## Welcome to the project

This is a new reference work and we are delighted to have you on board.

The idea that Shakespeare is a global author has taken many forms since the building of the Globe playhouse in London in 1599. Performances of Shakespeare not only create channels between geographic spaces but also connect different time periods. Divided into two major sections, Shakespeare and World Cultures and Shakespeare and Genres, the Palgrave Encyclopedia of Global Shakespeare showcases the diversity of the world-wide reception and production of Shakespeare's plays.
Global Shakespeares: A Critical Introduction

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Keywords
Cultural figure · Globalization · Intercultural performance · Ethics · Appropriation · Multilingual theater · Translation · World cinema · Race · Gender · Sexuality

Definition

Shakespeare’s works and Shakespeare as a cultural figure have been closely associated with world cultures. The history of global performance dates back to the late sixteenth century when Shakespeare’s plays began to be performed in continental Europe during his lifetime. The word “global” in global Shakespeare does double duty: it is an attributive genitive naming the stakeholder and playwright of the Globe Theatre, and it is a descriptive adjective signaling the influence and significance of that theater and of Shakespeare. Shakespeare has become both an author of the Globe and a playwright of global stature.

Shakespeare’s plays often feature locations outside England, Scotland, and Wales, and characters from the Mediterranean, France, Vienna, Venice, and elsewhere. Even the history plays that focus intently on the question of English identity and lineage feature foreign characters who play key roles, such as Katherine of Aragon in Henry VIII, and the diplomatic relations between England and France. As products of an age of exploration, Shakespeare’s plays demonstrate influences from a rich treasure trove of multilingual sources in Latin, Italian, Spanish, and French. Arthur Golding’s 1567 English translation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, a Roman collection of mythological tales, provided a rich
network of allusions for Shakespeare’s comedies (e.g., the story of Diana and Actaeon).

In fact, the history of global performance dates back to the late sixteenth century when Shakespeare’s plays began to be performed in continental Europe during his lifetime. European tourists and emissaries to England have also attended Shakespeare’s plays. During his lifetime, Shakespeare’s plays were performed in Europe and were subsequently taken to corners of the globe that seemed remote from the English perspective, including colonial Indonesia in 1619.

Since the late sixteenth century, Shakespeare’s plays have been performed in many parts of the world and in an increasing number of languages, dialects, and styles. It is notable that his work and name have been closely associated with the open-air theater and cultural institution known as the Globe in Southwark, London. Performances in the context of world cultures enrich Shakespeare’s own imaginations about the world, because globalization is a process that opens up cultures to one another and produces many new “worlds” within.

Over the past century, stage, film, and television adaptations of Shakespeare have emerged in the performance cultures of the UK, the USA, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Asia-Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and other parts of the globe. Anglophone-educated audiences in this global context become both outsiders (to the foreign style) and insiders (familiar with certain aspects of Shakespeare), while audiences elsewhere are insiders to local performance styles and outsiders to some parts of the Shakespearean narrative.

Global Shakespeare is not a phenomenon that takes place exclusively outside of the Anglophone world. Take the UK, for example. Performance styles borrowed from other cultures have helped to bring a sense of novelty to Shakespeare’s familiar plays. British directors began employing hybrid performance styles as early as the 1950s, with Peter Brook being a notable example. His Titus Andronicus (1955), starring Laurence Olivier, is one of the landmark productions that contributed to the rehabilitation of the play. It transformed Titus from an undervalued melodrama to a serious study of primitive forces and raw emotions of jealousy and revenge. Realistic but heavy-handed portrayal of the horrors and violence in traditional presentations of this play was replaced by an elegant, minimalist, Asian-inspired stylization. There was a strong contrast between aural and visual signs: scarlet streamers flowing from Lavinia’s mouth and wrists to symbolize her rape and mutilation and harp music accompanying her entrance. Brook’s Asian symbolism tapped into the kinetic energy of the play as ritual and inspired Jan Kott when it toured to Warsaw. Brook went on to produce A Midsummer Night’s Dream in 1970, which became an instant hit, and to adapt the Indian epic Mahabharata in 1985. His Titus is significant in the context of what I call boomerang Shakespeare, as it anticipates the use of red ribbons as symbols of blood and gore in Japanese director Ninagawa Yukio’s 2006 production of Titus at Stratford-upon-Avon at the RSC Complete Works Festival. Ninagawa treated the play as myth, because recurring ritual in a cycle is best understood through symbolism. Boomerang Shakespeare encompasses a range of events, including non-Anglophone productions, co-productions by British and foreign artists, local events celebrating Shakespeare’s global afterlife, and British productions that incorporate elements from more than one culture in its cast, style, or set. In 1994, the Barbican Theatre hosted a festival entitled Everybody’s Shakespeare that offered performances by the Comédie-Française (Paris), the Suzuki Company of Toga, Tel Aviv’s Itim Theatre Ensemble, Moscow’s Detsky Theatre, and the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus. More recently, the 2012 World Shakespeare Festival during the London Olympics, where the Globe Theatre hosted 37 productions of Shakespeare’s 37 plays in 37 languages, ushered in a new era of British appreciation of worldwide performances of Shakespeare. Such festivals of global Shakespeare are sometimes criticized for turning touring productions into a commodity that reinforces popular stereotypes of foreign cultures. The commodification of foreign cultures makes them seem easy to digest (the cherry blossom for Japan, drumming for Africa, the carnival for Brazil, and so on). Despite these potential pitfalls, festivals and
touring productions do make important contributions to the afterlife of the Shakespearean canon.

