

*'Accents Yet Unknown': The Changing  
Soundscape of Shakespeare in Contemporary  
Performance*

Non-Standard English (henceforth NSE) accents started to feature more prominently in mainstream Shakespearean productions in the early 2010s. Since then, more directors have curated the voice as a significant aspect of the *mise-en-scène* and NSE accents have no longer been systematically relegated to comic roles as the default acoustic shorthand to personate the marginal and the uneducated.

The impetus towards achieving greater acoustic diversity on the Shakespearean stage is generally linked to the pioneering work by poets, artists and writers who championed the use of regional accents in mainstream theatre, film and television in the second half of the twentieth century. This chapter argues that this pioneering work with regional accents has been reinforced all along by the steady rise of foreign Shakespeare on the English stage. A closer look at the steep increase in the number of foreign productions of Shakespeare that have either toured to, or that have been produced for, the English stage has highlighted a connection between the alienating, but also liberating, experience of hearing Shakespeare performed in a foreign language and the growing acoustic diversity deployed in English productions of Shakespeare aimed at English-speaking audiences.

This chapter therefore identifies and discusses the correlation between the rise of regional and foreign accents on the English stage, starting with the acerbic response prompted by the first regionally inflected voices to be heard on the Shakespearean stage in the 1960s. This chapter then focuses on key theatrical events, including festivals and anniversary seasons within which foreign Shakespeare featured prominently, showing how these events in turn provoked debate about the need for more acoustic diversity and the deployment of regional voices on the Shakespearean stage. Specific productions are granted more sustained attention than others, which are discussed only in passing, because they exemplify more clearly the benefits

and the challenges connected to current attempts to move towards greater acoustic diversity.

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Even in the 1960s, when new voices were starting to emerge in the writing of post-war playwrights, most actors were still well-versed in what Carol Rutter calls 'verbal camouflage': Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay, Peter O'Toole, Anthony Hopkins and Alan Bates were effectively 'bi-lingual', because they were trained not to use their regionally inflected accent on stage (2003: 247). When exceptionally used on the Shakespearean stage, regional accents caused outrage. Most memorably, Nicol Williamson, who was born in Scotland and raised in the Midlands, used his natural accent to play Hamlet in Tony Richardson's production at the Roundhouse in 1968. In this production, he presented the disaffected prince as a radicalized intellectual, thereby echoing the social movements and student protests that were sweeping across Europe and the United States at the time.

Reviewer John Simon found Williamson's accent objectionable and utterly inappropriate for the role. In his review, 'My Throat is in the Midlands', Simon first remarks on the acoustic quality of Williamson's voice: 'Williamson has a tendency to sound like an electric guitar . . . [and his] lips seem to part only for visual effect'. Simon then turns to Williamson's accent:

It has been called Midlands, North Country and Cockney with a loose overlay of culture. Only Henry Higgins could correctly place it South of the Beatles and North of the Stones and identify the veneer as grammar- or council-school. But even Colonel Pickering could tell that it isn't Hamlet. (1969: 56)

A little concession to 'modernization' still leads Simon to surmise that 'surely Jimmy Porter or Bill Maitland or some other Osbornian professional griper is no conscionable correspondence for the exacting idealist turned cosmic malcontent' (1969: 56). After commenting on Williamson's accent, Simon ends by complaining about his 'equine head', his 'gangling, skulking body', and his legs, which, he claims, if not 'exactly spindly' seemed to him 'obstreperously lower-class' (1969: 56).

Simon's review seems particularly acerbic and backward looking now, conjuring uncomfortable memories of late-Victorian biological determinism and their tragic racial and ethnic applications in the twentieth century. However, Simon's appraisal of the acoustic qualities of Williamson's voice was in fact perfectly in keeping with the then prevailing views

on the relative 'prestige value' of regional accents. In his influential 1970 study on 'Evaluative Reactions to Accent', social psychologist Howard Giles did not only confirm that 'regional accents [had] less prestige value than RP', but he also suggested that regional accents themselves, rather than attitudes towards them, were the problem that ought to be fixed:

[R]egional accent is a social stigma, and therefore two courses of action may be put forward to remedy this situation: (i) an attempt to change people's attitudes away from one of social prejudice for non-standard accented-speech, or (ii) an attempt to teach children competence in the standard accent to such a degree that at least they are able to produce this form in socially-appropriate situations. This latter objective would seem the more efficient method of dispelling the particular social prejudice involved for any significant length of time, and in this way therapy is related to the cause of the problem rather than its symptoms. (1970: 225)

The social psychologist, while seemingly intent on measuring attitudes to regional accents dispassionately and systematically, as befits a scientific enquiry, is in fact echoing the reviewer, who had found that the source of the problem with Williamson's interpretation of Hamlet was not his attitude towards Williamson's accent, but Williamson's accent itself.

Williamson's Hamlet is now regarded as a milestone in the recent history of the reception of the play on the English stage. Samuel Crowl has for example recently argued that '[t]he use of Williamson's native accent was one of the film's most exciting features': 'the very sound of his voice' made Williamson's prince come across as 'decidedly anti-establishment', brimming with 'the cheeky cocky wit of the early John Lennon', suggesting that 'Liverpool was closer to his domain than Whitehall' (2014: 113). But, as Simon's diametrically opposed response shows, Williamson's voice initially came across as indecorous and ultimately unacceptable as a vehicle to represent Shakespeare on the English stage.

An important precedent to Williamson's Hamlet was his role as Vladimir in a 1964 revival of *Waiting for Godot*. As John Calder reports, 'Beckett turned up at rehearsals and was unhappy about the way the production was progressing, the actor retaining his London barrister's accent for the author's reflective tramp. "Where do you come from? Is that your natural voice?" asked Beckett, and when told that Nicol was Scottish, asked if he could not use his natural non-London intonation. That evening Beckett looked pleased, more so as the days passed, and he commented, "There's a touch of genius there!" (2012).

More important work with regional accents followed, though at first in the context of radical adaptations of other classical authors or works. A prime example is the prominence accorded to Northern English in Tony Harrison's *Mystery Plays Cycle* (NT, 1977) and his *Oresteia* (NT, 1981). Barrie Rutter, who worked closely with Harrison in the 1980s, went on to set up Northern Broadsides in 1992. The company, whose repertory includes Shakespeare, English and European classical plays and new writing, has since then become best known for 'their distinctive northern voice' and for the 'strong musicality and clear narrative journey' of their productions.<sup>1</sup>

The 'verbal attack' (Rutter 2003: 236) that Harrison first and then Rutter waged against the continuing dominance of StP on the English stage has undoubtedly played a key role in refocusing attention on the acoustic dimension of performance and the connotations currently attached to NSE accents. However, as this chapter goes on to argue, the initial impetus towards acoustic diversity introduced by artists who promoted the use of regional voices on the Shakespearean and on the classical stage was amplified by the simultaneous rise of foreign voices and, more recently, of English voices inflected by foreign accents.

In addressing the impact of foreign Shakespeare on English-speaking audiences, this chapter also addresses a gap in current scholarship about non-English Shakespeare, otherwise known as 'Global Shakespeare'. When scholars consider what makes non-English Shakespeare in performance distinctively appealing to English-speaking audiences, they tend to focus on visual and textual features, or on the physical theatricality of music and song, if they focus on sound at all. While discussing Robert Lepage's directorial approach to Shakespeare, Robert Ormsby has, for example, identified features that give Lepage's Shakespearean productions 'a markedly global identity' (2011: 318). Among them, Ormsby highlights the use of unlocalized scenography, of modern translations that simplify and de-localize the original language, and of a heavily cut text as pre-requisites for a wider, international appeal within the so-called Angloworld. Writing about 'Global Shakespeare in a Post-Colonial Market', Kate McLuskie has similarly shown how the 'dynamic physical theatricality' of non-Western Shakespeare appeals to Western audiences, who reductively consume it as the product of 'a purposefully homogenized indigenous culture' (1999: 158). While drawing attention to important creative practices and problematic commercial and ideological processes that affect the reception of

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see [www.northern-broadsides.co.uk/about-us/](http://www.northern-broadsides.co.uk/about-us/). Last accessed: 30 November 2016.

'Global Shakespeare' by English-speaking audiences, 'Global Shakespeare' scholars tend to ignore the potential appeal and radical quality of its complex acoustic otherness. The loss of *semantic* meaning is compensated not only by visually recognizable settings or by physical theatricality, but also by unfamiliar *vocal* sounds, which change the acoustic make-up of the theatrical event. In turn, the acoustic diversity associated with non-English Shakespeare has a profound impact on the (re)constitution of audiences as acoustic communities.

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**'Even Now with Strange and Several Noises / ...  
We Were Awaked': The Rise of Foreign and Regional  
Shakespeare on the English Stage**

The desire to 'demonstrate Europe's cultural accomplishments' and the need to 'facilitate European regeneration and international communication', which led to the launch of major international theatre festivals on the Continent after the end of the Second World War (Allain and Harvie 2006: 156), was matched in England by an attempt to internationalize theatre programming. Theatre impresario Peter Daubeny, who had been the driving force behind visits from leading foreign companies in the 1950s,<sup>2</sup> was appointed to lead the RSC World Theatre Seasons at the Aldwych Theatre in London in 1964. The Seasons were discontinued in 1973, shortly before Daubeny's death in 1975. Despite launching under the auspices of the quartercentenary celebrations of Shakespeare's birth, the Seasons included precious little international Shakespeare, and probably deliberately so, because, as Robert Shaughnessy has argued, '[their] rationale ... [was] the showcasing of indigenous theatrical traditions ([or,] as Daubeny put it, "the original in the original language")' (2009: 3).

The first foreign Shakespeare production to be included in the World Theatre Seasons was Welcome Msomi's *Umabatha*, a Zulu version of *Macbeth*. This production met with great popular acclaim during its three-week run in 1972, but its reception was nevertheless symptomatic of a fundamental resistance to the sound of Shakespeare 'without its language'. The emphasis in contemporary reviews was on music, dance and costumes

<sup>2</sup> Visiting theatre companies invited by Daubeny in the 1950s included the Comédie Française and the Compagnie Edwige Feuillère, the Berliner Ensemble and the Moscow Art Theatre. For further details, see Shellard 1999: 151–2.

as signifiers of authentic African otherness,<sup>3</sup> probably as a direct result of a concerted attempt to insulate London audiences from the sound of Msomi's Zulu translation. As Mervyn McMurry reports, 'a simultaneous interpretation . . . was delivered by Huntley Stuart, a Zulu linguist, via earphone' (1999: 315), drowning out the sound of Msomi's Zulu translation. Had audiences been exposed to Msomi's Zulu translation they may have appreciated how, as McMurry notes, 'certain [Zulu] idiomatic expressions and conventions' had been 'effectively integrated' with the Shakespearean text (1999: 315). Instead, a fundamental distrust of the very possibility of a meaningful encounter between Shakespeare's language and the foreign sounds of Msomi's Zulu translation kept the two safely apart.

The demise of the Theatre World Seasons in 1975 was followed by a period of staunch conservatism, both in political and theatrical terms. Lucy Neal and Rose Fenton give a bleak account of the 'state of play' of public life and of the theatre industry, which they sought to enrich and diversify when they first launched LIFT, the London International Festival of Theatre, in 1981:

Margaret Thatcher had won the election and begun her eighteen-year hold on British politics and the public realm. Declaring that 'There is no such thing as society' whilst putting the 'Great' back into Britain, her leadership heralded a culture of free-market private enterprise and union-bashing, with a war in the south Atlantic and Poll Tax riots at home. Britain was in a recession and the arts had to justify their existence in the market place, competing with hospitals and schools. International arts were off the agenda altogether and it is hard to conceive the insularity of British theatre at the time – Peter Brook had abandoned the country in despair at its narrow-mindedness and cultural myopia to work in the more cosmopolitan Paris. (Fenton and Neal 2005: 16)

LIFT brought welcome relief to what *The Times* had described as the 'foreign theatre famine' that followed the end of Daubeny's Seasons in 1973 (Fenton and Neal 2005: 22). LIFT attracted to London world-leading theatre directors, such as Anatoly Vasiliev, and major national companies, like the Abbey Theatre. However, unlike Daubeny's Seasons, LIFT also invited emerging companies whose work was theatrically innovative and politically charged and, even more crucially, it provided a platform for local artists to collaborate with international directors and to

<sup>3</sup> Felix Barker, for example, mentioned 'jungle drums' alongside the 'magnificent ebony bodies' of the performers, thus reifying the latter, even while praising their beauty (1972).

produce site-specific theatre not only for, but with, local London communities. As Naseem Khan explains, LIFT was specifically conceived to encourage meaningful encounters with, rather than mere exposure to, different cultures and theatre traditions:

It is true that London had seen its fair share of international work previously, here and there, off and on. But it had been sporadic and for the most part unpredictable. ... like finding an exotic plant in your mundane backyard. LIFT – to carry on the metaphor – naturalized the plant. The shows they brought over [were] determinedly set in London soil. (Kahn 2005: 62)

As a result, LIFT events prompted critical and passionate engagement rather than curiosity or mere aesthetic appreciation of international productions as exotic artefacts. According to Khan, LIFT brought about 'a change in the way that "foreign" work and "foreign" people too were looked at' and 'started to unpick the old ideas of "authentic" culture, expos[ing] it for the fallacy it really was' (Khan 2005: 64).

LIFT certainly paved the way for site-specific performance that turned many unconventional venues in the capital into performance spaces. LIFT also developed a taste for international theatre in London audiences, which in turn led to the launch of other major international festivals, including the Barbican International Theatre Events (BITE) in the late 1990s. However, Shakespeare productions programmed by LIFT in the first ten years after its inception prompted deeply conservative responses to foreign Shakespeare, even in the context of the radically innovative work sponsored and supported by LIFT. Among them, especially noteworthy were the Compagnia del Collettivo di Parma Trilogy, comprising *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *1 Henry IV*, in 1983, *La Tempestat* by La Cubana in 1987, and two productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dreams* by Footsbarn Travelling Theatre and by Comedy Theatre Bucharest in 1991.

