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On Shakespeare, Anticolonial Pedagogy, and Being Just

Amrita Dhar

This essay is written from my conviction that there is no point to Shakespeare in the twenty-first century if the stakes of Shakespeare performance, scholarship, and pedagogy are not firmly anchored in the anticolonial (as opposed to the colonial), the reparative (as opposed to the exploitative), and the just (as opposed to the overtly or covertly accepting of the injustice of imperialism). The outsize presence of Shakespeare in the world of letters and theater today is a direct result of English imperialism, and I must begin by stating that fact without reservation. Just as I take Shakespeare's worldwide presence today as a given, I also take the fact that our world's interlocked history is an ongoing outcome of colonialism as a given. Any discussion of anticolonial pedagogy must first take into account that we are living in continuously colonial conditions.¹ Thus, everything that I write here comes from my commitment to anticolonial thought and action, and from acknowledging that there is no way to work toward justice in and through Shakespeare studies without taking into account the matter of European and especially English colonialism and the aftermaths of that colonialism, which include Indigenous genocide, chattel slavery, and profiteering war. Meditating on anticolonialism as an ethic brought to my professional life in the United States—an ethic that I have been compelled to explicitly develop because of my third-world and

¹ The scholarship of Ibram X. Kendi teaches us that racism is a naturally learned behavior within a racist society no matter one's intentions, and the only way for one to not be racist is to be deliberately antiracist. See *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016) and *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: Random House, 2019). I would argue, in the same vein, that a basic colonialism is part of our learned behavior in any mainstream twenty-first-century society irrespective of background and intention, and that the only way for a person to not be colonial in mindset and actions is to be deliberately anticolonial. If this is a politics of opposition, it is so because it is a politics of survival.

immigrant identity in the global North—and examining my pedagogy of Shakespeare, anticolonialism, race, and disability across campuses of a large Midwestern state university, this essay assesses the possibilities and impossibilities of decolonizing curricula, and justice-oriented pedagogy more broadly, at my institution and in the academy at large.

I open this essay with an account of my trajectory to the current moment, analyzing specific formative moments in my ongoing education. Thus, in the next section of this essay, I discuss primarily my journey as a student, a learner. In the subsequent section, I discuss curriculum-oriented strategies that I use in the present to engage my students—whom I see as my companions and fellow-citizens in the world we inhabit together—in the discovery, examination, and interrogation of literature’s capacities to hurt and heal, exclude and include, do harm and promote justice. Throughout, I write about my love of the literature I teach, and my love of teaching, while I fully understand that other and more urgent matters, such as simple survival and subsistence, increasingly occupy many of us who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color in the corporatized and capitalist, settler-colonialist and heteronormatively patriarchal, global North academy. A pursuit of the literary humanities, you might say, is a pleasure of peacetime. And does it really feel like peace in the United States, today, when pregnant persons’ bodily autonomy has been legally attacked, especially in a way that will disproportionately affect poor and disabled communities of color; when our collective ability to regulate the earth-draining fossil fuel sector has been curtailed; when mandating effective and scientific disease-prevention measures such as vaccines has been ridiculed and called unlawful; when Indigenous rights have been trampled anew by the settler state; and when arms proliferation is at a high, even as children die in terrifyingly frequent acts of gun violence and domestic terrorism?² Yet the living cannot in good conscience escape the duty of continued thought, pedagogy, and action. And I would argue that if a pursuit of the literary humanities is a pleasure of peacetime, it

² See, for instance, Ann E. Marimow, Aadit Tambe, and Adrian Blanco, “How the Supreme Court Ruled in the Major Decisions of 2022,” *Washington Post*, June 21, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2022/significant-supreme-court-decisions-2022/>, and the National Public Radio special series “Uvalde Elementary School shooting,” May 24, 2022–September 10, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/series/1101183663/uvalde-elementary-school-shooting>.

is nothing less than an urgency in a time of resistance and action. Poetry, after all, is not a luxury.³

Learning

I did my schooling and undergraduate studies in Calcutta, West Bengal, India. My undergraduate work—English Honours, as it is called—was at Jadavpur University. It was there, in lectures and seminars led by my teachers in India, that I had my first in-depth encounters with some of the biggest names in literature, world literature, premodern literature, and English literature. For instance, Shakespeare and Milton, both of whom I would continue to study in graduate school, first came to me through my brilliant teachers in my hometown, teachers who were simultaneously dedicated instructors at the university level and commentators on civic life.⁴ Through my teachers' example (and I could not be a teacher today had I not had the teachers I did), I came to see a position in the literary humanities as one that is necessarily publicly engaged, socially responsive, and activist in the full sense of rigorous-thinking-must-lead-to-responsible-and-meaningful-action.

My hometown, incidentally, is also where Shakespeare first entered a university program anywhere. By 1822, he was part of the English curriculum at Hindu College, which is now Presidency

³ Audre Lorde establishes gloriously the need for poetry in our day-to-day lives of resistance and survival. “[I]t is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt.” See “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 36–39.

⁴ For a small sampling, confined to writing in English, see Sukanta Chaudhuri, “Development vs Environmental Security: How to Kill an Ecosystem,” *Economic Times*, July 12, 2016, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/blogs/et-commentary/development-vs-environmental-security-how-to-kill-an-ecosystem/>, and “Knowledge Seekers: The Pursuit of Knowledge for Human Welfare,” *Telegraph* (India), July 4, 2022, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/knowledge-seekers-the-pursuit-of-knowledge-for-human-welfare/cid/1873033>; Supriya Chaudhuri, “Rolling in the Stuff of Magic,” *Telegraph* (India), August 26, 2000, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/rolling-in-the-stuff-of-magic/cid/891864>, and “Day and Life in the City,” *Telegraph* (India), December 4, 2010, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/day-and-night-in-the-city/cid/456115>; Swapan Chakravorty, “Imminent Ruin and Desperate Remedy: Calcutta and Its Fragments,” *Eurozine*, May 25, 2007, <https://www.eurozine.com/imminent-ruin-and-desperate-remedy-calcutta-and-its-fragments/>. See also Abhijit Gupta’s weekly “Only Connect” column in the *Telegraph*, 2004–6, and Sukanta Chaudhuri’s fortnightly column in the *Asian Age*, 1993–2001. Chaudhuri’s columns have been collected into a book, *View from Calcutta* (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2002).

