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## Allen D. Breck Award Winner: The Presence of the Past: Shakespeare in South Africa

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ALLEN D. BRECK  
AWARD WINNER



## The Presence of the Past: Shakespeare in South Africa

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IN WHAT WAYS HAS SHAKESPEARE—as a collection of texts, as cultural capital, as a tool of a colonial education system as powerful as the bible and the gun—manifest in South African culture? Today I will sketch the presence of the past in a way which aims to draw out the South African in Shakespeare as much as the Shakespearean in South Africa. I do this following the post-colonial call to redress the imbalance of knowledges between the West and the Rest, and in order to break a simplistic cultural binary which posits “African,” colonized culture on one side and “European,” high culture on the other. There are ongoing debates about the details of this model of, variously, cultural hybridity, creolization, or transformation. Nevertheless, recognition of the synergy that occurs with the meeting of cultures, however unequally, is central to any understanding of the cultural conditions of a post-colonial world, and, ultimately, of post-apartheid South Africa.

Bill Ashcroft has recently suggested that any kind of resistance to colonial domination has to create as well as resist.<sup>1</sup> This notion of cultural transformation, which stresses alternative forms of resistance, is a useful one in terms of conceptualizing the Shakespearean-inflected aspects of the work of Solomon Plaatje in the early twentieth century, and of a group of writers who, in the 1950s, can be seen to follow in this transformative tradition of writing a South African Shakespeare.

Born in what was then the Orange Free State in 1876, Sol Plaatje was a politician, a writer, a linguist, and an activist: “one of South Africa’s most important political and literary figures.”<sup>2</sup> His output included five translations of Shakespeare’s plays, of which only two survive, *Diphosphoso* (*Mistakes Upon Mistakes/A Series of Blunders*, his version of *A Comedy of Errors*) and *Dintshontsho tsa Bo Julius Kesara* (*Julius Caesar*).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 2–3; 5; chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Willan, introduction to *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings* ed. Brian Willan (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), 1. See the same claim made also in Willan, “Sol T. Plaatje and Tswana Literature: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Literature and Society in South Africa*, ed. Langley White and Tim Couzens (Cape: Longman, 1984), 81.

Plaatje has been read in a number of ways: as the co-opted native intellectual,<sup>4</sup> and as a representative of the emerging petit-bourgeois African class whose love of Shakespeare becomes a delineating marker of education and civility.<sup>5</sup> A third reading is exemplified by Leon De Kock's version of almost inadvertent Bhabha-ian mimicry which he finds at work in the writings of the mission-educated back elite, including Plaatje.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Njabulo Ndebele places Plaatje "firmly... in the genuine history of the struggle for liberation."<sup>7</sup> Plaatje's use of Shakespeare could also be theorized as essentially destabilizing the notion of the colonial subject,<sup>8</sup> following Helen Tiffin's vision of the colonial Other who takes up the challenge of the binary system and shifts himself from one side to the other, according to the promise of the civilizing mission. This movement disrupts "those very hierarchized binaries upon which the ideology of Empire... rests."<sup>9</sup> However, David Johnson worries that this kind of post-colonial "Plaatje-subject" will come to define Plaatje, "given the cultural authority" of the major Western institutions in which such theory is housed.<sup>10</sup>

Whether his use of Shakespeare is viewed as a strategy of disruption (Plaatje challenges the construction of his own "otherness" by proving he

<sup>3</sup>Tim Couzens and Brian Willan "Solomon T. Plaatje, 1876–1932: an introduction," *English in Africa*, Plaatje Centenary Issue, 3, no. 2 (September 1976): 2.

<sup>4</sup>David Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1996), 96.

<sup>5</sup>Tim Couzens, *The New African: A Study of the Life and Works of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), 6–18.