Reviewers of the Collettivo Trilogy, for example, were generally impressed by an approach to Shakespeare that combined *commedia dell'arte* with a Beckettian, post-modern theatre aesthetic,<sup>4</sup> but they either ignored the translation and radical adaptation undergone by the text or deplored it as an abomination. Michael Coveney, for example, stressed the eminently 'readable' quality of the theatrical language (1983), while Sheridan Morley simply denigrated the Collettivo's approach: 'I left wishing

<sup>4</sup> Michael Coveney (1983) compared the Trilogy to the radical approach of homegrown dramatists, like Edward Bond or Charles Marowitz, who had adapted Shakespeare to the conventions of the British avant-garde theatre in the 1970s.

the company had either liked *Hamlet* enough to do it as written or loathed it enough to leave it well alone' (1983). Neither Coveney nor Morley however paid any attention to the sound of Shakespeare in translation. Other reviewers went as far as arguing that English and foreign Shakespeares are ultimately incommensurable entities. Among them, Robert Cushman wrote:

We don't have to feel inferior. Shakespeare in English and Shakespeare in foreign [sic] are different animals. Nobody cares if a translation is mucked about with. A British production seeking this degree of license would either have to play against the text to a degree fatiguing to both actors and audience, or paraphrase, which is an abomination. There are those rhythms, prose or verse, and we are stuck with them. (1983)

Cushman's notion that Shakespeare can be 'mucked about' in translation reinforced his conviction that English productions do not, and should not take any liberties with Shakespeare's language, since Shakespeare would not be Shakespeare without its language.

Responses to the Collettivo Trilogy showed that their work was either dismissed as 'not Shakespeare' or appreciated in the context of an emerging international aesthetic, which, according to Andy Wood, made it possible for 'a piece of theatre . . . [to] mean as much in Caracas as in London' (1991). The increasingly familiar theatrical language used by Il Collettivo stopped even those reviewers who enjoyed their work from wondering how the foreign translation affected their experience of listening to Shakespeare without its language. The foreign translation was either ignored or dismissed as an aberration from the acoustic norms – what Cushman called 'those rhythms' – that were firmly associated with Shakespeare in performance at the time.

Even Fenton, who was publicly outspoken about the need for LIFT audiences to hear and appreciate foreign language theatre, was cautious when it came to programming foreign Shakespeare. In an interview published in *The Independent* in 1991, she urged her readers to be open-minded about foreign language theatre: 'we must be much less protectionist about our language and traditions of theatre and let *all* our antennae work: visual as well as auditory' (Donald 1991). However, the 'End of Festival Report' that year, when LIFT presented two productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one in English by Footsbarn Travelling Theatre and one in Romanian by Comedy Theatre Bucharest, reveals that Fenton had serious reservations: '[d]on't underestimate the extent to which "a foreign language" puts people off. In a 'note-to-self, Fenton then



added: 'Don't programme two *Midsummer Night's Dreams* in the same Festival, thereby handicapping the foreign language production' (Fenton 1991).

Other enterprising theatre producers wetted London audiences' appetite for foreign language theatre towards the end of the 1980s. Outstanding among them was Thelma Holt, whose award-winning international season in 1987 marked a watershed in foreign language theatre programming at the NT. Holt introduced the use of surtitles by means of 'super-proscenial projection', which, while 'enfold[ing] performance within the spectatorial regimes of world theatre' (Shaughnessy 2009: 6), also made foreign language theatre less forbidding and removed the acoustic barrier of simultaneous translation that had insulated English audiences from foreign language theatre in the past. Reviewers of Holt's Shakespearean offerings, however, continued to focus on their visual rather than their acoustic qualities, thus replicating the types of responses elicited by the Collettivo Trilogy four years earlier. Christopher Edwards, for example, praised Yukio Ninagawa's *Macbeth* for its 'visual flair', its 'sure grip on the dramatic heart of the play', and its 'intense stylization' (1987). Edwards, echoing Coveney's remarks about the theatrical language used by the Collettivo, felt that he could get to the heart of the production by focusing on its visual elements alone.

Direct exposure to the sound of foreign Shakespeare in performance would eventually sensitize English-speaking audiences to the material qualities of the sound of Shakespeare in translation. But the 1980s drew to a close without registering any major change in the interpretative sensitivities of those exposed to foreign Shakespeare. While the first ten years of LIFT and producers like Holt did much to develop foreign theatre programming, responses to foreign Shakespeare in the period show that the translation was at best heard as white noise. It was only during the 1990s that reviewers of foreign Shakespeare productions started to comment on the material qualities of foreign voices. Crucially, it was also during the 1990s that homegrown theatre-makers started to exploit the potential of foreign or regionally inflected voices to diversify the soundscape generally associated with English Shakespeare in performance.

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The 1990s witnessed a steady increase in the number of foreign productions of Shakespeare on the London stage and beyond. According to Shaughnessy, fewer than a dozen foreign productions had been staged in

London in the twenty-year period following the launch of the World Theatre Seasons in 1964; in the next twenty-year period, the number would rise to about fifty (Shaughnessy 2009: 4). Foreign Shakespeare also began to feature at theatre venues beyond London. The Bath International Shakespeare Festival, for example, started to showcase major international productions, including Eimuntas Nekrosius's *Hamlet* in 1999. Reviewers finally seemed more alert to the fresh challenges and opportunities associated with foreign Shakespeare. Silviu Purcărete's *Titus Andronicus*, which was staged at the Lyric Hammersmith in 1997, is a good example of a production that divided critical opinion in relation to the effectiveness and impact of the Romanian translation. According to *The Express*, 'the Romanian language . . . sound[ed] great. The scorching delivery of words, all seeming to end in 'pu' and 'cu', [was] supplemented by actors giving coyote-like howls of anguish as the action pick[ed] up steam' (Anon. 1997). Alternatively, the alien sounds of the foreign language spoken on stage was lamented as an insurmountable barrier that prevented any level of meaningful communication between the actors and the audience: 'the Latinate sonority of the Romanian language becomes an end in itself; the actors never address each other, or God, or us, as if their stage lives were remotely like real life' (Anon. 1997a). Far from being overlooked as irrelevant or secondary to the visual and physical aspects of its theatrical language, the foreign language translation was now regarded either as integral or ultimately deleterious to the impact of the production as a whole.

One other foreign Shakespeare production, right at the end of the 1990s, was deemed ground-breaking for the way in which it foregrounded the materiality of the actors' bodies, of the props and, crucially, of the voices that featured in it. When Romeo Castellucci's *Giulio Cesare* was staged by Societas Raffaello Sanzio at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of LIFT 1999, English-speaking audiences were confronted by a production that focused relentlessly on the sheer corporeality of the voice. Quite fittingly for a play that explores the power of rhetoric to shape personal and public identities, Castellucci placed the mechanics of voice production centre-stage: an endoscope inserted through the nose and throat of the actor playing Brutus projected real-time images of his vocal cords, which were shown enlarged and vibrating like an alien-looking organism, primordial and remote, on a screen behind him. Similarly, Mark Antony was played by an actor, Dalmazio Masani, who had had a laryngectomy and who delivered Antony's speech in the forum with the help of a prosthetic valve implanted in his throat. The focus that Castellucci placed on the

voice forced his audiences to come to terms with the materiality of the voice and the alien sounds produced by the mechanical enhancement of the human voice.

In keeping with the ethos of his company, which 'rose to international prominence for its radical attack against [text-centred] theatrical traditions' (Guidi and Massai 2017: 277), Castellucci used Shakespeare's play very loosely to 're-sensitise the spectator to Shakespeare's over-produced texts, by presenting us with the raw material that goes to make up drama – text, body, mis-en-scène, the work of performance' (Escolme 2005: 138). To Escolme's list, I would add the actor's voice, because the de-familiarization of the actor's voice is central to 'Castellucci's attack on "simple" and corrupt theatre' (Shepherd 2006: 136), namely on theatre that hides the means through which meaning is produced on stage. Castellucci's attack against the epistemological 'lie' of theatrical literariness, which he associates with the tradition of naturalism in Western theatre, translated into an unprecedented attention to the voice, which, along with sound and music, was curated by his then partner and collaborator, Chiara Guidi.

Guidi's experimental approach to sound and voice did not go unnoticed when *Giulio Cesare* was staged before English audiences in 1999. Reviewers described the 'earth-tilting impact' that this production had on their auditory and spectatorial sensibilities: while one reviewer noted that '[t]he production ambush[ed] the audience, constantly challenging concepts of the body's boundaries in a two-and-a-half-hour surreal sensory overload that [left] you reeling' (Halliburton 1999), another admitted that '[i]n a way that's almost impossible to describe to the Shakespeare purist, the production's sinister beauty shook one awake to the brutality and cruelty in the original, while remaining frustratingly oblique' (Cavendish 2001). What reviewers celebrated and deprecated in equal measure was the sheer power of a production that did not only wrench Shakespeare away from the sounds and familiar accents of the English language but also staged the voice as a grossly material, plastic medium produced by bodily organs and artificially enhanced by sound machinery. Crucial to this production and to its reception was the realization that the sound of a foreign translation could lend fresh insight into the source text and that StP is just one set of sounds out of all the natural and mechanically produced variations that the human voice can produce to make a canonical play like *Julius Caesar* signify anew, in a startling and thought-provoking way.

The increasing numbers of foreign Shakespeare productions in the 1990s went hand in hand with a steady rise of NSE accents in homegrown productions. Besides the founding of Northern Broadsides in 1991, other

productions marked a revival of interest in nationally or regionally inflected voices. Irina Brook's 1997 Oxford Shakespeare Company production of *All's Well That Ends Well*, for example, relocated the play to a North African marketplace town, re-imagining it as performed by local storytellers before an improvised audience made up of local shoppers and tourists. Brook accordingly relied on a mixed cast of white, black and Asian British actors in order to diversify the acoustic landscape of her production. Taylor praised 'the wildly varying styles', which ranged from 'the refreshing, earthy directness of the African Widow and Diana (Anni Domingo, Clara Onyemere) to Michael Greco's strutting, would-be Latin lover of a Parolles, who gabbles his treacheries at hilarious top speed' (1997). Other reviewers however found the delivery aesthetically unpleasant and dramaturgically problematic. Michael Billington, for example, granted that, while 'multi-cultural casting [is] admirable in principle, it creat[ed] extreme variation in style'. As a result, 'Rachel Pickup's highly traditional, formally elocuting Helena exist[ed] in a different world from . . . Michael Greco's Latinate, mustard-jacketed Parolles or Clare Onyemere's bold, physical, improbably virginal Diana planting a smacking kiss on the French King's lips' (1997). In Billington's reading of this production, the 'formally elocuting' Helena stood for a standard of elocutionary *and* sexual propriety, which Billington juxtaposed to the compromised sexual mores of the Latinate Parolles and the 'improbably virginal' Diana (1997). Billington was evidently finding it difficult to imagine a (Shakespearean) world where Helena and Diana could convincingly be played by Rachel Pickup and Clare Onyemere. Their dissonant voices, in other words, disturbed his sense of what delivery styles and accents most naturally suit the fictive world of a Shakespearean play, even when the setting is updated.

Other reviewers aimed their criticism at the perceived unevenness in the verse delivery: Jeremy Kingston, for example, described [Helena's] speech as 'intelligently varied', but he found that too many of the lines spoken by other characters were delivered 'without discernible knowledge of their meaning' (1997). Worth mentioning is that the production seems in fact to have caused no confusion or incomprehension even among younger members of the audience, as attested by Taylor's comments about his '10-year-old guest' becoming quickly 'engrossed and enchanted' by the production (1997). Billington, unlike Kingston, did not find the delivery of Shakespeare's language unclear or deficient *per se*. He rather found the range of voices used in this production unsettling because, as he went on to explain, 'Shakespeare's story seems more European than African'. What eluded Billington altogether, and what started to emerge from Taylor's

review, was the realization that this production offered an exciting remapping of the vocal acoustics of Shakespeare's play, whereby Helena, who is socially eccentric to the world of the court of the King of France, was the only character who spoke in StP. The use of different accents to question and complicate their connotations as markers of class and national identity clearly irritated those who expect English Shakespeare to function as the golden standard of elocutionary propriety, but was interestingly praised by Taylor for 'establishing its own kind of imaginative integrity' (1997).