By giving expression to marginalized, oppressed, and disenfranchised cultural voices, performances of Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays become a vehicle of empowerment, an agent to foster the multicultural good. Within the Anglo-European West, both homegrown and touring companies have staged Shakespearean performances in Britain that may sometimes seem foreign to the sensibilities, styles, and linguistic repertoire of the local audiences. Acclaimed directors such as Claus Peymann (Berliner Ensemble, Germany), Robert Lepage (Quebec), and Peter Sellars (USA) and internationally active British directors such as Tim Supple have presented the beauty of estrangement through multi-national casts, hybrid performance styles, and the use of one or more foreign languages on stage (see Mul-tilingual Productions).

On screen, too, Shakespeare has enjoyed a spectacular afterlife since 1899 when a silent film of a stage performance of King John (dir. Herbert Beerbohm Tree) was released. While mainstream scholarship tends to assume that international films of Shakespeare blossomed in the mid-twentieth-century post-war era with the prominent examples of Grigori Kozintsev, Franco Zeffeirelli, and Akira Kurosawa, the era of Shakespeare on silent film was already quite international. Kurosawa’s well-known Throne of Blood (Macbeth, 1957) and Ran (Lear, 1985) are far from the earliest or the only international films. Around the time Asta Nielsen’s cross-gender Hamlet (1921) was released as a silent film, gender-bending silent film adaptations of The Merchant of Venice and The Two Gentlemen of Verona were being made in Shanghai with expatriates in China as well as diasporic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia as target audiences. In post-British Raj India, James Ivory’s 1965 film Shakespeare Wallah follows a traveling troupe of English actors performing Shakespeare on the Indian subcontinent. Shakespeare has become part of the British diaspora and Indian cultural scenes thanks to an imposed British educational system and local resistance to cultural colonialism. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, global film industries enjoyed a decade of relative optimism and what scholars have called a renaissance of Shakespeare on film. The 1990s, up until the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, marked a time when filmmakers in the West were temporarily released from anxieties of the Cold War and turned their attention to Jane Austen, Edith Wharton, Shakespeare, and other classics. The international boom of Shakespeare on film, however, has continued into the twenty-first century, characterized by new experiments with genre. In 2006, for example, Chinese director Feng Xiaogang adapted Hamlet, Hollywood visual language, and the martial arts genre in his feature film The Banquet. Hollywood Shakespeare films such as Baz Luhrmann’s William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet and John Madden’s Shakespeare in Love have inspired creative re-interpretations of these films and of Romeo and Juliet in Anthony Chan’s Hong Kong film One Husband Too Many and Cheah Chee Kong’s Singaporean film Chicken Rice War.

Shakespeare has also thrived in other media around the world and has often been used as proof of concept or launch material for new technologies. As noted above, Shakespeare played an important role in early cinema. Directors of silent film drew on the canonicity of Shakespeare to validate and legitimize the new art form when only theatre was widely regarded as highbrow. Due to Shakespeare’s cultural cachet, his words are often used when new media are launched. When promoting his new invention of the telephone at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in June 1876, Alexander Graham Bell recited a soliloquy from Hamlet. Emperor Dom Pedro of Brazil reportedly cried “My God, it talks!” and Sir William Thomson later told the assembly at the British Association in Glasgow that “I heard ‘To be or not to be ... there’s the rub’ through an electric telegraph wire.” As a play about ghosting and a ghost on a haunted stage, Hamlet can be said to anticipate telephony as a new media and technology of representation on a global scale.

Buoying the fascination with the idea of containing the world within the “wooden O” (Henry V) was the fact that using globes and maps was an integral part of the education of an
early modern gentleman. Even though it is not the only venue associated with the playwright, the Globe in London has generated many of the ideas and tropes about Shakespeare’s universal appeal. Other London venues of the same period, such as the nearby Rose Theatre, never garnered the cachet that the reconstructed Globe (opened in 1997) enjoys. The modern Globe, a major tourist destination, is a palimpsest for the historical Globe, which opened in 1599 and burned to the ground due to fire from a stage cannon during a performance of Henry VIII in 1613.

