

Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia, *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008.  
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In his own contribution to this collection, co-editor Craig Dionne observes that "colonial culture wishes to 'Anglicize' the colonized subject through the civilizing influence of language, but [that] in so doing it has to codify identity as process and not ontology" (41). The distinction Dionne draws here between process and ontology stands in some ways as a central tenet of postcolonial scholarship. Not coincidentally, it is also a defining observation of contemporary academic models for understanding "Shakespeare," and, more broadly, the animus of academic discussions of identity in the wake of poststructuralism. Identity — of the subject, of the text — is a process, or an unending series of processes; stopping points are temporary, or provisional, always immediately subject to revision or displacement and always at least partly deferred. For the colonized subject, this realization presumably is at worst of neutral value, since it compromises the binaries that enable the process of colonization and then guarantee its results. But for the colonizer, for Shakespeare, it is supposed to be devastating.

This collection supports two observations about the state of the critical inquiry assessing Shakespeare and appropriation or adaptation. First, the colonizer and Shakespeare are no longer identical or overlapping or even necessarily aligned. Shakespeare has been wrested free from the master in whose image or service he once operated — though it seems more appropriate to say that "Shakespeare" has moved so far from "ontology" and into "process" that he — that "it" — is simply too voluble and volatile, at once too vast and too dispersed to fit comfortably with anthropomorphic metaphors. Nothing, in fact, has been done to Shakespeare: rather, the idea of Shakespeare has grown so large that it cannot be contained in anything other than scare quotes.

Second, all contemporary productions of Shakespeare are appropriations, and though some seem more overtly so than others, the notion of fidelity to an immutable Shakespearean original that allows such distinctions is itself no longer critically tenable. On this point, the editors (and to some extent, the essays in the collection) take what they call the "textual-essentialist risk" of suggesting that literary texts — specifically, Shakespeare's, for the distinction might be important — have a "grain":

If we agree that the literary text has a grain — an identifiable set of voices and historically conditioned ideological concerns that are, though open to different interpretive strategies, constitutive of its thematic design — then we are closer to thinking through the way the adaptation-appropriation "pulls" the text one way or another. Put simply, the ideology of the text can be reinforced or resisted. (9)

The value of this gesture is in its willingness to juxtapose the ostensibly irreconcilable premises of essentialism, on the one hand, with its poststructuralist critique, on the other. The gesture asks us to read identity (of the subject and of the text) as process, but not to dismiss entirely the notion of some sort of ideology native to the text and somehow partly visible in its grain. What the editors do here, in effect, is posit both "ontology" and "process," because both poles are necessary for the frame or approach that the collection wants to offer with regard to the notion of appropriation.

Though these two models of meaning sit uneasily next to one another, they need not be mutually exclusive. The key is in this collection's suggestion that they constitute a binary of their own, and that we not abandon ontology altogether, though we are perhaps encouraged to take "process" as the privileged term. To allow the Shakespearean text its grain is not to embrace essentialism but rather to enable and begin the work of assessing contemporary Shakespeare in terms of appropriation. To put it another way, we can say that productions of Shakespeare tend to be read today according to how they manage a relationship with an imagined authentic original, and that points of tension or friction perceived between the production and that original will be parsed in terms of their political and social and cultural dynamics. While many of the essays here dispute, implicitly or explicitly, the idea of an original, ontologically stable "Shakespeare," they do so only by supposing a functional equivalent that has been altered in appropriation: the point of departure for "process" is "Shakespeare," but now without the quotation marks.

A lucid and thoughtful introduction frames the scope and the terms of the collection and offers an overview of the volume's orientation with regard to its principal subjects of appropriation and postcolonial literary criticism. Jyotsna Singh's afterward commends the volume for "expanding 'the category of appropriation' so as to include a broad range of social practices" and functions as a useful quick history of academic approaches to Shakespeare in appropriation and adaptation (234). The essays themselves are grouped by fours into three sections. The first section, "Lowly Subjects: Transposing Tradition," covers "allusions, references, and textual fragments" in various genres from literary criticism to school readers, considering "how isolating specific pieces from a play-text reconfigures traditional literary interpretation" (10). Thomas Cartelli's piece on *Ulysses* will appeal particularly to readers interested in Joyce; indeed, it stands capably on its own as an

engaging and compelling reading of the novel. Craig Dionne's essay on the function of Shakespeare in British West Indies school texts considers what postcolonial deployments of Shakespeare can tell us about the West's own "native" relationship to Shakespeare as a marker of cultural capital. John Carpenter traces the appropriation of a phrase from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — "the forms of things unknown" — from Richard Wright through the Black Arts movement and various literary critical texts to consider the potentially radical difference between quotation and appropriation and suggest that the phrase has, over time, come to function independently of Shakespeare. Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan and Ana Sáez Hidalgo read Salman Rushdie's "Yorick" as a postcolonial appropriation of *Hamlet*.