Responses to Brook's *All's Well That Ends Wells* echoed reviews of an earlier production of *King Lear*, directed by Max Stafford-Clark towards the end of his artistic directorship at the Royal Court in 1993. In this production, Adrian Dunbar played Edmund as a disaffected 'khaki-uniformed Ulsterman with more of a political than a familial chip on his shoulder' (Hassell 1993). Dunbar played Edmund using his native Northern Irish accent, a rare and notable exception over a long and successful career that has involved performing several Shakespearean roles in StP. Most recently, when he played York in the BBC second series of *The Hollow Crown* (2016), he was praised in *The Telegraph* for 'speak[ing] the verse with lyricism, lucidity and complete plausibility' (Davies 2016). Worth stressing here is that, while Dunbar's acquired RP is heard and decoded by reviewers as entirely plausible, his native Northern Irish accent was paradoxically criticized for sounding 'artificial' back in 1993. Ian Shuttleworth, for example, complained that '[his] transparently artificial Ulster Edmund must [have left] most of the audience groping for a handle upon his characterization' (1993), while Morley observed that 'none of [characters] seem to be inhabiting the same universe, let alone the same play' (1993). Anticipating Billington's response to Brook's *All's Well That Ends Well*, Morley found that the range of accents deployed in Stafford-Clark's *King Lear* undermined any coherent 'sense of place and time' (1993). Like Billington, Morley registered acoustic diversity as an implausible and lamentable breach of aesthetic decorum, instead of wondering why Stafford-Clark chose to represent the fictive world of *King Lear* as a place where people speak differently. Morley simply faulted the acoustic diversity in this production as jarring and dissonant, and did not even consider the possibility that Dunbar's accent might productively activate parallels between the catastrophic 'division of the kingdom' in ancient and modern times.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A similar accusation was levelled at a 'Moving Theatre' production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, which was directed by Vanessa Redgrave at the Riverside Studios in 1995 and which otherwise got fairly

The 1990s also marked a time when British Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (henceforth BAME) actors started to attract critical attention for their forays into the dramatic canon. In 1991, Yvonne Brewster, founding artistic director of Talawa, one of the major and most successful black theatre companies in the UK, argued eloquently for the right of black actors to perform Shakespeare 'straight', in response to critical reviews of her production of *Antony and Cleopatra*:

Because it's an all-black company, critics expected . . . a kind of zingy sappy snappy approach, an Afro rap musical, a Tony and Cleo. They said, as if it was an accusation, 'But you relied completely on the text.' Of course I did. Shakespeare is not a bad writer, I said. It's dangerous to feel you can't do the plays as Shakespeare wrote them. But oddly enough, it's the English who feel you've got to do something with Shakespeare. As black actors, you can do versions – like *Trinidad Sisters* (instead of *Three Sisters*) and *Playboy of the West Indies*. That's cool. But if you do it straight, you're treading in areas you don't have a right to be. (Goddard 2010: 249)

Proving to the theatre industry that BAME actors could perform Shakespeare 'straight' and that they could (and should) be cast in mainstream productions of Shakespeare meant proving, first and foremost, that BAME actors could perform Shakespeare in StP. Any departure from StP was going to be regarded as a lack of skill or training rather than as a legitimate desire for acoustic diversity, as some of the actors raised and trained by Brewster went on to discover. David Harewood, for example, who had been offered his first Shakespearean role by Brewster in her production of *King Lear* for Talawa in 1994, became the first black actor to play Othello at the NT in 1997. The director, Sam Mendes, chose to evoke an early twentieth-century British colonial context as a setting for this production. Responses to Harewood's delivery of Othello's lines suggested that racial prejudice sadly belonged to Britain's colonial past as much as to the theatrical present of this production. Some reviewers enthused about Harewood's Othello finally looking the part, thus reinforcing the racial stereotype of the 'blacktor' as muscular, physical and hyper masculine,

favourable reviews. Rhoda Koenig at *The Independent* was the most outspoken reviewer to take a stance against the multicultural cast and the diversity of accents in this production: 'The casting call might have been held at the United Nations, what with black and white Romans and Egyptians speaking in French, Scottish and gypsy-restaurant accents. Some speak the verse for sense, some for music and some for neither' (1995). Once again, NSE accents were heard and decoded as poor delivery or attributed to a lack of understanding on the part of the actors.

looking ‘strapping’ and ‘handsome’, oozing gleaming charisma (Brantley 1998).<sup>6</sup> However, other reviewers regretted that Harewood did not sound right. Alistair Macaulay, in the *Financial Times*, noted that Harewood had a ‘mannered way of pausing before or after keywords’. ‘He is one of those actors’, he added, without specifying what type of actors he had in mind, ‘who seem to be speaking in an alien tongue’ (1997). It is quite staggering that Harewood should be criticized for sounding different from earlier Othellos, even in a production that was meant to foreground racial otherness within an intolerant, colonial context.

Jatinder Verma, founder of Tara Arts, the first company in the UK to champion a multicultural, specifically British-Asian approach to theatre making, has also often stressed the need to prove that British Asian actors can perform Shakespeare ‘straight’ and that they should resist the temptation to “‘Bollywood-ise” it, complete with cod-Indian accents’ (Verma 2008). Tara Arts productions of Shakespeare in the 1990s were accordingly devoid of phonetic variation. Even in the 1993 Tara Arts/Contact Theatre Manchester co-production of *Troilus and Cressida*, where Verma envisaged ‘Troy as the besieged East (Bosnia, British Asians), and the Greeks as the triumphalist West at its most self-confident and xenophobic’, Andrew Mallet was praised for performing Troilus ‘in the classic English style of strong enunciation and upright presence (and very well too)’ (Wainwright, 1993). Paradoxically, the widespread expectation that companies specifically set up to promote BAME actors on the English stage should conform to the convention of delivering Shakespeare and the classics in StP meant that, at least in the 1990s, experiments with non-conventional world-English accents were the exclusive prerogative of companies who, like the Oxford Shakespeare Company directed by Irina Brook in 1997, did not have to prove their theatrical pedigree.

The first productions to feature regional and lower-status accents in the 1990s were similarly criticized for their lack of plausibility or for failing to meet the prevailing aesthetic and artistic standards associated with Shakespearean performance. Guy Retallack’s 1998 production of *Richard III* at the Pleasance was, for example, performed in an accent described in *The Evening Standard* as ‘pure Bethnal Green’ (Anon. 1998). The East London accent used in this production jarred even with reviewers, who, like Taylor, had found the range of World English accents in Brook’s production of *All’s Well That Ends Well* ‘wildly varying’ and ‘refreshing’ only a

<sup>6</sup> Tonderai Munyevu uses the term ‘blacktor’ in his 2018 play, *The Moors*, which I discuss in detail in the Conclusion.

year earlier (1997). According to Taylor, the vocal register in Retallack's production 'diminish[ed] the grand endangering dimension of the original by presenting it as the world of the Krays'. 'Too much is flattened out', he continued:

The famous line dropped here, 'A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!' would have to be changed to 'Horse and Jockey, the Horse and Jockey! This pub for the Horse and Jockey!' to indicate the extent which a great tragedy finds itself scaled down. (1998)

Echoing Billington's and Morley's critical reviews of Brook's and Stafford-Clark's productions, Taylor objected to Retallack's notion that Shakespearean tragedy and the world of the Krays can possibly belong together. Nor would he credit those who enjoy this type of spatial and acoustic relocation of Shakespeare with sound aesthetic judgment: '[t]his production', he concluded, 'will appeal to *The Bill*-watching, *This Life* generation' (1998), namely to those members of the audience who would generally enjoy popular TV drama rather than 'straight' Shakespeare or classical theatre.

The only exception to the general rejection of regional variations in the 1990s was the critical and popular acclaim enjoyed by Barrie Rutter's Northern Broadsides. Since its inception in 1992, Rutter's company has promoted the use of regional voices. As Carol Rutter has argued, 'voices like [Barrie] Rutter's [had] never been cast as Shakespeare's royals, at least not at the Royal Shakespeare and National Theatres'; Rutter's company therefore set an important precedent by 'claim[ing] Shakespeare's "elite" text for "popular" speech' (2003: 236). Similarly, reviewer Irving Wardle hailed the company's commitment to the Northern voice as 'a thrilling departure in classical performance' (Rutter 2003: 236), and, on the twentieth anniversary of the company's inception, Andrew Dickson commended Rutter for 'taking theatre out of gilded proscenium cages and to new – especially rural – audiences' (Dickson 2012). However, Rutter's investment in the Northern voice has aimed to reverse rather than to deconstruct the traditional alignment of English Shakespeare with the speech of elitism. The systematic replacement of received pronunciation with Northern voices has effectively relocated Shakespeare into the rural North, 'making Verona', as Carol Rutter puts it, 'as naturally a suburb of Barnsley as Barnes, and the Nile a river that runs through Leeds before emptying in the Thames' (Rutter 2003: 238). The Northern voice has also been promoted as lending an earthy, rough materiality to Shakespeare's lines: in Barrie Rutter's words, 'the Northern voice shifts the centre of



gravity of the spoken text from the head, the intellectual, to the visceral' (Rutter 2003: 250). Despite the innovative and politically charged quality of its work, Northern Broadside has therefore reinforced the notion that the Northern voice suits popular modes of artistic expression. Northern Broadside nevertheless set an important precedent at a time when the delivery of Shakespeare on the English stage was still pretty uniformly aligned with the speech of elitism.

Responses to early experiments with NSE accents on the Shakespearean stage in the 1990s are particularly striking in light of the fact that attitudes to phonetic variation were starting to change. Phoneticians were by now reporting a decline in the prestige value accorded to StP. As J. C. Wells noted, RP was 'increasingly perceived as exclusive and formal' especially among 'younger people ... [who] no longer defer[red] to it in the way their elders ... did' (1999: 38). Paul Foulkes and Gerard Docherty even admitted that they could 'no longer assume that speakers of non-standard varieties automatically orient[ed] themselves towards the standard' and that, '[g]iven the changing status of RP, [phoneticians] might perhaps reassess the continuing role of RP as an educational norm' (1999: 12). The 1990s also marked the rise in popularity of a new modified regional variation, which David Rosewarne had influentially, if controversially, dubbed Estuary English in 1984. Estuary English, an intermediate variety of RP and Cockney, the working-class regional variation spoken by the working classes in East London, was hailed as a source of momentous phonological change in the pronunciation of the English language. Still according to Foulkes and Docherty, most of the phonetic changes first recorded in the late 1990s 'stem[med] from non-standard varieties as ... spoken in the south-east of England'. The 'London's working-class accent', they continue, 'is today the most influential source of phonological innovation in England and perhaps the whole of the English-speaking world' (1999: 11).

Very little, if any, of the excitement reported by the media at the time, however, translated into a sustained change in attitudes towards regional accents when used on the Shakespearean stage. Isolated examples of carefully curated, inflected voices in Shakespearean productions in the 1990s came up against a great deal of critical resistance. As Alan Cruttenden reported in 1994, 'the British [were still] particularly sensitive to variation in the pronunciation of their language. ... Such extreme sensitivity', Cruttenden added, 'is apparently not paralleled in any other country or even in other parts of the English-speaking world'. The level of sensitivity to pronunciation reported by Cruttenden in the mid-1990s was

going to persist well into the early twenty-first century, when a sudden influx of foreign Shakespeare refocused artistic efforts and critical attention on the need to diversify the sound of Shakespeare in contemporary performance.

## §

**'Half to Half the World Opposed': Remapping  
Foreign and English Shakespeare in the Early  
Twenty-First Century**

Renewed impetus towards the internationalization of English Shakespeare in performance came from the global ambition that shaped two mega-events organized by major theatrical institutions in the early twenty-first century: the Complete Works Season (henceforth CWS), led by the RSC between April 2006 and March 2007, and the World Shakespeare Festival (henceforth WSF), which was also led by the RSC, but involved other large theatre companies, during the Cultural Olympiad in 2012. These two mega-events, in turn, prompted fresh discussions about the importance of uncoupling Shakespeare from StP and the need to move towards greater acoustic diversity on the Shakespearean stage.

The CWS was launched to mark the end of an important chapter in the history of the company and its main house, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, which would be demolished in mid-2007 to reopen on the company's 50th birthday in March 2011. The CWS had two main components: the commissioning of a new edition of Shakespeare's *Complete Works*, which was edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen and published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2007, and the staging of the entire Shakespearean canon in a single season. Both components of the CWS were visionary and unparalleled in scope.

Bate and Rasmussen's edition of the *Complete Works* offered freshly edited versions of the play texts as first printed in the First Folio of 1623. The *Complete Works* was advertised as the first modern edition, which, 'being commissioned by a Shakespearean acting company', relied on the Folio as the first early edition to be 'authorized by Shakespeare's own acting company' (Bate and Rasmussen 2007: 55). The First Folio actually included plays that were re-set from earlier quarto editions, thus complicating the notion of what theatrical authorization or theatrical provenance might actually mean in the context of the transmission of Shakespeare's

plays into print.<sup>7</sup> However, Bate and Rasmussen did break new editorial ground by arranging the plays in the order in which they were printed in the Folio and by prioritizing the Folio version of plays that survive in more than one early edition, thus marrying traditional textual scholarship with innovation. Similarly, the CWS combined theatrical tradition and innovation, by undertaking the most extensive international collaboration ever attempted by the RSC since its foundation in 1961.

International companies invited to perform in languages other than English during the CWS included major national institutions with an established international profile: among them, the Berliner Ensemble performed *Richard II* in German; the Münchner Kammerspiele performed *Othello*, also in German; and the Ninagawa company performed *Titus Andronicus* in Japanese. Other productions were the result of international collaborations: Tim Supple presented his British Council sponsored production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, performed in English and several Indian languages by an Indian and Sri Lankan cast; Cheek by Jowl presented their production of *Twelfth Night* in Russian, in collaboration with their long-term partner, the Chekhov International Theatre Festival from Moscow; and Yellow Earth with the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre performed *King Lear* in English and Chinese, with dual language surtitles. A small number of grass-root and experimental companies also took part in the CWS: the Brazilian company Nós do Morro, patronized and trained by the RSC's own legendary voice coach, Cecily Berry, performed *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in Brazilian Portuguese, while Song of the Goat presented a compressed, 75-minute version of *Macbeth*, where lines from the English texts were interspersed with snatches of ancient polyphonic Corsican songs. Overall, eleven out of the thirty-seven main productions staged as part of the CWS were performed, at least partly, in languages other than English.

What prompted the RSC to enlist the collaboration of so many and so different international companies and directors? Michael Boyd had successfully pitched the CWS to the RSC Board shortly after becoming artist director in 2003. When asked what led him to propose such an ambitious project to the Board, he explained that his 'decision was partly inspired by [his] late school days when [he] moved to Edinburgh'. He then added that

The Edinburgh Festival, with its extraordinary hothouse experience of shifting from a Swiss mime clown to the Comédie Française to a Russian

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of 'The Making of the First Folio', see Massai 2007: 136–79, esp. 136–40.

theatre company in the space of two days [had] shaped [his] appetite [for international theatre]. (Smith 2007: 13)

After Edinburgh, Boyd became British Council Fellow at the Malaya Bronnaya Theatre in Moscow in the late 1970s, when the theatre was under the artistic directorship of multi-award winning Russian director, Anatoly Vasilievich Efros. The time he spent in Moscow informed Boyd's own sense of the deeply political role of theatre in society and the benefits of ensemble work (Crompton 2012). It must have also persuaded Boyd about the need for a national company like the RSC to have an international profile, not only through international touring but also through sustained collaboration with other leading companies worldwide. Unlike his predecessor, Adrian Noble, who had attempted to transform the RSC into an international corporation selling Shakespeare as a product of British culture for a globalized, mass-entertainment market (Kidnie 2009), Boyd invited visiting companies from overseas, as well as from across the UK, in order to diversify and internationalize the traditionally text-based, naturalist approach to Shakespeare championed by the RSC.

