

# Global Shakespeares in World Markets and Archives: An Introduction to the Special Issue

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## Abstract

Shakespeare is a local force to be reckoned with in the global marketplace and in digital and analog archives of collective memory. With the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 2014 and quatercentenary in 2016, there are several high-profile instances of global Shakespeare being tapped for its market value. The exchange value of Shakespeare is reflected in uses of Shakespearean themes and artifacts in appropriations, cultural diplomacy, and venues where nation states project soft power. There are no world markets without the proliferation of archives built on collective cultural memory. Conversely, there would be no archives without the cultural marketplace to validate that Shakespearean artifacts are archive-worthy in the first place.

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## Is Shakespeare a Universal Currency?

Shakespeare is a local force to be reckoned with in the global marketplace. Is Shakespeare a universal currency in world markets? A wide range of moral, political, and aesthetic values — profitable or threatening, as the case may be — have been associated with Shakespeare, and the values fluctuate and change over time. Value is subject to context, market demand, and ideological needs (Haines 2017, 1). The history plays seem to uphold monarchy even as they reveal its limits, and the gender politics in comedies are simultaneously liberating and oppressive. Shakespeare is far from a tabula rasa. As critics have recognized, Shakespeare's enduring appeal does not rest solely on "his linguistic virtuosity . . . nor on the power of the British empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." Jonathan Bate has argued that a combination of "permanent truths and historical contingencies" has contributed to Shakespeare's status today (2007, 40).

What criticism has not examined in depth is the factor of the world cultural marketplace. Shakespeare remains alive today in large part because the canon has become a self-validating, self-regenerating commodity in the global cultural marketplace. Shakespeare is alive not because of the canon's fixed value as determined by any one single factor. No single entity has enough

clout to influence global market volatility or the trading value of a cultural commodity. The tantalizing, dramaturgical gap between declared values and inferred intentions in the performance space generated by Shakespeare's plays keep them afloat in varying historical moments and in the ecosystem of world literature.

Shakespeare is our contemporary because the actions and objects from the worlds of Shakespeare overlap with and affect those from our worlds. Two of the most iconic props, *Othello's* handkerchief and bed, are transformed into an eroticized red *patta* or scarf that doubles as ceremonial wedding sheets in the South Indian film *Kaliyattam* (dir. Jayaraaj, 1997) to signify fertility and life and, in turn, to highlight the lack thereof. Tracing the journeys of such tokens sheds new light on the role of the handkerchief in *Othello* and Shakespeare's place in the cultural marketplace.<sup>1</sup>

Not only do props have an afterlife, but Shakespearean venues too have a life of their own. Multiple festivals have centered their entire branding effort on Shakespearean sites, including David Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769. In modern times, Elsinore in Denmark has been marketed as "Hamlet's castle" since the twentieth century. The annual Hamlet Sommer festival and its site-specific performances of *Hamlet* at Elsinore make the castle a self-fulfilling myth and product that comes full circle. As part of their effort to tap into the Shakespearean currency, the castle management actively encouraged use of the Elizabethan English spelling used by Shakespeare, Elsinore, rather than the Danish name Helsingør.

Contrary to expectations, imaginations of Shakespearean universality do not beget monotonic, repetitive, fossilized performances. Each culture and generation rebrand Shakespeare as their own, just as Shakespeare uses existing words in new contexts (such as "manager of mirth" in the entertainment business in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [5.1.38]). Shakespeare as a brand and an "archive-worthy" collectible is driving the growth in diversity in the entertainment industry while simultaneously sustaining traditional aesthetic values associated with classical literature. Jonathan Hope's research reveals that the notion that Shakespeare invents large numbers of new English words is itself a myth sustained simultaneously by a tautology about the Bard's "greatness" and by a form of intellectual, archival laziness (2012, 83). The *OED* regularly traces the origin of a word to Shakespeare and not further back simply because the name Shakespeare is taken as a mythical point of origin for all things English.