<sup>6</sup>Leon De Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 114. This reading can be compared to David Chanaïwa's, who finds in Plaatje "perhaps the most typical of the...reform-oriented intellectuals" who made the "terrible mistake" of buying into humanism at the expense of more direct political activism; "African Humanism in Southern Africa," in *Independence without Freedom: The Political Economy of Colonial Education in Southern Africa*, ed. Agrippah T. Mugomba and Mougo Nyaggah (Oxford and California: ABC-Clio, 1980), 15 and 35 respectively. De Kock replies that Chanaïwa "fails to recognise the possibility...[of] constructing counter-narratives in which the discourse of 'civilisation' was reappropriated and redeployed"; *Civilising Barbarians*, 114.

<sup>7</sup>Njabulo Ndebele, "Actors and Interpreters: Popular Culture and Progressive Formalism" in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Johannesburg: Congress of South African Writers, 1991), 82.

<sup>8</sup>The strategy of assimilation which disrupts the simple categorization of colonizer/colonized can be effective. Ania Loomba has illustrated the possibility of using Shakespeare "as a suitably weighty means through which [to] negotiate [a] future" in her examination of Kathakali drama's adaptation of Shakespeare; *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, eds. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 163. David Schalkwyk and Lerothodi Lapula have been "struck by the way in which Plaatje treats Shakespeare as material to be used and...rather than as an idol to be worshipped"; "Solomon Plaatje, William Shakespeare, and the Translation of Culture," *Pretexts: literary and cultural studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 16.

<sup>9</sup>Helen Tiffin, "Plato's Cave," in *New National and Post-colonial Literatures: An Introduction*, ed. Bruce King (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 154.

<sup>10</sup>Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa*, 109.

can be “the same”), assimilation (Plaatje took what he was given and changed it to his own purpose), or ironic civility (whether he meant to or not, the gap between material conditions and colonial education’s humanist discourse served as implicit activist criticism), it is important to allow for a Plaatje who is not fooled into submission by a colonial Shakespeare. In addition, often inflecting the critical recognition of Plaatje’s importance to South African literature is the way in which Plaatje’s appreciation of Shakespeare legitimates Plaatje’s own importance as an artist and icon.<sup>11</sup>

Whether or not Plaatje’s relationship with Shakespeare can be read as a relationship with a series of texts (including the “narrative” of “civilization”) that carried with them an ultimately empty promise of political and social justice, one of the aims of his translations was to show that Setswana was a language which deserved to be protected. In his Introduction to *Diphosphoso*, Plaatje tells his reader:

It has not been an easy task to write a book such as this in Setswana.... But we are driven forward by the demands of the Batswana—the...cries of people exclaiming, “Tau’s Setswana will be of no use to us! It is becoming extinct because children are not taught Setswana! They are taught the missionary language! They will lose all trace of our language!” That is why we undertook to tackle this task.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond this, what more can we say about Plaatje’s translations of Shakespeare? Is there a way to free the “Plaatje-subject” from the binary of either subversive native Other or co-opted colonial subject, in a way that might allow him to artistically own his relationship with “Shakespeare” without concomitantly catching them both in the imperialist and oppressive colonial education system? Is it possible to claim a hybrid Plaatje without privileging Shakespeare?

In a field concerned with another Other, work has been done on women’s translation in the early modern period. Critics have illustrated

<sup>11</sup>See Tim Couzens, “A Moment in the Past: William Tsikinya-Chaka,” *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 2 (1988): 60–66. See also Willan, “Sol T. Plaatje and Tswant Literature,” 82–87, for a discussion of Plaatje’s relationship with Shakespeare. Willan also explores the political motivations and “ideological connotations” of the translations (88). In addition see Stephen Gray’s discussion of *Mhudi*, “Plaatje’s Shakespeare” *English in Africa* 4, no. 1 (March 1977): 1–6: “Plaatje did ‘monkey’ Shakespeare” (1). Plaatje’s Shakespearean influence is discussed by Couzens and Willan in their introduction to the *English in Africa*, Plaatje Centenary Issue, where a selection of Plaatje’s writings on Shakespeare is given, entitled “Plaatje and Shakespeare” (7–8). See also David Chanaiwa “African Humanism in Southern Africa: The Utopian, Traditionalist, and Colonialist Worlds of Mission-Educated Elites” in *Independence without Freedom: The Political Economy of Colonial Education in Southern Africa*, ed. Agrippah T. Mugomba and Mougo Nyaggah (Oxford and California: ABC-Clio, 1980); and David Johnson’s account of Plaatje as “The Colonial Subject and Shakespeare,” in *Shakespeare and South Africa*, 74–110.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Willan, *Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings*, 383–84.