In addition to performances in international contexts, Shakespeare and his contemporaries were fascinated by the idea of the globe. In the late 1590s, courts, grammar schools, and colleges were regularly adorned by globes and maps such as Gerhard Mercator’s world maps. While there are a number of theories about why the Lord Chamberlain’s Men named their playing space “the Globe” in 1599, it is likely that they did so to tap into the English enthusiasm for terrestrial and celestial globes such as the renowned 1592 globes by Emery Molyneux.

There are many reasons why global Shakespearian productions are often accompanied by a celebratory tone and much fanfare. Presentations of Shakespearian motifs, quotations, and plays on the world stage have often been construed as a source of legitimation of cultural value. Along with post-Cold War campaigns for soft power, festivals and directors in many countries put on Shakespeare’s plays as part of their quest for cosmopolitanism.

Among the key features of Shakespearian performance in our times are cross-media and cross-cultural citations. Adaptations refer to one another, as well as to Shakespeare, across cultures and genres. Baz Luhrmann’s 1996 film version of Romeo and Juliet is a good example. It brings both the melodramatic and tragic elements of the play into stark relief against modern media history. The Singaporean film Chicken Rice War (dir. Cheah Chee Kong, aka CheeK, 2000) parodies Hollywood rhetoric and global teen culture by commenting on the popularity of Luhrmann’s film, which starred Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio and brought the classic tale of power and passion to a fictional, modern-day Verona Beach. Chicken Rice War’s engagement with Shakespeare shows its director’s desire to use a global icon to critique the Singaporean government’s propaganda about the city-state’s identity: “New Asia.”

Reading the same play in a different context, however, produces a different kind of intertextuality. For instance, in twenty-first-century Palestine, Romeo and Juliet has acquired a new sense of urgency beyond a tragic love story. In the shadow of bombing and wars, the lovers’ fleeting affair has given way to the danger they are in and the risk they take. Juliet asks Romeo how he has made it to her balcony. Romeo says he is aided by “love’s light wings.” This exchange is usually interpreted in a lighthearted manner, with an emphasis on the couple’s youthful exuberance. Reading the play with his students in Abu Dis, Tom Sperlinger notes that what might otherwise have been construed as a more innocent lover’s complaint or teenage hyperbole now acquires a far more earnest tone, especially when Juliet warns Romeo that “[i]f they do see thee, they will murder thee” (2.2.70). Engaging with Romeo and Juliet in the context of modern military conflicts entails a deeper level of self-reflection and offers the potential to see the play in a new light.

Elsewhere Shakespeare has been used as a platform to explore politically and socially sensitive issues. Set in modern Iran, HamletIRAN (2011) suggests that “something is rotten” in the country where the Green Movement arose in the wake of voting fraud during the 2009 presidential election. Directed by Mahmood Karimi-Hakak, the production features characters singing Persian folk songs and courtiers wearing turbans, with an image of Mount Damavand in the closing scene. The performance takes place around a pool, a traditional centerpiece of Persian gardens. The tormented hero of the play wishes to set things right, but he does not act rashly for fear his country may fall into chaos. Likewise, the Tibetan-language film Prince of the Himalayas (dir. Sherwood Hu, 2006) explores the sensitive topic of Tibet’s place in modern Asia. Set in ancient Tibet, the film centers on the young prince Lhamoklodan, who sets out in a quest to find his
and his country’s identity. In the Thai meta-
theatrical adaptation of Macbeth, titled Shake-
speare Must Die (dir. Ing Kanjanavanit, 2012),
the characters stage a play in which a general
takes the throne through a series of bloody mur-
ders. The story parallels that of a superstitious and
murderous contemporary dictator known as Dear
Leader. The two worlds collide when the players
stage Macbeth in a world ruled by the dictator.
Shakespeare Must Die is political in nature and
critiques Thai politicians. At the time it seemed
inevitable that the film would be censored due to
its sensitive subject matter. Shakespeare’s tragedy
serves as a platform to launch a difficult conver-
sation about contemporary issues.

