, the least memorial in content was actually the explicitly titled *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume*, mainly a collection of scholarly essays on Shakespeare without any specific Indian focus, but prefaced by an introduction that asserted a century and a half's tradition of Shakespeare pedagogy at the Presidency (earlier Hindu) College. In that introduction, Taraknath Sen, himself a justly celebrated scholar and teacher of Shakespeare, asserted a pedagogic tradition beginning with Richardson in the nineteenth century and extending through C. H. Tawney, H. M. Percival, and Manmohan Ghosh to the 'greatness and power' of Praphullachandra Ghosh in the early twentieth century.[39] Collectively, the histories of translation, adaptation and pedagogy made a strong case for the cultural embedding of Shakespeare in vernacular literary and dramatic practice, characteristically expressed as a proprietary claim, whether of Shakespeare to India or of India to Shakespeare. There is certainly some editorial unease about Shakespeare as colonial legacy, most commonly resolved by the counter-assertion of an imperishable literary empire of which India continues to be part. Fashioned as part of the celebratory *politesse* of official quatercentenary literature, these assertions seem today to be painfully uncritical and unreflecting. But what was achieved as part of this claim, an actual inventory of Shakespearean translation, adaptation and (to a lesser extent) commentary, that is an *archive*, was more important. In effect, this archive gave textual substance to cultural memory, unquestionably demonstrating more than a century's work with Shakespeare in the languages of the

[38] C. D. Narasimhaiah (ed.), *Shakespeare Came to India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964), 5.
[39] Sen (ed.), *Shakespeare Commemoration Volume*, vii–xii.

sub-continent, work that, in its many angles of deployment, its gaps and silences, its transformations and distortions, could serve as a memory-site for the future. For the colonial intelligentsia, and even for the middle bourgeoisie, Shakespeare is indeed a memory-site in Pierre Nora's sense, a repository of the specific histories and engagements that had worked to produce the complex substance of 'colonial modernity'.

Yet it is arguable that the Quatercentenary in fact stood more or less at the culmination of a process of *liberation* from Shakespeare, rather than, as Rosa García-Periago has argued, his rebirth and 'Indianization' on the postcolonial stage.[40] Though 1964 was an intensely memorial year, Shakespeare's affable familiar ghost was, in the long run, in the process of being relegated to the status of an occasional visitant, rather than revived as genius of the stage, which he was for the theatre of the nineteenth century. The quatercentenary year itself, 1964, produced some respectful enactments, such as Ebrahim Alkazi's *Raja Lear* in Urdu for the National School of Drama, played in Western costume. In Bengal, the Marxist Utpal Dutt, who had begun his career playing Shakespeare in English with Geoffrey Kendall's Shakespeareana company in 1947, was by the 1950s taking Bengali Shakespeares from metropolitan locations to small towns and villages, using the open, *jatra* setting to emphasize the popular and social elements of the plays. Records for the Quatercentenary show a large number of adaptations for vernacular stages, in addition to performances in English by local groups and touring companies. Dutt's Little Theatre Group, linked to the Marxist Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) called on 17 April for a mass meeting to celebrate Shakespeare's fourth centenary at the foot of the Ochterlony Monument in Calcutta, where scenes from *Othello* were enacted.[41] This commenced one of several Shakespeare festivals during that year, with further full performances of *Othello*, *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet*, all translated by Dutt, at the Minerva Theatre. A review of

[40] See Rosa García-Periago, 'The Re-birth of Shakespeare in India: Celebrating and Indianizing the Bard in 1964', *Sederi* (*Yearbook of the Spanish and Portunguese Society for English Renaissance Studies*)**22** (2012), 51–68.

[41] For an account, see Lal and Chaudhuri (eds.), *Shakespeare on the Calcutta Stage*, 78. For Dutt's theatre ideology, see Utpal Dutt, *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2009).

Julius Caesar commended the performers' success in giving a 'modern shape to the ideological struggle' by locating the play in a fascist country.[42] The IPTA also independently staged *Julius Caesar* in a more humble proletarian location on the outskirts of the city on 23 April, announcing a month-long Shakespeare festival of its own. Dutt's Shakespeare, despite its agitprop roots and its political commitment to what its maker called 'Third Theatre', took no great liberties with the text or settings, though Dutt, like the IPTA, was influential in creating a politically engaged theatre of the people for the twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, it was from Bertolt Brecht that he borrowed the term (though not the form) 'epic theatre'.

