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“You have served me well:” The Shakespeare Empire in Central Europe¹

Abstract: Shakespeare has often served as an instrument of cultural colonialism. In this essay I argue that the current practice of Shakespeare studies in many ways replicates this pattern. By priming the discourse through Shakespeare, it perpetuates logocentric regimes of knowledge that tend to impose reductive perspectives—such as the binaries of Shakespeare’s original–adaptation and that of the author–adapter, but also scripture–exegesis, London–province or London–Continent, centre–periphery and empire–colonial subjects. Drawing on case studies from five centuries—of sixteenth- and seventeenth-

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Give me thy hand.

Thou hast been rightly honest. – So hast thou. –

Thou, and thou, and thou: you have served me well,

And kings have been your fellows. (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4:2:13-16)

His is the patronising, self-gratifying voice of the empire.



century travelling performers, through eighteenth-century German theatre, to twentieth- and twenty-first-century writing and performance, I argue for a need to revisit the logocentric and colonial epistemology. I call for breaking away from the critical heritage of the “Shakespeare Empire,” for reconceptualising how we use Shakespeare, and for refocusing our critical attentions to the thick descriptions of cultures and crafts that make and host Shakespeare.

Keywords: Shakespeare in Europe, travelling actors, Shakespeare in performance, Shakespeare in translation, adaptation, historiography, logocentrism, decolonisation, recrafting.

Introduction

In his inspiring book on the history of black music in Britain since 1945, Jeffrey Boakye reflects on the uses of music:

Music can be a *celebration*.
 Music can be a way of talking about *oppression*.
 Music can be a type of *resistance*. (Boakye 6)

In tracing the various uses, Boakye manages to write an incisive critical history of multiracial British culture by drawing on and critiquing the colonial binaries of Black and British. He offers a powerful polemic with the mainstream accounts. He does so by showing how music has served to embody the aspirations, tensions and contentions, clashes and achievements of Black peoples, who—despite the officially sanctioned whitewashing—have for millenia shaped Britain.²

Boakye’s work is part of an important movement of decolonising and diversifying histories—an intellectual current that is fortunately also having an impact on Shakespeare studies.³ The decolonisation of Shakespeare is a project perhaps most visible in connection with Critical Race Theory, but it extends far beyond and far deeper. A number of outstanding scholars and writers have shown the systemic links between colonial racism, imperialism and the European Enlightenment.⁴ The Enlightenment construction of Shakespeare as

² For more on black history of Britain, see David Olusoga’s *Black and British* (2016) and Kehinde Andrews’s *The New Age of Empire* (2021).

³ See the work of Patricia Akhimie, Dennis Britton, Kim F. Hall, Sujata Iyengar, Farah Karim-Cooper, Noémie Ndiaye and Ayanna Thompson, to name a few, and the work of the RaceB4Race initiative (<https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race>).

⁴ Apart from discussions with colleagues, the writers who have influenced me the most are the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, the writer and thinker Amitav Ghosh, and the historian Jürgen Osterhammel.

a secular classic—or rather, a crypto-Protestant one, irrespective of historical evidence—has left its mark not only on the colonised lands, cultures and bodies of the British Empire, but also on a greater part of the world affected by the spread of English and the associated cultural colonisation. Boakye’s aforementioned uses of music can easily be reworded: by substituting “Shakespeare” for “music” we get a formulation of the agenda that has come to shape the majority of Shakespeare studies in English written by scholars from outside the Anglosphere. In many ways, this agenda is part and parcel of the Enlightenment project, from the emancipation of nation states to the Cold War (cf. Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 137).

In this essay I will focus more specifically on Shakespeare in Central Europe, though many of the observations and theoretical implications could be extended to other parts of the global Shakespeare Empire. While I acknowledge and respect the importance of studies that document “the Enlightenment Shakespeare” (and I have myself contributed to that agenda), there comes a point where one needs a breath of new air—especially more than three decades after the much-proclaimed and hubristic declaration of the “End of History” and the end of the Cold War. How many conference papers and journal articles can one read and enjoy of “Shakespeare as a space of freedom in tyranny,” of “Shakespeare misused and abused by oppressive regimes” or of “Shakespeare as the secret ally and champion against Communism”? Inasmuch as these studies are valuable in themselves and serve an important role of crossing borders and making oneself understandable to colleagues abroad, they are necessarily telling only one part of the history. Within international Shakespeare studies, this discourse effectively reinforces cultural colonialism. I would argue that it belittles the autonomy of the individual case studies—the translations, adaptations or productions: in short, the creative acts in their own right. There are several casualties in that agenda. By foregrounding Shakespeare—the global classic from England with his powers of spreading humanist, enlightened or democratic values—other values move to the background:

the *cultures* and *practices* that engendered them;
the *crafts* necessary to create the work (the translation, the adaptation or the production); and,
the *complexity* and *interpretive openness* of the historic moment *here and now*.

How could we decolonise Shakespeare and move beyond this restrictive agenda? And more heretically: What use is Shakespeare? Why should we continue to talk about it internationally? What can we say to one another about “our Shakespeares”?

In what follows, I react to the oppressive hubris and tedium of the inherited agenda and call for a radical break from its prescriptive categories of what uses Shakespeare can serve—or indeed *what* that “Shakespeare” can and

should be. I draw on several Shakespearean examples from the last 450 years to show how the inherited epistemology has restricted our perspective and obliterated the cultures that created those examples. I argue for a need to move beyond the logocentric and Enlightenment legacy in order to recognise the autonomy of the creative acts that work with Shakespeare. By extension, I ask to reconsider how we conceptualise Shakespeare and the surrounding cultural heritage.

The Logocentric Hubris

Four hundred years ago, the 1623 publication of *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* laid the groundwork for a logocentric study of Shakespeare. The gradual establishment of this monumental work as a literary canon in the Enlightenment century—a hundred years after his death—and the “making of the national poet” (to use Michael Dobson’s phrase) has been the subject of many important critical studies.⁵ That process, however, has gone hand in hand with the increasing logocentrism of our Western epistemology. Serious knowledge in the West has become language-based and written to such an extent that in his contribution to the volume *Crisis in the Humanities*, published in 1964—coincidentally the year of a great Shakespeare anniversary—the British-Czech philosopher Ernest Gellner provocatively observed that:

Language [...] is culture. [...] The humanist intellectual is, essentially, an expert on the written word. [...] A literate society possesses a firmer backbone through time than does an illiterate one. (Gellner cited in Gare 21)

Sure enough, most Shakespeare scholars are well aware that the plays were written for performance and have gained their global cultural prominence in performance, not only as literary works, but the *study* has been essentially rooted in its written form.⁶ The written form offers a firmer grip on the knowledge.

⁵ The bibliography would be too long to list here. Emma Smith’s *Shakespeare’s First Folio* (2015, 2023), her edited volume *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s First Folio* (2016), Peter Kirwan’s *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Apocrypha* (2015) and Emma Depledge and Peter Kirwan’s edited volume *Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade, 1640-1740* (2017) are as good a starting point as any in regards to the establishment of the Shakespearean canon. The construction of Shakespeare as a national figure is the subject of Michael Dobson’s classical *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (1992) or Gary Taylor’s *Reinventing Shakespeare* (1991).

⁶ Lukas Erne’s argument on the formation of the play scripts *as we know them from print* is also relevant in this context. See his two books *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (2003) and *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (2013).