The other key feature of global Shakespeare is
artistic collaboration in a post-national space. It is
no longer productive to profile performances by
their perceived cultures of origin. Shakespeare’s
works are not transmitted simply from the center
to the periphery, or merely from one country to
another. Such labels as “Shakespeare in India” are
not always helpful in our understanding of global
Shakespeare. As evidenced by the cultural coor-
dinates of such stage works as Sulayman Al-
Bassam’s The Al-Hamlet Summit, the “origin
story” and reception history are far from linear
or straightforward. The British-Kuwaiti play has
been accused of reinforcing and benefiting from
Western prejudices against the Arab region. Karin
Beier’s Der Sommernachtstraum features nine
languages (A Midsummer Night’s Dream,
Düsseldorf, 1995; Berliner Theatertreffen, 1996).
It espouses an unabashedly utopian vision of “ein
europäischer Shakespeare.” Ricardo Abad’s Otelo
(Manila, 2008) appropriates the Philippine
komedyja, a legacy of the Spanish colonial period.
Ninart Boonpotthong’s production When I Slept
over the Night of the Revolution (Bangkok,
2007) is haunted by the restless ghosts of Hamlet
and Thaksin Shinawatra, the ousted Thai prime
minister. Other works challenge the binary of
Anglo-American cultures and “the rest of the
world.” The German poet and filmmaker Michael
Roes’s Arabic-English film Someone Is Sleeping
in My Pain: An East-West Macbeth (2001) was set
and shot mostly in Yemen and performed mainly
by Yemeni tribal warriors who were not
professional actors. Likewise, the cross-cultural
double entendres in Life Goes On (2009), a Brit-
ish-Asian film of King Lear by Saneeeta Datta,
compel us to consider an entire network of cul-
tural exchange. The Bollywood film is set in con-
temporary London among an immigrant family of
Hindus from Bengal. It creates a cultural location
that is neither here nor there.

Translation, in tandem with performances
online, on screen, and on stage, is an important
force behind the rise of global Shakespeare. The
Complete Works has been translated into German
a number of times beginning with the German
Romantics and into Brazilian Portuguese by Car-
los Alberto Nunes in 1955–1967 and by Carlos de
Almeida Cunha Medeiros and Oscar Mendes in
1969. Literary translation sometimes modernizes
the semantics of the source text, which brings the
text forcefully into the cultural register of a differ-
ent era. As such, Shakespeare in translation
acquired the capacity to appear as the contempo-
rary of the German Romantics, a spokesperson for
the proletarian heroes, required reading for the
Communists, and even an icon of modernity in
East Asia. We can learn a great deal even by just
looking at new titles given to Shakespeare’s plays,
because they reveal the preoccupation of the soci-
ety that produced them, such as the 1710 German
adaptation of Hamlet entitled Der besträfte
Brudermord (The Condemned Fratricide) and
Sulayman Al-Bassam’s The Al-Hamlet Summit
(English version in 2002; Arabic version in
2004). While Western directors, translators, and
critics of The Merchant of Venice tend to focus on
the ethics of conversion and religious tensions
with Shylock at center stage, the play is trans-
formed in East Asia with Portia as its central
character and the women’s emancipation move-
ment in the nascent capitalist societies as its main
concern, as evidenced by its common Chinese
title A Pound of Flesh, an 1885 Japanese adapta-
tion of The Merchant of Venice entitled The Sea-
son of Cherry Blossoms, the World of Money, and
a 1927 Chinese silent film The Woman Lawyer.
Translations are sometimes presented as part of a
country’s soft power. In New Zealand, the trans-
lation of the Sonnets and The Merchant of Venice
into te reo Māori was hailed as a major cultural
event. By 1934, Shakespeare had been translated into over 200 Indian languages using Indian names and settings. Shakespeare has come to be known as unser Shakespeare for the Germans, Sulapani in Telegu, and Shashibiya in Chinese (the latter two are transliterations of the sounds of the “Shakespeare”).

It is worth noting that global Shakespeare productions have been censored as often as they have been celebrated. Shifting political ideologies have suppressed and encouraged the translation or performance of particular plays for one reason or another. During the 1930s, for example, censorship drove performers and audiences to just a few plays in Japan, the Soviet Union, and China. As Japan was preparing for wars and calling for its citizens’ unquestioned loyalty, its government censored Hamlet on the ground of the theme of regicide. “Left-wing” plays were banned from the International Theatre Day organized by the Japan League of Proletarian Theatres (led by Murayama Tomoyoshi) on 13 February 1932. In 1935, Joseph Stalin disapproved of Hamlet, because, according to him, life is joyful for the communist state. While the comedies were generally supported by the Soviet government, Shakespeare was banned entirely during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966–76. Shakespeare’s comedies had a firm place in the state-endorsed repertoire for the stage and reading materials in the USSR and its close ally, China, during this time. Shakespeare was appropriated as the spokesperson for the proletariat, an optimist and a fighter against feudalism through such plays as Much Ado about Nothing.

Conclusion

Global Shakespeare is a body of traveling cultural texts and a space where people and ideas meet. However, making and studying global Shakespeare is a localizing process. One reason for Shakespeare’s global reach is the oeuvre’s ability to allow audiences to project various values onto the open narrative structure. The illusion that Shakespeare seems to be universal lies in the fact that Shakespeare’s narratives are flexible and can blend into other cultures.

Further Readings


Donaldson, Peter S., and Alexa Alice Joubin, eds. MIT Global Shakespeares. https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu


