Shakespeare as Viewed from Contemporary Critical Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper of mine has a dual purpose. Presuming that reading contemporary Shakespeare criticism is a relatively new field of study in Bangladesh, I have enlisted a number of books on the subject to familiarize the general readers. I have printed this list of books at the end of this essay for those who want to look at it. In the main essay, I mention several essays, but not all, to inform the readers about the critical approaches undertaken in Shakespeare studies today. The technique I have followed here is to discuss the theories in groups rather than as individual theories, making it easier to understand the alignment of critical thoughts on Shakespeare and the non-alignment. Secondly, I would like to give an idea of determining my position as a Shakespeare critic and highlighting my critical views with the support of critics whose ideas I have found relevant to my meaning. What this means will become clear as I progress with the paper.

Jonathan Gil Harris, whose book, Shakespeare and Literary Theory (2010), I have heavily depended on in writing this paper, discusses two critical positions on Shakespeare: the Iagoist and Henryist positions. He begins his "Introduction" by using a speech by Canterbury in King Henry V as an epigraph. This is an attribute to King V's excellent command of oratory, which blends the knowledge of the practical world with the art of theorization: "So that the art and practice part of life / Must be the mistress to his theoric" (1.1.51-52). That is, all human actions are amenable to theorization. On the other hand, Iago condemns Cassio as a "'bookish theoric' given to 'Mere prattle without practice'" (1), meaning theorization without substance.

"For Henryism," says Harris, "all practice—no matter how unselfconsciously—by theory" (2). And Shakespeare and critical theories are, as Harris says, "kissing cousins" (4). Harris quotes Terry Eagleton as saying, "... it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida" (4). Harris also reports the Slovenian

psychoanalytic theorist Slavoj Zizek having said that “Shakespeare without doubt had read Lacan” (4).

Commenting on the inseparability between critical theory and Shakespeare, Harris makes this brilliant conclusion: “Shakespeare and theory do not belong to different times and lands; they are instead kissing cousins, speaking a shared tongue” (4).

Ronald Barthes ends his famous 1967 essay, “The Death of the Author,” with “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.”[1] That is when the door for the critics opened wide. What Shakespeare meant in his works is less important than how we want to interpret him. The fable of the six blind men going to the zoo to perceive what an elephant looks like is a close analogy to how we view Shakespeare. Therefore, as Greenblatt said, Shakespeare is no longer a unified artist. [2]

Critical theories on Shakespeare have mushroomed over the last hundred years. From foundational studies highlighting Shakespeare's humanism and universalism to psychoanalytical and gender studies, which comment on the peculiarities of gender formation, and cultural and materialistic studies, which focus on the material aspects of human societies, Shakespeare criticism has come to a point where posthumanism and ecocritical studies now call the shots.

For me, wading through this “sea of troubles” (Hamlet, 3.1.59)[3] created by these intensely insightful and scholarly essays and books is a challenging job. But I have found something reassuring. The critics’ quest goes in two major directions: should Shakespeare be studied singularly by his texts, or should he be studied by considering other extra-textual factors? All the major critical interpretations fall into these two divisions, this way or that way. For instance, the textual criticisms include formalism, universalism,

[1] In Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, Edited by David Lodge. Revised and expanded by Nigel Wood (Harlow, England: Longman, 1988, 2000), 150.

[2] See his General Introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

[3] All the quotations from Shakespeare’s works refer to the following edition: The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works: Revised Edition, Edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan; Consultant Editor Harold Jenkins (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1998).

structuralism, new criticism, close reading, textualism, deconstruction, character studies, etc. And the extra-textual interpretations will call for new historicism, cultural materialism, psychoanalysis, feminism, queer theory, Marxism, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, ecocritical theory, mimetic desire theory, ecofeminist theory, posthumanism, cognitive ethology studies, and so on. Another way to assess them is to recognize that many of these theories are aligned ideologically and thematically, and are different only in degrees.

