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De-centring Shakespeare, incorporating Otherness:  
Diana Henderson in conversation with Koel Chatterjee

*KC: To begin with, I was wondering what you think of cultural anthropophagy as a different way of examining global Shakespeares? Do you think it can be a useful tool for the study of global Shakespeare?*

DH: One of the most fascinating aspects of cultural anthropophagy as a methodology is that it offers the alternative of viewing global Shakespeares from the perspective of a non-Anglophone “Other’s” native tradition, with all the complexity that the articles make clear—which also means I, as an Anglophone North American, should not be the person privileged to answer the second question. Such a tradition is hybrid and turning to pre-modern worlds for authenticity in the present has always been a complicated move. But this is not a return to origins in any simplistic way, and it *is* Brazilian. It is not a UK or US export of theory nor even an attempt to build on French theory, as has been true of much recent global Shakespeares thinking, perhaps most suggestively in Douglas Lanier’s work. So, there is some irony in asking what I think, and the proof should be what people who are *not* me find valuable as a means of talking back against what are still perceived as centres of global Shakespeares studies. I will nonetheless add that, being a woman who is interested in modernist thinking and is struck by the fact that this is coming out of a modernist manifesto, I know how masculinist those manifesto movements tended to be. So, it is very interesting to see the development of a theory that at least initially had a lot in common with Dada, with Futurism, with other modernist movements, even with the UK’s Wyndham Lewis. And many

(though not all) of those male assertions were often linked with violence, right? Similarly, here is cultural anthropophagy going back to a violent act (especially if we are asked not to think of it predominantly as a metaphor); it is not going back to any form of—

*KC: Yes, not going back to a gentle merging or assimilation. I have been preoccupied for a while with the vocabulary we use for analysing global Shakespeares. I am very uncomfortable with terms like Adaptation, or Remediation, or even translocations. I mean, with a term like Remediation, it suggests a change of media. So, when a film maker interprets a Shakespeare text on film, that is a Remediation, but is it cultural anthropophagy? When a series of words from the text are represented as a cinematic image, for instance, is it a form of cannibalisation? One of the terms used in the introduction of this collection is 'incorporating Otherness' which I liked. Cannibalising has the association of violence which I am not sure I am comfortable with. It is such an inherently negative word, just as appropriation has connotations of plagiarism.*

DH: I agree, and my feminist pacifist side objects a bit to using that particular term.

*KC: Yes, I am tempted to use a less aggressive term like absorbing or assimilating though neither captures the sense of anthropophagy quite as well as a metaphor, of course. But they are gentler terms, more akin to collaboration, which is the term you use quite a bit.*

DH: And you know warrior culture, where I feel sure it is mainly men we are talking about... I mean when we think of the Tupi eating enemies and even one another: that seems to me something difficult to celebrate, even if I understand the value of such difficulty, the way it unravels dominant western philosophical assumptions and binaries.

*KC: But that's where the question of power comes in, doesn't it? I mean the minute you talk of cannibalising a culture there is once again the power dynamic, that seeming imbalance of power which a lot of postcolonial theory tries to address. You are talking of trying to ingest another culture and absorb their power and while you make something newer and stronger, it also means the old body or old culture ceases to exist. So, I wonder if that is the right term and whether we need to push the vocabulary further. I am struggling with the term itself, though I find the metaphor quite useful.*

DH: I am too, and that is why I think it is good to have a conversation about it. I do not think I have the answer for everyone, but as women, we may have a slightly different perspective on the multiple ways that power functions and the multiple valences of the concept. Which part do you really want to push on? And I do not think finding the right words is ever going to end, or the terminology be stable. I mean, the fundamental problems of inequity and cultural exchange are not going to be solved by a new word or even a new methodology. But if it prompts new discussion, then that is what we are hoping for. I have always liked the word collaboration, obviously: I use that word for a reason, in part because it shares with anthropophagy a focus on people, not just on works. The notion of going back to what people do with materials: I like that. I like the agency it makes visible, the power relations it makes visible. I like that the conversation is not just about property, which is a problem with "appropriation." I like that cultural anthropophagy is not progressivist in the sense that evolutionary narratives are, or that even "adaptation," the term we so frequently use, is, at least implicitly. I like the human, visceral, embodied side of it. That is really great. At the same time, a lot of great post-colonial theory has not come from Europe exclusively, and it is worth considering: how does this new vocabulary supplement that important work? If we

consider cultural critics such as Bhabha and Spivak, for example, originally from hybrid subcontinental traditions, and the ways they talk about mimicry and the subaltern respectively: what is different here in using cultural anthropophagy, and how is it different from rethinking a metaphor Bacon used in regard to reading books, or that Montaigne more directly cited and transposed to reflect on European conflicts—so, again going back to Europe, but rethinking it? I think there *are* differences, but I want to hear others thinking them through. One difference cultural anthropophagy has to offer is that it is not speaking from the position of the colonised Other but rather at a moment, historically, of contestation. So, the primary point is *not* that those originary Brazilian figures were being subordinated—and that fact in itself seems worth “thinking with.”