University, in north central Kolkata.⁵ Shakespeare's current inhabitation of the subcontinent's school and college curricula in general, and Bengal in particular, has come about through a complex, centuries-old history—embodying, at once, profound if conflicted Anglophilia (itself often a product of male upper-caste privilege) and radical anticolonial resistance (especially in the hands of twentieth-century practitioners). While scholars such as Gauri Viswanathan, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Jyotsna Singh, working in the US, variously and generatively theorized the impact of colonial English education systems (including and especially involving Shakespeare) for the subcontinent's political postcolonial reality, my teacher Swapan Chakravorty, for instance, wrote in Calcutta about the ways and byways of Bengalis' engagement with English literary studies (often with special emphases on Shakespeare).⁶

In my heady undergraduate days, early in the twenty-first century, my friends and I were reading everything we could lay hands on, and certainly reading all these scholars—such as Viswanathan, Spivak, Singh, Chakravorty—for all the stories they had to tell. (They are storytellers.) At the same time, we were also attending and often participating in productions of plays by Shakespeare, Euripides, Girish Karnad, Ntozake Shange, Kalidasa, Bertolt Brecht, Aimé Césaire, and Mahasweta Devi, among others. An important upshot, for me, of this promiscuous and almost indiscriminate consumption

⁵ For an accessible introduction to Indian Shakespeare, especially popular Shakespeare, see Jonathan Gil Harris, *Masala Shakespeare: How a Firangi Writer Became Indian* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2018). See also Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) and Vikram Singh Thakur, *Shakespeare and Indian Theatre: The Politics of Performance* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury India, 2020). I should note that the city of Calcutta, which was the capital of the British government in India until 1911, had its name formally changed to Kolkata in 2001. (In 1911, Delhi was named the capital city of India; New Delhi remains the capital of India to this day.) Like so many of my contemporaries, I use “Calcutta” for talking about my city pre-2001 and “Kolkata” for talking about geographically the same city in more recent years.

⁶ See, for instance, the wave of scholarship produced in the 1980s and 1990s, including Viswanathan, *Masks*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1990), and *Thinking Academic Freedom in Gendered Post-Coloniality* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1992); Jyotsna Singh, “Different Shakespeares: The Bard in Colonial/Postcolonial India,” *Theatre and Hegemony* 41, no. 4 (1989): 445–58, and *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: “Discovery” of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Swapan Chakravorty's essays collected in the volume *Bangalir Ingreji Sahitya Charcha [The Study of English Literature by Bengalis]* (Kolkata: Anushtup, 2011). See also Singh's recent work *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019) and Akshya Saxena, *Vernacular English: Reading the Anglophone in Postcolonial India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

of literature and theater from across periods and cultures—yet materially produced within the context of our chaotic but beloved city, in our specific moment—was that I came to see all these writers as part of my own coming of age; as part of my inalienable intellectual inheritance; and as part of the exhilarating blend of portable magic that I would now always own.⁷ Shakespeare, no less than Mahasweta Devi (then living and writing in my city) or Aimé Césaire (certainly not then living and writing in my city, but nevertheless writing about many of my realities), was indisputably mine. Like other writers who were forming my sense of belonging within the literary traditions of the world, Shakespeare was mine to think with, think about, have opinions about, discuss, teach, perform, write on. And as far as my Shakespeare was concerned, a production's merits or a classroom discussion's virtues had nothing to do with any parochial "accuracy" of the material in merely historical terms, but everything to do with what was rendered as a true and invested observation of the world, and with what came through in the plays as luminously in service to the people who were the theater's inspiration in the first place.⁸

Imagine my surprise, then, during my first year of teaching as a Graduate Student Instructor at the University of Michigan, when one of my students, a young white woman, casually mentioned to me one day that I was her "first Shakespeare professor who's not white." I was surprised, and then surprised at my surprise.⁹ What had I been expecting? That a white North American undergraduate student at Michigan had been so far taught her Shakespeare by a bunch of multilingual Bengalis? Or that various multicultural teachers in schools and colleges in the United States made nonwhite Shakespeare professors commonplace in the global North? I, who had never had a white Shakespeare teacher until graduate school, and who had certainly never thought of myself as a "Shakespeare professor who's not white," learned something important that day: that I indeed was, in my current context, a person of color (in a way

⁷ See Emma Smith, *Portable Magic: A History of Books and Their Readers* (London: Penguin, 2022) and Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (New York: Scribner, 2000).

⁸ "The greatest poet in the English language found his poetry where poetry is found: in the lives of the people." James Baldwin, "Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare," *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (1964; New York: Vintage, 2010), 65–69. I mention plays because, at the time, our main engagement was with the plays of Shakespeare much more than with his poetry.

⁹ I have later heard this comment from students also elsewhere, including at my current institution, The Ohio State University.

that I was and am not among other Bengalis and Indians and South Asians), an instructor of color (in a white-majority setting), an immigrant instructor of color (and therefore perceivably foreign in my current setting), and an immigrant instructor of color teaching one of the great bequests of English colonial capital, Shakespeare, in a still-colonized, settler-colonized, land, this country that calls itself the United States.

My student and I had a lively and genial exchange. She had done some Shakespeare in school but was hoping to “deepen her understanding of Shakespeare” now. She had not considered *The Tempest* as a tale of colonization but could see why someone like me, someone with an obviously postcolonial background, might, and she was intrigued that one really could “look at Shakespeare in all these different ways.” The conversation stayed with me, intriguing me with what I had learned about my own identity where I was now. But it wasn’t until much later, while listening to a lecture by Kim F. Hall a few years ago, that I started to understand the vaguely surprised tone of my student’s remark, and that I started to grasp another dimension of why my being her instructor of Shakespeare was remarkable (she did, after all, remark on it).

Hall did a hauntingly beautiful lecture at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 2016. She mentioned in it that “[p]eople of color, but particularly Black people, are not free to love Shakespeare.”¹⁰ As I listened, I was struck by how much I could relate to what Hall said and how equally much her truth was not my truth. During my education, with the general privileges and ambiguous advantages of a post-refugee-status Bengali middle-class and muddled-caste upbringing, I had never considered that I was not free to love my Shakespeare—and even more, my Milton.¹¹ In a manner that now seems to me miraculous, I had never doubted that my opinions of these writers were as good and as valuable as anyone else’s.¹² I was

¹⁰ Kim F. Hall, “Othello Was My Grandfather: Shakespeare in the African Diaspora,” Shakespeare’s Birthday Lecture at the Folger Shakespeare Library, June 27, 2016; see a full transcript at https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Shakespeare%27s_Birthday_Lecture:_%22Othello_Was_My_Grandfather:_Shakespeare_in_the_African_Diaspora%22

¹¹ As a girl, I knew very well what was expected of women in my section of life. A little ambition, within decorous bounds, was acceptable, even good. But the ambition had to be genteelly exhibited for, and approved by, a generally patriarchal and caste-oriented “we-stay-within-our-bounds” system. So it is not that I did not know that I was transgressing—but I had rebellion enough to also know that anyone wishing to place me in my “safe” role/box/home/marriage/kitchen should meet resistance.

¹² Thinking about it now, I must conclude that language had something to do with it. I had encountered Shakespeare first not in his language, but in mine, Bengali. Just as representation matters, translation matters. There is perhaps something always

certain that I had every right to love my Shakespeare and to speak my love. But now, after years of living in the United States, years also of scholarly activism toward justice-oriented pedagogy in a country where white supremacy and settler supremacy remain the underlying current animating every formal institution, I knew somewhere deep in my bones what Hall meant. Hall tells of her study in “encounters between Shakespeare and race from the 18th to the 21st century”:

[T]he initial evidence suggests that my own experiences have many precedents: much in [the] combined history of Blackness and Shakespeare makes claiming three things at once—a Black identity, a desire for freedom, and an appreciation of Shakespeare’s plays—a more formidable task than you might imagine.

Hall could be talking about me, my friends back home, my students at Jadavpur. Much in the combined history of colonialism/postcolonialism and Shakespeare makes claiming three things at once—a postcolonial identity, a desire for freedom, and an appreciation of Shakespeare’s plays—a more formidable task than you might imagine. This was brought forcefully home to me when I started my current faculty position.

On my first day as an assistant professor, my first class was The Ohio State University’s English 2201, “Selected Works of British Literature, Medieval through 1800,” to be taught at the regional campus of Newark, Ohio. (The main campus of Ohio State is in the city of Columbus, Ohio.) As I walked in and went to the front of the class, four students stood up and walked out. I said my greetings and started to pass out copies of the syllabus. Some ten minutes later—we were still talking about the syllabus—four students came in. I noted, to my surprise, that they were the same four students—all white, all male—who had left a little while ago. When I looked up at them, one of them volunteered, uncertainly: “We thought this was a British literature class.” So it is, I said, please come in and take your seats, here are copies of the syllabus, these are the texts we shall be using. The following year, one student, again on the first day of the semester (English 2220, “Introduction to Shakespeare”), told me that I didn’t “look like a Shakespeare professor.” There are variations of these sentiments and comments every year. Where I teach, it seems usual to question a junior Brown female immigrant academic’s ability to teach and discuss *The Greats*, and especially *A Great Like*

inalienable about what is first encountered through one’s very own (such as a mother tongue), and as one’s very own.

Shakespeare. Because of who I am, my teaching the early English literature survey or a Shakespeare class or a Milton class is frequently a bit suspect—if not outright an “agenda” that takes away from the “real” Shakespeare, say, from that “lofty” language, the “universal” themes, the “timeless” poetry, and the “true” understanding of human character.¹³

But in the course of my teaching in white-majority classrooms in large schools of the US Midwest, I have also come to know that most of my students arrive with a genuine thirst for knowledge and are only looking for opportunities to learn about the wide expanses of the world that they do not have firsthand experience of. It is one of the great privileges of my life to work with young people; people who *want* to learn to think critically and live responsibly; people who never, ever, dismiss an idea out of hand and can always be relied on to examine what has been proposed to them. In both the cases mentioned in the last paragraph, the students who said what they did spoke out of a frankness that I respect. And it was their candidness and their openness that allowed them, in both cases, not only to continue in my classes but to complete them with high grades. I thus cannot but be open myself, cannot but see my teaching as a form of care for my students and for the world that we occupy together.

I say out loud, always in the first few meetings of any given semester, that I teach the premodern material I do because this is history and literature that we need to know in order to understand—really understand—where we are today: capitalism, colonialism, racism, ableism, and heteronormative patriarchy. I also spell out that I research and teach early modern English literature because this is where I go to talk about the things that I want urgently to talk about: gender, race, sexuality, disability, and language. I clarify that I am not offering an uncritical “safe place” in my classes. I say, too, that I care more about my students’ learning than about their short-term comfort. That said, I also point out that in our learning community, as long as we respect one another and remain open to learning from our mistakes, we cannot say the “wrong” thing. Just as nothing solidifies race so much as *race-making*, or *race-ism*, nothing disrupts racism so much as our willingness to acknowledge our learned and

¹³ Like Felice Blake, I too have heard numerous times the statement: “I study Shakespeare; I don’t do race.” See Blake’s “Why Black Lives Matter in the Humanities,” in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 307–26.

structural racisms and commit to doing better.¹⁴ Since it is impossible, living in the world we do, to *not* have bias, we need to commit to grappling honestly with our biases. What is at stake is not praise or blame but solidarity and our collective obligation to create a more equal world.¹⁵ I also say out loud that I am indeed a Brown woman from the postcolonial third world and that I absolutely prioritize the voices of the historically disenfranchised. So, for instance, a race-conscious reading of a text and a race-ist reading of a text are not both of equal validity. I acknowledge that the discipline of English literature, and certainly my subdiscipline in premodern English literature, has a white supremacy problem.¹⁶ That is: white supremacists profess a liking for premodern English literature, and some, indeed, train in white-majority fields precisely in order to make claims for the superiority of a culture that produces “great” literature—such as Shakespeare.¹⁷ Even as we study what we do, therefore, we need

¹⁴ For a very accessible formulation of what interrupts racism, see Ibram X. Kendi’s children’s boardbook *Antiracist Baby* (New York: Kokila, 2020). See also my essay “When They Consider How Their Light Is Spent: On Intersectional Race and Disability Theories in the Classroom,” in *Race in the European Renaissance: A Classroom Guide*, ed. Matthieu Chapman and Anna Wainwright (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Press, 2023), 161–86.

¹⁵ See Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019).

¹⁶ For instance, in 2019, my campus was one of several in the US to receive white-supremacist flyers (The Ohio State University, Anti-Hate Resources and Action Network, “Campus Attacks,” <https://u.osu.edu/fighthate/assault-on-u-s-campus/>). My department, in particular, received many—ostensibly because it is seen as a possible haunt for those who are likely to believe in the superiority of white people or English people or European people. See also Luke O’Brien’s article on a past student of The Ohio State University’s Department of English, “The Making of an American Nazi,” *The Atlantic* (2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/the-making-of-an-american-nazi/544119/>. As I now write, in autumn 2022, the main campus of Ohio State is again host to hard-right campaigns. On November 15, 2022, this campus was visited by Jack Posobiec, anti-democracy speaker and collaborator with white nationalists and antigovernment extremists: <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jack-posobiec>.

¹⁷ The problem is especially pronounced in the field of medieval literature, of which many tropes, signs, symbols, and catchy excerpts are made to directly serve violent and white-supremacist ends. See Jennifer Schuessler, “Medieval Scholars Joust with White Nationalists. And One Another,” *New York Times*, May 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/arts/the-battle-for-medieval-studies-white-supremacy.html>; Hannah Natanson, “It’s all white people’: Allegations of White Supremacy Are Tearing Apart Prestigious Medieval Studies Group,” *Washington Post*, September 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/09/19/its-all-white-people-allegations-white-supremacy-are-tearing-apart-prestigious-medieval-studies-group/>; and Kristin Romey, “Decoding the Hate Symbols Seen at the Capitol Insurrection,” *National Geographic*, January 23, 2021, <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2021/01/decoding-the-hate-symbols-seen-at-the-capitol-insurrection>.

to reckon with how the field of premodern English literature has historically driven out Black, Brown, Hispanic, third-world-immigrant, and postcolonial subjects—especially those who place the past they study in critical dialogic relationship with our unequal present.¹⁸ I finally emphasize what my background, and my studying what I did from within that background, has meant for me: that an anticolonial sensibility was so centrally the point of my intellectual efforts that I didn't even call it by that name.¹⁹ And that I do what I do because I believe in the classroom as one of the last truly meaningful places of possibility in the world, and because I love what I do.

That word returns: love. Hall talks about her love of Shakespeare, a Black love, a complex love that sustains her scholarship in premodern literature, and a love that allows her to make connections, across centuries, between the literary legacy of Shakespeare, African-descent performers from the eighteenth century to the present, and transformative scholarship and performance today.²⁰ But she too asks why this love of Shakespeare should even matter in the time of the New Jim Crow and in our relentless hour of racial discrimination

See also Helen Young, "Why the Far-Right and White Supremacists Have Embraced the Middle Ages and Their Symbols," *The Conversation*, January 13, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/why-the-far-right-and-white-supremacists-have-embraced-the-middle-ages-and-their-symbols-152968>. While some medievalists opposed to white supremacist ideals like to claim "This is not who we are," other medievalists opposed to white supremacist ideals point out that it is precisely as a result of this kind of smugness and complacency (the this-is-not-who-we-are kind) within the white-majority field of medieval studies that medieval studies has been co-opted in violent white supremacy. Early modern studies—again, with an unmarked Eurocentrism even in the name of our field of study—is not without its own problems. Wendy Beth Hyman and Hillary Eklund write how "Shakespeare, perhaps more than any other literary figure, has been trotted out as a symbol of white cultural supremacy" and why it is incumbent on us, as scholars, to address and correct this notion ("Introduction: Making Meaning and Doing Justice with Early Modern Texts," *Teaching Social Justice Through Shakespeare: Why Renaissance Literature Matters Now*, edited by Eklund and Hyman [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019], 2). To reiterate, then: premodern English literature has a white supremacy problem.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Kathy Lavezzo's article documenting Stuart Hall's departure from medieval studies: "New Ethnicities and Medieval 'Race,'" *Addressing the Crisis: The Stuart Hall Project 1* (2019): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.17077/2643-8291.1003>.

¹⁹ I still hesitate to, because like so much in our corporatized global North, even terms such as "decolonization" can be bent out of all meaning through being co-opted by administrators, public relations cadres, and politicians. See also the critique by Olúfemi Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (London: Hurst, 2022).

²⁰ Among Kim F. Hall's many pieces of transformative scholarship, see particularly the critical landmark *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

and violence.²¹ Her answer, convincingly, is toward demonstrating “Shakespeare’s role in racial formation in this country and the resultingly profound relationship between Shakespeare and Black freedom” and thus also about positing a “Shakespeare usable for the next 400 years.” This resonates deeply with me. I have written elsewhere about why the very ubiquity of Shakespeare in erstwhile-colonized or still-colonized places is reason to take decolonial and anticolonial Shakespeare studies seriously.²² Shakespeare’s generative affordances in the decolonial/anticolonial program is precisely why my love for Shakespeare matters. All my pedagogical strategies for justice-oriented Shakespeare studies—as outlined in the next section—are geared not only toward creating the world that I want to live in, but also toward creating an academy that I can love enough to continue working within.²³

I recognize that my institution wants to be seen to be changing; it wants to be perceived as truly transforming itself from a stronghold of white male cisgender able-bodied belonging into an institution authentically welcoming for persons of all races, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, religions, and nationalities, among other categories.²⁴ There is not a week that goes by without missives from our

²¹ See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010). For other work at the intersection of race and the US legal system, especially the criminal justice system, see also Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2014); Beth E. Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Carol Anderson, *The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021); Margaret A. Burnham, *By Hands Now Known: Jim Crow’s Legal Executioners* (New York: Norton, 2022); and the “NAACP Criminal Justice Factsheet,” <https://naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>.

²² Amrita Dhar, “*The Invention of Race and the Postcolonial Renaissance*,” *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (2022): 132–38; <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2021.38>.