My Position as a Shakespearean Critic

This paper aims to speak about the dominant interests I have accrued from this hard-boiled critical world. It will be found that I am in favour of a non-formalist approach. Why? Well, as Said concocted the word 'orientalist' for those European scholars who wanted to view the East as they imagined it, I may pose as an orientalist in the reverse order. As Professor Serajul Islam Chowdhury once quipped, the students of English studies are Macaulay's grandchildren, so is or is not my position as a critic of Shakespeare. But this allegation cannot be sustained anymore as English studies and Shakespeare have become both global and glocal phenomena, and millions of Shakespeare idolaters are there like me, whose first language is not English, and like me, many of whom are not colonized as my forefathers were. Ian Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (1961; in English translation 1964), is an iconic non-English, non-colonized figure, from whose position my critical position is not different.

Yet, Iago's speech, "I know our country disposition well" (Othello, 3.3.196-207; 204), resonates with me, and it hurts me too. Yes, as much as Othello is a stranger to Venice, I am also a truant visitor to the world of Shakespeare.

Atef Laouyene, in his essay, "'I am no Othello. I am a lie': Shakespeare's Moor and the Post-Exotic in Taleb Salih's Seasons of Migration to the North" (2008) brings in David Kastan to highlight Talib Salih's situation, which is similar to my feelings about Shakespeare. Kastan is quoted as saying, "What value Shakespeare has for us must, then, at least begin with the recognition of his difference from us; only then can we be sure that what

we hear are his concerns rather than the projections of our own."[4] Sure enough, Kastan speaks about two situations across time: Shakespeare's and mine. Laouyene's further paraphrasing helps: "While admitting that this kind of critique stems from a 'historical naivete', Kastan suggests that it is also emblematic of an unwavering commitment to the 'situatedness of the critic' whose 'presentist' attitude determines his or her negotiation with the past."[5]

Miguel Ramalhete Gomes gives a more succinct definition of presentist studies: "... presentism has sought...to complement historical work with an equally complex awareness of the importance of the critic's own context in shaping Shakespearean criticism."[6]

That is fine, so far as the difference in time between Shakespeare and Kastan, Laouyene, or me exists. But I am like Othello, from a far-off country and a different culture and language, whose exposure to Shakespeare happened because of the colonial past of the subcontinent. So, I am a global as well as a presentist (glocal) respondent.

For me, Shakespeare has not only travelled through time but also space and culture, as Alexa Alice Joubin emphasizes: "The transnational cultural flows go beyond the scope of geopolitical divisions of nation-states and cultural profiling." [7]

However, to particularize Shakespeare in the paradigm of global English studies, we should include translation, adaptation, appropriation, dramatization, filmization, and redaction studies.

I have translated eleven of Shakespeare's plays in Bengali prose, though in the early phase of the colonial rule, Lala Sitaram (1861-1937) was what Macaulay would have liked to see. He translated Shakespeare's six plays in Urdu and fourteen in Hindi. In his preface, he said that the idlers of India had better read Shakespeare to learn "the tenderness of Cordelia, the fortitude

[4] In *Native Shakespeare: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage,* Eds. Craig Deonne & Parmita Kapadia (Surrey, England: Ashgate 2008), 213-232, 214.

[5] *Native Shakespeare,* 214.

[6] *Native Shakespeare,* 233.
[7] *Native Shakespeare,* 248.

of Edgar, the fidelity of Kent and the heroism of Henry V."[8] My allegiance to Shakespeare can thus be seen as historically subsumed. And translation plays an ambassadorial role. In an extended effort, I have also, in English, edited, annotated with lengthy introductions, three Shakespearean plays for Albatross Publications, Dhaka, which are as follows: *As You Like It*, *Hamlet,* and *Macbeth.*

The Double-Fold Critical Approach:

Universalism/ Humanism/ Formalism/ New Criticism vs New Historicism/ Psychoanalysis/ Queer Theory/ Feminism/ Marxism

Based on Ben Jonson's famous eulogical line on Shakespeare, "He was not of an age, but for all time,"[9] hundreds of quotations, like "To be, or not to be" (*Hamlet,* 3.1.56), or "Cowards die many times before their deaths, / And the valiant never taste of it but once" (*Julius Caesar,* 2.2.32-33) or "The world is mine oyster" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor,* 2.2.2) can easily be decontextualized from his works and applied to any conceivable human situation of any culture, age and country. Shakespeare, of course, is not unique in this respect. All great writers have these virtues of universality in their works.