In the modern context, Indian music in British director Tim Supple's production of *Twelfth Night* (2003) helps to construct the aural landscape of a British Illyria while signifying the different origins of Viola and Sebastian in the adaptation. Meanwhile, Hamlet as a figure of thought keeps

turning up in unlikely places, ranging from a filial, patriotic prince in a Confucius temple in mid-twentieth century China to a procrastinating politician in Germany and the USA (often without Yorick's skull). Taken out of context, Ophelia has become a commercialized commodity associated with joy and modern life, as shown in high-thread count cotton beddings sold in Taiwan (Huang 2012).

### Shakespeare's Exchange Value

Karl Marx sees a commodity's exchange value — something defined relationally — as independent of its use value, the value of utility (1990, 126-27). The exchange value of Shakespeare is reflected in its uses in cultural diplomacy and venues where nation states project soft power. In October 2015, during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Britain, he quoted *The Tempest*, "what's past is prologue" (2.1.289), to British Prime Minister David Cameron, and urged the two countries to "join hands and move forward" despite the antagonistic history between them, including the Opium Wars. Significantly, Xi received a collection of the sonnets from Queen Elizabeth II as a gift during the state banquet. The sonnets in printed form consolidate Shakespeare's cultural capital and diplomatic value.

Often when Shakespeare is referenced or quoted in the global marketplace, the passages are given an ethical burden and curative quality which contributes to the Shakespearean myth. For example, Al Pacino not only quotes Shakespeare in his film *Looking for Richard* (1996) but also cites, in a larger context, the American admiration of Shakespeare and anxiety of not being qualified enough, whether by birth or upbringing, to "get it right." The citational quality of Shakespearean adaptations hinges on the mystified idea that the plays offer a moral high ground across time and culture.

The multiple transtemporal and transhistorical worlds of Shakespeare are the subject of this special issue, which draws upon the papers presented at the conference on Global Shakespeares: Mapping World Markets and Archives (George Washington University, January 24-25, 2014). There are no world markets without archives built on collective cultural memory. Conversely, there would be no archives without the cultural marketplace to validate that Shakespearean artifacts are archive-worthy in the first place. These two concerns are considered together in this special issue.

### Archives and the Marketplace

In digital and analog archives of cultural globalization, Shakespearean memorabilia and performances play an important part as well. The archives reflect and inform marketing strategies that keep Shakespeare relevant, compelling, and profitable. As Jonathan Arac theorizes,

globalization as a cultural process "opens up every local, national or regional culture to others" and produces 'many worlds'" (2012, 35). While there are several vetted, curated visual and textual archives, YouTube has become an "accidental archive" without centrally controlled curatorship (O'Neill 2014, 11). A system of user-generated videos that are buoyed by an ad-hoc tag cloud, YouTube both reflects and influences the ebbs and tides of global Shakespeare. Shakespeare in world markets is buoyed by the large number of professional and amateur digital videos circulating on various platforms. Digital videos, in contrast to analog videos, are non-linear. As a non-sequential medium, digital video allows instant access to any scene in a performance and encourages a non-curatorial approach to the archive. While videos are only partial witness to live performance events — recording only what the camera operator chooses to see — they are performance events in their own right when viewed and re-played online. Collocations and collections of digital videos thus form their own ecosystem — a marketplace of ideas and an archive of possibilities.

With this in mind, the contributors map the itineraries of Shakespeare films, productions, objects, and interpretations in world markets in South Africa, Bollywood, and world music (including music from former British colonies). We also map the movement of various motifs and agendas in cinematic soundtracks, music in stage productions, and images of Hamlet constructed by the American Communist Party, and how the histories of these motifs intersect within such ad hoc archives as YouTube, and within curated and vetted archives such as Bardbox and the MIT Global Shakespeares open-access digital performance archive.