At least in one important respect, though, Boyd's investment in innovation through international programming was a direct response to the radical changes introduced by Noble. Noble's planned overhaul of the RSC, also known as 'Project Fleet', would have involved a complete transformation of the physical, logistical and artistic make-up of the company. His attempt to turn a national, heavily subsidized company into a more dynamic corporation, in keeping with the globalization and commercialization of the theatre industry, was threatening to undermine the company's core identity, which is informed by its commitment to ensemble work, to outreach and to the fulfilment of a social agenda that sees Shakespeare more as shared cultural capital than as a globally marketable commodity. Noble had also initiated a gradual withdrawal from the company's official London home at the Barbican Arts Centre, in favour of temporary arrangements with more central London West End venues and more touring overseas.<sup>8</sup>

The Barbican's main response to the gradual withdrawal of the RSC from its programmes was the launch of the first Barbican International Theatre Events season (henceforth Bite). Bite was going to prove a major, critically acclaimed undertaking, and had a profound impact on the

<sup>8</sup> On Adrian Noble's directorship, see Kidnie 2009: 45–64; on the company's earlier ethos and structure, see Sinfield 1994: 182–205.

programming, staging and reception of Shakespeare on the English stage. Set up as a six-month festival in 1998, when the RSC started to cut the number of productions transferring to the Barbican, Bite became an all-year-round venture in 2002, when the RSC stopped performing at the Barbican altogether. Starting from 2002, Bite brought some of the best international directors of Shakespeare and their companies to London. Among them, a Catalan *Macbeth* directed by Calixto Bieito in 2003, a Russian *King Lear* directed by Lev Dodin in 2006, and a Dutch version of Shakespeare's Roman plays, called *Roman Tragedies*, directed by Ivo van Hove in 2009. According to Maria Shevtsova, Bite turned out to be 'of immense service to theatre-makers and theatregoers . . . in Britain':

[By] invit[ing] some of the most interesting theatre in the world, whether it is established or breaking through to prominence or still on the edge, waiting to be caught up in the international circuit, . . . Bite has helped to inspire makers of theatre working in Britain to explore their art in greater depth and breadth. (2010: 293)

As early as 2003, Dominic Cavendish reported that '[b]oth Graham Sheffield, artistic director of Bite, and Louise Jeffreys, then Head of Theatre, burn[ed] with a conviction that London need[ed] a dedicated space for international work'. Cavendish realized that Bite had not only sprung out of the new programming opportunities made possible by the withdrawal of the RSC but that Bite was also changing attitudes towards 'foreign Shakespeare' at the RSC:

We're back to Shakespeare. Bite's programmers can't avoid straying into RSC territory; directors from round the world want to tackle the Bard, and audiences, from wherever they hail, want to see his work. . . . Small wonder that Michael Boyd, the new RSC supremo, has been holding constructive talks with Graham Sheffield about bringing the company back for regular seasons. He would seem to understand, rather better than his predecessor, that the world's most famous dramatist fits incredibly easily under an internationalist umbrella. (2003)

Cavendish, in other words, did not only appreciate the fact that foreign Shakespeare was an exciting alternative to the quintessentially English brand of Shakespeare in performance associated with the RSC, but he also predicted that the excitement generated by Bite would affect programming at the RSC. The CWS was a calculated response to the experimental and international approach to Shakespeare showcased by Bite.

The CWS became a genuine theatrical watershed in its own right. Prior to it, the pioneering curatorial approach to the voice undertaken by some

directors in the 1990s seemed all but forgotten. In 2002–3, for example, the under-classes in Nicholas Hytner's NT production of *Henry V*, starring Adrian Lester in the title role, spoke in regional or inner-city accents: Bardolph (David Kennedy), Pistol (Jude Akuwudike) and the Hostess (Cecilia Noble) sounded like modern-day East-Enders, while Nym was played by Robert Horwell in his natural North-Yorkshire accent. Just as predictably, the French sported stage French accents, while Robert Blythe and Tony Devlin played Fluellen and Macmorris in their native Welsh and Northern Irish accents. National stereotyping was downplayed by local editing of the text and by the excision of Jamy, which drastically reduced both the comic and the subversive potential often associated with these characters (Penlington 2010: 245); in all other respects, though, this production simply juxtaposed the higher ranking English characters, whose speech was normatively marked by prestige phonetic variations, to lower class and foreign characters, who were just as conventionally marked by lower status and put-on stage accents.

When Hytner went on to direct *1* and *2 Henry IV* at the NT in 2005, he once again resorted to conventionally marked voices to conjure a familiar sense of national identity, qualified primarily by class and only secondarily by geographical differences. Black British actors Jeffery Kissoon and David Harewood played Northumberland and Harry Percy but spoke in StP, thus sounding exactly like every other character in the King's all-white party. Though factional and splintered, the ruling class was, at least acoustically speaking, perfectly uniform. The carriers in *1 Henry IV* 2.1 (Harry Peacock and Elliot Levey), along with Gadshill (Thomas Arnold) and Chamberlain (Ian Mitchell) just as predictably spoke in a lower-class accent, tinged with a light Essex inflection. Hal (Matthew MacFadyen) in 2.4 mimicked the cockney accents of the waiting staff, including Francis (Darren Hart) and the Vintner (Robert Blythe), while the motley crew of country soldiers recruited by Falstaff and Bardolph in *2 Henry IV* 3.2 – Davy (Ian Gelder), Mouldy (Alistair Petrie), Shadow (Michelle Dockery), Wart (Darren Hart), Francis Feeble (Elliot Levey) and Peter Bullcalf (Harry Peacock) – had very strong, camped-up Gloucestershire accents.

Similarly, even while Boyd was planning the CWS, RSC in-house productions staged under his artistic directorship were still acoustically conventional. Jonathan Slinger, for example, did not get to use his Northern accent when he played Puck in Greg Doran's 2005 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, even though the mechanicals predictably spoke in a strong regional Brummie accent. Just as unsurprisingly, Slinger spoke in his natural Northern voice when he played the comic servant

Dromio of Syracuse in Meckler's 2005 production of *The Comedy of Errors*. Boyd's own 2005 production of *Twelfth Night* was the only production that offered a refreshing, if minor, departure from the dominant acoustic norm in the early 2000s. By casting two Scots, Forbes Masson and Meg Fraser, to play Feste and Maria in their native accents he added a love interest and psychological complexity to their relationship: the phonetic variation in their voices suggested a potentially shared background, and their status as outsiders in Illyria, where all the other characters spoke in StP, made Feste's disappointment at being rejected in favour of the boorish Sir Toby all the more harrowing.

Foreign accents in Shakespearean productions in the early 2000s were used just as conventionally as regional or lower-status variations. In a 2004 production of *The Winter's Tale* by the Creation Theatre Company from Oxford, Leontes (Andrew Harrison) and Hermione (Sasha Waddell) put on Russian accents to double as Old Shepherd and Son in Bohemia. Their Russian accents were all but gone when they returned as Leontes and Hermione in act 5. As noted by reviewers at the time, the Russian accents reinforced the traditionally comic interpretation of the characters who populate Bohemia:

Waddell . . . and . . . Harrison have a chance to demonstrate their comic range . . . as the Old Shepherd and his son in an Eastern European version of pastoral life. Their performances are sufficiently distinctive to avoid confusion when they return as the royal couple in the final scene, with all traces of Russian accents expunged. (Loveridge 2004)

Foreignness, signified as a departure from StP, inevitably came across as comic and stereotypical and, as the reviewer pointed out, the tragic roles played by Waddell and Harrison at the Sicilian court were neatly juxtaposed to their comic roles.

In the wider context of these acoustically conventional productions, the CWS offered a unique opportunity for international companies to be heard performing alongside the RSC. Some felt that the contributions by international companies were unfairly sidelined: Katherine Duncan-Jones, for example, pointed out that 'these companies often appeared for barely a week, and sometimes for only a couple of days' and that '[t]he brevity of such appearances severely moderated the apparent generosity of their inclusion in the larger Stratford season' (2007: 359). However, the sound of a wide range of voices, either foreign or marked by regional or foreign accents, had a profound impact on audiences and critics alike. As Peter Kirwan reported, 'language', or 'the process of speaking and hearing

Shakespeare' in languages and registers other than English or StP, was a major aspect of Shakespearean performance that the Complete Works season 'opened up to debate' (2007: 99).

The sound of Shakespeare in the non-English productions showcased by the CWS was indeed the primary focus of critical responses to the overall event. Reviewers of Ninagawa's *Titus Andronicus*, for example, commented on how the sound of the Japanese translation suited Ninagawa's stylized, semi-operatic approach. As Alastair Macaulay put it, '[i]f . . . spoken in English, the extent of its theatrical artifice would seem ludicrous' (2006). In the same spirit, Charles Spencer noted that '[t]he explosive guttural sounds of Japanese . . . seem exceptionally well suited to the play's churning violence' (2006). Echoing Spencer, Terry Grimley observed that '[t]hough it might take a moment to adjust to it', the soundscape of Ninagawa's production 'suit[ed] the material to exhilarating effect' (2006).

Spencer was similarly impressed by the Washington-based Shakespeare Theatre Company's production of *Love's Labour's Lost*: 'The language is treated with respect and is for the most part extremely well spoken (Shakespeare sounds great with an American accent)' (2006a). Conversely, Barbara Gaines's production of 1 & 2 *Henry IV* from the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre did not get uniformly positive reviews, at least partly because some of the actors attempted to put on affected, Anglicized accents. Taylor wrote extensively about the plight of American actors who feel, or are made to feel, the need to anglicize their accent to perform Shakespeare on the English stage:

[Gaines's productions] feel constrained by an unnecessary deference to Englishness. It's not just that they look embarrassingly old-fashioned, with terrible long wigs and black-leather ye-olde-cum-modern uniforms that were all the rage at the RSC in the 1970s. More hampering are the weird, semi-anglicised accents affected by several of the leading actors. As Sir John Falstaff, Greg Vinkler. . . [gives] a genuinely engaging performance, marred for me, however, by the fact that Vinkler has overlaid his native tones with an inappropriate veneer of English gentility. . . . Likewise, given that Jeffrey Carlson plays the unreformed Prince Hal with the body language and nervous sniggers of a contemporary slacker, why has he been told to mangle the vowel sounds that come naturally to him? (2006)

Having regretted the 'verbal camouflage' attempted in this production, Taylor went on to note: 'the irony, of course, is that the American accent is much closer to how Shakespeare would have sounded than English RP' (2006). The overall result, in Taylor's view, was that Gaines's productions



'came across more as a skilled imitation than something that has found its own voice' (2006).<sup>9</sup>

Entirely novel in reviews of the CWS was the realization that Shakespeare's language is not merely a vessel that neutrally conveys the meaning of his works and that becomes redundant or meaningless in translation. Reviewers like Taylor and Spencer began to consider the possibility that Shakespeare's language is in fact a complex system of signs whose material texture and rhetorical complexity take on additional connotations when marked by foreign accents or translated into a foreign language. Rather than harping on what is *lost* in translation, thus clinging to a mode of *linguistic* understanding that privileges the recognition of the familiar, both from a semantic and a phonetic point of view, reviewers started to celebrate what is *found* in translation, namely a mode of *non-linguistic* understanding that relies on the sound of the foreign language translation as much as on other non-linguistic aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, such as gestures, blocking, visual imagery and stage design.

The production that most forcibly encouraged this new mode of non-linguistic understanding of Shakespeare's language in performance during the CWS was Tim Supple's Indian and Sri Lankan *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Although sponsored by the British Council and conceived by a British director, Supple's *Dream* was designed, rehearsed and first performed in India in the first half of 2005, before it toured internationally in 2006. Performers spoke in their native languages; similarly the theatrical language of this production was informed by theatrical practices and conventions drawn from across the Indian subcontinent. The result was an astonishing feast of languages and theatrical traditions, which, far from coming across as artificial, reflected the multilingual and multicultural contexts from which this production originated. In the words of the director,

[a]crobats from Delhi worked with dance masters from Kerala; realistic actors from Mumbai worked with folk actors from Tamil Nadu; musicians from Manipur, Kolkata and Tamil Nadu played together. And Shakespeare's words flourished in dialogues between English and Malayalam;

<sup>9</sup> Other reviewers echoed Taylor's astute reading of the verbal soundscape of Gaines's productions. Spencer, like Taylor, found the attempt to Anglicize the actors' natural North American accents counter-productive: 'Several of the leading actors . . . attempt English accents. This is entirely unnecessary for, as Peter Hall has observed, Shakespeare sounds terrific with an American voice, and the attempt at anglicisation results in some extremely weird, pseudo-genteel vowel sounds. Prince Harry frequently becomes "Prince Hairy", and Falstaff announces that he'll be "hanged" rather than hanged before going to sleep behind the "erras" (arras)' (2006b).

Tamil and Hindi; Gujarati and Sinhala; Marathi and Kannada. India is a multilingual nation: our production would be multilingual too. (Supple 2006)

The rich variety of languages and sounds offered audiences a unique acoustic experience, which, in Peter Foster's words, 'outstrip[ped] the need to understand every word' (Supple 2006).

Being placed in a position of 'linguistic non-understanding' enabled English-speaking audiences to experience aspects of Shakespeare that signify semiotically rather than semantically in performance. Or, as Supple put it, 'seeing and hearing the *Dream* come alive in seven languages and the multitude of approaches of an Indian cast . . . scoured clean my perception of the play', generating a level of reception and interpretation that went 'beyond the clichés so ingrained in the way we speak and hear Shakespeare' (2006). Reviewers picked up on Supple's attempt to 'scour clean' our sense of what Shakespeare should sound like in performance. Ian Shuttleworth, for example, felt that the language mix 'prove[d] no barrier whatever to understanding; moreover', he added, 'we [could] appreciate the poetical sonorities of whatever language [was] being spoken at the time.' Gordon Parsons even compared the experience of listening to Supple's production to the surprise and pleasure that Shakespeare's original audiences must have experienced as they were first exposed to the aural thickness of his language:

its colourful vivacity, its strangeness to the British eye and ear and the total commitment of a cast to a play largely untrammelled by the weight of tradition . . . must be the kind of theatre experience that the Bard's first audiences must have relished. (2006)

What is striking in this comment is the novel realization that a different 'Shakespeare' from the one the 'British ear' has been attuned to since the rise of StP in the eighteenth century can emerge from the sonorities and rhythms of Shakespeare performed in other languages.