²³ I am indebted to Margaret Price, who has undertaken multiple mixed-methods studies in disabled faculty life, for this formulation. See especially her book *Crip Spacetime* (forthcoming from Duke University Press in 2024). See also Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

²⁴ My university’s documentation of its own history leaves unremarked the race, for instance, of its first students: “In 1870, The Ohio State University was founded as a land-grant university. Its original name was the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College due to its location in a farming community. The first classes were held on September 17, 1873 with the first class of six men graduating in 1878. The first woman, an engineering major, graduated in 1879. The college’s name was changed to The Ohio State University in 1878.” See <https://ehistory.osu.edu/topics/ohio-state-university>. As Richard Dyer points out: nonwhite people are raced, white people are just people. See Dyer’s “The Matter of Whiteness,” *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 1–40. Today, my university professes an aspiration toward equitable opportunities

administration about our “Shared Values,” or our ostensible passage “On Seas of Care,” or our upholding of “inclusive excellence.”²⁵ We even have an entire Office of Diversity and Inclusion.²⁶ Buffeted as I am on those “seas of care,” however, I must also recognize that this urgency of public-image-curation on the part of my institution is a function of its very real anxieties about whether it is possible—or even ultimately desirable—for it to change. There is a difference between wanting to be seen to be changing and actually changing. I therefore recognize, as well, that if an institution habitually and proactively supported its members of nonwhite, non-cisgender, non-able-bodied, non-US-citizen backgrounds, and so on, that is, if an institution in fact supported its diverse community, it would become an inclusive place and take a real step toward equity in the world. But that is not where we are. Yet in the daily life of my institution there remain us, its students and teachers and learners. And we still have our classrooms, our desks, our libraries, our discussions—all of which we can use to imagine necessary transgressions, places of genuine hope, and a world where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.²⁷ It is to my classroom that I now want to turn in this discussion of anticolonial Shakespeare pedagogy.

for all: “Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, disability, gender identity or expression, genetic information, HIV/AIDS status, military status, national origin, race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, protected veteran status, or any other bases under the law, in its activities, academic programs, admission, and employment.” See the statement by the university’s Office of Institutional Equity: <https://equity.osu.edu/>.

²⁵ See the statements on the institutional web pages <https://oaa.osu.edu/shared-values-initiative> and <https://oaa.osu.edu/vision-mission-values>. The College of Engineering at Ohio State even offers a certificate in “Inclusive Excellence”: <https://engineering.osu.edu/diversity-inclusion/inclusive-excellence-certificate>. Many in the Ohio State community, including Andrea N. Williams, Director of The Women’s Place at Ohio State (<https://womensplace.osu.edu/>), have pointed out the tautology inherent within the term “inclusive excellence”—for if a university culture is *not* inclusive, it is by definition not excellent. It should suffice to say “excellence,” and mean it, precisely by baking inclusion and equity into all aspects of university life. But mentions and even protestations of “inclusive excellence” are everywhere in my institution’s rhetoric.

²⁶ See <https://odi.osu.edu/>.

²⁷ I deliberately note the resonances between bell hooks’s and Rabindranath Tagore’s pedagogical philosophies. See particularly Tagore’s “Where the Mind Is without Fear” (published in English as poem “35” by Tagore in *Gitanjali*, 1912; <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45668/gitanjali-35>) and hooks’s idea of “Education as the Practice of Freedom” in *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

Teaching

I teach Shakespeare across undergraduate and graduate career stages of students at my institution, The Ohio State University. At the regional campus of Newark, Ohio, which serves undergraduates in an open-admission four-year program, the most common Shakespeare offerings are “Introduction to Shakespeare” (English 2220) and “Shakespeare’s Major Plays” (English 4520). Another frequent offering is English 3378, “Special Topics in Film and Literature,” which I have taught as a Shakespeare and film class, either “World Film Shakespeares” or “Indian Film Shakespeares.” All these classes enroll students pursuing both the English Major and the General Education program. Thus, there is a range of preparation that students bring to the classroom. Some students come with significant prior knowledge of premodern literature, including Shakespeare, and for some, this is their first college-level Shakespeare. At the main campus of Columbus, Ohio—and in my classes, we are aware of the profound colonialism embedded within and expressed in the very name of the city—I teach Shakespeare, specifically *Othello*, for the entire first half of a graduate seminar in Disability Studies, “Disability and the Early/Modern” (English 7891). While the unfolding discussions and class materials range in depth and scope depending on the level of the course, I have a few core goals that are common to all these classes: good close reading, a sound grasp of a few plays, and an intersectional and dynamic understanding of how these plays work for us, today, in the twenty-first century.²⁸

To that effect, I open every class with a few questions that the community must consider:

- 1) What do we mean when we say “Shakespeare”?
- 2) Whose Shakespeare is it anyway? (And who is an “authority” on Shakespeare?)²⁹

²⁸ Explicitly and otherwise, my pedagogical, scholarly, and activist understandings of intersectionality are indebted to the germinal work of two legal scholars, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Williams, especially Crenshaw’s “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Article 8 (1989): 139–66 (available at <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>) and Williams’s *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

²⁹ This question was clarified in my mind as a result of a conversation with Arthur L. Little, Jr., who, while a guest of the graduate-student-led Early Modern Colloquium

- 3) Is it “anachronistic,” or historically inaccurate, to “do” Shakespeare with lots of actors of color, of disabilities, of the “wrong” gender, and so on? (And what does it mean to care about historical accuracy, especially if that care occurs at the expense of lived lives of the present?)³⁰

And, just to make my provocation fuller, I also sometimes ask:

- 4) Is Shakespeare white?³¹

In the “Introduction to Shakespeare” class particularly, that fourth question prompts students to read the first question more carefully—once, that is, some especially surprised students get past the point of “Dear lord, is our (Brown female foreigner junior) professor really asking us if Shakespeare was white/English? Has she not heard of the Swan of Avon? The Bard? The poet not of an age but for all time?” Asking “Is Shakespeare white?” is so outlandish and outrageous (I am not, after all, above the occasional gimmick) that students are obliged to wonder what on earth I mean by “Shakespeare.” Thus, we get to consider, collectively, that when we say “Shakespeare,” we mean, as Kim F. Hall elucidates in her aforementioned lecture, one or more of four things: first, the historical person William Shakespeare; second, the writings of the historical person William Shakespeare; third, four centuries of cultural conversation around the historical person William Shakespeare and his writings; and fourth, a (dubious) metaphor for Englishness and/or white Europeaness.