Secondly, Karen Raber, "Posthumanist studies,"[10] traces the birth of humanism back to the Roman Architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (80 BCE to 15 BCE), who said, in his masterpiece, *De Architectura,* that the human body was the most proportionate entity in the world. In 1490, Leonardo Da Vinci drew the figure of the Vitruvian Man in a circle and a square. The Renaissance ideal of humanism, that is, human-centredness, was born. Hamlet uttered in 1601: "What a piece of work is a man...the paragon of all animals" (2.2.305 ff.). Despite Hamlet's reference to man's reduced status as "this quintessence of dust" (2.2.310), man's exceptionality was recognized at the expense of all

[8] Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1933), 18. This is a must-read book for Shakespeare enthusiasts in the subcontinent.

[9] Used as the epigraph by Greenblatt in his General Introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare,* 1.

[10] *The Arden Research Handbook of Contemporary Shakespeare Criticism,* Edited by Evelyn Gajowsky, 2021, 292-304.

other organisms. With a further elevation of this image in the eighteenth century, that is the Age of Reason, allowing a bifurcation between the mind and the body, where the body was reduced to, as Hamlet says, "That flesh is heir to" (3.1.63), by the nineteenth century, however, the human supremacy was challenged in the Romantic poetry (Wordsworth, etc.) and paintings (Gainsborough and Constable), where an adoration for nature was conceived as the recognition of the fact that the humans could not be at the centre and was instead a part of the great ecological world. The Vitruvian Man was actually a Vitruvian Straw. It was further noticed that the Vinci man was a white European, neither a black nor a woman. In reaction, theories like Ecocritical, Antihumanism, and Posthumanism were developed to confirm the zoological ordinary identity of the human.

In the Shakespearean critical field, however, the humanist purchase ran fine for a couple of centuries, but a searching interest grew to connect Shakespeare's writings with the age in which he lived. Some advanced critical views, however, maintain that such a quest to find traces of his life in his writings is futile, and rather they can be derived from other sources and documents. My point here is that though it is impossible to reconstruct a replica of what Shakespeare meant, the critics' desire is to attempt to understand Shakespeare's life and writings in tandem accurately. Stephen Greenblatt, the proponent of the groundbreaking new historicist theory, famously opened the first chapter of his seminal book, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), thus: "I began with the desire to speak with the dead."[11]

While Greenblatt's critical engagement with Shakespeare has excavated the extra-literary sources to put Shakespeare in a historical perspective, on a fictional level, writers have also attempted to recreate a verisimilitude of Shakespeare as he might have lived. Maggie O'Farrell won the "2020 Women's Prize for Fiction" by writing *Hamnet: A Novel of the Plague,* in which she vividly describes the last moments of Hamnet's death, through which we get a glimpse of the father that Shakespeare was.[12]

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[11] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 1.

[12] Maggie Farrell, *Hamnet: A Novel of the Plague* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), 229: "He [Shakespeare, but unnamed in the novel] moves quickly across the room and pulls back the cloth. And there is his son's face before him, a blue-white lily-flower, eyes sealed shut, lips pursed, as if the boy is displeased, unimpressed by what has taken place.