Of course some reviewers felt misled into unfamiliar territory, 'cheated' into watching productions that they did not recognize as 'Shakespeare'.<sup>10</sup> On the whole, though, the revival of Supple's *Dream* in the context of the CWS, at a time when Stratford audiences and reviewers were exposed to a significant range of foreign voices or voices inflected by foreign accents,

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Hallmark: 'Language barrier broke midsummer spell. . . . On so many levels it was awesome . . . But why, oh why, was such a large chunk of the play performed in seven different Indian languages – without any translation? Surely the Bard's power flows through his mastery of language, and when I couldn't understand it, I ended up feeling cheated' (2006).

triggered a novel appreciation of Shakespeare's language delivered in 'accents yet unknown'. Supple's *Dream* was probably the production that came closest to fulfilling Boyd's own understanding of the benefits of performing foreign Shakespeare on the English stage: 'there's been a sort of war in British theatre – partly a xenophobic war', waged on the premise that 'all foreign Shakespeare is bad Shakespeare because there is not enough respect for the author's words. . . . I consistently refuse to see them as mutually exclusive'. (Smith 2007: 14) Boyd understood that foreign Shakespeare does not involve a loss but a transformation of Shakespeare's language into 'something rich and strange', which in turn re-moulds its original texture into equally suggestive sonorities.

More generally, the CWS promoted a different appreciation of Shakespeare's language in performance. As Elinor Parsons put it, 'language is too often taken to be simply a matter of vocabulary and syntax'. What the CWS demonstrated, in Parsons' words, was that '[e]ngagement with Shakespeare's text should be extended beyond "words, words, words" with more emphasis placed upon the sound and rhythm of what characters say' (2007: 7–8). The 'sound and rhythm' of the foreign Shakespeare productions presented in Stratford in 2006–2007 stimulated a different hearing mode in English-speaking audiences, and especially in Stratford audiences, who had never been exposed to such a wide range of voices, accents and performance styles before.

This different mode of appreciation of Shakespeare's language in performance had a palpable impact on the use of regional accents on the Shakespearean stage. The use of regional voices in productions presented as part of the CWS was still quite limited and mostly confined to productions that explicitly updated Shakespeare,<sup>11</sup> but the need to start using regional voices emerged in discussions about the CWS more generally. In an interview with Jim Burke, Irish actor Finbar Lynch reiterated the urgent need for a radical acoustic reform of the Shakespearean stage: 'I think . . . that Shakespeare . . . done in an actor's own accent is closer to the original, because Elizabethan English wasn't ironed out in the way that RP is. But even now', he added, 'there are people who think that we should lose our

<sup>11</sup> The Cardboard Citizens' *Timon of Athens* represented a welcome departure from the conventional use of StP in the English productions presented as part of the CWS. This production reimagined the play as a motivational workshop and the actors, who shared a background of homelessness and marginalization, got to use their own accents. Their accents effectively punctured the patronizing rhetoric peddled by the facilitators and the fact that several actors played Timon, using accents ranging from StP to English and foreign variations, amplified Timon's personal plight to encompass other types of dispossession.

accents when playing lords or aristocrats' (Burke 2006). Sadly, Lynch did not get to use his native Irish accent when he played Cassius in the production of *Julius Caesar* that Sean Holmes presented as part of the CWS. In this production, a generic Irish accent was conventionally used for the 'Second Commoner' (the Cobbler) in the opening scene.

However, the legacy of the CWS had a lasting impact on subsequent productions staged on national and regional stages across the country. Peter Kirwan, for example, detected a connection between the vocally experimental quality of Conall Morrison's 2007 RSC production of *Macbeth* and lessons learned during the CWS. '[T]he legacy of the Festival continues', he observed, while writing about this production, and the fact that it featured 'a cast drawn from around the world' and that it 'play[ed] with accent and multiculturalism within Shakespeare' (2007: 102).

Equally significant is the fact that in 2008 David Tennant got to use his natural Scottish accent to play Berowne in Greg Doran's *Love's Labour's Lost*. Tennant's Scottish accent, familiar to cinema and television audiences in the UK and beyond, was deemed not only appropriate but highly desirable for a character like Berowne, in a play like *Love's Labour's Lost*, whose extensive wordplay, puns and the self-consciously literary quality of its language can alienate modern audiences. According to Billington, Tennant successfully used his natural accent to 'express ... pragmatic skepticism' (2008), a fitting response to the King of Navarre's plan to shun the company of women in order to devote three years fully to scholarly endeavours. Spencer in *The Telegraph* also found that, by '[s]-peaking in his natural Scottish accent ... , his Berowne shoots from the quip ... and somehow manages to transmute even the most unpromising lines into genuine laughter' (2008). Also in 2008, Tennant played the title role in Doran's production of *Hamlet*, but he did not use his Scottish accent for the foremost tragic role in the Shakespearean canon. Interestingly, Taylor complained about a decision that would have seemed entirely uncontroversial before the CWS refocused attention on the drawbacks of acoustic normativity on the Shakespearean stage: 'It's a pity ... that Tennant is using an RP accent rather than his natural incisive Scots lilt that might promote greater intimacy of rapport' (2008).<sup>12</sup>

In this respect, Hytner's 2011 production of *Hamlet* at the NT proved more daring, and it did so in ways that harked back to Williamson's

<sup>12</sup> Tennant went on to use his Scottish accent when he played Benedick alongside Catherine Tate's Beatrice in Josie Rourke's production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, which opened to critical and popular acclaim at the Wyndham Theatre in London in May 2011.

landmark interpretation of Hamlet's role in the 1960s. Rory Kinnear's Hamlet, anticipating his approach to Iago in the 2013 NT production discussed later in this chapter, spoke in a light Estuary accent. His accent set him apart from the other characters at Claudius's court. As a result, he sounded openly anti-establishment. Kinnear, who was educated at St Paul's School and then read English at Oxford, normally speaks in StP, both on and off stage. His Hamlet therefore sounded like someone who, appalled by the moral standard of the world he was born into, had turned his back upon it by toning down his accent. Kinnear's put-on accent was a calculated decision, in keeping with Hytner's updating of the play, which transformed Shakespeare's early modern rendition of an old Nordic story about prince Amlodi or Amleth, into 'something we recognise as the world we know' (Hytner 2011).

Another NT production, also staged in 2011, registered important changes in the soundscape of 'English' Shakespeare in performance. Dominic Cooke's *The Comedy of Errors* turned the cavernous depths of the Olivier Theatre into a sounding box that reverberated with regionally marked and foreign accents, punctuated by the singing, in an foreign language, of popular songs, including 'Madness', 'People Are Strange' and 'Paranoid' (Purves 2011). Lenny Henry, as Antipholus of Syracuse, and Lucian Msamati, as Dromio of Syracuse, spoke in a thick Nigerian/West African accent, while their Ephesian twins spoke in distinctive English accents, the master in a middle-class/Surf London (South London) accent and the servant in a heavy Cockney accent. Reinforcing the updating of Epheseus as a modern-day version of multicultural and multi-ethnic London, Claudie Blakley and Michelle Terry as Adriana and Luciana came across as stereotypical 'Essex WAGs teetering on impossible heels' (Purves 2011), while their maid (Clare Cathcart) spoke in an exaggerated stage Spanish accent. Some reviewers recoiled from the sight and sound of what struck them as an 'extended urban nightmare' (Billington 2011):

There's a strong sense of a multicultural society throughout, with a bewildering mix of acute accents, which in some ways succeeds rather too well in evoking modern Britain: many-hued, richly diverse, and, er, nobody can actually understand anybody. (Hart 2011)

This review shows how the fear of being placed in a position of 'linguistic non-understanding' by a major Shakespearean production on the main stage at the NT channelled more general anxieties about the state of multiculturalism in contemporary Britain. The blend of familiarity and strangeness detected and lamented by some reviewers was directly linked to

the kind of dislocation experienced by the main characters in Shakespeare's comedy of mistaken identities: those who look familiar, or even familial, turn out to be strangers, causing Shakespeare's characters – as much as some reviewers – to doubt their ability to understand the world around them.

The wide range of marked voices in Cooke's production captured the accents spoken in present-day London. Quoting a survey carried out by Sue Fox, Mara Logaldo found that

the urban slang spoken in London is actually less and less identifiable with Cockney or with other variants of vernacular London English (LE), differing in vocabulary and accent, and is increasingly influenced not only by Standard American English, as would seem more predictable (given the pervasive influence of this variety worldwide), but by the dialects imported by immigrants, especially English-lexicon ones like Jamaican Creole, with inflections of Bangladeshi, Gujarati, and even Arabic. The process is mainly the outcome of the huge immigration of Afro-Caribbeans and Asians from the 1950s onwards, which has resulted in language or dialect contact between white and second- or third-generation black children, adolescents, and teenagers. (2010: 120)

Cooke's production effectively evoked the soundscape of contemporary London, as described by phoneticians like Fox and Logaldo. By doing so, this production activated aspects in the fictive world of Shakespeare's play that speak directly to the challenges faced by multiculturalism in the UK (and beyond) in the wake of a global resurgence of fundamentalism, conservative nationalism and sectarianism.

The comic resolution of the play in the context of Cooke's updating showed how a convergence of diverse voices can generate what Paul Gilroy calls 'a shared culture' that 'mediates the relationship between . . . different ethnic groups that together comprise . . . Britain' (1987: 294–5).<sup>13</sup> The acoustic diversity built into Cooke's production constituted a close theatrical counterpart to Gilroy's notion of a new 'ethics of antiphony' (1993: 200). The reciprocal interchange, or antiphony, generated by the use of different foreign accents and regionally inflected voices on the main stage of the NT resembled the sort of 'language or dialect contact' described by Fox and Logaldo, which, in turn, triggers important changes in the

<sup>13</sup> As Gilroy explains, '[t]he effects of the . . . penetration of black forms into the dominant culture mean that it is impossible to theorize black culture in Britain without developing a new perspective on British culture *as a whole*. . . . An intricate web of cultural and political connections binds blacks here [in the UK] to blacks elsewhere. At the same time, they are linked into the social relations of this country' (1987: 205).

cultural connotations associated with phonetic variations as markers of class and national identities.

The legacy of the CWS played an important role not only in the curatorial work that went into the acoustic make-up of individual productions staged in its wake, but also in the organization of the next mega-event to include a record number of foreign-language productions. Deborah Shaw, who had headed the Bath International Shakespeare Festival in the early 2000s, before being appointed Festival Director during the CWS in 2006–2007, was now put in charge of the WSF that took place in 2012 as part of the Cultural Olympiad. Shaw's long-term commitment to bringing world theatre to Britain informed the Festival's large-scale investment in foreign Shakespeare.

Statistically, the WSF nearly doubled the number of foreign Shakespeare productions staged in England up to that point in time. Between March and August 2012, audiences in London and at venues across the country had a chance to listen to Shakespeare performed in eleven African languages, thirteen Asian languages and sixteen European languages other than English (including Welsh), as well as in Māori, Mexican and Argentine Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese.<sup>14</sup> The RSC and Shakespeare's Globe alone, as just two of the several partners that took part in the Festival, showcased a staggering number of international companies. As part of the Globe to Globe 2012 Festival (henceforth G2G), Shakespeare's Globe invited thirty-seven companies to perform all the plays most commonly attributed to Shakespeare in languages other than English over a period of six weeks, from late April to early June. The RSC opted instead for in-house mini-seasons and large international collaborations. Three shipwreck plays – *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest* – were, for example, staged as part of the 'What Country, Friends, is This?' Trilogy. *A Soldier in Every Son: An Aztec Trilogy* was instead co-produced with the National Theatre of Mexico, but performed in English, alongside *Richard III* and *King John*, as part of the *Nations at War: The Struggle for Absolute Power*. *Troilus and Cressida* and *Two Roses for Richard* were also co-productions, performed respectively in English with the Wooster Group, from New York, and in Brazilian Portuguese with the Companhia Bufomecânica, from Rio de Janeiro.

Both approaches to festival programming – hosting visiting companies versus international collaborations – proved at their most interesting when

<sup>14</sup> For a full list of WSF productions by language, see 'Appendix 1: Productions by Country and Language', in Edmondson, Prescott and Sullivan 2013: 271–4.

English jostled for attention with other languages, whether as interpolations within foreign language productions staged during the G2G or as inflected by the different companies who participated in the WSF. Snippets of English were smuggled into some of the foreign productions staged at G2G, despite a strict ban on English imposed by the organizers, who were obliged to follow the guidelines issued by the funding body (the London Olympic Games Organizing Committee) for this event. As a result of this controversial ban, companies who would normally use English when performing Shakespeare in their own countries had to perform entirely in other languages. Some of the companies who occasionally ignored the ban made their use of English all the more significant and suggestive.

Among the companies who occasionally ignored the ban, London-based Two Gents Productions (henceforth TwoGents) proved by far the most interesting and thought-provoking. TwoGents were invited to revive their production of *Vakomana Vaviri Ve Zimbabwe* (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*), which had premiered at Ovalhouse, South London, in 2008. The invite was however conditional on the company's willingness to perform it not in English and Shona, as they had done in 2008 and on tour since then, but exclusively in Shona, the language most commonly spoken in Zimbabwe, the country of origin of the company's two founding actors, Denton Chikura and Tonderai Munyevu. Directed by German-born Arne Pohlmeier, TwoGents had always performed Shakespeare in two-men English versions, interspersed with Shona, for mixed audiences in London, across Europe and the UK, and in Zimbabwe. Having dutifully had their script translated into Shona by poet translator Noel Marerwa, TwoGents nevertheless retained enough English to ensure that their mixed audiences heard key moments in their productions in both languages. By doing so, they managed to retain their distinctive approach to Shakespeare's language, which combines the company's eccentricity of acting style and diction with their commitment to performing Shakespeare in English.