It is beyond the scope of this essay to go deeper into our logocentric epistemology. Words—scriptures, literary formulation, as well as the rigorous regimes of textual production and publication—have become the primary medium of Western knowledge, often at the expense of the organic complexity of life and culture. I have analysed some of the issues elsewhere⁷ and have taken issue with the widely accepted logocentric theory of performatives as developed by J. L. Austin’s and John Searle’s Speech Act Theory. Their theory of performatives acknowledges but methodologically marginalises the situation—i.e., the external conditions, the context, and the political and sociocultural circumstances. In brief, performatives do *not* do things in their own name and by themselves, but only as the ostensive, published manifestations of the predicament. It is that *predicament*—i.e., the interaction and its setup—that deserves the methodological first place and prominence. Reducing a theory of action to an action of words pronounced under felicitous conditions, as Speech Act Theory does, is a hubristic trick inherited from European Enlightenment. It *divides* the complexity of things into controllable and legible parts, and *rules* over them with a set of a priori protocols. Or, as Amitav Ghosh writes on account of the “European Enlightenment’s predatory hubris” and the men who built colonial cities like Mumbai, New York, Boston or Kolkata:

[T]hey were trained to break problems into smaller and smaller puzzles until a solution presented itself. This is a way of thinking that deliberately excludes things and forces (“externalities”) that lie beyond the horizon of the matter at hand. (Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* 56)

In a similar way, no matter how much some Shakespeareans have stressed the need to build on the “authority of performance” (Worthen), old habits die hard: “the logocentrism of the Abrahamic religions in general, and the Protestant Reformation in particular” (Ghosh 84) has continued to firmly hold sway. Studying Shakespeare is crucially tied with textual exegesis. In an uncanny way, the Shakespearean canon has become a secular “scripture” (the scare quotes signal irony, not endorsement): with a “divinely inspired creator,” often referred to as the “Bard.” “His” birth—and it is certainly “he,” a white male—was

⁷ So far, I have dedicated four separate studies to the subject. For a historiography of non-textual performance, see my essay “Modelling the World Through Play” (2020). For a critique of Speech Act Theory and its colonial hubris, see “Heterotelic Models as Performatives” (2021). For the historiographic consequences of our logocentric history-writing and a methodological suggestion, see “Transnationality: Intercultural Dialogues, Encounters and the Theatres of Curiosity” (2023). And for a critical account of my practical exploration that goes beyond logocentrism, see “Performative Models and Physical Fictions” (2023). For a criticism of and an attack on Linguistic Philosophy, see Gellner.

established to coincide with the feast of the national patron saint (23 April), irrespective of verifiable historic truth, and although his roots lay in a town “in the heart of England” (to quote from the Royal Shakespeare Company website), his creative life was firmly rooted in London, the bustling centre of an aspiring nation state and a burgeoning empire. It comes as no surprise then that Shakespeare studies has more often than not operated along the imperial routes: the canonical scripture and its exegesis; the master playwright “for all time” and his disciples; and London as the centre that reaches out to its global peripheries. Many studies as well as works have been dedicated to the colonial uses of Shakespeare: the Shakespearean canon has served as a tool for spreading Enlightenment in its positive and negative aspects. As such Shakespeare became a global classic in the sense of an ‘entrance ticket to modernity:’ a scripture used to codify civil ways of speaking and behaving, as well as to shape individuals’ intellectual horizons, interiority and feeling (in the sense of Harold Bloom’s *invention of humanity*). Knowing, admiring, having, reading, thinking though, performing—in short, keeping company with—Shakespeare has become a certain sign of being modern.⁸

This is to state the obvious, but those habitual epistemological patterns have persistently crept in and continue to determine how we study, think and write about Shakespeare.

An Interlude on Crafting and Recrafting

Picture a scene in early modern London, perhaps a tavern, maybe a playhouse run by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men or the King’s Men. The key players are present, many of them are shareholders in the company, among them William Shakespeare:

Shakespeare: I have a new play.

Someone: What is it?

Shakespeare: What I told you some time ago. It’s *Romeo and Juliet* [or *Hamlet*, *King Lear* or pretty much any other play].

Someone: Good. A remake. “Money is in keeping old ideas fresh.” Good.⁹

Shakespeare: You see, “all my best is dressing old words new.” [Sonnet 76: 11]¹⁰

⁸ The notion of being modern has also come under serious criticism. See Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991), and its postcolonial critical use in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement* (2016) and *The Nutmeg’s Curse* (2021).

⁹ By way of acknowledgement I would like to thank TV director and producer Tom Atkinson for alerting me to this truism of the TV industry.

¹⁰ All quotations of Shakespeare and line numberings are from *The RSC Shakespeare* edition.

Someone: Who is in it?

Shakespeare: I have written it with you in mind. Everyone is in it with what they can do.

Shakespeare—alone, or together with others—used his theatre crafts of a producer (to use the modern word), player (to use the old one), poet and playwright to create a play on the basis of older works, that would give him, his colleagues and their company an opportunity to play to their strengths, appeal to audiences and venture (or “test”) their collaborative powers of performance.¹¹ That meant taking into account what individuals actors could offer; what the affordance of the staging was; what the unseen labour of theatre making was (the “labours lost,” to cite Natasha Korda); and of course the fine, ineffable tissue of what would “surprise” and land well with the audience.¹² It would be unthinkable to reduce the company’s interaction to Shakespeare as the “solitary genius” who creates new dramatic texts, and the actors as reproductive artists that give their bodies to the creation.¹³ Apart from being one of the acting company, Shakespeare was a self-proclaimed adapter who reworked older plays and stories, so to inscribe an aura of originality would be hubristic. The originality was in the *craft*—or rather, in the *recrafting*—of the plays. Also, many of the plays were published without his name given—not necessarily a sign of flawed acknowledgement, neglect or misappropriation, but perhaps a sign of modesty and an indirect signal that the plays are reworking old material with the help of the company and their craft—which tends to get acknowledged on the title pages of early prints in such formulations as: “As it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publicquely, by the right Honourable the L. of *Hunsdon* his Seruants” (the 1597 Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*) or “As it was Plaide by the Right Honourable the Earle of *Darbie*, Earle of *Pembrooke*, and Early of *Sussex* their Seruants” (the 1594 Quarto of *Titus Andronicus*).

I would argue that the logocentric foisting of authorship upon Shakespeare, with the accompanying properties of originality, singularity and godlike creation, should be replaced by a focus on the crafts involved, on the

¹¹ Adam Railton, currently working on his doctoral project at the University of Hull, under my and Lisa Hopkins’s supervision, focuses on the collaborative nature of early modern theatre making. He has alerted me to the word *test*, used by actor Joseph Taylor in his prefatory verses to Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (published 1629). As Adam argues, Taylor uses the noun *test* to highlight the tentative, “what if” nature of the venture of performing plays.

¹² For the unseen and mostly women’s labour in the Elizabethan playhouse, see Natasha Korda’s *Labors Lost* (2011).

¹³ I am using the expression *solitary genius* in the sense of Jack Stillinger (1991). For a more recent treatment of the Romantic cult of the creator, see Maarten Doorman’s *De romantische orde* (The Romantic Order, 2004).

relationality of the sources and Shakespeare's *recrafting*, and on the interactive cooperation of the company and the entire environment.¹⁴ To approach his plays as *recrafting* would offer perspectives that are more organic and that wouldn't "deliberately exclude[] things and forces ('externalities')" (Ghosh) and continue to conceal the "labours lost" (Korda) that are integral to the creative process.

Shakespeare in Central Europe

In his cultural history of *Hamlet* in Germany from the 1770s onwards, Peter Marx documents how, over a period of almost three centuries, Shakespeare's tragedy has served German intellectuals as the matrix of questions that probed into the political, cultural and personal spheres and offered a poetic, literary and theatrical, as well as public space for self-reflection. "Deutschland ist Hamlet," declared Ferdinand Freilingrath famously in his 1844 poem, and the ghost of *Hamlet* the play (no pun intended) has continued to haunt Germany in its path to self-understanding. No wonder then that finding evidence of *Hamlet* in Germany before the reception in the Enlightenment age—in the wake of David Garrick's revival of the "national poet"—became an occupation for generations of German theatre historians. When did *Hamlet* first "arrive" on the Continent? When did Shakespeare's plays spread across the Channel? When did the English actors first cross the Channel and how did they shape Continental culture, and specifically the culture of Germany? The hunt is still on.