*KC: Yes, because I was thinking of it in terms of when I teach Shakespeare, I find students these days respond better to, say a Bhardwaj film that has completely digested the text and reinterpreted it in a new way. I was giving a lecture a few weeks ago on Othello and we were discussing the position of women in society and, Desdemona’s motivations. When they saw some of the sequences from Omkara (2006), a lot of them who weren’t Indian or have never been to India and didn’t recognise the social systems there related immediately and suddenly understood why Desdemona behaved the way she did much more easily than when they had approached Desdemona through the text. I think students these days are responding better to productions where Shakespeare has been internalised and then reproduced in new ways in which both sources have merged to create something stronger. So, I think anthropophagy might have some benefits from a pedagogical point of view. I would then ask you whether you think that cultural anthropophagy as a tool can take us beyond the existing paradigms of teaching global Shakespeare?*

DH: There are at least two ways of thinking about that question. One is to stress that cultural anthropophagy is coming out of one particular location which itself contains multiple cultures and interactions, and to emphasize the ways its people later have gone back to their past, to a cannibal past and redeployed it in a radically creative new way. Another is that cultural anthropophagy can serve as a functional metaphor that speaks across cultures, translating the unfamiliar in a way similar to what Montaigne attempted when he was writing *Of Cannibals* using the Tupi example. By which I do not mean it is “merely” a metaphor, but rather that it shows the dynamic, inevitable power of the metaphors and stories that fundamentally structure human thinking. So, Montaigne in talking about Brazilian cannibalism helped create a new myth of the Noble Savage, which of course would have its own problems, and cultural anthropophagy now is trying to get away from that—from the reinstatement of a binary between self and other, even if their valuation is inverted. The further point, however, is that Montaigne was also using this example to expose reported cannibalism within the civil war in France, arguably defying the binary itself. So, we might want to build upon our awareness that these inherited stories have been diversely, even contrarily reinterpreted to new ends when discussing specific examples of Shakespeare: perhaps this can help us break down simpler distinctions based on region or location, that a work is “from” there or “from” here. In a time of global circulation, no location can be static or definitive in itself—especially when discussing collaborative artworks. Yet a consciousness about location still matters. In a similar way I hope we can now agree that we are all living in the Anthropocene age, and as a result there is no singular nature outside culture; that is another antiquated binary that cultural anthropology flips and re-numerates to make nature rather than culture plural. Even so, single versus plural is still binary thinking. It seems to me that, be it Bhardwaj or the RSC, there is no pure, singular culture that has not gone through versions of hybridity. And what this adds cannot always be allegorized as a symptom of hierarchical

power differentials, within or between cultures. So, I think all that is interesting. Addressing that complexity is one dimension of what *Omkara* does so well too. Of course, we certainly get the infiltration of the West through the representation of Kesu and so forth, and that is not to be discounted. But, as you say, the material has been entirely digested, made its own thing—and maybe that also reminds us, whether we are in the Anglophone tradition or not, that of course there is no pure, continuous heritage here, there, or anywhere. Which makes visible that every production, every instance of global Shakespeares, whether or not it is so labelled, is always being digested, has always already been digested.

*KC: How does cultural cannibalism affect consumption of Shakespeare then? Even as recently as 2012, I felt that there was a certain amount of exoticisation, of Othering, with productions such as the ones at The Globe. Do you think that has changed in any way in the last few years? I am thinking of the most recent RSC Twelfth Night where Viola and Sebastian are Indian royalty washed up on British shores, or Emma Rice's Midsummer Night's Dream at the Globe where brown people were representations of British society and not representations of an Other necessarily. There was a sense of integration there, an incorporation of otherness that was satisfying to someone like me. Do you think anthropophagy could be the kind of critical tool we need to consume Shakespeare or teach Shakespeare today?*

DH: I would make a distinction between global Shakespeares as a phenomenon of big institutions doing performances, or state-sponsored performances, and what we as scholars do or teachers do. It is crucial that we talk increasingly across those boundaries—that is the reason we are both where we are today, having this conversation in Stratford-upon-Avon at the “Radical Mischief” conference co-sponsored by the Shakespeare Institute *and* the RSC.