Their sophisticated understanding of the politics that inform the delivery of Shakespeare's language on the English stage had already emerged quite clearly in the opening sequence of the 2008 version of their *Vakomana Vaviri Ve Zimbabwe*. In this earlier version, Chikura and Munyevu had burst onto the stage shouting at their audience in Shona. It soon became clear that they were personating cab drivers trying to secure the custom of unwitting members of the audience by offering them competitive fares. Chikura and Munyevu quickly switched to English to decide



whether it was sensible for them to speak Shona, given that the customer/member of the audience they were addressing was 'a white'. However, addressing this customer/member of the audience in English proved just as fraught. Chikura's claims – 'I speak proper English', 'I speak Shakespearean English' – and Munyevu's cutting reply – 'No you don't' – seemed specifically meant to catalyze any potential resistance on the part of those members of the audience who were used to hearing Shakespeare delivered in StP. Chikura's further claim that 'Shakespeare [was his] grandfather' provoked Munyevu to retort that 'No, [Shakespeare] was not [his] grandfather'. Chikura's reply, 'I'll show you', framed the entire production as an attempt to show Munyevu (and the audience) that he could and would perform Shakespeare in English, though inflected by the accents, sounds, songs and traditions of a different language and (theatrical) culture.

Other key moments in this earlier version of *Vakomana Vaviri Ve Zimbabwe* had drawn the audience's attention to the inflected quality of the English spoken by Chikura and Munyevu. One such moment occurred in 4.1, when Chikura and Munyevu recruited three members of the audience to play the Outlaws. The three unsuspecting spectators were carefully selected because of their gender and their race. The first of the Outlaw scenes thus became the perfect pretext for Munyevu to ventriloquize a high-pitched white female, a booming baritone black male and a white male who spoke in StP. The accent, tone and register used to deliver Shakespeare in mainstream English productions was thus evoked to signal the distance between a normative 'English' Shakespeare and this company's unique brand of Shakespeare in performance, which is neither normatively English nor straightforwardly foreign, but rather a brand new type of non-mainstream, intercultural English Shakespeare.

Although duty-bound to perform in Shona during the G2G, TwoGents managed to deliver Shakespeare's text in translation while inflecting both Shona and English with accents that would sound non-standard to their Festival audience. For their revival of *Vakomana Vaviri ve Zimbabwe*, Marerwa was asked to produce an archaic and literary translation that would make Shakespeare's language sound remote to modern Shona speakers. Chikura and Munyevu often strayed from the Shona translation to interpolate English not only to supplement the sparse surtitles used at the Globe during the Festival but also to allow both Shona speakers and non-Shona speakers to share the experience of hearing Shakespeare in a linguistic register that was simultaneously familiar and strange.

TwoGents also modified and expanded the original opening sequence in order to emphasize not only the intercultural quality of their approach to

Shakespeare, as they had one in 2008, but also the fundamental hybridity of their subject-positions as Zimbabwean actors, who would normally perform Shakespeare in English in fringe venues, and were now invited to perform Shakespeare on the Globe stage, but in Shona. Chikura and Munyevu took their time to stage their entrance at the Globe Theatre. While the audience chattered expectantly, Chikura lifted one side of the trapdoor on the main stage and peered out, seemingly shocked by his surroundings, thus stressing the significance of their temporary relocation from a venue like Ovalhouse to the Globe Theatre. Chikura then disappeared from view, closing the trapdoor behind him. Most members of the audience may not have noticed him at all at this stage. A few seconds later, though, Chikura flung the same side of the trapdoor open and instantly secured the attention of all members of the audience as the door landed on the stage with a loud bang. The whole theatre fell perfectly silent and all eyes focused on Chikura, who, still looking overwhelmed, climbed onto the main stage followed by Munyevu. Sporting Elizabethan costumes – Munyevu wore deep-brown velvet doublet and hose with a dark-brown cape flung over one shoulder, while Chikura wore an open white shirt over knee-length hose – they stood still for a few long moments, looking nervous and ill at ease.

By protracting their entrance, Chikura and Munyevu drew attention to their complex status as insiders and outsiders, and not as mere visitors on the Globe stage. Their surprise on entering the stage, the huge trunk they hoisted onto the stage, and their entrance from the cellarage, which was used in Shakespeare's own time to admit demons, ghosts and other liminal creatures on to the main stage, suggested Chikura and Munyevu's status as travellers and outsiders. However, their choice to wear not only period costumes, but costumes that they had borrowed from the Globe's own collection of meticulously manufactured artefacts for original practice productions, simultaneously marked Chikura and Munyevu as 'authentically' Elizabethan and as in-house company actors. Other companies chose to stage their entrance at the Globe either by paying homage to Shakespeare's original home (some actors kissed the stage) or by waving national flags or singing national anthems, thus breaking another ban on any reference to belligerent nationalism, which – the organizers felt – would run against the spirit of internationalism and communality in which Festival had been conceived. TwoGents were the only company who did not cast themselves in the role of either deferential or defiant guests, opting instead to position themselves as playful, intercultural go-betweeners.

After a long pause, Chikura and Munyevu finally took a bow, acknowledging their role as performers, to the great relief of the audience, who

applauded and cheered on finally being acknowledged as spectators. The opening sequence was however far from over. TwoGents continued to tease the audience by drawing attention to the distinctive features of their approach to Shakespeare. They first proceeded to take out their props from the trunk and to hang them, slowly and ceremoniously, on a rope tied to the two columns that flank the entrance to the tiring house (or discovery space) at the back of the Globe stage. After carefully placing a thumb piano on the base of one of the two columns, Chikura smiled confidently at the audience and readied himself to speak. Much to everyone's amusement, the language that came out of Chikura's mouth was not Shona, but the first line of the English prologue that TwoGents had used to open their inaugural production in 2008: 'Two friends, both alike in dignity / In fair Zimbabwe where we lay our scene...'. Peals of laughter rose from the yard, while Munyevu, staring sternly at Chikura, proceeded to translate the same line in Shona. Taking turns, and blatantly contravening the ban on English, they delivered the entire version of the original prologue line by line, first in English and then in Shona.

When the action of the play finally got underway, Chikura and Munyevu switched to Shona. Most visiting companies avoided using English, and their audiences depended entirely on the sparse surtitles shown on two digital boards placed on either side of the main stage. As a result, speakers of the foreign language being used on stage stood out quite clearly from those who may have been familiar with the play but did not understand the language. The ban on English, in other words, split the audience into two palpably different groups: one who identified more immediately with the performers, laughed at their jokes and responded more directly and emotionally to the action being performed on stage, and another who watched both the performers on stage and the foreign language speakers in the audience, as if the latter were part and parcel of the spectacle of 'foreignness' that was unfolding before them in the Globe. Conversely, TwoGents kept switching to English, albeit briefly, speaking in an informal, acoustically inflected register, thus giving their audience an opportunity to hear a textured, accented Shakespeare that departed both from modern spoken Shona and from StP, as routinely used on the English stage.<sup>15</sup>

Other WSF productions used a range of NSE accents, but they did not prove as popular with the critics or their audiences as *Vakomana Vaviri ve Zimbabwe* had done on the Globe stage. An RSC production of *Troilus and Cressida*, co-presented with The Wooster Group, New York, is a good

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this production, see Massai 2017.

case in point. The Wooster Group, like TwoGents, regard the performer's voice not as a mere vehicle through which meaning is conveyed to the audience, but as a source of meaning in its own right. The company's approach to canonical playwrights, including Racine, O'Neill and Chekhov, as well as Shakespeare, has routinely privileged the voice over textual interpretation. As company performer Kate Valk put it, when asked to describe their trademark approach to the classics, 'we don't sit around the table a lot and break down the text. It happens on our feet because Liz [director Elizabeth LeCompte] needs to hear it in the room' (LeCompte *et al.* 2013: 128). Hence Gerald Siegmund's apt and helpful description of their work as 'a theatre of voices' (2005: 178).

The Wooster Group's approach to *Troilus and Cressida* was, in other words, perfectly in keeping with this company's sustained interest in the voice, and can best be understood in the context of their work with Shakespeare, and of their 2005 production of *Hamlet*, more specifically. Their production of *Hamlet* placed just as much emphasis on how modulations of the voice can carry connotations that exceed and transform the meaning of the source text. This production had been conceived not as a new interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy, but as a live reconstruction of John Gielgud's 1964 *Hamlet*, starring Richard Burton as Hamlet and Gielgud himself as Old Hamlet. The Gielgud Burton *Hamlet* was filmed and shown in cinemas across the United States on 23 and 24 September 1964. The Wooster Group in turn repurposed a recording of this production, working especially on the sound of Shakespeare's lines as delivered by the original performers, 'editing out long pauses' or 'adding pauses where pauses had been left out' (LeCompte *et al.* 2013: 128). The edited video and sound recording was then projected onto the back of the stage and used as a palimpsest by the Wooster Group performers, who spoke over, and often suppressed, or parodied, or simply accompanied, the voices of the original performers. The Wooster Group, who had been attracted to this production by the calibre of 'some of the greatest English performers ... involved in it' (LeCompte *et al.* 2013: 122), explained that they were less interested in establishing 'whether Gertrude knows that Claudius killed her husband' (LeCompte *et al.* 2013: 128) than in measuring their own voices up against those of their famous British predecessors. Their approach to *Hamlet* thus focused less on what Shakespeare's lines might mean than on how they have been or can be spoken.

Gielgud's 1964 *Hamlet* offered the Wooster Group a prime opportunity to show how powerfully voice resonates on the Shakespearean stage.

As scholars have repeatedly observed, Gielgud's and Burton's modes of delivery in this production were distinctively 'Janus-like', respectively 'looking squarely back to Edwardian traditions' and 'coming from film' (Cartelli 2008: 156). Gielgud's voice embodied a 'traditionally classical, melodic approach' to the delivery of Shakespeare's language on stage (Folkerth 2002: 3), which harked back to the acting styles associated with earlier generations of Shakespearean actors. Richard Burton came from a very different background: born Richard Walter Jenkins Jr into a coal-mining, Welsh-speaking household in Pontrhydyfen, near Port Talbot in South Wales, he was trained by his English teacher, Philip H. Burton, whose patronym Richard adopted as a tribute to Philip's fostering and influence over his formative years as a young student with a driving passion for language and for Shakespeare. Philip realized the potential of Richard's vocal ability and memory skills, and decided to transform his rough, but powerful, voice to conform to mid-twentieth-century standards of phonetic propriety. Melvyn Bragg writes eloquently about the time that Philip and Richard spent together:

They practised in the living room on psalms and Shakespeare . . . Philip also took Richard out on to the hills and up to the top of the Welsh mountains like master and disciple in some biblical parable. The boy would speak . . . the Chorus from *Henry V* and [he] would go further and further away from him, forcing him not to shout but to make certain [he] could hear him. . . . The voice changed: darkened, soared over the valley. . . . He was accent perfect. (1989: 37–8, 40)

Burton may have brought the freshness associated with his delivery on film to his performance as Hamlet in 1964, but his voice was as trained and constructed as Gielgud's, though in accordance with mid-twentieth rather than late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century variations of RP.

The Wooster Group responded to the textured quality of Gielgud's and Burton's voices, as well as to their acting styles, and worked carefully to modulate their voices to those of the original performers in order to create a layered soundscape of different accents and registers. According to Elizabeth LeCompte's own recollection of the rehearsal process, accents were one of the company's primary concerns:

At first, I thought, 'We can't do English accents!' . . . [The actors] were imitating the English accents, and it sounded copied – badly copied; an affectation rather than something deeply felt. But then, slowly, as they stripped away the English accents and stayed with the exact shape of the language and the metre of their particular performance, they began to invest it so deeply that, when they would go into an English accent, it was fine.

But that took ... a year, and I never knew it was going to happen.  
(LeCompte *et al.* 2013: 125–6)

Gielgud's and Burton's accents, which conveyed multiple temporalities in conforming to different British models of phonetic propriety, became a point of departure, with occasional moments of identification, in ways that beautifully evoked a long tradition of negotiations over Anglo-American cultural identities as mediated through the appropriation and reception of Shakespeare on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Wooster Group's investment in voices, sound and accents as sources of theatrical interpretation and cultural meanings re-emerged as a defining feature of their collaborative production of *Troilus and Cressida*. RSC actors, directed by Mark Ravenhill, played the besieging Greeks and the Wooster Group played the besieged Trojans. The two companies only met for a five-week period of shared rehearsal, having worked on the production independently beforehand. In the production itself, the two companies performed as warring enemies, using clashing acting styles: the RSC actors wore modern military desert camouflage and delivered their lines naturalistically in StP, while the Wooster Group wore fake wigs, body suits and feathered headgear, and spoke through head-mikes in the accents of Native American Indians from the upper Midwest, who could be seen in filmed recordings shown on small videos at the back of the stage. Everything about the appearance, diction and acting style used by the Wooster Group suggested a presentational, or citational, approach not only to Shakespeare's play but also to the composite subject position they performed as mostly white actors, playing Shakespeare's Trojans as Native American Indians.

Some reviewers found the clash of styles and registers aesthetically and theatrically unbearable: Billington described the production as 'less [of] a collaboration than an awkward stylistic collision' (2012), and even those who appreciated the self-consciously constructed quality of the Wooster Group's approach deemed their work, and the production as a whole, to be 'half-baked, pointlessly baffling, ill-conceived and sophomoric' (Prescott 2013: 217). The same reviewers also objected to the fact that a production should 'at least give us an idea of what the work is about' (Billington 2012) and that it should add up to a satisfying theatre-going 'experience' (Prescott 2013: 217). However, other reviewers found that the clash of registers suited the notoriously problematic quality of Shakespeare's bitterly satirical play, where both Greeks and Trojans fall short of the martial or romantic ideals associated with them in earlier classical or vernacular

incarnations of the myth of the fall of Troy.<sup>16</sup> Jane Shilling, for example, felt that the production 'buil[t] a powerful sense of beleaguered humanity' and, though 'not an ideal production . . . – whatever that might be . . . [it was] intelligent, engaged, and an honourable realization of a play full of intractable questions' (2012). One other significant contribution this production made to the WSF as a whole was the forcible demonstration of the visual, acoustic and ideological distance that divides different approaches to Shakespeare in contemporary performance. What is at stake in the sound of the spoken word on the Shakespearean stage? The Wooster Group and their collaboration with the RSC, as much as the participation of TwoGents in the G2G, showed that accents, inflections and the modulations of the performer's voice can be used to reinforce acoustic normativity and the crippling social and national stereotypes that acoustic normativity supports, or that they can be used to de-familiarize English-speaking audiences from the sound of Shakespeare in performance, as a first step towards their gradual dismantling.