It won't come as a surprise that much of the search has been text-based and literary, even if the claims made extend far beyond the literary realm. So, for instance, Ralf Haekel, in his 2004 book *Die Englischen Komödianten in Deutschland*, argues for the English actors as key players in the establishment of German professional theatre. While Haekel's work with sources is exemplary, his focus is logocentric: even though he is making an argument for *the theatrical profession*, his study does not reflect on theatrical practice. Similarly, June Schlueter's meticulous studies of surviving play scripts (see Schlueter, "New Light" and Schlueter, "Across the Narrow Sea") infer far-reaching conclusions for early modern theatre practice, but without involving the theatrical and interactive aspects of the craft or the broader transnational contexts. On account of the 1620 anthology of *Englische Comedien und Tragedien*, which Schlueter tacitly takes for performance scripts that could have been written by the actors themselves, she suggests that the English actors "would have known what pleased their German audiences" (Schlueter, "Across the Narrow Sea" 237; see also Drábek, "Why, sir" 143).

¹⁴ I am using the notion of *craft* and *cooperation* in the sense of Richard Sennett and his Homo Faber trilogy.

As David Mann says in his book on the Elizabethan player, “Too much attention to the text [...] can distort our view of its place in the performance” (Mann 1). The bias implicit in looking for English actors—or more specifically, the potential cultural diplomats of Shakespeare’s dramatic literature in early modern German-speaking Europe—distorts our view even more. It tends to bypass the study of the live theatrical culture that was able and open to receive any such transnational influence. And in so doing, such studies ignore the fact that the existing theatre probably already contained what the researcher focused on: the English actors identified as the English actors’ novel import. Much of it could well have been there already—if only we abandon Shakespeare and see what there is before the ‘first encounter.’ If the record says that a company of English actors performed “a play about the Jew,” after a few iterations of logocentric mulling-over this record becomes a possible reference to a performance of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. One wonders though: Were there no other English plays about Jews that the English actors could perform, or were the other, non-Shakespearean plays a goods too common and not worthy of cultural importation? And also: Had there been no other non-English plays on the subject that were already in circulation? Why should Shakespeare’s *Merchant* be so prominent? How likely is it that an early modern audience would, by default, share the modern researcher’s enthusiasm for Shakespeare, or that the early modern actors would assume that Shakespeare’s plays were what audiences in Dresden, Graz, Danzig (Gdańsk) or Laibach (Ljubljana) were hungry for? Let us point out that even among the English playwrights Shakespeare wasn’t the prime export article. The plays of Thomas Kyd, Thomas Dekker, William Rowley and James Shirley left a much more significant mark on seventeenth-century German theatre.¹⁵

I would argue that this wishful search for Shakespeare and for London plays in Germany—as mediated by English actors—is flawed, and that in a colonial sense. Ignoring what there is and not starting with a thick description of the receiving culture is a blindness of a colonial kind. It goes with a tacit, but very violent assumption that ‘what we have to offer to you is better.’ The long and blood-soaked history of Western colonisation has ridden on such wilful, arrogant blindness that imposed on the colonised an allegedly superior religion, culture, literature or art. And it is shocking that this blindness still persists nowadays in academic studies, with questions such as: Had there been “genuine” religion or “genuine” culture in the Americas, in the Far East, or in Africa? How “genuine” or “valid” they were is to be judged on European Enlightenment terms—no doubt about that. A similar affair—without the violence and

¹⁵ For Kyd abroad, see Nicoleta Cinpoș’s edited volume *Doing Kyd*. For Dekker, Rowley and Shirley, see Bärbel Rudin’s “Die Textbibliothek.”

bloodshed—is apparent in the study of English actors on the Continent. The approach is flawed for other reasons too:

(1) *National*. What does “English” mean in this context? Let us leave aside the complex problem of the formation of nation states that may appear as a given now but were far from such before the late seventeenth century. If, for instance, in June 1588, three actors asked for permission to perform (jump, dance and make a play with a wooden horse) at the festivities in Strasburg, what nationality can we assume? The record lists them as “Hanns Brosem von Eystett, Martin Brenner und Lienhart Nollus von Hull aus Engelland” (Brand and Rudin 23). Does it mean then that Hanns Brosem was German (for he was from Eichstätt in Bavaria), and that Martin Brenner and Lienhart Nollus were English (as they were from Hull)? Or is it that they had passports from the two cities? Can we conclude that Brenner and Nollus were “English actors”? Let us not forget that claiming to be foreign and exotic is a marketable commodity in performance—irrespective of whether it is true or not. If the English actor Robert Browne’s daughter Jane spent most of her life in Germany, the Netherlands and, after the death of her husband Robert Reynolds, in Warsaw with the King’s allowance, is she to be viewed as an “English” person? Is Thomas Dekker, whose parents were probably Dutch and he himself may have been born in London, but also anywhere else, to be seen as “English”? What nationality is the late-seventeenth century musician and composer Geoffrey Finger (c1660-1730)? He was born Gottfried Finger in Olmütz (Olomouc; parents’ ethnicity unknown), before coming to London in around 1687 he had a career in Germany, and died in Mannheim. He would probably introduce himself as “of Munich,” and a decade later as “of London.” So what is he in our logocentric history? German? Czech? Moravian? English? or whatever nationality his parents happened to be?

(2) *National-Cultural*. Does it mean that English actors play English plays—i.e., plays from the London stage? What does “Englishness” mean in the theatre? I have discussed both questions in an earlier essay (Drábek, “Why, sir”) and have argued that, just like “Italian comedy,” the “English comedy” was a style, not an assignation of origin, let alone of the language. What is remarkable about the repertoire of “English actors” in Germany, many of whom were born in continental Europe (such as Johann Schilling or Johann Georg Gettner), is how many of the plays had their antecedents in the area. The *Faustus* play, popular among central European puppeteers ever since, had been a German story before Marlowe’s stage adaptation. There had also been numerous plays about a magician selling his soul to the devil (Drábek, “English Comedy” 186). Dekker’s and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr* about the martyr St Dorothea had been a popular subject of vernal festivities before the English actors brought their version—which immediately got adapted to suit local theatrical practices (see Neuhuber 131-140). There are numerous examples (see Drábek and

Katritzky, and Drábek, “Transnationality” 642-643), and to ignore the existing culture in favour of a narrative of “English plays on the Continent” would be missing the basic principles of theatre.

(3) *Professional*. To be a “player” did not automatically mean to be a theatre actor, let alone a theatre actor of spoken drama. The English word also referred to musicians, as did the German expressions of *Spieler*, *Lustmacher* or *Instrumentist*—the latter of which was also used to stage actors (Spohr). Bärbel Rudin has convincingly shown that the travelling actors throughout the early modern era were far from one-dimensional and specialised in their activities, but combined different performative activities—not only spoken and sung drama, but also dance, acrobatics and mechanical displays with puppets and automata (Rudin). Our anachronistic assumptions that to be called an “actor” (or “player”) came with a specific profession and craft is another example of logocentric blindness. When I asked one of the general editors of the REED project (Records of Early English Drama) about the taxonomies and the assumed divisions of labour, they admitted that the inclusion or exclusion of “puppeteers” and other “non-dramatic” (their word) performers was in principle at the discretion of the editors of the individual volume. The consequences for our understanding of the theatrical cultures are far-reaching. In an unpublished lecture “The Challenge of Simultaneity: Writing Theatre History beyond the Grand Récit” delivered at the University of Hull (29 April 2015), Peter Marx—probably responding to my own myopic vision of English actors—laid out the theatrical and performance scene in Cologne in the 1620s. By switching off the historiographic filter of searching for English actors, the early modern city sprung to life with unexpected performative activity at least as worthy of historical study, only without the colonial ghost of Shakespeare and English theatre haunting it. Without the filter, even the activities of the English players become much more diverse and vivid—as M.A. Katritzky has documented in a number of publications.

Despite the apparent methodological problems with searching for Shakespeare in early modern Europe, the efforts are unceasing. Arden Shakespeare has launched a much needed series, in collaboration with a research project (<https://www.unige.ch/emgs/>) led by Lukas Erne at the University of Geneva. The Arden series is named after the project, Early Modern German Shakespeare. To date, two volumes have come out, with meticulously translated, edited and annotated scripts of four anonymous early modern German plays that have a link to Shakespeare:

Volume 1: *Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet: Der Bestrafte Brudermord and Romio und Julieta in Translation* (ed. Lukas Erne and Kareen Seidler, 2020) containing the eighteenth-century text of *Der bestrafte Brudermord* (Fratricide Punished) and the 1680s south Bohemian play *Romio und Julietta*.