This unpacking of what we mean when we say “Shakespeare” leads intuitively into a consideration of “whose Shakespeare”: “who gets to call Shakespeare theirs” through “what processes of ownership or creative belonging or liberty” and “who gets to be a Shakespearean.”

2014 at the University of Michigan, mentioned that “There’s racism in Shakespeare” is not the end of the conversation on Shakespeare and race but the beginning of that conversation.

³⁰ This question is indebted particularly to Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi’s *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). See also Sawyer Kemp and Cameron Hunt McNabb’s conversation, “Disability and Shakespeare: A Guide for Practitioners and Scholars,” *The Sundial*, July 7, 2022, <https://medium.com/the-sundial-acmrs/disability-and-shakespeare-a-guide-for-practitioners-and-scholars-c9ebbfef3c0c>; Kyle Grady’s “‘The Miseducation of Irie Jones’: Representation and Identification in the Shakespeare Classroom,” *Early Modern Culture* 14 (2019): 26–43, <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/emc/vol14/iss1/3>; and Laura Seymour’s *Shakespeare and Neurodiversity* (forthcoming).

³¹ This question was inspired by Emma Smith, “Was Shylock Jewish?” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2013): 188–219.

For this section of our discussion, I find it useful to lead with a mini-lecture on how Shakespeare is embedded within various cultures of the world today, and how different interpretations and adaptations of Shakespeare enrich our understanding of the words and themes of the plays and poetry. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology's *Global Shakespeares* video and performance archive is one of my go-to resources for illustrations of the numerous adaptations and uses of Shakespeare in different parts of the world.³² Some examples that I love working with include *Bhrantibilash*, a 1963 Bengali film adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* in which post-Partition Bengal is evoked to poignant effect (to me, *Comedy* remains indubitably a story of the Partition); the 2010 film *Tempest* directed by Julie Taymor, in which Helen Mirren's Prospera becomes a figure of maternal authority that throws into relief the play's absent Sycorax; Toni Morrison and Rokia Traoré's magnificent 2011 play *Desdemona*, which is brief enough that sometimes we can read entire scenes out loud on the first day of class, everyone taking turns; Vishal Bhardwaj's 2006 film *Omkaara*, whose Bollywood music numbers magnificently layer the themes of love, jealousy, caste, and power in the play; and Madeline Sayet's deeply introspective 2022 play *Where We Belong*, which documents the author's Mohegan journey in Shakespeare.³³ Even this brief and teaser-ly exposure to a multiplicity of Shakespeares serves as an invitation for students to engage with our "classical" material on their own terms, according to their specific critical and intellectual needs, and with an eye to what this centuries-old literature and theater can do for them, for us, here, now.

Depending on the class, I also like to draw students' attention to the British Library Harley Manuscript 7368, which contains the play *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, and in which the writing on ff. 8r, 8v, and 9r has been identified to be Shakespeare's. The lines contain what has come to be known as Shakespeare's plea for refugees.³⁴ I then show a performance video of that plea filmed at Shakespeare's

³² See the digital repository at <https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/>.

³³ Manu Sen, dir., *Bhrantibilash* (1963); Julie Taymor, dir., *The Tempest* (2010); Toni Morrison and Rokia Traoré, *Desdemona* (London: Oberon Books, 2012); Vishal Bhardwaj, dir., *Omkaara* (2006); and Madeline Sayet, *Where We Belong* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022). See also Sayet's interview with Barbara Bogaev, interviewer, "Farewell, Master, Farewell, Farewell," on *Shakespeare Unlimited* (podcast), episode 170, Folger Shakespeare Library, June 22, 2021, <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited/where-we-belong-sayet>.

³⁴ Images of manuscript pages from *The Booke of Sir Thomas More* (1601) are available from the British Library, Harley MS 7368, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/shakespeares-handwriting-in-the-book-of-sir-thomas-more>.

Globe Theatre in London. The video makes electrifyingly present the urgency of Shakespeare's 400-year-old words in our own time of unprecedented mass migration on the planet.³⁵ Focusing attention on Shakespeare's writing-of-a-part simultaneously helps students conceptualize/reconceptualize Shakespeare as as much a writer of plays as a reviser of one, as much a creator of wholes as a writer of fragments, as much an original composer as a collaborator in the theatrical profession.³⁶ This is also where I get to insert a brief lecture on the conditions of work in Elizabethan and Jacobean professional playhouses, and thus bring into relief for students the quality of popular entertainment in Shakespeare's period and culture. At or toward the conclusion of the first week, I either play clips from or refer students to specific episodes of the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Shakespeare Unlimited* podcast.³⁷ I have used this podcast series heavily while teaching at the Newark campus because so many regional campus students commute to class. I have found the podcasts wonderfully useful to get students listening on their drive; they function almost as a means of priming students for the classroom discussion.³⁸ They arrive already warmed up and part of the conversation. Even better: during the term, students invariably listen to many more episodes than are formally assigned.

An immediate and salutary effect of all this zooming out in our view-of-Shakespeare-in-the-world is that students become aware of the parochialism inherent in thinking of Shakespeare as a metaphor

³⁵ "The Stranger's Case: Refugee Week," *Shakespeare's Globe*, June 20, 2018. <https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2018/06/20/the-strangers-case-refugee-week/>. As Ruben Espinosa points out, however, it is important to discuss *why* the play itself, *Sir Thomas More*—and not just the fact of Shakespeare's handwriting in the manuscript of the play—continues to have particular purchase in our own time: precisely because of an all-too-contemporarily-relevant anti-immigrant sensibility otherwise platformed in the play. "It is the white rioters who are the catalyst for More's speech, and it is these rioters that propel the violent racism in our present moment" ("A 'nation of such barbarous temper': Beyond the White Savior of *Sir Thomas More*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 39, no. 4 [2021]: 693). Espinosa is also right to caution: "We should consider . . . the pitfalls of centering Shakespeare and allowing his voice to overshadow the on-the-ground realities [actually facing immigrants]" (684).

³⁶ On Shakespeare's writing-in-parts, see Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern's *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁷ See the full series at <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited>.