that translation can be seen as an act of authoring. Danielle Clarke has detailed the powerful political commentary found in female-authored texts of the period, and shows that translation is a site of intervention and public involvement, pointing out the ideological implications of the act of rewriting inherent in translation.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Plaatje's acts of translation may have been overstressed as imitation, in the modern sense, and under-recognized as creative imitation in the early modern sense. This suggests itself in an evaluation of *Diphosphoso* by Shole J. Shole. Shole repeatedly stresses the "fine...free...and idiomatic" nature of Plaatje's translation: "Plaatje did not attempt to retain the original form at the expense of meaning... this is what makes *Diphosphoso* the success it is."<sup>14</sup>

What emerges from Shole's evaluation is that attempts at literal translation from Shakespeare's English to Setswana fail poetically and linguistically, while using Shakespeare as what we may recognize to be a source is far more successful: "At times his freedom reaches ridiculous extremes.... [W]here [Plaatje] cannot translate, he creates."<sup>15</sup> Shole compares Plaatje's translation to Raditladi's of *Macbeth*, which follows the original literally. The result is a piece of work at times so nonsensical "that one may wonder whether [Raditladi] understood his own work himself."<sup>16</sup> A direct translation, which does not make cultural and idiomatic allowances, becomes a "mistranslation."<sup>17</sup>

We can thus theorize a hybrid text, both Shakespearean and Plaatjean. Viewing Plaatje as having done something to Shakespeare, instead of reading Plaatje's work as valuable because of its debt to Shakespeare, is one way to trace the presence of a Shakespearean influence on South African literature without privileging the colonial half of the hybrid.

Ania Loomba, amongst others, has pointed out the failings of a generalized notion of hybridity.<sup>18</sup> Addressing specific cultural and historical conditions is imperative in order to avoid reinscribing the terms of dominance that hybridity as a concept first sought to counter.<sup>19</sup> Ulf Hannerz, in an article on the South African township, Sophiatown, suggests creolization as a framework within which to place the voices of a group of

<sup>13</sup>Danielle Clarke, "Translation, Interpretation and Gender: Women's Writing c.1595–1644" (Unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, n.d.), C.10946.

<sup>14</sup>Shole J. Shole, "Shakespeare in Setswana: An Evaluation of Raditladi's *Macbeth* and Plaatje's *Diphosphoso*" *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 4 (1990/91), 51–64, here 51 and 59.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 60–61.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>18</sup>Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 173–183.

<sup>19</sup>See Natasha Distiller, "A Sign that History is Happening: Shakespeare in 20th-Century South African Literature," *Literature Compass* 2 (2005):145. See 1–18 for an overview of the concept of hybridity.

men who wrote for the popular *Drum* magazine in the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare permeates both the writings of, and about, *Drum* magazine, its staffers, and Sophiatown itself, which through texts including interviews, literature, journalism, criticism, and conference papers, has been constructed as a Shakespearean space.<sup>21</sup>

Anthony Sampson, the editor widely accredited with the changes that made *Drum* the voice of the new urban African in 1951, came to South Africa from Oxford with “a knowledge of 243 Elizabethan plays.”<sup>22</sup> In what by now is a familiar imposition of “structures of knowing”<sup>23</sup>, he thus brought a particular idiom to his understanding of Sophiatown. Sampson said, “[A]ll that frenzied activity ... seemed to me to be every bit a Shakespearean play with terror and murder waiting in the wings.”<sup>24</sup> This is a sustained metaphor. Elsewhere, in an interview, Sampson says the mixture of “white characters” in the shebeens (or bars) of Sophiatown, “was marvelous. I always thought it was very like the Elizabethan theatre”. Similarly, Sampson describes the enforced class mixing amongst black South Africans as, “very much like a scene from Falstaff—a funny mixture of people with the odd pickpocket in the background. It was wildly romantic....”<sup>25</sup>