Volume 2: *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*: *Tito Andronico and Kunst über alle Künste, ein böß Weib gut zu machen in Translation* (ed. Lukas Erne, Florence Hazrat and Maria Shmygol) with the 1620 version of *Titus Andronicus* from the anthology of *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*, and the 1672 German play translated as *An Art Beyond All Arts, to Make a Bad Wife Good*.

The researchers and volume editors are very aware of the contexts in which the German adaptations of Shakespeare's plays were created and they cannot be faulted for a lack of attention to detail, or awareness of the contentions:

While little is known about the identity of Shakespeare's early modern German translators and adaptors, the plays published in this and its companion volume bear witness to the ingenuity of their dramatic engagement with Shakespeare's drama. (Erne, Hazrat and Shmygol xix)

It is welcome that these little known German plays, clearly related to Shakespeare's, have received such critical attention and are now available in English.¹⁶ It is not their critical diligence, but rather the epistemological setup—and the priming through inherited concepts—that is the problem. Locating the autonomous identity of the German plays within a Shakespearean pedigree skews the portrait of the cultures that engendered them.¹⁷ While the editors very carefully study how Shakespeare's plays were adapted to their German versions and acknowledge the contexts in which they emerged, the casualties are evident. The editors foreground:

As scholars have come to realize, many of Shakespeare's English texts embed within themselves the contributions of actors, revisers and adapters. They are socialized products, in keeping with the eminently socialized art form that is theatre. We have been used to thinking of Shakespeare's socialized early modern texts as purely English, but such monolingualism imposes upon them a restriction that simply does not square with the international traffic of early modern theatre companies and their plays. From the late sixteenth century, plays that were performed in commercial theatres in London also had an existence elsewhere, not only in the provinces but also on the Continent, and in particular its German-speaking parts. (xvi)

The editors carefully establish everything there is to discretely know about the context—i.e., everything for which there is relevant factual evidence. Yet,

¹⁶ The second volume, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, is also fully available in Open Access.

¹⁷ See also my review of the first volume in *Early Theatre* (2022) (Drábek, "Lukas Erne").

the primary angle is Shakespeare and the diaspora of his plays. In the following sentence, which draws on a topical reference to Brexit, the editors stress that:

it seems a good moment to remember that Shakespeare’s plays have always also been European, and that we have much to gain from recovering the life they led on the Continent. (xvi)

I thoroughly agree that there is much to gain, but the Shakespearean lens is unfortunate and—as I have shown—reductive in understanding the complex cultural organisms of the region and the time. The *crafts* that enabled those plays—the live theatrical culture without which none of them would have come to be—are labours lost and excluded from the project’s purview. From a theoretical point of view—taking the word *theory* in its original sense of *observing* and *viewing*—Shakespeare on the Continent (or rather our logocentric construction of Shakespeare) has helped scorch the cultural landscape that actually hosted “Shakespeare” and gave his plays a new life.

Shakespeare among the Actors

In her remarkable book, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: The King’s Men*, Lucy Munro not only goes a long way to make up for the critical neglect of the period between Shakespeare’s supposed retirement from the stage in 1613 and the 1660 reopening of the London theatres after the Civil War. Her book also very carefully documents the process in which Shakespeare’s plays came to shape his acting company’s repertoire for decades after his departure. Munro has a keen eye to the theatrical detail—the acting crafts, the physical bodies of the actors, as well as the social and collective dynamics within the company. What emerges from her discussion is not only Shakespeare as the playwright (a literary figure), but rather Shakespeare the actor and sharer, and after his departure also, very importantly, Shakespeare “the theatrical commodity” (Munro 7): an asset in a venture that contributes to the successful life of the theatrical company. Munro reaches beyond the year 1660 and her observations have implications for an understanding of the Restoration companies and their cultivation of the Shakespearean heritage.

It is this culture that engendered not only the obvious adaptations—such as Nahum Tate’s *King Lear*—but also the more theatrical *recraftings* of the plays. The theatrical Shakespeare that Munro presents came to shape the repertoire in multiple ways. I would argue that the heritage engendered whole playwrights. The prematurely deceased Thomas Otway (1652-1685) wrote plays that mined Shakespeare’s theatrical craft for the dramatic situations and interactions perhaps more than anyone else. In his prologue (spoken by

Mr. Betterton) to his *The History and Fall of Caius Marius* (1680), he hints at that fecundity:

Our *Shakespear* wrote too in an Age as blest,
The happiest Poet of his time and best. [...]
And from the Crop of his luxuriant Pen
E're since succeeding Poets humbly glean. (Prologue: 20-21, 26-27)

However, only the subplot of *Caius Marius* is a direct—i.e. textual—adaptation of Shakespeare and Otway acknowledges as much apologetically:

Though much the most unworthy of the Throng,
Our this-day's Poet fears h' has done him wrong.
Like greedy Beggars that steal Sheaves away,
You'll find h' has rifled him of half a Play.
Amidst the baser Dross you'll see it shine
Most beautifull, amazing, and Divine. (Prologue: 28-33)

The subplot is gleaned from *Romeo and Juliet* and Otway's "adaptation" has been much mocked. There are seemingly preposterous moments, such as Lavinia's line "*O Marius, Marius!* wherefore art thou *Marius?*" (2:2:267), but to be sure they are ridiculous only to the literary reader. From a dramatic point of view, while Otway borrows lines from Shakespeare's play, he is original in his treatment of the action and the storyline—and, what is more, he has an exquisite sense for the dramatic situation and the personas' interaction. Where Nahum Tate merely retouches the lines and redirects the conclusion of the play, Otway is genuinely thorough in his recrafting of the material. Even more importantly, the main plot—which hardly gets mentioned by scholars of Shakespeare in adaptation—is what carries the play. There are no textual (verbal) echoes of Shakespeare but Otway "humbly gleans" from Shakespeare's "luxuriant Pen" and reworks dramatic (not ideational) motifs from *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, *As You Like It* and, perhaps most surprisingly, *King Lear*.¹⁸ Compared to the theatrical effectiveness of individual scenes in Otway's tragedy and the craft with which he built on Shakespeare's dramaturgy, the textual borrowings are a superficial trap of little significance, apart from giving the literary critic tangible evidence to confirm what Otway already admitted.

We could say similar things about Otway's other plays—*Don Carlos*, *Prince of Spain* (1676), *The Orphan* (1680), *The Soldier's Fortune* (1681) or his

¹⁸ It was David Drozd who pointed out the echo of *King Lear* in Otway's second scene of Act IV. This was during a reading of my Czech translation with actors from the National Theatre in Brno (Czech Republic) at Masaryk University on 10 September 2022. I am thankful to everyone who participated and made the reading possible.

best known play *Venice Preserv'd* (1682). We could say it also about a number of the early plays of Aphra Behn (1640-1689) and John Dryden (1631-1700), before the two playwrights fell for the fashionable French style, and by Dryden's rival and later collaborator Nathaniel Lee (1653-1692), especially his *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1681). If we were to abstract from the plays' ideational level—their politics, their period sensibilities and affective tastes—the dramatic bones that build them are Shakespearean.¹⁹ In this way the Restoration playwrights would take the Shakespearean dramatic heritage and “keep invention in a noted weed” (Sonnet 76:6)—by dressing their own creations in the familiar habits, fashions, sensibilities, expressions as well as themes of their age.

From this perspective of *theatrical recrafting*, shouldn't we do much more of the fact that Friedrich Schiller reworked Otway's *Don Carlos*? Or even more interestingly that a German play *Das gerettete Venedig* was performed in Brünn (Brno) at Easter 1763? This was very likely a version of Otway's play, probably influenced by French dramaturgy (judging from the play's Polish reception), and it was performed by the company of the theatre and opera impresario, actor, rope-dancer, dancer and puppeteer Johann Joseph Brunian (Scherl 80-84; Havlíčková 221, 227; Żurowski 71). Or do we only restrict ourselves to the fact that Brunian also produced *Macbeth*, *Kaufmann von Venedig*, *Richard II* and probably also *Timon von Athens* in F.J. Fischer's versions (published in Prague in 1777)? Was Brunian's repertoire of the early 1760s (including *Das gerettete Venedig*) more in the wake of the actors' cultivation of the Shakespearean heritage, while that of the late 1770s (including *Macbeth*, *Kaufmann*, *Richard II* and *Timon*) was already responding to the pre-Romantic fashion introduced by David Garrick? And—importantly for the historian of Shakespeare in Central Europe—which of the two repertoires should receive more attention?