Postcolonial Shakespeares

Yet paradoxically, to remember Shakespeare in 1964 was also to create the conditions for forgetting him. Certainly post-Independence urban theatre, receptive on the one hand to contemporary influences from Europe and attempting, on the other, to 'rediscover' indigenous performative traditions, such as *jatra*, *yakshagana*, *kathakali*, *nautanki* and much else, never re-established Shakespeare as cultural master-text in the way that colonial theatre inevitably had. Rather, experimentation with Shakespeare in some of these styles, such as B. V. Karanth's production of *Macbeth* (*Barnam Vana*) in *yakshagana* style at the National School of Drama in 1979, or Habib Tanvir's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as *Kamdev ka Apna, Basant Ritu ka Sapna* (1993, revived 1995 and many times thereafter) using an eclectic mix of folk theatre traditions and with tribal actors, or Sadanand Balakrishnan's Kathakali *Othello* (1996), and Lokendra Arambam's Manipuri *Macbeth, Stage of Blood* (1997), produced distinctive and extremely memorable Shakespeares that have been exhaustively written about in the context of postcolonial re-appropriation. For Shakespeare was not, of course, actually forgotten: he remained a significant cultural property, open to new kinds of indigenization and 're-purposing' in radically altered political and social contexts. But Shakespeare was not in any sense 'reborn' in 1964, nor did the Quatercentenary actually *commence* the process of indigenization and decolonization. Rather, he had been indigenized from the start, but decolonization

[42] Cited in Lal and Chaudhuri (eds.), *Shakespeare on the Calcutta Stage*, 109.

reduced his cultural importance and ubiquity, making him part of a dramatic repertoire that could be fitted to new contexts, genres, and performative styles.

I would like to suggest that time – postcolonial time, with its inescapable emphasis upon historicity, belatedness, and rupture, constitutes the necessary context for understanding post-Independence Shakespeares. Histories of Shakespeare adaptation, which naturally focus on striking individual productions, often do not convey sufficiently the *relative* place of Shakespeare with respect to adaptations from many other languages, and the nature of experimentation and originality in vernacular theatre in the phase of decolonization. While attention has been drawn to outstanding individual adaptations of Shakespeare, it should be noted that Brecht, Pirandello, Lorca, and to some extent Greek tragedy share space on the modernist stage with remarkable revivals of folk, traditional and even classical styles and materials. Between 1947 and 1980 there is a marked decline in translation activity, fewer actual performances, and, above all, less dependence on Shakespeare as a formative element in theatre culture.

It was not until the 1990s that India was caught up in another kind of engagement, this time with what might be called global Shakespeare, a distinctive and much-analysed phenomenon which leaves its mark as much upon the cinema as the theatre. We may think particularly of Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (*Macbeth*), *Omkara* (*Othello*), and now his Kashmiri *Haider* (*Hamlet*).[43] These films suggest that Shakespeare is not forgotten, yet we should note that postcolonial remembrance is always a form of betrayal. Instead of the layered, or sedimented memory of the archive, so painstakingly built up through the nineteenth century, we have the instantaneous presence we are more accustomed to associate with the internet, or with its digital toy, the hyperlink. Global Shakespeare inhabits its own time, which is the time of the eternally contemporary, the time of the remake or remix. This is not Benjamin's *jetzeit*, a past charged with the time of now. It might seem that Shakespeare's continued presence takes its toll from the cultures of memory, but this is not quite so in practice. Rather, the Shakespeare of the contemporary Bombay film deliberately

[43] See Supriya Chaudhuri, 'What Bloody Man is That? *Macbeth*, *Maqbool*, and Shakespeare in India', in *The Shakespearian International Yearbook*, XII: 97–113.

erodes nostalgia, obliterating any awareness of the text's existence in historical, sedimented time. In such transactions, Shakespeare is no longer a classic in the old sense, that of the culture of veneration: rather, he is part of that constantly circulating capital that no one precisely owns, but on whom literary, theatrical or cinematic fortune may depend.