Greenblatt, in his 2004 biography of Shakespeare, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare,* writes about the connection between Shakespeare's acting as Hamlet's father's Ghost and the deaths of Hamnet, his son at the age of eleven, and his father, which anticipates O'Farrell's poignant description.[13]

This correspondence between critical and creative biographies resonates with my understanding of the role of a writer's critic. Rather than focusing on the universalized aspects, my natural bent is to explore the life and society of a writer's age to glean a deeper insight from his writings.

This biographical approach may directly contrast with the formalist approach, where every meaning must come from the text and whatever is printed between the two covers. One good example of formalist criticism is Cleanth Brooks's study of the child image in *Macbeth'*s soliloquy: "And pity like a naked new-born babe" (1.7.21). Commenting on the simile of pity imagined as a naked boy, he views that the language is paradoxical as the child is suggesting both the newborn's helplessness and the angelic power: " . . is Pity like the human and helpless babe, or powerful as the angel that rides the winds?"[14]

Like Brooks, the structuralists, led by famous figures like Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Ludwig Wittgenstein, etc., tended to maintain that words become a font of undecidedness, to use a term that gestures towards the persistent wavering at the heart of linguistic meaning. Referring to words and their meanings not always carrying one-to-one fixed correspondences, Harris refers to Feste/Clown in *Twelfth Night* for saying: "a sentence is but a cheveral glove to a good wit, how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward" (3.1.12-13). When Juliet, from her balcony, desperately utters to

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"The father cups a hand to the son's chill cheek. His fingers hover, trembling, over the bruise on his brow. He says, No, no, no. He says, God in Heaven. And, then, crouching low, over the boy, he whispers: How did this happen to you?"

[13] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 322: "Enacting the purgatorial spirit who demands that the living listen carefully to his words—'lend thy serious hearing / To what I shall unfold' (*Hamlet,* 1.5.5-6)—Shakespeare must have conjured up within himself the voice of his dead son, the voice of his dying father, and perhaps too his own voice, as it would sound when it came from the grave. Small wonder that it would have been his best role."

[14] Cleanth Brooks, "The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness," in *Harold Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages,* Macbeth, *edited with an introduction by Harold Bloom, Volume Editor: Janyce Marson* (New Delhi: Viba Books, 2010), 253.

Romeo, who is standing below, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet" (2.2.43-44), she helps linguistics like Saussure to stress the undecidability of the meanings of words. In a short distance from here, Rene Girard's theory of 'mimetic desire' acknowledges the structural inevitability of human emotion. For instance, Romeo's passion for Juliet conflicts with Juliet's parents' choice of Paris as her would-be husband. So, a love triangle is structurally formed where Romeo must desire to outdo Paris's bid for Juliet, even though it might turn him into a martyr of love. Girard's idea of scapegoating can also be applied to the play by conceiving that for the strife between the families of the Montagues and the Capulets, the lovers are made the scapegoats.[15]

New Criticism also falls into this formalist and structuralist category, of which *Theory of Literature* (1949), written jointly by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, is a representative book. They quote W. T. Stace as saying, "... the play *Othello* is not about jealousy but about Othello's jealousy, the particular kind of jealousy a Moor married to a Venetian might feel."[16] Stace recognizes the play's racist basis, but he refuses to generalize it as a clashing point between two cultures. His view is not far off from that of Bradley, a famous formalist and character-based critic, who viewed Shakespeare's handling of Othello's character from a non-racialist perspective, saying that Shakespeare would have laughed if anybody told him that his portrayal of Othello was very accurate as a Moor. Bradley implies that Shakespeare was just creating a character named Othello, whose racial identity was merely incidental.[17]

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[15] Mimetic desire issues out of a competitive zeal. One person desires to imitate another person in gaining a thing. Girard applies his theory of scapegoating to a situation where there is no difference between two contending figures—undifferentiation takes place—and in such a situation someone else is to be blamed for the impasse and that someone is the scapegoat. Harris, 36: "This is often done through an act of arbitrary violence against a scapegoat who is blamed for the undifferentiation, and who is made to carry its burden by being killed or banished."