If we recall that the earliest German version of *Hamlet*—*Der bestrafte Brudermord*—was actually printed in 1781, allegedly based on a now-lost manuscript of 1710, what context should we view the text in? Wouldn't we ignore the theatrical culture of the time if we were to assume that the 1781 text was a time capsule from 1710, which was itself in turn a time capsule from a hundred years before? True, manuscripts and texts could do that: they are time capsules of sorts. But theatrical commodities are always homeostatic, *here and now*, and evolve organically because that is how they stay alive. And I would argue that shifting the critical perspective from the logocentric histories of

¹⁹ Of course, this is not to say that identifying Shakespeare's influence in Otway's plays means getting to the ultimate source and only begetter. Shakespeare's plays rely on craft inspired by the art of Thomas Kyd or Christopher Marlowe and “beautified by the feathers” of the likes of Robert Greene, Henry Chettle, John Lyly—and of course George Peele.

Shakespeare to the “drama-centric” focus on the action (*drama*) here and now—on the practices and crafts involved—leads to more rounded, diverse as well as inclusive portrayals.

***Komedye* and Šilok as a Case Study**

How much does it matter that a play has Shakespeare somewhere in its dramatic “DNA”? How important was the provenance of Shakespeare’s plays and their properties—that which Shakespeare studies too often essentialise in its common denominator: their origin with Shakespeare the English-language writer *par excellence* in a London company of the early stages of the British Empire? I have offered a number of historic instances where Shakespeare’s dramaturgy—as well as the theatrical craft of other English players—inspired and shaped the practices of others; these were instances where “our lofty scene [would] be acted over | In states unborn and accents yet unknown” (*Julius Caesar* 3:1:122-123). The majority of those plays made no reference to Shakespeare or the sources of their inspiration—so to speak, “where they did proceed” (Sonnet 76:8). All the evidence of versions of *King Lear* or *Romeo and Juliet*—the two plays for which certain evidence exists in seventeenth-century German-speaking Europe and which surely related to Shakespeare’s London plays—occurs without his name.

The case of *King Lear* is relatively straightforward, although there are no extant scripts of the early modern German versions (for evidence of *King Lear* in early modern Germany, see Rudin, “Die Textbibliothek”). These plays could have been based equally on Shakespeare’s versions and/or on the anonymous *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella* (printed in London in 1605). While there is general consensus on the superior quality of Shakespeare’s play, travelling players would probably be more attuned to the anonymous *King Leir*: it is comedic; its situations are recognisable scenarios (*theatergrams*); and it is much less dependent on language. Just like other travelling plays—such as the anonymous and superpopular *Mucedorus*, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* or the little studied dramaturgy of Robert Wilson (active 1572-1600)²⁰—it allows actors to apply their art “on the fly” and the scripts “play” straightaway. In contrast, while infinitely more rewarding in the long run, both intellectually and emotionally, Shakespeare’s plays require disproportionately more rehearsal, focused attention from both actors and audiences, and linguistic competency. In other words, Shakespeare’s plays take much more effort to recraft and produce outside of its original habitat.

²⁰ I am grateful to Adam Railton for drawing my attention to Robert Wilson.

The case of *Romeo and Juliet* is more complex. Shakespeare’s tragedy in the two extant versions—Quarto 1 of 1597 and the longer, almost identical versions that follow Quarto 2 of 1599—is not the only dramatic variant available. Bandello’s novella and its many variants had been popular throughout early modern Europe and served several dramatists as sources for their versions—Lope de Vega’s tragicomedy *Castelvines y Monteses* (c. 1615) or Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla’s *Los bandos de Verona* (1640) (see Drábek, “Dramaturgy” 780-781), not to mention the various operatic versions and the dramatic lookalikes with which any such play would be grouped: the versions of Pyramus and Thisbe, the many iterations in the Italian Comedy (*commedia dell’arte*) and other fated lovers. We would fall for the availability bias (a sign of the Shakespeare filter?) if we assumed that Lope de Vega’s or Rojas Zorrilla’s versions were not as prominent as Shakespeare’s. The Spanish Empire, through the Habsburg dynasty, played a decisive political role in early modern Central and Western Europe (not to mention the Americas or the networks of Jesuit school drama and festivities) and the Siglo de Oro plays circulated perhaps even more than the English.²¹ Shakespeare’s play, even if used directly in performance, would never arrive in an unchartered territory. Most ingredients of any recrafting of that story would already be in place.

Early nineteenth-century Czech folk drama offers a remarkable example of the use of Shakespeare without the dependence on words, on his structure of the play script, and also without any acknowledgement of his authorship—at a time when Shakespeare’s name became well known and established in the theatrical and intellectual circles. The anonymous *Komedye o dvouch kupcích a o Židovi Šilokoj* (The Comedy of two merchants and Šilok the Jew) dates most likely from the late 1810s or the 1820s (Sochorová, “SDDNO” 108).²² The anonymous Czech playwright apparently did not work with Shakespeare’s play but with a popular chapbook (*Volksbuch*) called *Kupec z Venedyku, nebo Láska a Přátelstvo* (The Merchant of Venice, or Love and Friendship). This prose adaptation of F.J. Fischer’s German version came out first in Jindřichův Hradec in 1782,²³ but went through several reeditions (Litomyšl 1809, 1822). The preface to the chapbook announces the reason for its publication:

²¹ For an account of the reach of Rojas Zorrilla’s play, see Gonzáles Cañal. See also my discussion of Jiří Antonín Benda’s and Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter’s singspiel *Romeo und Julie* (1779) in Drábek, “Dramaturgy” 792-796.

²² The manuscript is deposited at the Strahovská knihovna (sig. DV IV 35). Its front page can be viewed at <https://www.amaterskedivadlo.cz/main.php?data=multimedia&id=59160>. The text is published in Sochorová, “SDČO” 349-390. All quotations from the *Komedye*—with the exception of the title page—are taken from Sochorová’s edition.

²³ An edition of the chapbook is included in my “*České pokusy*” 309-323.

Bylo již mnoho Čtení v českém Jazyku vydaných, které Chválu zasloužili; i pročez se také douffá, že tento vydaný Kus (který z německé Komedy z nova v Češtinu přesazen, pro jeho rozličných Osob Představování) Čtení hoděn, a za to uznán bude. Jsem tehdy té Náděje, že české Řeči Milovnícy toto Čtení mile přečtou, a s ním sobě zbytečný Čas tak ukrátějí, jakoby sami při té Komedy (která ve velkých Městách s tím největším Zalíbením představovaná, a jak od Vyššího tak Nižšího Stavů oblíbená byla) přítomni byli.—Přítom ale se dobrotivým Česko=Čtenářům oznamuje: že v brzkém Čase z této Kněho=Tiskárny více ještě tomuto nápodobných Kusů vydaných bude. (cited from Drábek, “*České pokusy*” 310)

[There has been much reading published in the Czech language, deserving of praise; whereupon it is hoped that the present published piece (which from a German *Komedy* newly in Czech is set forth, for its performance of diverse personas) is worthy of reading, and will be deemed as such. I am therefore of a great hope that lovers of the Czech tongue will be pleased to read this and pass their leftover time with it, as if they were themselves present at the comedy (which is performed in large cities with the greatest following, beloved of both the upper and the lower sort).—At the same time, let it be known to all Czecho-readers: that in a short time this book press will publish more such pieces.]