Sampson brings a delighted English gaze to the politically and socially fraught township scene: “I can remember watching a man hide under a table when word came that his wife was looking for him while his mistress was bundled out of the window. That was like watching an Elizabethan play.”<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, Sampson reports:

<sup>20</sup>Ulf Hannerz, “Sophiatown: the view from afar,” in *Readings in African Popular Culture*, ed. Karin Barber (Oxford and Bloomington: International African and Institute and Indiana University Press, 1997). I am grateful to Sandra Klopper for making me aware of this article. For a history of the development of Sophiatown see Paul Gready “The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 1 (March 1990); Hannerz, “Sophiatown”; and Tom Lodge, “The Destruction of Sophiatown,” in *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal*, ed. Belinda Bozzoli (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983). The reasons for the destruction of Sophiatown are indicative of burgeoning formal apartheid in the new philosophy of the Nationalist regime; they are cited variously as slum clearance, the elimination of “black spots” from the white cities, and the “symbolic importance of eliminating African rights to the ownership of land”; *From Protest to Challenge*, ed. Thomas Karis and Gwendoline Carter (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 24. In addition, Sophiatown has been read as a geographical and symbolic space of resistance, impossible to control on both levels; Lodge, “The Destruction of Sophiatown,” 346–48.

<sup>21</sup>Paul Gready has called “The co-existence of an emergent black urban culture and the National Party’s intent to destroy such a phenomenon... both the significance and tragedy of Sophiatown”; “The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties,” 139.

<sup>22</sup>Mike Nicol, *A good-looking corpse* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 26.

<sup>23</sup>Anthony Fothergill, “Cannibalising Traditions: Representations and Critique in Heart of Darkness,” in *Under Postcolonial Eyes: Joseph Conrad After Empire*, ed. Gail Fincham and Myrtle Hooper (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1996), 94.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in Nicol, *A good-looking corpse*, 26.

<sup>25</sup>Anthony Sampson, *Sophiatown Speaks*, ed. Pippa Stein and Ruth Jacobson (Johannesburg: Bertrams Avenue Press, 1986), 43.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Nicol, *A good-looking corpse*, 95.

It came to me suddenly that I was watching an Elizabethan play. It was as if the characters had tripped straight from the stage of the Globe, lugging their dead bodies with them. Sophiatown had all the exuberant youth of Shakespeare's London. It was the same upstart slum, with people coming from a primitive country life to the tawdry sophistication of the city's fringes. Death and the police state were around the corner: and there was the imminent stage direction:  
Exuent with bodies...<sup>27</sup>

The theatricality of this description, which overlooks the reasons why people were forced into townships, and sense of enjoyment and distance it implies can be contrasted with Bloke Modisane's account of living in Sophiatown's violence, in his autobiography *Blame Me on History*. This, too, is done with reference to Shakespeare:

Violence and death walk abroad in Sophiatown, striking out in revenge or for thrills or caprice; I have lived in my room, trembling with fear, wondering when it would be my turn, sweating away the minutes whilst somebody was screaming for help, shouting against the violence which was claiming for death another victim.... Is it a friend out there whose blood is screaming forth through the multiple stab wounds? A relative, perhaps?... A stranger?... [T]here in my room I knew that after the facts have been examined,...the rationalisations equated, the truth will confront me with a sense of shame; I would admit that no man, no relative or friend or stranger deserves the death of a beast. It was Caesar's boast that "the skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks, they are all fire and every one doth shine"; if I allowed one spark—no matter how distant and insignificant—to be extinguished, then by this, my fire too would forfeit the right to flicker.<sup>28</sup>

The difference between observer and participant is inscribed in the differences in emotional response to the drama. For Sampson, the Shakespearean framework describes voyeuristic enjoyment; for Modisane Shakespeare's texts become a conduit for the expression of distress, as well as for signifying the effect of extreme and sustained violence on himself and others of his community in what, because of Shakespeare's cultural status, was a suitable register.

<sup>27</sup>Anthony Sampson. *Drum: A Venture into the New Africa* (London: Collins, 1956), 80.