[16] Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: A Harvest Book: Harcourt Brace & World Inc. 1949), 32.

[17] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Third Edition with a New Introduction by John Russell Brown, Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1904;1992), 159: "I do not mean that Othello's race is a matter of no account. . . . It makes a difference to our idea of him; it makes a difference to the action and catastrophe. But in regard to the essentials of his character it is not important; and if anyone had told Shakespeare that no

Greenblatt's interpretation is just the opposite. His New Historicist approach also merges with the Reader's Response Approach, when he views the problem of Othello from a racial perspective. In "The Improvisation of Power,"[18] Greenblatt says that Iago makes Othello a victim of the rhetoric that he is a converted Christian, and culturally, he is not a white Venetian, but a Moor from North Africa. He constructs the idea that Desdemona will become impatient with Othello because of their race, age, and cultural gaps, and will go for "some second choice" (2.1.232-233). Capitalizing on it, Iago injects the seed of suspicion into Othello: "Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio" (3.3.200).

When he realizes that he has brought Othello completely under control, he proceeds, according to Greenblatt, to improvise an idea gathered from old theological texts that even adultery can be committed by a legally married couple if they are sexually too forward.[19] Greenblatt's idea here is that Iago has not only aroused Othello's suspicion about Desdemona's loyalty but has also improvised that his married life is tantamount to sin as he has prioritized his lust over modesty. And who is responsible for turning his modesty into lust? Of course, Desdemona. So, Desdemona must be removed as a sinner, for she has betrayed him twofold: she had established a liaison with Cassio and turned Othello into a sinner too.[20]

Englishman would have acted like the Moor, and had congratulated him on the accuracy of his racial psychology, I am sure he would have laughed."

[18] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago a£nd London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 2005), 222-254.

[19] Greenblatt quotes Saint Jerome, who said "An adulterer is he who is too ardent a lover of his wife" (248). Then he mentions Saint Jerome quoting from Seneca: "All love of another's wife is shameful; so too, too much love of your own…. Nothing is fouler than to love a wife like an adultress" (248). Calvin is also quoted: The "man who shows no modesty or comeliness in conjugal intercourse is committing adultery with his wife" (248). The "*King's Book*, attributed to Henry VIII, informs its readers that in lawful matrimony a man may break the Seventh Commandment 'and live unchaste with his own wife, if he do unmeasurably or inordinately serve his or her fleshly appetite or lust'." (248)

[20] "This moment of erotic intensity, this frank acceptance of pleasure and submission to her spouse's pleasure, is, I would argue, as much as Iago's slander the cause of Desdemona's death, for it awakens the deep current of sexual anxiety that with Iago's

A similar feeling is also expressed by Hugh Quarshie, the great Ghana-born non-white RSC actor of Shakespeare, who, in his speech delivered at the Shakespearean Conference in Barcelona, said that Shakespeare wrote *Othello* with racial prejudice. He says he, therefore, never acted as Othello to avoid subscribing to Shakespeare's racist perceptions. (But I found out much later that he performed as Othello, maybe, after, he wrote the essay, "Second Thoughts About *Othello*").[21]

To come back to Greenblatt, he actually proposes this brilliant theory of improvisation against the orientalist Daniel Lerner, who theorized that the success of the Western imperial powers was due to their superiority as a race to other races. Greenblatt flatly refuses this racist supremacist interpretation and comes out with the idea that, like Iago, who is a member of Western societies, the European imperial powers also exerted an improvisational quality wherever they went to plant colonies. We can supplement this idea by referring to the divide-and-rule policy improvised by the British in ruling India by enforcing a communal divide between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Greenblatt's contention with John Dover Wilson, a vanguard of old historicism and a pioneer of New Criticism, can also be noted to show the difference between New Criticism and New Historicism. Wilson edited the Cambridge New Shakespeare edition of *Richard II* (1595) in 1939, and in his Introduction, he left this perception that the usurpation of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke was just a formality of power handover, and it did not worry Shakespeare's Queen Elizabeth. But Greenblatt, evoking the exchange between history and literature, said that firstly, Elizabeth likened herself to Richard II[22], and, secondly, the play was demanded by a group of Earl of Essex's supporters, led by Sir Gelly Meyrick, who approached Shakespeare's company, Lord Chamberlain's Men with a payment of 40 shillings on top of