### Marketing and Commemorating Shakespeare in 2016

There were several high-profile instances of global Shakespeare being tapped for its market value in 2014, the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, and in 2016, the quatercentenary of Shakespeare. Worldwide festive activities in 2016 surpass in number, scale, and enthusiasm of those in 2014. Sujata Iyengar has coined the term "deathiversary" in reference to the cultural phenomena surrounding Shakespeare's 400th anniversary, a term that highlights the commemorative obsession with Shakespeare's death.<sup>2</sup> Tang Xianzu, Miguel de Cervantes, Francis Beaumont, and Philip Henslowe all passed away in 1616, and 2016 marks the 500th anniversary of the publication of *Utopia*, but for numerous reasons Shakespeare alone took the spotlight, which is an indication of the current value of Shakespeare in world cultural markets.

Theater companies, festivals, publishers, academic institutions, and even restaurants seize the opportunity to increase their cultural capital, profit (as the case may be), and visibility by offering public events around Shakespeare, and particularly Shakespeare branded as a global

author. In 2014, China's National Center for the Performing Arts hosted the "Salute to Shakespeare" series in Beijing, suggesting a new interest in site-specific commemorative events and a new Chinese "assertiveness." What makes Shakespeare commercially viable and attractive, it seems, isn't Shakespeare at all. What matters are the themes and innovations that artists bring to the texts (Li and Sanders, 124-25). An international Shakespeare festival took place in Shanghai in fall 2016.

Meanwhile, quantifiable impact on society is a particularly coveted criterion for assessment in the UK. Site-specific performances and events add to the market value of "Shakespeare." In 2016 as well, the Folger Shakespeare Library sent its First Folios to all fifty U.S. states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. King's College London headed a consortium called Shakespeare400 for a year of programs, performances, and exhibitions. In addition to "1616: A Momentous Year" — a series of readings, family events, exhibitions, conferences, productions, and lectures — the London Globe showed thirty-seven new ten-minute films on thirty-seven outdoor screens to mark the occasion along a 2.5-mile route from Westminster Bridge to Tower Bridge ("The Complete Walk" 2016). These films, such as "Cleopatra beside the Pyramids," "Shylock in Venice's Jewish ghetto," and "Hamlet on the rocks of Elsinore," were shot on locations perceived as aligning with the settings in the plays. For example, the Globe's publicity material emphasizes that the series aims to capture "the astonishing breadth of Shakespeare's global imagination," as the Globe's in-house magazine phrased it ("The Complete Walk" 2016, 29).

Shakespeare's plays are apparently not only food for thought but also culinary delights. The Shakespeare 400 Chicago festival offered, among other events, the year-long Culinary Complete Works, a "complete culinary tour of the . . . plays through the vibrant and diverse restaurant scene." Examples include fare that "channel[s]" *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Topolobampo and Tony Mantuano's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* in Cafe Spiaggia.

Many of these festivals share similar approaches to marketing global Shakespeare. The 2016 festival in Chicago echoes the international spirit of the ambitious World Shakespeare Festival during the 2012 London Olympics. They even feature some of the same touring productions. For instance, Chicago-based Q Brothers' *Othello: The Remix*, The Company Theatre of Mumbai's *Twelfth Night* and Belarus Free Theatre's *King Lear* were featured both in London in 2012 and in Chicago in 2016. Other international foreign-language productions touring to Chicago include Cheek by Jowl's Russian *Measure for Measure*, Shanghai Peking Opera's *The Revenge of Prince Zi Dan (Hamlet)*, Mexico Foro Shakespeare's *Enamorarse de un Incendio*, and Poland's Song of the Goat's *Songs of Lear*. Commodified commemoration is a paradoxical genre, because these festivals "remember Shakespeare best when [they] make him new" (Calvo and Kahn, 14).