There is no mention of Shakespeare in the preface, only of the enthusiastic reception and popularity of the play in the theatres of larger cities. The chapbook wishes to simulate the sensation of being at a performance. This is echoed in the next publication, *Makbet vůdce šottskeho wogska* (Makbet the Leader of the Scottish Army, Jindřichův Hradec: Ignácius Vojtěch Hilgartner, 1782), where the preface observes:

To všeckno jest z německé Komedy vytaženo, a v Češtinu obráceno. Poněvadž ale všyckni Lide takové Komedy přítomni býti nemohou (neb se nejvíce jen v Hlavních Městách představuje;) tak se to milým Česko=Čtenářům tuto představuje a podává. (cited from Drábek, “*České pokusy*” 326)

[All this is pulled out of a German comedy and turned into Czech. But since not all people can be present at such a comedy (as they are performed mostly in capital cities), therefore this is introduced and presented to the kind “Czecho-readers.”]

It is the play’s theatrical popularity that sells the print—and it clearly found its Czecho-readers, judging by the reeditions.

The anonymous playwright from a rural area in East Bohemia clearly took inspiration in that exhortation. The early decades of the nineteenth century saw a remarkable theatrical activity in several close-knit communities of East Bohemia. The culture, known as *selské divadlo* (rural or farmers’ theatre) or as *sousedské divadlo* (neighbourhood or community theatre), produced a number of remarkable artefacts, among them several surviving play scripts, mostly in

rhyming verse, some of biblical drama, others stemming from the popular baroque culture (chivalric plays and romances, the patient Griselda, Genoveva etc.). The plays include songs and comical interludes, sometimes as afterpieces to the main acts. The *Komedye o dvouch kupcích a Židovi Šilokoj*, a verse play in rhyming couplets, is no outlier in the genre of *sousedské divadlo*. It employs a set of unnuanced personas that draw on clichés and stereotypes—Šilok, Jesyka and Jakob the Jew are unapologetically anti-Jewish racist caricatures. The title page of *Komedye* lists the personas:

persony tyto	
Opovidnik, 1.	Messenger [i.e. Narrator]
Kníže, 2.	Prince [Porcia’s father]
Antonyo, 3.	
Basanyo, 4.	
Šilok, 5.	
Jakob žid, 6.	Jakob the Jew
Jesyka, 7.	
Rolenc [Lorenc], 8.	
Čert, 9.	Devil [a conventionally comic role]
Graciano, 10.	
Morochius Mouřenin, 12.	Morochius the Moor
Akaron [Arakon] princ, 14.	
Kapitan 15.	
Advokat 16.	
Servus s policajtem 17,18.	Servant with the Policeman
Nercisa, 19,	
Kovař, 20	Blacksmith
Kača 21.	Káča [i.e. Kate]
Vašiček 22.	Vašiček [i.e. Young Wenceslas]
Doktor 23	

The list is clearly incomplete, missing No. 11 (probably Porcia), No. 13 (probably Kuba, i.e., an equivalent of Gobbo) and possibly No. 24 (the *Blazen*, i.e., the Fool).

The play opens with a song for the entire company (*zpěv pro všechny*), followed by the *Opovědník’s* (Messenger’s) summary or argument of the plot with a moralism about earthly vanity. The *Opovědník* clarifies that the two merchants of the title refer to Basanyo and Antonyo, outlines Porcia’s situation with her late father the *Kníže* (Prince), but makes no mention of Šilok or the pound of flesh bond.

The next scene shows *Kníže* and his daughter Porcia: the prince is about to die and takes leave of his daughter Porcia with the three caskets and a dying wish. The scene is remarkably reminiscent of other baroque dying scenes, such

as those of Admetus (in baroque versions of Euripides's *Alcestis*), of Ahasverus (in versions of the biblical story of *Esther*), or the death of Everyman (in the numerous versions of *Everyman*, *Elckerlijck*, *Jedermann*, *Kdožkolvěk* or the Latin *Mercator* plays). This clearly is the Czech playwright's addition to the dramatic plot, if not to the storyline. The scene concludes with a two-part song sung by Porcia and *Kníže* about the art of dying well.

Basanyo meets Antonyo and goes straight to the point: he has consulted the stars (*nechal jsem si planetu čísti*; I had the planet read for me) and he is hopeful, albeit moneyless for now. Antonyo offers to borrow money from Šilok. Before they depart, the comic plotting tempter *Čert* (Devil) offers to lend them money himself. Šilok enters—speaking in broken Czech grammar, mispronouncing Czech consonants, as well as rhyming irregularly—and suggests to Antonyo that they strike a deal at a feast they are both invited to. He then calls his servant Kuba (which is a common Czech diminutive of Jakub) and asks him to watch over the house.

Lorenco enters, sends Kuba away and calls for Jesyka, who is ready to elope. Before her elopement to Belmont with Lorenco and before turning Christian, she also speaks in the cliché stage caricature of Jewish Czech. Later, when she is baptised, she not only adopts the Christian name of Nercisa and becomes a servant to Porcia, but also drops all the linguistic caricature.

Antonyo tells Basanyo of the heated debate with Šilok at the feast which concluded with a jest: committing a pound of flesh in exchange for the three thousand ducats. Nonetheless, he sends Basanyo on his way to Belmont. The Devil enters and threatens to make their lives difficult by taking sides with Šilok and becoming his advisor.

Jakob and Šilok rejoice in the news of Antonyo's losses, but Šilok suffers when hearing from Graciano of Jesyka being baptised as Nercisa and of the fact that it was Šilok's loan that enabled his daughter to elope. The Devil cheers Šilok up and tells him to get a good sharp knife ahead of his revenge.

The *Opovědník* announces the shift of location to Belmont and explains the trick with the three caskets. He says that the first suitor is Morochius the Moor and that Porcia is very anxious, should he guess the answer and become her lord—*neb se ní velmi nelíbil* (for she very much did not like him). In the scene with Morochius, there is no racial caricature at play, and when he fails in the test, Morochius sings a heartfelt song. The next suitor is Arabon, an English lord, who also departs with a song. Basanyo's selecting is underscored by music. Porcia at first doesn't recognise him but on Nercisa's reminder remembers how much she loved him. She asks him not to hasten the choice, but Basanyo doesn't want to delay it. He succeeds and a double wedding is held. The Devil enters, wishing to disrupt, but Lorenco beats him away. A messenger enters with a letter from *Fenedych* (Venice). Porcia and Nercisa give their husbands rings and send

Basanio and Lorenzo to go and help Antonyo. The scene concludes with two songs, from Basanio and Lorenzo, and from Porcia and Nercisa. When the men leave, Porcia tells Nercisa that they will follow them disguised as men:

Já se postavím za advokáta
a ty za mého služebníka.

I'll stand for an advocate
and you for my servant.

The scene shifts to Venice: Šilok talks to *Kapitan* (the Governor) and tells him he wants his satisfaction of Antonyo's pound of flesh—a detail everyone refers to as a joke or a prank. Antonyo enters, is captured by a Servant and a Policeman, whereupon Basanio enters and asks for his release. Šilok is adamant and refuses all sums of money offered to him. When Antonyo has taken leave of Basanio, the *Advokat* enters and starts a disputation with Šilok, which follows the basic contours of the court scene in Shakespeare's play.

When Šilok relents and offers to accept money, the *Advokat* retorts:

Žádné, žide, nedostaneš,
ale o tvé doma přijdeš,
tys měl dělat jako lidi,
tebe ale čert uklidí.

None, Jew, will you get,
but will also lose your [money] at home,
you should have done like people do,
but the devil will sort you now.

At this point the play takes a shocking turn and the greatest departure from its source:

Šilok:

Tak dyž mi mé zboží i peníze berete,
tak mi také můj život vemte.

Advokat: Co nám je po tvém životu,

ty nemilosrdný židouchu,
když se mrzíš, tu máš provaz,
třeba si s ním hrdlo uvaž.

Tu se oběsí.

Šilok:

If you are taking away my goods and my money,
take my life as well.

Advokat:

What do we care for your life,
 you merciless Jewish shyster,²⁴
 if you are cross, here is a rope,
 with it you can tie your throat.

Here he hangs himself.