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help expresses itself in quite orthodox fashion as the perception of adultery." (*Renaissance Self-fashioning,* 250)

[21] Hugh Quarshie, "Second Thoughts About *Othello*," 1999: International Shakespeare Association Occasional Paper No. 7 (Clouds Hill Printers, Chipping Campden). Quoting " . . . Iago's statement, 'These Moors are changeable in their wills' (1.3.348), Quarshie opines that "Of all the parts in the canon, perhaps Othello is the one which should most definitely not be played by a black actor." (5)

[22] John Dover Wilson, ed. *Richard II* (Cambridge University Press, 1939, 2009), Introduction xxxii: Elizabeth reportedly told her librarian, William Lambarde, in August 1601: "I am Richard II, know you not that? . . . This tragedy was played forty times in open streets and houses."

their regular charge of £10 to stage an special performance of *Richard II* on the eve of the coup on February 7, 1601. The rebellion failed, but the investigation prompted the authorities to question the company, though Shakespeare was spared. So, Greenblatt emphasizes that while Wilson ahistorically concludes his argument in favour of keeping fiction as fiction, he discusses this as an instance of how fiction relates to the real world.[23]

In *Shakespearean Negotiations,* Greenblatt studies *King Lear* in “Shakespeare and the exorcists,” and observing the language of Tom o’Bedlam, that is, Edgar, he concludes that Shakespeare must have read the book *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) by Samuel Harsnett. The book was written against the fake Catholic practices of exorcism, by which, in the name of driving away witches from the supposedly possessed people, the Catholic priests spread their influence on the faithful. But the practices were pure and simple forgery, where certain made-up rituals were acted out to impress the patient and the public watching the exorcist’s performance. There was nothing genuine but all fraud, and with the transition of England from the Catholic Queen Mary to the Protestant Elizabeth, these Catholic rituals were forbidden. Harshnett’s book was a strong protest against these fake practices. However, by emphasizing that Shakespeare might have read it, Greenblatt suggests that what intrigued Shakespeare about these practices was how these false techniques induced the spectators’ interest and suspense. As the stage was a playground for sustaining suspense, Greenblatt opines that what was banned on religious grounds, or these practices being evacuated of their original religious significance, was revived by Shakespeare as a perfect ploy for stage activities.[24] This is how the background source becomes a powerful tool for judging a literary product, not in isolation but in the context of a conglomeration of social factors.

Such brilliant connections, however, were considered inadequate or confined to mere conjectures by critics like John Drakakis, a quasi-cultural textualist critic, who raised the question, in “Intention and Editing” (2010) about Greenblatt’s propriety in conjecturing that the reference to the mermaid

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[23] Stephen Greenblatt, *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 15-23, 17-18.

[24] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations,* 94-128: “Because with our full complicity Shakespeare’s company and scores of companies that followed have created profitably to our desire for spectacular impostures” (128).

sitting on a dolphin (*AMND,* 2.1.149-154)[25] grew out of Shakespeare's memory of his visit to Kenilworth to watch a performance with his father when he was a boy.[26] Drakakis says, we do not know whether Shakespeare had gone on such a visit; there is no concrete document either, so Greenblatt has inferred an episode that may not have happened.[27]

W. H. Auden, known for his anti-biographical stance, wrote a sonnet about Shakespeare's life, highlighting that what happened between Shakespeare and his wife is perhaps unwarranted for critical writings.[28] Like

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[25] *AMND,* 2.1. 149 ff: Oberon: "Since once I sat upon a promontory, / And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back."