³⁸ Another audio series that I use to get students warmed up for class discussions, especially discussions with a focus on Milton or *Paradise Lost*, is *Promiscuous Listening: A John Milton Podcast*, hosted by Marissa Greenberg, <https://marissagreenberg.com/promiscuous-listening-a-john-milton-podcast/>. See also Greenberg's "Podcast Pedagogy," *The Sundial*, January 12, 2021, <https://medium.com/the-sundial-acmr/podcast-pedagogy-5185e1c1016e>.

for Englishness or whiteness or Europeanness or any such colonialist position. It becomes obvious that whatever Shakespeare the person might have been, it is Shakespeare the world literary and theatrical phenomenon that is our proper topic of discussion and engagement today, and that the value of this Shakespeare is in what it has made possible in the world in terms of ownership within specific communities, in resistance to oppression, and in creative and regenerative possibilities of politics and art. I inculcate this ownership of Shakespeare in my students deliberately. It is valuable for what it then allows us, as a class, to achieve: to take things apart and put them back in new and thought-provoking ways; to do our work of close reading and critical thinking without the baggage of nostalgia for some sort of “glorious past” producing “great literature”; and to get on with true learning, which is an undertaking of nervousness and excitement in equal measure. It is right, I tell students, that we should be exhilarated and terrified in turn. I still am, I say—I still am, after two decades of professional study in Shakespeare. The ground we are on is hallowed not because we are treading in the footsteps of a genius, but, much more remarkably, because this is ground that has been traveled for hundreds of years by profoundly disparate peoples for an almost unimaginable range of purposes. To get to study the grain of these journeys, even a small selection of these journeys, is to travel in human history and to take measure of emotional endeavor at the level of individuals’ and communities’ dreams and tears and elegy and anger and peace. Shakespeare is indeed special, and this is why.

What follows is our plunge into the plays themselves—into close reading, group discussions, mini-lectures interspersed with low-stakes reflective writing in the classroom, role-plays of selected pivotal moments in the plays, viewing and unpacking short theater and film clips of performances and adaptations, and lots of digging in the online *Oxford English Dictionary* for words and their roots and their meanings and their affordances. To model a due diligence with the centuries-old material, I name and encourage what I call a “habit of learning”: I acknowledge the challenges posed by Shakespeare’s writing or its theatrical representations; I mention that we should not be surprised if reading five lines and thinking-through-writing about them takes an hour; I do bite-sized and chunk-sized lectures; I incentivize online submission of discussion questions and use those questions in classes; I plan hands-on class activities such as a signature-led assembly of the first quarto of *King Lear* from printed sheets; I do plenty of office hours. Then, somewhere near the end of the first month, the switch flips: students’ struggle and effort turn into something like exhilaration,

and the very quality of engagement changes.³⁹ At that point, I take notes in real time as my students speak to one another.

Thus, in an “Introduction to Shakespeare” (English 2220) class: “Is that administrator person [Angelo, in *Measure for Measure*] actually proposing forced sex?” “He did say that he’s relying on her [Isabella’s] ‘tender shame’ not to out him!”⁴⁰ “Why is it *her* shame if *he’s* attracted to her in that icky way?” “Oh man, look at this: ‘my authority bears of a credent bulk, / That no particular scandal once can touch / But it confounds the breather’. He’s actually saying that he expects her [Isabella] not to be believed because he is in a position of authority!”⁴¹ “Well, [Dr. Richard] Strauss didn’t come out of nowhere.”⁴² “This is quite the Shakespeare lesson in how not to believe survivors.” “#MeToo.”

Or while talking about “Shakespeare’s Major Plays” (English 4520): “Wait a minute, what does she [Portia] mean by ‘Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?’ It’s not like it’s a profession, being a Jew!”⁴³ “Wait for it, they will also point out finally which is the alien and which is the citizen.”⁴⁴ “Equal before the law, right!” “Shylock was being pretty bloodthirsty, but she’s being violent too.” “It’s just that she’s using the law to do it.”

Or in “World Film Shakespeares” (English 3378): “So, the lyrics of the song [the qawwali ‘Tu mere rubaru hai,’ or ‘You are in front of me,’ in the film *Maqbool*] do the double work of indicating the

³⁹ Susannah B. Mintz calls it “the wild alchemy of students falling in love with a poet I love before my eyes.” See her *Love Affair in the Garden of Milton: Loss, Poetry, and the Meaning of Unbelief* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021), 28.

⁴⁰ *Measure for Measure*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and Robert Watson (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 4.4.21.

⁴¹ *Measure for Measure*, 4.4.24–26.

⁴² As Ohio State now documents through its office of University Compliance and Integrity, “Ohio State released a report from independent investigators that details acts of sexual abuse against at least 177 former students by Dr. Richard Strauss during his employment with the university from 1978 to 1998.” See OSU Office of Compliance and Integrity, “Strauss Investigation,” <https://compliance.osu.edu/strauss-investigation.html>. Most students today find it telling—if not surprising—that complaints numbered into the tens and then into the hundreds, across years and then decades, before the university took any action. On May 17, 2019, then-President Michael Drake of Ohio State wrote to students, faculty, and staff: “On behalf of the university, we offer our profound regret and sincere apologies to each person who endured Strauss’ abuse. Our institution’s fundamental failure at the time to prevent this abuse was unacceptable—as were the inadequate efforts to thoroughly investigate complaints raised by students and staff members.” See The Ohio State University Office of the President, “A Message from President Drake: Strauss Investigation Report,” May 17, 2019, <https://president.osu.edu/story/strauss-investigation-report>.

⁴³ *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 4.1.170.

⁴⁴ *The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.345–47.

spiritual and the romantic?”⁴⁵ “She [Nimmi, based on the Lady Macbeth figure] clearly wants him [Maqbool, the Macbeth figure].” “Why wouldn’t she? Abbaji [the Duncan figure] is so much older.” “How did they [Nimmi and Abbaji] come to be in a relationship, anyway?” “What did she know? She must have been a minor when he took her in, took her out of the streets.” “Is she looking for power? Or just a way out?” “Remember how Nimmi also manipulates Maqbool?” “Does it matter that she *has* no way out? She’s a Muslim woman in a Hindu-majority country and she is known in her community as the mistress of a gangster patriarch. Where will she go?”