<sup>28</sup>Blake Modisane, *Blame Me on History* (1963; repr. Craighill: AD Donker, 1986), 59–60.

Modisane refers to Shakespeare throughout his autobiography: "Why not? Even in Shakespeare's time people have been known to 'smile and murder while they smile.'"<sup>29</sup> He ranges from quoting Laertes to exemplify the emotion which causes people to take part in riots and Roderigo's description of Othello to illustrate the place of the black man in white society, to references such as: "If I am a freak it should not be interpreted as a failure of their education for a Caliban"; "We took up arms against the advance of poverty"; and "the sound and fury thrillers from Republic pictures."<sup>30</sup> Johnson characterizes Modisane's use of Shakespeare as "using the words of Shakespeare's characters in order to explain his own psychological processes."<sup>31</sup> Given the complicated relationship Modisane presents himself as having with the "European" culture he loved, his use of Shakespeare must also signify his learning in Europe's best. Equally important is his desire to use Shakespeare to normalize the chaos of his own milieu in terms that are both accessible to his readers and that work to confound their value judgment: "Even in Shakespeare's time..."

What Ez'kia Mphahlele has called the "grand Shakespearean image" manifests in pieces in *Drum* which describe township life.<sup>32</sup> A May 1953 tabloidesque expose called "My husband was a flirt," begins, "You know the old saying: 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.' And I'm scared of hell in the first place."<sup>33</sup> A December 1956 example of the creation of a partly Shakespearean discourse, which is energetic, urban, and specifically South African, is Casey Motsisi's in "Lobola? It's a Racket" [Lobola is a form of customary dowry]: "Ah, there's the rob – oops, rub!...catch me paying lobola!"<sup>34</sup>

Shakespeare also had a meta-textual influence on the writers of *Drum*. Motsisi was known as "Shakespeare of the Shebeens."<sup>35</sup> Can Themba had been his English teacher, thus, according to Mike Nicol, the man "who once taught Motsisi Shakespeare's sonnets...went on to teach him about life in Sophiatown."<sup>36</sup> In addition, the Shakespearean idiom has spilled over into critics' descriptions of the life and times of the *Drum* writers, as in, "Despite its destruction the importance of Sophiatown as a community and a culture has lived beyond its death, because not all that was solid melted into air."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 143, 168, 179, 103, and 65.

<sup>31</sup>Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa*, 175–76.

<sup>32</sup>Ez'kia Mphahlele, "My Experience as a Writer," in *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*, ed. M.J. Daymond, J.U. Jacobs, Margaret Lenta ( Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1984), 79.

<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Nicol *A good-looking corpse*, 150–55.

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in Gready "The Sophiatown writers of the Fifties," 147.

<sup>35</sup>Nicol, *A good-looking corpse*, 216–26.

<sup>36</sup>Nicol, *A good-looking corpse*, 220.

<sup>37</sup>Gready, "The Sophiatown writers of the Fifties," 163.

Can Themba, of all the *Drum* staffers the most “steeped in English literature,”<sup>38</sup> also makes use of Shakespeare in his depiction of Sophiatown life as both content and stylistic feature. Examples include integrating a slang reference as part of an illustration of tsotsi taal (gangster-speak): “Weh, my sister, don’t lissen to that guy. Tell him Shakespeare nev’r said so!”<sup>39</sup> as well as in his propensity to invent words, Shakespeare-like: “the law in all its horrificiency prohibits me.”<sup>40</sup>

Themba’s first short story, which was also the winning story in *Drum*’s first short story competition, has as its protagonists a young couple, victims of “Love[’s]...often ill-starred ways.”<sup>41</sup> Instead of a Montagu and a Capulet, we have an umXhosa and a BaSotho, but the tragic consequences of their communities’ irrational hatred is written in the stars, or at least, in the literary tradition.