[26] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004). Greenblatt guesses that the Queen's Men visited Stratford in 1569, the Earl of Leicester's Men in 1573, and the Earl of Warwick's Men in 1573, all of whom were looked after by John Shakespeare as the Mayor. And about the source of the dolphin reference in *AMND,* Greenblatt writes: "In the single most extravagant entertainment Leicester staged for the queen during her long stay, a twenty-four-foot-long mechanical dolphin rose up out of the waters of the lake adjacent to the castle." (30, 46)

[27] John Drakakis, "Intention and Editing," *Style:* Volume 44, No. 3, Fall 2010, 365: "Greenblatt's own narrative is hedged around with 'seems,' 'maybes,' etc., to the point where we can see the writer being progressively seduced by the very fiction he is in the process of creating. We do not know if Shakespeare knew about this particular entertainment; we do not know whether he had watched it as a boy; we do not know if his father ever took him to this spectacle; we do not know what contemporaries thought about an eight-mile trip from Stratford to Kenilworth."

[28] A shilling life will give you all the facts:
How father beat him, how he ran away,
What were the struggles of his youth, what acts
Made him the greatest figure of his day:
Of how he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night,
Though giddy, climbed new mountains: named a sea:
Some of the last researchers even write
Love made him weep his pints like you and me.

With all his honours on, he sighed for one
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;
Did little jobs about the house with skill
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still
Or potter round the garden: answered some
Of his long marvellous letters but kept none.

the poet's wife's indifference to his fame, his life may be of no importance to us in judging his works, because many unfounded conjectures take place.

Like new historicism, feminism is a study of culture rather than the text for the signified language only. Iago's pejorative line about women: "They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown" (3.3.206-207) is a nuanced repetition of Hamlet's now rather infamous line: "Frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.146). But Elaine Showalter in her landmark essay, "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism" (1985) argues that Ophelia has been misrepresented by the subsequent ages as epitomized by the great nineteenth-century painter John Everett Millais, where she rather is shown as a beautiful corpse who has lost her agency due to her being a woman. That is, Ophelia's situation is compromised in the succeeding phases of criticism by the traditional male view of women, failing in love, becoming subjected to neural attacks, that is, becoming insane: "These Pre-Raphaelite images were part of a new and intricate traffic between images of women and madness in late nineteenth-century literature, psychiatry, drama and art."[29]

A few years later, after this essay was published, Janet Adelman, in her pathbreaking book, *Suffocating Mothers* (1992), articulated that in King Lear, the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia may be treated as another instance of how the patriarchal values sanitize the rebelliousness of the females. Cordelia who was a strong character in the earlier parts of the play is made to shed off all her spiritedness and succumbs to Lear's (a male progeny) customized view of daughter, which he expected to find in Cordelia, 'tenderness,' but which he did not find in the kingdom-dividing scene: "So young and so untender?" (1.1.108).[30]

W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems,* ed. by Edward Mendelson (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1979), 32.

[29] Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism," 85.

[30] Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origins in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 1992),125: "Insofar as the Cordelia of 1.1. is silenced, insofar as we feel the Cordelia who returns more as an iconic presence answering Lear's terrible need than as a separate character with her own needs, Shakespeare is

All these above complaints can be summed up by referring to Virginia Woolf, the arch-feminist critic of the first generation, who said in "Shakespeare's Sister" (1929) that if Shakespeare had a sister with equal talent, she would never have shone like Shakespeare simply because she was a woman.[31] For Woolf, as Harris says, "Material conditions are paramount in fostering creativity."[32]

Queer Theory /Psychoanalysis/Materialism

From feminism to materialism is a short walk. With Petruchio's utterance in *The Taming of the Shrew,* "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua" (1.2.74), all romantic comedies in Shakespeare thematically turn into the mode of marriage proving a gateway to fortune for young men. Young lovers like Lysander, Bassanio, Orlando, and Ferdinand all fall into this group of fortune seekers through marriage.