Everywhere we look, there are signs that Shakespeare is taken as a spokesperson for the human in many parts of the world and has acquired a high value in world markets of cultural goods. In 2016, the London Globe toured Dominic Dromgoole's production of *Hamlet* to 197 countries and territories. In his book *Hamlet Globe-to-Globe*, Dromgoole recounts the reason why they chose *Hamlet*. The enterprise is built on the assumption that while interpretations of *Hamlet* may vary, the play has the unique potential to interest audiences across cultures:

*Hamlet* is ram-packed with iconic moments which translate across cultures, a necessity, but most important of all it is mysterious, the greatest necessity. The protean nature of the text was as important as its elusiveness. There is something about the kaleidoscope of possible responses to *Hamlet* which suited a journey of such rapid and extensive change . . . We need to travel with a story that could talk to people in all these ways. It also needed to talk with purpose. Not with a message. (14-15)

Writing for *The Economist*, journalist Jasper Rees observes that global Shakespeare shows us that while "cultures may find reasons to be at one another's throats, there is something primordial that binds all of us: the human need to stand up and tell stories of love and death." When Dromgoole's twelve-actor *Hamlet* toured through Africa, Annastacia, a sixteen-year old girl, traveled sixty kilometers to Kasane, Botswana, with her school group to see the show. The message she took was this: "In our culture when somebody marries his brother's wife this is dangerous because children end up doing mistakes in life" (Rees 2015). The Botswana reception of *Hamlet* brings to mind renowned anthropologist Laura Bohannan's account of her experience telling the plot of the play to the Tiv. Everything that the Western critical tradition deemed morally problematic in *Hamlet*, the Tiv considered natural and logical (28-33). The "tribal" reaction to what Bohannan assumed to be universal in her own world at Oxford University made her realize that "one can easily misinterpret the universal by misunderstanding the particular." There may be a universal human capacity for morality, but each culture fills in the particulars.

### Global Perspectives on Shakespeare's Currency

Presented here are six case studies with six distinct but interconnected methodologies to Shakespeare's currency in world markets and archives. Despite their differences, the performances and marketing strategies we have observed share one common underlying principle: innovation. They do not present a frozen Shakespeare from four hundred years ago, fit for consumption today after reheating in the microwave. Rather, they embrace innovation and freely acknowledge that,

as Robert Musil observes, anything permanent will inevitably lose "its ability to impress" (1986, 320-322).

To map the itineraries of Shakespeare in world markets we have to first listen to the sounds and sweet airs of the plays in global contexts. Research on global Shakespeare has not paid due attention to the musical dialogues on stage and on screen. Kendra Leonard's article rectifies this situation by analyzing the musical landscapes of several productions and films that create musical dialogues between Elizabethan drama and the cultures of Britain's (former) colonies. Tim Supple, for example, uses Indian music to signify the divide between a "British Illyria" and Viola and Sebastian's origins in his 2003 *Twelfth Night*. Viola and Sebastian "travel" from East (cued by music of India) to the West (which is represented through Western music) which has long appropriated concepts of the East. Viola and Sebastian, however, remain firmly rooted in the East. Music signifies multilayered localities: fictional and historical. Indian music again is used to frame a colonial past in the BBC's *Virgin Queen* (2005) and *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007). Music from former British colonies and a faux-medieval score are used in Eugenio Barba's *Ur-Hamlet* (2006) to mark up cultural differences. Barba juxtaposes Saxo Grammaticus' Latin narrative against more modern Asian music in *Ur-Hamlet* in the multicultural production which features multiple performance traditions. World cultures that may appear to be "harmonious" on stage begin to appear contentious once the audience pays attention to the musical landscape. Leonard points out that the world music here reframes race and character in disturbing ways.

In contrast to Leonard's musicological investigation, Adele Seeff takes a dramaturgical approach to analyze the politics of race in South African Broadcasting Company's adaptations of *Macbeth*, examples of local programming that tapped into a global entertainment market. Shakespeare, a formerly imperial icon, is now a "point of access" for global audiences. With a broader representation of black South African artists, these made-for-television appropriations were conceived to be "reclamation projects" that could help "heal a nation's trauma." These self-conscious "reclamation projects" remain, however, hostage to the historical baggage of apartheid. Indigenous African identity is a moving target, and the post-racial worlds portrayed by the two films do not counter the effect of ethnic and cultural hierarchies in the newly democratic Africa. Seeff argues that "Shakespeare is decidedly neither Africa's contemporary nor Africa's kinsman."