The comic figure of the Devil gives praise to his chthonic master, Lord Luciper, and rejoices that he will be able to bring his lord *pečeně* (a roast) from this comedy. The scene then immediately progresses to the reward. The *Advokat* takes a liking to the ring, but Basanyo says that it is a ring *od své nejmilejší* (from my most beloved), but when the *Advokat* insists, Basanyo gives it away. Lorenzo admits that the servant also got his ring as a recompense. The *Advokat* thanks kindly for the rings and they depart. Basanyo thanks again (in a couplet) and Porcia speaks, as if arriving. (There are no stage directions in the manuscript at this point, so it is unclear how this should be realised on stage.) The dialogue between Porcia, Basanyo, Lorenzo and Nercisa concludes the play, followed by a song.

The *Opovědník* announces an interlude about a blacksmith and his unfaithful wife, who is punished when her beloved is shot from a rifle by the blacksmith. While there is no apparent thematic link between the merchants' comedy and the afterpiece, Ludmila Sochorová has pointed out a similarity with the comic interlude of the punished adultery from the 1608 play of Samson, its folk variants known as *Salička*, as well as Pergolesi's opera *La serva padrona* (Sochorová, "ODDNO" 97). I have observed elsewhere on the transnational circulation of this Boccaccian farce and its links to Shakespeare's (or more specifically, Will Kemp's) theatre (Drábek, "Samson" 222-227). This is not to say that we should assume that both the merchant comedy and its afterpiece have a *deliberately* common ancestry, but rather note how deeply English comedy was connected with and ingrained in the transnational European theatre culture.

The epilogue of the *Komedye* rounds up the show and recalls both parts. The manuscript ends with nine passages to be delivered by *Blázen* (the Fool) as running commentaries throughout the show. The text doesn't indicate where these passages belong but it is probable that they would have helped in the otherwise abrupt transitions—such as the moment when the *Advokat* and

²⁴ The word *židouch* is not a common one, but it was formed using a common suffix *-ouch* that associates derogatory meaning. Czech speakers would associate such words as *padouch* (scoundrel), *zloduch* (villain) or *melouch*, a word for underhand, illicit jobs, borrowed from Yiddish *meloche*, which refers to jobs, professions and work that Jews were banned from practising (*Slovník spisovného jazyka českého*, <https://sujc.ujc.cas.cz/search.php?heslo=melouch&sti=36750&where=hesla>).

his servant—Porcia and Nercisa in disguise—depart, and when they re-enter as themselves.

What does the *Komedye* represent in the history of Shakespeare in Central Europe? It certainly has a relation to Shakespeare’s play, but to call it an *adaptation* in the broader sense of the word would be unduly stretching the already elastic term. To use *adaptation* to describe how *Komedye o dvouch kupcích* relates to *The Merchant of Venice* would not say anything else but that there is a relation of sorts. To push it further would only nourish the logocentric perspectives of origin–iteration.

More importantly, such a categorisation would completely skew the perspective of what *sousedské divadlo*, its community shows and its performative practices were—with all their raw and baroque comedy, clichés, narrow-minded moralisms as well as ignorant racial stereotyping and xenophobia. The *Komedye* was feeding off the popular chapbooks, their mimetic desire for the theatre in the greater cities, but never at the expense of their own values and community practices. Analogical processes occur with every theatrical creation—even if to a less obvious degree than with the *Komedye*.

How then could one conceptualise Shakespearean *recrafting* without incurring the availability bias and the colonial blindness I have pointed out in the historic examples above? The notion of Shakespeare comes with a regime of knowledge: it has its own epistemology that primes what we see. If that is so, how can we decolonise the “Shakespeare Empire of Knowledge” and change our epistemology towards a more inclusive and diverse one—and to a less one-directional perspective that keeps returning to the textual canon?

Conclusion: Adaptation, Translation and Performance as Recrafting

The logocentric realm is a self-sustaining matrix. Words engender more words and enclose themselves in a world of their own. However, when it comes to adaptation, translation and performance, the logocentric realm cannot remain intact: there are other, non-verbal and non-rational forces at play.

Roman Jakobson, in his seminal essay “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” (published in 1959), discusses translation in the broadest sense and its three basic varieties—*interlingual* (generally referred to as translation proper), *intra-lingual* (rewordings and paraphrases into sociolects and other forms of the same language) and *intersemiotic* (which entails adaptation into other sign systems or media). Ever since it was published, Jakobson’s essay has served as a very fruitful ground for translation and adaptation studies—within the logocentric realm. As I have argued in an essay on metalinguistic theory (Drábek, “Functional Reformulations”), Jakobson’s essay is well aware of the limits of linguistic and textual communication. In an oblique admission of

the limits of the logocentric system, Jakobson makes a remarkable observation. Towards the end of the essay, he refers to Dionysius the Areopagite (also known as Pseudo-Dionysius), one of the philosophers of the *via negativa* (knowing God indirectly, by what cannot be named). Jakobson observes on the unspeakability of things and refers to Dionysius's "call[] for chief attention to the cognitive values [...] and not to the words themselves" (Jakobson 238). In other words—and very importantly for my argument in this essay—Jakobson writes in his essay on the *linguistic* aspects of translation, but acknowledges also the other autonomous non-linguistic, semiotic systems. His theory of translation is far from being enclosed and fully contained within the logocentric pattern—although it has been often used as such by other theorists of adaptation and translation. In his other writing Jakobson gave ample evidence of external, non-linguistic realities that language can only “negatively” speak about, but not *nominalistically* contain. Omitting the essential qualifier in the study of translation and adaptation—namely, the *linguistic* aspects—would amount to what Ghosh has called (as quoted above) “deliberately exclud[ing] things and forces (“externalities”) that lie beyond the horizon of the matter at hand.”

I argue that the study of adaptations, translations and performances of Shakespeare should be brought back to those “externalities.” A study of these individual autonomous creative works need to include all the “things and forces” that produced them. The fact that they are interlingual, intralingual or intersemiotic *translations* of Shakespeare is, in real terms, nothing more than a recognition of their *relation* to Shakespeare—and that relation is never a unilinear relation of ancestry. On the basic level, each such creative work brings together first and foremost the practice and craft that created it; and only secondarily Shakespeare. Revising this epistemological hierarchy is crucial for a more evenhanded, inclusive and unprejudiced—or if you will, decolonised—knowledge of the work.

Let me offer three examples from the three modes involved—performance, translation and adaptation:

(1) *Performance*. In a plenary at a global theatre studies conference in the UK, a leading Shakespeare scholar spoke about their experience from the Globe to Globe Shakespeare Festival of 2012. As part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad, the much-written-about festival held at Shakespeare's Globe brought 37 productions of 37 Shakespeare plays in 37 different languages from all over the world. Perhaps caught off guard, the scholar admitted to their frustration with the experience, feeling often as an “embarrassed spectator of foreign Shakespeare.” While their following rationalisation tried to mollify the dissonance, there was a clear sensation of being part of shows that were alien to the here and now. Landing well perhaps only with ethnic communities of London, the Shakespearean's gaze was alienated. A great proportion of theatre is made for specific, local audiences, not for the illusory audiences composed of citizens of the world.

A similar phenomenon occurs at Shakespeare conferences. Presenting about (say) a Czech production, translation or adaptation always poses a major problem to anyone who doesn't share the relevant cultural knowledge. To what extent can Shakespeare genuinely serve as a common denominator—a cultural *lingua franca* of sorts? What can we actually say to one another that would not be remoulded by this intercultural diplomatic protocol? Do we do justice to our painstaking research into performance histories if we try to share them in the Shakespeare Empire? I admit to my great scepticism: How can I expect that even a close colleague of mine from a neighbouring country can not just respect, but also appreciate and understand the refinement and nuance of the cultural work that my case studies present. Isn't it inevitable that such a discourse has to break away from the Shakespearean bounds towards other disciplines—such as theatre history, theory and practice of acting or stage directing, scenography or media? This often seems to be the inevitable methodological path. In this sense for instance, David Drozd in his essay “Enter Fortinbras?” in the present volume, starts with the obligatory map of “Shakespeare in the Czech lands” before proceeding to the crafts in evidence: he expounds the artistic trajectories of individual directors and the relevant theatre companies, and only then illustrates their craft on token scenes from *Hamlet*. To be sure, the import of the study is not about Shakespeare, but rather about the theatrical art that created the productions.