Conversely, two other WSF productions, this time produced in-house by the RSC, showed how detrimental and untenable a conventional, a-critical approach to accents to signal stereotypical national identities had become, especially in the wake of productions where voices had been carefully curated. These two productions – Greg Doran's *Julius Caesar* and Iqbal Khan's *Much Ado about Nothing* – were lambasted for their politically incorrect use of put-on African and Indian accents by their British black and Asian cast. Doran was criticized for 'set[ting] the play in an unspecified, nameless African country:' '[a]re we to assume', as Monika Smialkowska put it, 'that Africans in general are like the figures represented here' or that they speak in the 'generic "African English" . . . accents in which the characters spoke' (93) in this production? Similarly, Khan was taken to task for using generic stage accents:

With this production of *Much Ado*, we have a parody or pastiche of 'internationalism', with apparently second-generation British actors pretending to return to their cultural roots in a decidedly colonial way. Not ever intended as offensive or racially subversive, this *Much Ado* is

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Ann Thompson on Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*: 'Chaucer is careful to give the maximum value and attractiveness to his presentation of romantic love, while simultaneously reminding us through his constant irony that it is not the highest good. . . . Chaucer . . . is sure of his ultimate standards, but [unlike Shakespeare], he does not ridicule or condemns his characters for not measuring up to them' (1987: 160).

nevertheless unable to offer anything other than the veneer of Indian culture, served on a bed of Bradford or Birmingham Anglicized rice. Overlong and overindulgent, it does little other than cement the comedy caricature of India in the British psyche. (Quarmby 2016)

The difference this review draws between representation and caricature is important in the context of recent debates about the opportunities and challenges associated with intercultural performance.<sup>17</sup> As Kate Rumbold has cogently put it, 'the RSC often sets plays in foreign locales, without the expectation that every member of the production team and cast be from that country. However, as she went on to add, it is also possible that, 'in the hyper-global context of the WSF – and particularly, of the Globe to Globe Festival – . . . the internationalism of the play came under new scrutiny' (2013: 151–2).

As with the CWS, the most important legacy of the WSF seems to have been a new alertness to the importance of venue and context to the reception of signifiers like regional and foreign accents, as used in the charged cultural space of contemporary English Shakespeare in performance. No matter how much (or how little) curatorial attention theatre artists bestow on unconventional colour, gender and accent casting, its reception and effectiveness will be gauged in relation to the context within which the target audience decode these crucial identity markers.

Instructive in this respect were local responses to the Festival programming in Newcastle and Gateshead. The Festival programming in the region included 'official, franchised, branded events', which, as Adam Hansen and Monika Smialkowska have noted, failed to 'engag[e] . . . with

<sup>17</sup> 'Intercultural' became a byword for cultural imperialism in the 1990s, when postcolonial critics such as Rustom Bharucha criticized Western directors who plundered non-Western traditions in order to inject new life and new energy into Western drama. For more details, see Bharucha 1993. Refocusing the debate on the increasingly globalized quality of culture and of world theatre cultures more specifically, William B. Worthen extended Bharucha's critique of intercultural performance to what he referred to as 'globalized Shakespeare'. Worthen argued that 'globalized commerce' is the main framework within which 'globalized Shakespeare' is produced and consumed and that the framework of 'globalized commerce' can therefore turn Shakespearean performance into intercultural productions which in fact erase cultural difference in the name of a universal, transcultural Shakespeare. However, Worthen also conceded that 'performance forms and practices can, on some occasions, retain their history' (2003: 123) and that 'theatre practices [can] be deployed with different kinds of force in different locations, [and can] do different kinds of work in different local and global registers' (2003: 129). Even Bharucha has more recently admitted that, while 'some appropriations are misappropriations of other people's cultural texts, contexts, and histories, . . . not every appropriation is necessarily imperial, colonial, or neocolonial in its methodology, rhetoric, or impact' (2004: 6).



the North East on the level of setting, costuming or dialect' (2014: 108–9). The Shakespeare on offer in Newcastle and Gateshead in 2012 ranged from *In a Pickle*, a pre-school version of *The Winter's Tale* to Doran's 'African' *Julius Caesar*, along with a Tunisian *Macbeth*, *The Rest Is Silent* by dreamthinkspeak, and a handful of amateur productions sponsored by the RSC's Open Stages project. As Hansen and Smialkowska observed, 'there was no clear rationale as to why these particular shows of all the Festival's repertoire were chosen to be presented in the Newcastle and Gateshead area'. They went on to conclude that 'one could be forgiven for feeling that Shakespeare was on tour rather than at home in the region, with companies from elsewhere bringing random offerings to the locals' (2014: 109).

The Tunisian *Macbeth* was the offering that most starkly highlighted the disconnection between what was presented on stage and the range of expectations that audiences from the North East brought to the Festival. As Hansen and Smialkoska pointed out, 'it was a privilege, stimulating and enlightening, to see how Tunisians were using Shakespeare to rethink their lives', but it was not clear to them 'what opportunities the World Shakespeare Festival present[ed] for someone from Jarrow, Fenham, South Shields or anywhere in the greater Newcastle–Gateshead conurbation, to rethink *their* lives using Shakespeare' (2014: 111–12). The lack of productions originating from the North East of England was felt to be deeply regrettable, especially at a time when significant amounts of funding were devoted to showcasing homegrown as well as 'Global Shakespeare' across the country. What interests me most about this critical response to the staging of this Tunisian *Macbeth* in Newcastle is the consequent realization that the region was, in other words, conspicuously missing from local stages at a time when regional Shakespeare could have been more easily brought to national and international attention. And it was primarily the Tunisian *Macbeth*, in all its visual and acoustic otherness, that raised awareness about the marginalization of regional Shakespeare and regionally inflected voices in Shakespeare in contemporary performance.

Productions since the WSF seem to have responded to this enhanced sensitivity to accents and to the need for the contemporary Shakespearean stage to reflect regional diversity and the nation's changing demographics, even more so than in the immediate aftermath of the CWS, as shown by the two productions discussed in the final two sections of this chapter.

## §

**'A Smack of All Neighbouring Languages':  
Accenting Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well***

Nancy Meckler's 2013 RSC production of *All's Well That Ends Well* lent Parolles unprecedented contemporary resonance. Jonathan Slinger played this character, the 'manifold linguist' (4.3.172) who knows a smattering of German, Dane, Low Dutch, Italian and French (4.1.51–2), as 'a closeted gay man hiding behind a fake Sandhurst accent' (Billington 2013a). Slinger reverted to his native accent when alone on stage and during the kidnapping trick in 4.3, when, as Taylor put it, 'he disintegrate[d] . . . from gloating swaggerer to frantic, camp Northern blabbermouth' (2013). While some reviewers like Taylor highlighted the comic potential of Slinger's manifold voices, his Parolles tapped on this character's complexity, which is often overlooked in performance, and highlighted parallels with Helena's character, which are routinely ignored in productions delivered entirely in StP.

In most modern productions, Parolles is represented either as a comic type, the Plautine *miles gloriosus* or swaggering soldier, or as a self-deluded character, who experiences a moment of genuine self-discovery during the kidnapping trick.<sup>18</sup> These productions tend to read Parolles as a comic foil for Bertram, who is also exposed as a liar and a coward by the bedtrick set up by Helena to force him to accept her as his wife. However, as Meckler's production showed, Parolles can also function as a counterpart for Helena, who, like Parolles, lacks status and social standing, or, as Lafew puts it, 'the commission of . . . birth' (2.3.261) that has 'put such difference betwixt [Bertram's and her] estates' (1.3.109–10). Slinger's use of StP and his native Northern accent (Slinger was born in Accrington, Lancashire) laid bare the class dynamics that inform both Helena's and Parolles's relations to higher-rank characters in the play, highlighting key concerns to do with power, authority and identity, which StP productions quite simply fail to register.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, James Garmon's performance as Parolles in the 2011 Shakespeare Globe production directed by John Dove, who played this character as a comic type, as noted by Billington: 'the comedy is in good hands with James Garmon's popinjay of a Parolles' (2011). At the other end of the spectrum, Greg Doran's Parolles, played by Guy Henry, proved particularly moving in a generally sombre production characterized by a nostalgic harking back to the values of the older generation, which the younger characters learn to appreciate. See, for example, Kidnie: 'Guy Henry's comic inventiveness . . . [was] deepened through his self-knowing dignity after his humiliation at the hands of the Dumaine brothers' (2009: 48).

In Meckler's production, Slinger used StP consistently up to 2.3. While in the play Parolles attempts to disguise his social and personal shortcomings by dressing up (his 'scarfs' are repeatedly mentioned as tokens of his vanity and pretentiousness), Slinger had up to this point managed to hide his insecurities by speaking in StP. Slinger first used his Northern accent when he found himself momentarily alone on stage at the end of 2.3. At this point in the play, Lafew starts to see through Parolles's social pretensions; Lafew 'finds him out' when Parolles overreacts to the former's suggestion that he is Bertram's servant:

LAFEW	Your lord and master did well to make his recantation.
PAROLLES	Recantation! My lord! My master!
LAFEW	Ay. Is it not a language I speak?
PAROLLES	A most harsh one, and not to be understood without bloody succeeding. My master!
LAFEW	Are you companion to the Count Rossillion?
PAROLLES	To any Count; to all Counts; to what is man.
LAFEW	To what is Count's man; Count's master is of another style.

(2.3.187–96)

This fraught exchange hinges on the double meanings of the words 'man' (as in 'servant' and 'mankind') and 'count' (as in the title and the verb). Parolles's sensitivity at being regarded as the 'Count's man' confirms Lafew in his conviction that Parolles lacks the 'style' of a 'master' and that he and Count Rossillion are not equal.

Their exchange in this scene also reveals that Lafew had initially believed Parolles 'to be a pretty wise fellow', because Parolles had made 'tolerable vent of [his] travel'. Parolles had, in other words, *sounded* well-spoken and well-travelled enough to gain Lafew's respect, albeit momentarily ('for two ordinaries' [2.3.202], that is, after dining with him just twice [*OED n.12b*]). Parolles' appearance – his gaudy 'scarfs' and 'bannerets' – had then made Lafew question the legitimacy of Parolles' seemingly elevated status (2.3.206). After their brief exchange in 2.3, Lafew concludes that Parolles is 'good for nothing but taking up', that is 'to borrow money from' (*OED, v. 6a*). He then adds, punning on the verb 'to take up', that Parolles is actually 'scarce worth' the bending over to be picked up (*OED v. 1b*), thus reducing Parolles to the status of a worthless piece of garbage.

When Slinger's Parolles was left alone on stage to vent his frustration at being so harshly dismissed by Lafew, he did so using his Northern English accent. The sudden switch of accent gave Parolles's outburst additional

resonance. When he complained that he 'must be patient' because 'there is no fettering of authority' (2.3.213), he sounded like a social pariah *not only* because of his cowardice on the battlefield but also because of his attempt to fit in at court. Slinger's marked regional accent jarred within the acoustic context of a production that had, up to that point, been performed entirely in StP. The jarring sound of Slinger's regional accent took on a very powerful connotation of social exclusion and made Parolles's character more easily and more immediately intelligible to Meckler's audiences. The sudden change in the acoustic register of Slinger's delivery of his short soliloquy in 2.3 effectively translated an early modern concern with the relative importance of personal worth versus social status into a very contemporary preoccupation with social exclusion, unequal access to education and lack of diversity within the ruling elite and key institutions and organizations. Among them, this production singled out the army, within which Slinger's Parolles tried to get himself established, but also the RSC, where Slinger is generally expected to set aside his regional accent and to use StP in order to comply with the acoustic parameters that are still dominant on the mainstream Shakespearean stage.

The humiliation Parolles suffers in Act 4 acquired a similarly social dimension in Meckler's production. The smattering of languages Parolles speaks at other moments in the play is no use to him in 4.1, where some lords in Bertram's party surprise, bind and hoodwink him, pretending to be a foreign legion among the Duke of Florence's enemies. Their aim is to show Bertram that Parolles is 'a most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, [and] an hourly promise-breaker' (3.6.9–10). Slinger reverted to his Northern accent in this scene and in his questioning before Bertram in 4.3. This time, Slinger's native accent suggested the breaking down of Parolles's constructed social persona, which he had been using to hide not only his cowardice but also his sense of dislocation, a common plight among those who struggle to get by in a world to which they feel they do not naturally belong.

Generally staged in a comic key, 4.1 and 4.3 came across in this production as cruel bullying. Parolles's capitulation, in turn, did not amount merely to a reversion to type, as Parolles self-identified as a braggart – 'Who knows himself a braggart, / Let him fear this: for it will come to pass / That every braggart shall be found an ass' (4.3.328–30). In this production, Parolles's unmasking made the enforced acknowledgment of his lowly origins – 'Simply the thing I am / Shall make me live' (4.3.327–8) – especially touching and resonant, because it conveyed his sense of exclusion in terms that contemporary audiences could grasp,

tapping on social connotations that are still commonly attached to StP and NSE accents, on and off the Shakespearean stage.