The second group, "Local Productions: Nationalism and Hegemony from the Third Space," offers readings of particular stage productions and of larger trends in theatrical appropriations of Shakespeare. In her essay on Jatra Shakespeare, Parmita Kapadia rejects "oppositional" models of appropriation as reductive and therefore inadequate for assessing productions that "negotiat[e] between multiple indigenous discourses while simultaneously mediating between the colonial and neocolonial" (96). A Bengali actor in the role of Othello, she argues, signifies quite differently to different audiences of the same production. These differences will not register in a reading of the production predicated on "black/white" or "East/West" binaries. Jennifer Drouin and Maureen McDonnell consider similar issues in their respective pieces on the role of Shakespeare in the production of Québécois and Australian national identities. Drouin argues that since "Québec does not have the same colonial relationship" to Shakespeare as Canada has (116), the plays can be used independently of their association with British colonialism "in the creation and solidification of one national [Québécois] identity" (118). McDonnell considers in fine detail questions of identity and performance implicit in the casting of Aboriginal actors in Company B's 1999 production of *As You Like It*. These three essays are remarkable both for how well they fit together and for their success individually in balancing incisive, specialized observation and critique with background information useful for general readers. Niels Herold closes out the second section by considering in tandem two peculiarly North American trends in appropriation — corporate Shakespeare and prison Shakespeare. The essay recalls earlier work, by Douglas Lanier and others, on the use of Shakespeare as an inspirational tool for business management and suggests the need for more work on Shakespeare as a therapeutic space.

The third section, "Translating Across: Between the National and the Cultural," revisits the principal questions of the first two parts by focusing on a series of translations as appropriations. Pier Paolo Frassinelli's argument about Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* nicely captures the critical bent of much of the collection and of this section in particular:

Shakespeare's text and cultural capital are not so much destroyed as refashioned, transculturated, turned into the agents of a transformative process in which the pre-existing oppositions — between the canonical text and its anticolonial adaptation, between Western and peripheral, colonizer and native cultures — are put under pressure. (184)

In the ensuing essays, Ameer Sohrawardy discusses Diophosho-phosho, Solomon Plaatje's Setswani rewrite of *The Comedy of Errors*; Donna Woodford-Gormley looks at two Cuban adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*; and Atef Laouyene examines Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. In these essays, "Shakespeare" is "a cultural object that belongs to, and has been transformed by, its encounter with a multiplicity of transnational cultural formations" (184): the original, authentic Shakespeare is not destroyed, partly because there is nothing to be destroyed; there is only process to be continued. Shakespeare as text and Shakespeare as cultural capital seem to circulate today with fewer restrictions, with fewer obligations to the authentic "Shakespeare" to which much popular conception and academic stewardship still adheres. This is not an indication that something fundamental has changed in the way Shakespeare is used to produce culture, but rather that Shakespeare as text and Shakespeare as cultural capital are slowly being emptied of the ideologies with which they were packed in the nineteenth century. If it is distressing to acknowledge this unpacking — or if, on the other hand, the critical approach to producing and consuming Shakespeare outlined in this collection has begun to seem obvious — it is worth thinking through the "textual-essentialist risk" and deciding whether ideology in the plays is a grain or a veneer. Regardless of whether practitioners approach Shakespearean appropriations from an "ontology" perspective or from a "process" perspective, it is possible that the larger lessons of the past several decades of criticism have begun to take, and that "Shakespeare" is losing his quotation marks.

The shortcomings in the collection are minor. Irregularities in citation style from essay to essay as part of what seems to have been a hands-off policy on the part of the editors are unlikely to register next to the nice touches. The inter-citations linking each essay with at least one other, for instance, are effortless and effective, enhancing the collection's already remarkable sense of cohesion. And while some contributions fall short of the eloquence and clarity of the general mix, the bulk of the collection makes for compelling and engaging reading. Even the most particular reader is likely to find in each contribution an insight or observation that rewards the effort. Strong contributions from a variety of scholars working in a variety of fields, an introduction and afterword that stand as excellent essays in and of themselves, and a sense of cohesion rare in essay collections make this volume a worthwhile addition to the field.

References

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