(2) *Translation*. Recently, I was asked to translate Katherine's final monologue from *The Taming of the Shrew* as I had translated some Shakespeare before. This monologue wasn't for a performance but for a practical manual for secondary school students about the different ways in which theatre could be part of our lives. The assignment, given to me by the project lead Kateřina Jebavá (a professional actor and academic), came with a request: the workshop activity around Katherine's monologue relates to questions of interpretation, of relationships and of empathy; the translation should focus on the dialectic between *what* we say and *how* we say it, as well as what we intend by it, and how all this relates to our public self-presentation.²⁵ (Some of the workshop activities that precede in the manual are on social, professional and gender roles.) I completed the translation and sent it off to Kateřina for comments, asking her to read it *as an actor* to make sure that *the translation plays well*.

²⁵ The project, led by Dr Kateřina Jebavá, with the full title of “Divadelní umění, postupy a techniky jako trenážér komunikačních dovedností a občanských, sociálních a personálních kompetencí” (Theatrical arts, practices and techniques as a trainer of communication skills and civic, social and personal competencies; <https://www.jamuni.cz/>), is realised in a collaboration of the Theatre Faculty of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno and the Theatre Studies Department at Masaryk University (Brno, Czech Republic).

The translation was to her satisfaction—with one detail: the halfline “Confounds thy fame” in the passage “dart not scornful glances from those eyes [... It] Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds” (*The Taming of the Shrew* 5:1:149, 152). Kateřina’s misgivings were not about the meaning but about the social, interactional space that the Czech words opened for the actor playing Katherine in relation to the others on stage, in the audience and beyond. There is no point trying to replicate in English the eight or so successive variants we came up with; they would translate almost the same and would totally fail to convey the social dynamics and the embodied and embedded “give” that they offered to the actor. As a matter of fact, the time we spent on those three words exceeded the time I needed to translate the entire monologue. In both her case and mine, we brought our various skills and expertises to the table to recraft this tiny moment. I would argue that capturing the collective and individual craft that joins on drama translation is a challenge that Shakespeare studies needs to grow up to; otherwise it will continue to add to the many labours lost of the Shakespeare Empire.

(3) *Adaptation*. Václav Havel’s final play *Odcházení* (Leaving, 2007) is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and openly works as an intertextual mosaic that incorporates passages from Martin Hilský’s Czech translation of the play. The semi-autobiographical story of the retiring politician Rieger who is losing his power, influence and worldly means acknowledges the borrowings. But that would only be a part of the story. In an equal measure *Odcházení* is also an adaptation of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* with explicit intertextual references to that play (see also Drábek, “Shakespeare’s Myriad-Minded Stage” 44-45). Nevertheless, by far the most important, vital feature of the play is Havel’s own predicament as a playwright of a certain classical status, who also has a prominent political persona that exists at some distance from and tension with the artistic one. The autobiographical aspect was reinforced by Havel’s own film version of his play (2011), which featured the actor Dagmar Havlová, his second wife, in the role of Rieger’s female friend and partner. The protagonist ex-prime minister Rieger, however, was far from a straightforward self-projection. He is equally a critical and perhaps even parodic portrait of Havel’s successor, Václav Klaus. The play crucially captures the bitter aftertaste of the once hopeful politician who, on retiring, finds himself a profoundly flawed, compromised and spineless ruin of a personality. That sentiment resonated with the deadlock in Czech politics of the early 2000s. The sociopolitical context of Havel’s *Odcházení* plays a more significant role than its relation to *King Lear* and *The Cherry Orchard*. What is more: the play is Havel’s return to playwriting after a hiatus of several decades, and the difference from his earlier, absurdist style, is remarkable. Studying Havel’s play merely as a Shakespearean adaptation—as has been done—would be harmful to the contexts, culture and crafts that produced the play.

A similar case is that of Djanet Sears’s *Harlem Duet* (1997), an acknowledged adaptation of *Othello*. If we remove the Shakespeare filter, *Harlem Duet* is by equal measure an adaptation of Euripides’s *Medea*—a point that has escaped all critics of the play (as far as I am aware). But the play is, first and foremost, a creation that originated in the theatrical craft of Djanet Sears, as well as of Nightwood Theatre, Toronto, the company that gave the play its theatrical life, and crucially in the racial and racist injustices and legacies that America’s black people live in.

What these three examples share—as well as all the others I have offered in this essay—is that their true identity and the crafts that made them emerge only once we take them out of the shadow cast by the Shakespearean filter. I would argue this is the case with the majority of recent publications on Shakespeare in Europe. For instance, Zsolt Almási and Kinga Földvály’s *Shakespeare in Central Europe after 1989: Common Heritage and Regional Identity* (2021), a special issue of *Theatralia*, or Boika Sokolova and Janice Valls-Russell’s edited volume *Shakespeare’s Others in 21st-Century European Performance: The Merchant of Venice and Othello* (2021) offer numerous remarkable examples where Shakespeare is no more than a *pretext*—a springboard to analyses of social, political, cultural and theatrical phenomena that are completely independent of Shakespeare. Their deployment of the Shakespearean heritage is more or less accidental. Among such instances are Gabriella Reuss’s study of the post-1989 Hungarian puppet scene (Almási and Földvály 151-170), Šárka Havlíčková Kysová’s cognitivist analysis of modern Czech opera scenography (189-208), or Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik’s essay on Polish stage dystopias that reflect on the recent migration crisis (121-138). In Sokolova’s and Valls-Russell’s volume, one could highlight two essays that strip *Othello* of its themes of race and post-colonialism and turn it into a play focusing on major sociocultural problems: domestic violence and abuse in Bulgaria (in Boika Sokolova and Kirilka Stavreva’s essay) and in Portugal (in Francesca Rayner’s).

How should we as scholars conceive of Shakespeare in such instances, when our close colleagues present on phenomena that exist behind a cultural border? It would be socially and intellectually inept and untactful to debate them: we don’t share the material. To assume that we share Shakespeare and that entitles us to enter the discourse would be—I argue—to impose and indulge in precisely that quasi-colonial practice I have critiqued in this essay. In such thorough and rigorous studies of the problems, contentions, cultures and crafts that happen to draw on the Shakespearean cultural heritage, Shakespeare is more or less an accidental friend: more of a hook to start the discourse proper than the main subject. Perhaps in such instances, to highlight the Shakespearean aspect would be “a custom | More honoured in the breach than the observance” (*Hamlet* 1:4:17-18). I would argue that in such a case we should focus on these

performances, adaptations and translations as instances of *recrafting*, creative and cultural acts that build on specific practices and crafts, rather than as iterations of a shared cultural asset. Performances, adaptations and translations are not textual traffic. They rest upon realities—crafts, habits and practices—that exist well outside the logocentric realm and cannot be contained within the mere sphere of language. We should abandon the logocentric impulse of bringing these culturally specific creative acts into the colonial discourse of the global Shakespeare Empire. That perspective, by virtue of its epistemology, casts the works’ own culture into the shadow and in so doing erases the essential part of their way of living.

In the case of Central Europe—a region that continues to solicit the post-colonial associations of its Soviet past—this is specifically true. Since 1945, Shakespeare has often been used as the one more-or-less allowed voice of freedom, humanism and modernity *vis-à-vis* the oppressor. In that discourse, the Anglosphere has played the role of the liberator—and by association, Shakespeare would become its mediator and cultural diplomat. I believe it is time to move on and abandon that triumphalist, imperial narrative. In this respect I wouldn’t agree with Erne, Hazrat and Shmygol that “Shakespeare’s plays have always been European, and that we have much to gain from recovering the life they led on the Continent” (xvi). Given the incessant *recrafting* that takes place in all arts practice, it is perhaps high time to start with those and see how Europe with its cultures has made Shakespeare. We have much to gain from recovering the crafts and knowledges that formed what we know as Shakespeare, as well as offered new homes to host Shakespeare’s own crafts. Shakespeare is not an empire on which the sun never sets. It is a community of artists, scholars, intellectuals and publics that occasionally draw on Shakespeare’s craft in their own practice.

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