In his most sustained use of Shakespeare as both idiom and vehicle, and picking up on Sampson’s metaphor, Themba writes of South Africa in terms of Shakespeare’s plays, in “Through Shakespeare’s Africa,” written in 1963 for “New African.”<sup>42</sup> Themba begins by characterizing the violence of African life as something “Shakespeare would have understood without the interpolations of the scholars, and in this wise the world of Shakespeare reaches out a fraternal hand to the throbbing heart of Africa.”<sup>43</sup> Themba goes on to enlist Shakespeare as a vehicle for an expression of political anger, in a characteristically coolly sardonic tone. By writing his familiarity with Shakespeare “in this wise” into both the style and the story, Themba demonstrates at once his own sophistication, education, urbanity and intelligence, and the stupidity and brutality of the system that denies him equality. In form and content, Themba harnesses the best of British to make a point about the worst of South African. Just one brief example follows.

With the help of *Othello*, Themba jibes at

all the horror that one can conceive in the imagination of a backveld farmer who has tended his lands, jealously; guarded his honour, savagely; and contemplated his women in this dark

<sup>38</sup>Michael Chapman, ed., *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1989), 209.

<sup>39</sup>Can Themba, “The Dube Train,” in *The Will to Die*, second impression (London: Heinemann, 1985), 59.

<sup>40</sup>Can Themba, “Crepsicule,” in *The Will to Die*, 2.

<sup>41</sup>Can Themba, “Mob Passion,” published in *Drum* in April 1953. Chapman, ed., *The Drum Decade*, 33, entire story 32–38.

<sup>42</sup>“Anthony Sampson, some-time editor of *Drum*, was perhaps the first person to remark that the turbulence of urban African life was like the stage of Shakespeare’s Elizabethan world...”; Can Themba, “Through Shakespeare’s Africa,” *New African* 2, no. 8 (1963): 150.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

jungle of black, virile, uninhibited men, fearfully; leap up when these words [“Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/ Is tuppung your white ewe!”] are hurled to afright the night.”<sup>44</sup>

He correlates Othello’s situation with that of his readers, not missing the opportunity to advise them on how to get a white girl, as he gleefully points out he did, and a real Desdemona at that. “Worse than that,” he says, Othello “made himself indispensable to the state. It is this, also, that the urban African is continually doing.”<sup>45</sup>

Themba uses the politics of sex in Othello to comment on the apartheid state’s policies, which in their political control of the personal overstep the boundaries of truly “civilized” behavior:

By the way, let this quickly be said[:] in the world that Shakespeare cast for Othello and his miscegenatious doings, this kind of thing was not illegal. They had not yet come round to an Act of Immorality. The law, those days, was more concerned with whether charms and witchcraft were practiced on a girl to turn her mind to unnatural love. That was a serious crime. But we in the townships have long passed that stage. City-bred lover-boys who still use “roots” to catch the girls get laughed out of the shebang.<sup>46</sup>

Themba’s irony is characteristically complex. In Shakespeare’s Venice, he suggests, it is only a matter of time until they would “come round” to implementing racist legislation, thus pointing to the truly backward inevitability of the white man’s racism. Furthermore, in Shakespeare’s Venice, witchcraft is still taken seriously, whereas “civilized” urban Africans “have long passed that stage.” The colonial discourse of the White Man’s Burden (of which “Shakespeare” is a component), which needs barbarous natives to civilize and which encodes Western cultural, religious, and moral superiority, is dismantled.

The *Drum* writers can be seen to be Plaatje’s heirs in the South African Shakespeare they mobilized to express their frustrations. Ngugi wa Thiong’o has vigorously contested the authenticity of what he calls an “Afro-European” literary tradition. This tradition belongs to the petty-bourgeoisie ruling classes who are a creation of colonialism, and is “another hybrid tradition” and not a truly African one.<sup>47</sup> Insofar as the South African Shakespeare I have sketched here belongs to an elite educated by colonial institutions and offered class mobility through their edu-

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>47</sup>Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Curry, 1986), 26–27.

cation, I have indeed described an “Afro-European” tradition. However, where this analysis differs from Ngugi’s is in the ascription of sites of cultural ownership. This is not meant to override Ngugi’s important analysis of cultural imperialism. Rather, it is to insist that the so-called “European” half of the hybrid is as African as the Africans who transform it. Thus an Africanized Shakespeare is a part of writing in English in South Africa.

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