This weekend exemplifies an attempt to change and shows that people are trying to do a bit more talking across professional boundaries. It is a change that more scholars need to be involved in—in the sense of intervening, working with artistic companies in ways companies can hear, and being realistic about what that company has to do. Because the artistic companies do have a bottom line: they have to have people in seats (or standing!).

“Consumption” for them involves not just what they want to theorise about, what Shakespeare does, but rather, will people show up? And (usually) pay to watch? So, in that case, there are (at least) two kinds of consumption going on. I like the idea that the cannibalistic vision gives more power to whoever is consuming; maybe that takes us away from the Adorno-Horkheimer vision of the passive capitalist consumer (or at least the often overgeneralized description of their vision)<sup>1</sup> and allows a little more activity, even for consumers of mainstream commercial arts. Maybe we can draw on that to bring the worlds of what we actually do in global Shakespeares as scholars closer together with those public performances. I have worked recently with a *Merchant of Venice* that began in Venice, in the Ghetto.<sup>2</sup> It was very actively trying to think about how “we,” as a multicultural performance group, be sensitive to our location and not try to colonise it. Adjust to it. So “digesting” the place, and time—perhaps that is another thing cultural anthropophagy might help us do, as artistic collaborators. I have since been filming that work in America because the same director, Karin Coonrod, has put on subsequent performances there—but she has made

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<sup>1</sup> See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944, revised 1947; English translation 1972).

<sup>2</sup> The Compagnia de’ Colombari production directed by Karin Coonrod was first performed as part of the 2016 commemorations of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, and the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare’s death. Modified versions were subsequently performed in Montclair, New Jersey (2017) and at Yale University and Dartmouth College (2018), and Henderson has developed an online module and documentary incorporating some of the show’s development and performance footage. Pertinent to what follows is that the show featured five different actors playing Shylock’s scenes across each evening’s performance, and included an extra-textual moment when all five gather in grief at his daughter Jessica’s elopement; at that moment, the one female Shylock releases a loud, long howl.

changes to fit the place. For example, she raises issues of race in America. Even if not in the Venetian Ghetto, Judaism is obviously still crucial because *Merchant* is still about Shylock; but having an African-American woman be the female Shylock howling in pain in the middle of the play happens because this is now a performance in America. It evokes different local histories and contexts and digests the play once again in specific ways. The more we as scholars likewise understand what is possible and what is not, and can listen with or to the performers, the more impact we will have.

*KC: This Venetian production is of course quite well known now, but do you think that perhaps it is easier to find examples of anthropophagy when considering non-Anglophone, or even non-UK or non-US centric Shakespeare productions? For instance, the Parsi theatre tradition in western India which assimilated Shakespeare quite irreverently along with other European, Sanskrit and indigenous sources. I like the idea, however, that it is not just non-Anglophone productions that may be analysed through the metaphor of cannibalism.*

DH: I don't think it is *just* non-Anglophone, but it *is* non-Anglophone. There is so much to be offered by looking at non-Anglophone. I also think that there is a lot to learn from translation studies. That is another dimension of what we are talking about: who is consuming what. Making visible all the performers, all the collaborators, means including translators. Back in 2008 when I was editing *Alternatives Shakespeares 3*, Rui Carvalho Homem from Portugal (perhaps that is ironic in the context of thinking about Brazil as a colonized power, but—), he was writing about a translator, and a Marxist translator at that, under Salazar, under a Portuguese tyrant. The translator, Álvaro Cunhal, was trying to use Shakespeare to challenge the politics of his time and place. So, attending to creative consumption can be helpful both in analysing geographically diverse cultures and in considering the translated text. But also, if

we can stop dividing text from performance even in translation, if we can stop thinking about Anglophone meaning only the text part, that would be incredibly helpful. When we were doing *Merchant*, it was framed with a bit of Ruzante, in the Venetian local dialect, at the start, plus elements of the commedia dell'arte tradition—all before you got to Shakespeare. Which at the same time reminded us where Shakespeare's comic figure Lancelot Gobbo came from, so in a sense you are digesting it back. We were in Europe, but we could still start thinking in terms of colonialism: it was the Venetian Republic we were talking about. I am thinking too of the good work that people such as Yong Li Lan and Eleine Ng are doing through the A-S-I-A database, studying the mixture of theatrical traditions and also translating across languages—multiple languages—and not privileging any part of the production. That certainly has a lot to offer and resonates with cultural anthropophagy.