One of the most frequently encountered questions in the study of global Shakespeare is the cultural and language barrier. Can one engage productively with global Shakespeare when one does not understand the foreign language? Echoing Leonard's and Seeff's analytical methods, Sujata Iyengar demonstrates another productive approach to understanding otherwise inscrutable global Shakespeare. In her study of two Indian and one Italian film versions of *Othello*, Iyengar

suggests that when one does not understand the foreign languages (Malayalam, Khariboli, and Italian), one could be more attentive to the local roles of objects and props in global circulation and in creating and attributing agency — or what she calls, following Jane Bennett, "the life of things." The films both indigenize and transform the most iconic object, the handkerchief, along with the bed of Othello and Desdemona, into a rhizomatic network connecting multiple sources of agency, characters, and meanings.

Another important issue in the study of global Shakespeare is how to understand local and worldwide political histories. Jeffrey Butcher's study of the Leftists' appropriation of the character and discourses of Hamlet shows that they used "Hamletism" (the act of applying Hamlet to national identities) to advocate international proletarian solidarity rather than to promote war. Butcher argues that the Leftist citations of *Hamlet* out of context helped to develop a global proletarian identity at the intersection of art and politics.

The next two articles turn to the question of archive in the study of Shakespeare. Richard Burt asks what is a global archive? Can letters in the play form a unique archive of their own? His study focuses on the letters that go unread in Shakespeare's plays, such as *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Henry V*. Burt argues that these moments when letters go unread are associated with madness (for example, Olivia refuses to allow Feste to "read madness" (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.308) — that is, to read Malvolio's letter). Burt's article suggests that unread letters have a "multi-media archival effect" because they are not "open and shut letters" but rather "open and cut letters" that blur the line between "alphabetic letters and the so-called material supports of letters as text messages."

Complementing Burt's theoretical take on the acts of collecting and interpreting letters as an archive, Christy Desmet takes a close look at various genres of digital archives. Specifically, she makes a case for the concept of curation as a central issue that distinguishes crowd-sourced archives from vetted, scholarly ones. Shakespeare has gone global thanks in large part to digital media. In "The Art of Curation: Searching for Global Shakespeares in the Digital Archives," Desmet theorizes YouTube as a crowd-sourced "wild archive" that resists the imperative for curation, and, by contrast, scholarly digital archives that are vetted, editorialized, and curated. The YouTube environment may seem free of the tyranny of the academic establishment, but it turns out to be somewhat monolithic. A basic search on *Romeo and Juliet* in 2013 brought up mostly mainstream and Anglophone professional and amateur videos. Desmet reports as well that there are "surprisingly few examples of global Shakespeare." Archives with intellectual backing such as the MIT Global Shakespeares and Canadian Appropriations of Shakespeare may have more vetted contents in a more global context, but they are not immune from the impulse of collecting, which



is an act of self-enclosure. Desmet moves on to theorize digital interfaces across all of these genres of digital archives as a boundary space that organizes a user's experience, rather than representing their experience. The interface has an important curatorial function with ideological effects that are sometimes overlooked. "Interface constitutes us as subjects," cautions Desmet. Therefore, curation constitutes the archive.

A currency may work or be converted across borders, but the concept of "global" Shakespeares reveals just how intensely local all performances are, whether digital or analog. The ideological encodings of all performances in all forms, including Anglo-American ones, should be studied within, rather than in isolation from, this broader context.

### Notes

1. References to the works of Shakespeare come from the Folger Digital Texts unless otherwise specified.
2. See also Iyengar's comment on a Facebook post on 19 February 2016; quoted with permission.

### Online Resources

Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP). <http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/>.

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