In the graduate seminar “Disability and the Early/Modern” (English 7891), the eight or so weeks that we devote to *Othello* feels initially like an expansively long time.⁴⁶ But our weeks fill quickly as we read adaptations and afterlives of the play in the works of Djanet Sears (*Harlem Duet*, 1997), Toni Morrison and Rokia Traoré (*Desdemona*, 2012), Lolita Chakrabarti (*Red Velvet*, 2014), and Keith Hamilton Cobb (*American Moor*, 2020) and unpack the ongoing enmeshments of race, gender, postcolonial inheritance, enslavement inheritance, nationality, and im/migration status in creating or enforcing conditions of disability.⁴⁷ “The *Othello* that we read or see in the twenty-first century is not the same that Shakespeare’s audience read or saw in early modern England, or that slave owners saw in nineteenth-century America, or that Afrikaners saw in Apartheid South Africa.”⁴⁸ Reading in twentieth-century and contemporary disability theory, we know that a physical or mental difference or impairment does not in itself equal disability. It is, instead, a range of social and structural conditions that restrict access by not providing access that makes a disability out of any physical or cognitive non-normativity.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Vishal Bhardwaj, dir., *Maqbool* (2003).

⁴⁶ I am indebted to my graduate students Kayley DeLong, Sahalie Martin, D’Arcee Charington Neal, Elise Robbins, Mykyta Tyshchenko, and Jamie Utphall for the insights I mention in this paragraph.

⁴⁷ See also the series *Exploring Othello in 2020* hosted by the Red Bull Theater, a series of conversations and readings of selected passages from the play by a group of BIPOC theater practitioners, writers, and scholars (October 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2020), <https://www.redbulltheater.com/exploring-othello-2020>. Like the *Shakespeare Unlimited* podcasts mentioned earlier, this series was a brilliant warm-up for class conversations.

⁴⁸ Ayanna Thompson, “Introduction,” in *Othello* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 3.

⁴⁹ The Disability Studies readings for this graduate seminar focus on both contemporary and early modern texts, keeping in mind that “early modern studies that focus on literary character may unintentionally parallel the medical model of disability. By regarding disability as an individual difference that resides within each separate individual character (rather than as a broader social phenomenon that affects readers, audience

Simultaneously, since this course is about “Disability and the Early/Modern,” we also study various dimensions of global early modernity, which is the context in which Shakespeare’s Venetian play is set: we examine the 1601 “Draft declaration on the expulsion of ‘Negroes and Blackamoors’,” we go through the entries in the TIDE Project’s open-access collection of *Keywords* essays, and we read Kim F. Hall’s user-friendly introduction to *Othello* in the Bedford/St. Martin’s edition (since this class serves graduate students from multiple humanities, science, and arts disciplines, it is important for me not to presume expertise in literature or premodern topics).⁵⁰ Throughout, we thread our discussions of the play and its adaptations and performances with key scholarship in postcolonial theory and critical race theory, such as those offered by Stuart Hall, James Baldwin, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Saidiya Hartman, and B. R. Ambedkar.⁵¹ Term-end projects and significant student contributions in this class have included critiques of afro-futurism and afro-pessimism through the figure of Othello; a study of Othello’s immigrant identity as a maker of radical in-betweenness and non-belonging; and creative-critical considerations of the interracial romantic relationship between Desdemona and Othello.

A final feature of these Shakespeare courses that I want to mention is that of my invitation to my classes, whenever possible,

members, and performers), many of these readings foreground disability as an individual condition that one character/figure has as opposed to regarding disability as a social phenomenon that brings certain people together into a disability community.” Sonya Freeman Loftis, *Shakespeare and Disability Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4.

⁵⁰ See the “Draft declaration on the expulsion of ‘Negroes and Blackamoors’,” (1601), British Library Historical Manuscripts Commission, Salisbury MSS, xi, 569 (Hatfield Cecil Papers 91/15), <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/draft-proclamation-on-the-expulsion-of-negroes-and-blackamoors-1601>; the webpages of the European Research Council project “Travel, Transculturality, and Identity in England, c. 1550–1700” at <https://www.tideproject.uk/>; Nandini Das, João Vicente Melo, Haig Smith, and Lauren Working, *Keywords of Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); and Kim F. Hall, ed., *Othello: Texts and Contexts* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006).

⁵¹ See particularly Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (London: Penguin, 1964); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986); Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14; and B. R. Ambedkar, “Waiting For a Visa,” *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 12, part 1, ed. Vasant Moon (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1993), 661–91.

of scholars from the postcolonial world or the global South.⁵² My own enthusiasm about these different expert voices comes from my scholarly ethic of collaboration and mutual teaching. My institution does not have much direct or visible support for guests from other institutions to our classrooms, and as such, I must work hard to find the funds to invite external speakers. But I do this work because the visitors make real for my students the presence of teachers and writers and instructors who don't "belong" with optical correctness to the culture under consideration.⁵³ The global-South visitors' virtual appearance—of course from different timezones in the world—re-table for my Midwest-situated students the accumulated grief and anger of generations of postcolonial learners, and similarly make visible for my students something of the postcolonial history of leveraging the power of Shakespeare for talking back to political might. As Arundhati Roy teaches us: "Respect strength, never power. And never, ever, forget."⁵⁴ My students also get to see the strange love that genuinely multilingual scholars bring to the verse of Shakespeare both in his language and in so many other languages.

That word returns: love. There is no way for an anticolonialist to "do" Shakespeare without love—just as there is no way for an anticolonialist to teach, at any level, at any institution, today except toward justice.⁵⁵ I know now that our love has perhaps to be the stronger for our knowing that any full attainment of justice is simply not within our reach: not in our lifetimes, maybe not even in our children's lifetimes. But it is our work still to try, to continue to do the work, to show up every day for our students, to hold our institutions accountable and bring them closer to what they claim they want to be, and to think and write and will things into being as much as ever we can.

⁵² I am especially grateful to Paromita Chakravarti, Iqbal Khan, Amrita Sen, and Jyotsna Singh, all of whom have been recent visitors to or contributors for my classes, for their insights on pedagogical practice in different parts of the world.

⁵³ Whenever I have managed to carry out these invitations—always generously received by the scholars I have approached—the visits have been worth every minute of the online sessions.

⁵⁴ See Arundhati Roy's many decades of work in *My Seditious Heart: Collected Nonfiction* (London: Haymarket, 2019).

⁵⁵ For this sentiment, I am indebted to Natalie Diaz's poetry collection *Postcolonial Love Poem* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2020).