*KC: That is a good precursor to the question I was going to ask you next. Do you think discussions on global Shakespeares usually centre on how the East adapts the West? Do you think there is a cross-cannibalisation happening now, as we have both noticed, where the West is now absorbing the East? How does that affect the studying or teaching of Global Shakespeare now that global Shakespeares is a part of most Shakespeare courses?*

DH: Well I would say two different things again. In terms of cultural anthropophagy, what I like is that it complicates East/West with North/South as well. It prompts us to think about what it means for this framework to come from Brazil, which has very rich theatrical traditions *and* Shakespeare traditions: among the best known, of course, being the theatre of the oppressed, of the worker, of the poor, in the practices of Augusto Boal and others. This tradition encourages us to think differently about aesthetics, to reconsider what roles theatre performs within the wider cultural surround. So, the North/South distinction as well as the

East/West becomes very important for what cultural anthropophagy might add to much global Shakespeares work. But the East/West dynamics at present absolutely matter too. Again, it is very hard to say where the boundaries are. I do not think there is any person now, no matter where or who you are, who has access to an uninterrupted chain from Shakespeare, his time and place. Making the complexities of inheritance more visible is crucial. Based on what I have seen working with those who create the MIT Global Shakespeares Video and Performance Archive, much of what gets shared is a direct result of which scholars and artistic companies we meet. Personal networks work. So do economic realities: where is the money, and where is the funding? Where are the traditions that are rich and where is there a cluster of people teaching or performing Shakespeare? Consumption follows from national or local structures. It follows the people who are moving across as well as within those spaces. So, for example, when you four [Koel Chatterjee, Varsha Panjwani, Preti Taneja, Thea Buckley] created an Indian Shakespeares on Screen event in London [2016, in collaboration with Asia House and the BFI], the impetus came from four people who straddle those two worlds. Are you East or West? Is the Brazilian who draws on modernist manifesto thinking and cannibalism to be located as North or South? Does it matter if he is the child of Italian immigrants? These networks of cosmopolitan transnational movement are overlaid on particular spaces and times. Acknowledging these realities can help us be more nuanced when discussing location. You know the debates in Asia, such as the attack on Ong Keng Sen for mixing different nations or languages or traditions, for mix-and-match kinds of hybridity. But you know too about the Parsi theatre's mixed traditions...it is not like doing traditional Kathakali, it is mixing. So how do we feel about that? You tell me what you think.

*KC: Well that is the central question. I mean you go back to adaptation theory, don't you? People are still caught up in the question of fidelity, how faithful is this to the original. But there is no 'original' anymore.*

DH: And never was, by the way—because theater is a performance form. And we know that, every dimension of it, from publishing at that time to performance at that time, we just know that the process was dynamic and always changing.

*KC: There is also an awareness now of how it's not the author. Of how he's not the only creator. There's the performers coming in to it, the editor coming in to it. So I think it is...there's very distinct schools in India in terms of Adaptation where people still are struggling with colonial reverence to the text so it's interesting that a Kathakali Shakespeare might cause quite a bit of reaction. But then again, Bhardwaj's Haider (2014) had quite a divisive reaction in India with two camps of people either strongly supported or strongly opposed the film.*

DH: --though that was less about Shakespeare and more about how the film comments on Kashmir: the boldness of going into a contemporary minefield, quite literally.

*KC: Yes, because it reminded me of the Thai Macbeth, **Shakespeare Must Die** (2012) by Ing Kanjanavanit, which was censored and banned in Thailand for the movie's anti-monarchy overtones. There is that space which is...I wonder if cannibalising Shakespeare is actually touching a cord in the way that Shakespeare perhaps meant it to, forcing people to get away from their elitist and Anglo-centric way of thinking about Shakespeare. That's probably why, going back to my students, why they react so instinctively to the themes of the plays when they*

*are presented a version which is not 'typical' Shakespeare, which has been cannibalised and reinterpreted in new and more familiar ways. Why perhaps Emma Rice's shows brought in packed houses at the Globe and attracted a demographic who usually stay away from theatres. They instinctively seem to relate to a Chinese or Japanese production in a way that promotes questioning and debate where they fail to react to more traditional productions.*