## §

### 'Do You Know My Voice?': Accenting Iago in *Othello*

Two recent productions of *Othello* – directed by Nicholas Hytner at the NT in 2013 and by Iqbal Khan for the RSC in 2015 – have also used accents, alongside unconventional casting, in order to revisit the complex interracial dynamics explored in the play. Hytner's production, starring Adrian Lester and Rory Kinnear in the lead roles, used aural rather than visual identity markers to signal otherness, prejudice and exclusion. Kinnear's use of Estuary English was one of the main strategies through which class replaced race to code Iago, rather than Othello, as an outsider. In Khan's production, race was still firmly at the heart of the tragedy, but the casting of Lucian Msamati as Iago, alongside Hugh Quarshie's Othello, transformed Iago's originally racially inflected prejudice against the Moor into a sobering exploration of intra-racial tensions. Msamati's younger and less assimilated Iago spoke in his native Tanzanian accent, while Quarshie's Othello, who performed the lead role in impeccable StP, cut a striking figure as a successful general and a more integrated member of the Venetian elite. Their relationship, fraught from the beginning, gained depth and contemporary resonance in the context of Khan's consistently unconventional approach to the casting of other key roles. Among them, Emilia was played by British-Indian actress Ayesha Dharker in her original accent and Montano was played by black British actor David Ajao, who gave this character greater depth in the improvised 'rap off' sequence added to the nuptial revels in Cyprus in 2.3.

Both productions broke new interpretative ground by combining unconventional casting strategies with a careful curatorial approach to voices and accents. Other Iagos had already spoken in regionally marked accents. Bob Hoskins, for example, played Iago in Jonathan Miller's 1981 BBC production as 'a working-class sergeant' dogged by 'social frustration' (Petcher 1999: 60). Commenting on Hoskins's Iago, Edward Petcher refers to 'a strong tradition of modern Iagos', who have similarly highlighted class as the root of Iago's resentment against Othello:

In this respect, Miller . . . goes back to Frank Finlay's 'solid, honest-to-God N.C.O.' opposite Olivier . . . and further to Olivier's own Iago in 1938 opposite Ralph Richardson. This line carries on to Ian McKellen,

opposite Willard White in Trevor Nunn's 1989 RSC production: McKellen's northern accent sets him apart from the rest of the cast, particularly Othello and Cassio, who spoke in traditional BBC tones. (1999: 60)

In these earlier productions, Iago did not seem as starkly juxtaposed to Othello, because Othello was still the primary target of exclusion and prejudice. However, the casting of Lester as Othello in Hytner's production significantly mitigated Othello's racial otherness. By the time he played Othello in 2014, Lester had built his reputation as one of the most prominent classical actors in contemporary British theatre by playing key leading roles in major gender-blind and colour-blind productions, including Rosalind in Cheek-by-Jowl's milestone production of *As You Like It* in 1991 and the title role in Hytner's *Henry V* at the NT in 2003. As Billington has rather crudely, but effectively, put it, 'Lester is a fine classical actor, who just happens to be black' (2013b), or, as Christina Patterson has more sensitively argued, 'few black actors have moved beyond racial stereotypes as deftly as ... Lester' (2009).

The casting of a black Iago was also not entirely unprecedented. The Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington DC had cast black actors Avery Brooks and Andre Braugher as Othello and Iago, alongside Fanchelle Stewart Dorn as Emilia, in 1990–91. However, this earlier production had not offered a radically new reading of the play, as Khan's did in 2015. This production extended, or at best inverted, the sense of exclusion experienced by these three characters, as Miranda Johnson-Haddad explains:

Frequently one of the most obvious visual features of a traditionally cast *Othello* is that Othello himself stands out as a solitary figure among the white Venetians; his difference is palpable, and in many productions this difference is further emphasized by Othello's native African or specifically Moorish garb. In this production, however, it was Othello and Iago who stood out together. In scenes involving Othello, Iago, Emilia, and Desdemona, it was Desdemona who stood out. (1991: 477)

Subtle variation in the delivery of their lines did highlight slight differences in the status of these three characters. Brooks, for example, 'delivered many of his speeches [in a] lilting, mellifluous cadence' (Johnson-Haddad, 1991, 478), which set him apart not only from the Venetians but also from Iago, who, as a result, seemed more assimilated than Othello. This production therefore lent fresh insights into Iago's resentment against Othello, as Angela C. Pao has observed: '[Othello's and Iago's] shared status as partially assimilated outsiders ... magnify[ied] Iago's sense of betrayal

and rejection when Othello promot[ed] Cassio', which was in turn 'compounded as he watch[ed] Othello solidify his position in Venetian society by marrying a highborn Venetian lady' (2006: 32). A later production, directed by Penny Metropulos for the Acting Company in New York in 1995, had also cast two black American actors, Ezra Knight and Allen Gilmore, as Othello and Iago. However, the lack of a wider rethinking of the implications that this type of unconventional casting can have on the dramatic economy of the play as a whole led some reviewers to assume that they were watching a colour-blind production, while others found the casting distracting (Pao 2006: 40).

What set the two productions under discussion here apart from earlier ones is their combined approach to casting *and* acoustic diversity, on the one hand, and some careful tweaking of the dialogue, on the other. In Hytner's production, for example, the dialogue was substantially cut. The cuts in Act 1 – 135 lines in total – were especially significant. Some cuts were required by the updating of the play: the first act took place in a contemporary, urban setting that resembled present-day London, with punters drinking outside pubs, while military and political leaders had emergency meetings in formal council rooms; once the action moved to Cyprus, the setting changed to a modern-day military outpost and the soldiers wore desert camouflage uniforms and modern weaponry. Most other cuts were however specifically aimed at removing references to Othello's status as an outsider. These cuts included Roderigo's description of Othello as an 'extravagant and wheeling stranger' (1.1.134) and Othello's allusion to his having 'fetch[ed his] life and being / From men of royal siege' (1.2.21–2). In keeping with these cuts, Brabantio's insinuations that Othello had used witchcraft to steal his daughter away from him were drastically toned down. Other cuts lessened Brabantio's power and status. In fact, Brabantio was reduced to a pretty pathetic and isolated figure and other scripted, non-verbal cues in 1.3 indicated that the other characters did not share Brabantio's racist views. When, for example, Brabantio wondered, before the Senate, how Desdemona, 'in spite of nature, / Of year, of country, credit, everything' (1.3.95–6) could have fallen for Othello, all the other Senators were visibly shocked and their body-language suggested that they were distancing themselves from him.

The updating of the setting contributed to deflecting attention even further away from Othello's racial otherness. When Hytner introduced the *Othello* NTLive cinecast on 26 September 2013, he explained that Othello's descent into abject and murderous jealousy only makes sense in his production when understood in the context of the military base of the Venetian army in

Cyprus. He then went on to compare the military base to a bell jar, in order to emphasize the impact of enforced confinement on troops stationed in enemy territory, especially when soldiers have nothing to do but wait. Hytner hired a general, Jonathan Shaw, who had been in charge of the British troops in Basra in 2007, as a military adviser in order to bolster the accuracy and verisimilitude of his directorial vision for this production, where Othello's gullibility had nothing, or very little, to do with the colour of his skin. In the programme notes, Shaw accordingly explained that:

Duping . . . mak[es] sense once it is understood that [Othello] is a 'military orphan' whose moral code is derived entirely from his military upbringing within a culture which is based on trust; for trust is the basis of all soldering. Othello and Iago have clearly been in many fights together, life-and-death situations, in which each has probably entrusted their life to the other and at some points saved each other's life. Iago has proved his 'honesty' on battlefields around the region; Othello has every reason to trust him implicitly. Betrayal is the most heinous of military sins so it is the last to be suspected. . . . His colour marks him out but, from a military perspective, this is the least interesting point of discord. (2014)

In this important respect, Hytner took *Othello* into a brand new stage in the history of its reception in mainstream British theatre.

Hytner's approach seems all the more remarkable when considered in relation to earlier NT productions of *Othello*. When white actors used to black up to play Othello, Othello's racial otherness came across either as racist parody or as purely cosmetic. Laurence Olivier's Othello, in John Dexter's 1964 National Theatre production, falls into the first category, as intimated by Lester's comments on his predecessor: '[Olivier's] stage performance . . . [was] doing a very generalized parody. It's colour as character, not just colour as colour. And there is this insulting idea . . . that because the dots of why Othello believes the things that he does can't be joined, people go, "Well it's about colour"' (Rees 2013). Paul Scofield's Othello, in Peter Hall's 1980 National Theatre production, fell into the second category, in that Othello's racial diversity seemed to have no discernible impact on Scofield's interpretation of the role. In fact, Billington implicitly reinforced the bias outlined by Lester above by admitting that he 'could never quite believe that this eloquent, dignified sophisticate would be such a willing dupe' (1980).<sup>19</sup> Lester's Othello, on the other hand, came across as an insider in a contemporary, cosmopolitan

<sup>19</sup> The only other NT production of *Othello*, starring David Harewood in the title role and directed by Sam Mendes in 1997, was discussed earlier in this chapter.



urban setting, where racist views were relegated to old and seemingly out-of-touch characters, like Brabantio. It is in this context that Lester's StP and Kinnear's Estuary English accent acquired more resonance than in earlier productions, where both Iago's regionally marked accent and Othello's racial difference were directly linked to social discrimination.

Similarly, Khan's production offered an original reading of the play because the unconventional casting was supported by the use of multiple accents and other local departures from Shakespeare's text and its performance tradition. Non-verbal communication, for example, played a key role in the opening scene, where Msamati's Iago flinched in response to Roderigo's racist remarks about Othello. As Taylor reported, '[w]hen Roderigo . . . refer[red] to the absent hero as "thick-lips", we [saw] Iago freeze and then decide to make light of it, burbling parodic raspberries through his own lips and cuffing Roderigo with a feigned jokiness' (2015). In Khan's multiracial society, racism was still simmering just below the surface. Even more troubling were the intra-racial tensions that emerged when Iago was once again alone on stage at the end of 1.3. As Dominic Cavendish noted, Msamati's Iago had a clear motive for hating the Moor:

At a stroke we move beyond black-and-white ideas of racism as a motivator for Iago, and racial difference as the reason for Othello's ruinous suggestibility. In this version, they're both outsiders and that makes for a fascinating psychological dynamic. When Msamati tells James Corrigan's doltish Roderigo, spit flecking from his mouth, that he hates the Moor, what might sound like a nonsense (doesn't he qualify as a 'Moor' himself?) acquires an added level of complexity. His Iago repeatedly uses that phrase "the Moor" with a hint of sarcasm. The envy is subtle but unmistakable: why should his boss "own" that identity, while he – short, stocky, a figure of forced affability – must dance humble attendance upon him? Without adding a word to the text, the other's elevated position implicitly rankles more. (2015)

Other significant departures from Shakespeare's text included the nuptial revels in 2.3, when, after Othello and Desdemona retire for the night, Othello's soldiers party on. It was at this point in Khan's production that the action of the play slowed down and improvised signing and new dialogue offered a fresh perspective on Iago, Montano and Cassio. This sequence also made it clear that thinly veiled racial tensions, as opposed to Cassio's lack of 'brains for drinking' (2.3.27), triggered the rioting among the soldiers. Similarly significant was the addition of a traditional African song which, sung by Msamati's Iago, evoked a 'world elsewhere' and the extent to which Msamati's Iago was not at home among the Venetians.

Cassio's crass remarks about Iago's song revealed the same type of casual racism voiced by Roderigo in the opening scene. This time, however, Cassio's racism was not shrugged off and, instead of getting Cassio drunk, Iago and Montano challenged him to take part in an improvised rap competition.

The rapping competition left Cassio feeling angry and humiliated. As Fiona Mountford recalled, '[t]here [was] a magnetic moment during the raucous knees-up in Cyprus when the assembled men start[ed] beat-boxing and sharp race-based undercurrents suddenly bubb[ed] up out of nowhere' (2015). Far from bubbling 'out of nowhere', the inter- and intra-racial tensions detected by Mountford were carefully woven into this production from its very opening scene, as already noted above. As a result, Iago's resentment was now clearly fuelled by the fact that he felt betrayed by one of his own people. As Taylor perceptively put it, '[t]he fact that Othello has promoted this spuriously liberal white man over him adds a new strand of bitterness to the villain's vengeful hatred'. And, as Taylor continues, '[Iago] evidently feels disdain for Othello's assimilationist approach' (2015).

The inter- and intra-racial tensions that Khan worked into this production affected not only Iago's relationship with Othello and with the Venetians but also with his wife, Emilia. Played by Dharker in a recognizable British-Indian accent, Emilia was not only an outsider among the Venetians but also a stranger within Othello and Iago's community of black officers and soldiers in the Venetian army. Iago's fraught exchanges with Emilia in the play were compounded in this production by the lack of a shared cultural background, which made it easier to understand why Emilia failed to question Iago's motives when she unwittingly helped him to plot Othello's demise. Emilia's accent also set her apart from the other characters and her isolation made her unwillingness to confide in others more understandable. By the time Desdemona asked Emilia's advice in 4.3, Desdemona was herself uprooted and isolated and could no longer make sense of what was happening to her and to Othello, as the latter became increasingly remote and inaccessible.

All in all, Hytner's and Khan's productions represented a daring and radical updating of Shakespeare's play. Their departures from the source play and its performance tradition were not cosmetic changes carried out for novelty's sake; they instead amounted to a coherent, relevant and timely exploration of the failings of multiculturalism in contemporary societies, where integration is tragically undermined by lingering racisms and fresh social and economic divisions. Along with Meckler's

2013 production of *All's Well*, Hytner's and Khan's productions of *Othello* have marked an important point of departure from performance traditions that continue to associate Shakespeare in performance with the sounds and registers of the speech of elitism.

§

To sum up, this chapter has charted the long and largely unexplored rise of accented Shakespeare on the English stage in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, focusing on the impact of foreign productions on how Shakespeare's plays are acoustically re-interpreted and re-presented to modern audiences. Accent is now an increasingly curated aspect of the complex process of non-verbal communication activated by live performance. This new level of acoustic diversity connects the delivery of Shakespeare's language in performance with the English spoken off-stage by contemporary audiences. This chapter has more generally shown how the acoustically diverse productions discussed in more detail in its final two sections represent the culmination of a long and gradual process of acoustic reform that is starting to give back to the English spoken on the Shakespearean stage all its 'native breath' (*Richard II* 1.3.167), in all its current acoustic diversity.