DH: This also gets at the question, what are familiar genres for students now? More students are comfortable with film than with theatre. They have more experience of it. So, what feels more current or immediate and therefore gets their emotions involved are the conventions of film. Even if it is film from another culture in a different language. Film is still more familiar than going and watching people in live embodiment artforms. For most students. But you also brought up another aspect of the cultural anthropophagy vocabulary which could be useful as a counter to the reintroduction of Shakespeare as the figure of the author, which has in the last 15 years become oddly resurgent. Even among some people who were involved in new historicism and cultural materialism in the first place—which would seem to imply that you would not then go write in familiar Bardolatrous ways about the genius Shakespeare and how he foresaw everything that is happening now. But that genius-artist is a difficult romantic inheritance to let go of, for students as well as for “consumers” in audience terms. It is very hard to resist... there is a self-interested reason for all of us to hold on to Shakespeare at a time when Humanities and the Arts are not generally given the prestige they once held. You talked about consumption, you talked about globalisation. Given the economic realities in which we are living, I really do understand strategic use of the author figure. But it is also good to fight against Shakespeare being the singular genius or invoking him as an author-figure unironically. So, I think ‘Tupi or not Tupi’ is a pretty funny one-liner for playing against all that, which could be useful.

*KC: So where do you think Global Shakespeares as an academic discipline is going to go from here?*

DH: Predictions are hard. I would hope it is going into new territories. I will say that Brazil is currently the most highly ranked nation in terms of the proportion of performance work included on the MIT open-access Global Shakespeares Video and Performance Archive. And, as mentioned earlier, that is not because the site aspires to be an accurate world map based on any form of scientific survey of productions worldwide. That result is based on networks, and local producers being interested and interesting enough to have captured attention from the local scholars who serve as regional editors, because the project is quite grassroots-orientated. To generalise from that: there needs to be more grassroots movement, there needs to be more bottom-up movement which involves both scholars and performers. In the MIT example, Brazil is a place that has done that, and therefore they have produced a high proportion of the collection. If I can speak on behalf of the MIT collaborators for a moment: we also intentionally have less Anglophone work there for precisely the reason we do not want to replicate the hierarchies that events such as the Globe-to-Globe festival tend to reproduce; I am thinking about the marketing and language that surrounded the performances, that 'Coming home to the Globe' core/periphery inheritance, the ghosts (or perhaps zombies?) of colonialism. Especially but not only in Britain, English-language scholars and artists need to be conscious about the export mentality of our economy right now. Once again, trying to resist that dominant model is very hard, and it is also very hard to find people, enough people, who can record and do the labour of capturing alternatives. Cameras are getting cheaper, but it is still hard to get quality productions that can be explained by scholars so that others (students, general viewers) elsewhere can understand the

performances in their local habitat with the subtleties that one needs. We are not trying just to say, ‘I saw something, it was really exciting,’ or even to have students say, ‘that was exciting!’ and stop there. That is not enough in itself to warrant adding it to a scholarly archive or site. So, we need to get to know and hear from local scholars in order to enrich the picture. How do those scholars have the money to come to conferences, or how do we have the money to go and see them? These are complicated issues. As a result, for example, African countries are wildly underrepresented—which sends us back to the issue of the global economy itself. As we talk about India, we are talking about the legacy of the Commonwealth still, even if subcontinental artists are doing their versions of Shakespeare in various languages and traditions that are not in English. When you talk about your students, *Bhardwaj* works very well, because *Bhardwaj* works very well. Because he is a good film maker with a good-sized budget. And so, if we post some low-budget filming of a low-budget performance, do we just re-inscribe the inequities? Is it worse to have nothing? Is it worse to have tokenism? Is it worse to have something that the students will look at and say, ‘I don’t get that’ and be put off? So, these are the concerns scholars, wherever they can, need to be thinking about, and listening. Listening is more important than me talking, telling others where the future is going. I want scholars from across the globe to come forward, to feel welcomed to tell us about what is going on where they are. Plus, as more people are used to a range of social media, we may be at a point when that big-budget or filmic bias is becoming less of a problem. Because really, all you need is a cell phone to record, if the work is sufficiently interesting in itself. There has to be more exchange, and that brings with it opportunities for younger generations—for our students too who are so at home online, for the first YouTube generation. I do think we have many more possibilities for sharing that diversity, so I hope that is at least one of the places global Shakespeares is going.

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