But Petruchio's forceful dominance over Katherina is redeemed by intense love and mutuality of feelings. Petruchio admits that his cruel behaviour is only a surface matter: "This is a way to kill a wife with kindness" (4.1.196) or Katherina's long reconciling speech at the end, 5.2.137-180, about "her loving lord" (161), has given this idea to the gender critics that the cross-exchange of feelings between the genders was also experimented by Shakespeare through the use of disguise. Rosalind as Ganymede in *As You Like It* says: "I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman" (2.4.4-5). Going beyond the significance of being a stage device, her disguise makes Rosalind recognize the presence of him and her in

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complicit in Lear's fantasy, rewarding him for his suffering by remaking for him the Cordelia he had wanted all along."

[31] Virginia Woolf, "Shakespeare's Sister," this passage quoted by Harris, 110: "Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. . . fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground . . . fiction is like a spider's web attached so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there completely by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in midair by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in." (Woolf 1929, 3-4)

[32] Harris, 108.

herself, which conforms to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the queer theoretician, who claims that Shakespeare's sonnets play into the inbetweeners of 'he' and 'she': " . . . the master mistress of my passion" (Sonnet 20, 2).

This psychological cross-gender fixation is the basis for Freud's notion of the Oedipus Complex. An infant grows an automatic fascination for his/her opposite parent, and grows a sense of rivalry with his/her same-sex parent.[33] Why does Hamlet not take revenge at once on Claudius? Based on this mother-fixation tendency by a male child, Freud theorizes that Hamlet feels his rivalry towards his father, as the possessor of his mother, has been materialized by his uncle, who killed his father and has been playing a substitute role for him (Hamlet).

While for Freud, sexuality precedes the societal factors, for Lacan, Melanie Klein, and Michel Foucault, human instinct is not atavistic; it is socially determined. More like a deconstructionist, Lacan believed in the loose connection between the signifier and the signified. Referring to Polonius's question, "What do you read, my lord?" and Hamlet's retort: "Words, words, words" (2.2.191-2), Lacan comments, as paraphrased by Harris, that "For Lacan... signifiers always slide away from meaning to other signifiers."[34] Similarly, Melanie Klein conceives of the 'Object Relations Theory' by which she entertains the idea that an infant's first fascination goes towards his/her mother's breast. She mentions the 'good breast' as having positively sustained the child's growth, implying that human consciousness develops through the orientation of the objects in his/her surroundings. Soon, however, because of external factors, he/she develops a destructive impulse out of envy and jealousy. H/She feels dispossessed. Othello's turning from a loving husband into an uxoricide is what Klein implies by envy created from a plot of

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[33] Harris, 77: "Freud famously called this infantile nexus of sexual longing, aggression, and repression the 'Oedipus complex'. The name derives from Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus, deserted at birth by his royal parents and brought up by shepherds, kills a man whom he does not know but who turns out to be his biological father, and has sexual relations with a woman who is, also unbeknownst to him, his biological mother. Finding out what he has done, Oedipus blinds himself, a punishment that Freud reads as a displaced form of castration."

[34] Harris, 96.

jealousy.[35] Foucault has given the same idea about our psychological orientation. Foucault refers to Lady Macbeth's somnambulism, explaining that her social position causes her symptoms, and the recriminations she encounters are society's disciplining and marginalizing processes.[36]

Marxist Materialism: Commodity Fetishism and Reification, or money gives the alienated ability to mankind.

Karl Marx refers to *Timon of Athens* in his essay "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society" (1844). Timon accidentally comes across hidden gold in the ground and digs it out with an accompanying soliloquy: "What is here? / Gold? Yellow, glittering precious gold?" (4.3.25 ff). Harris summarizes Marx's comment on this incident: "For Marx, Timon's speech shows a transhistorical awareness of how money enables people to become their opposites based on their ability to buy what they do not have. It is thus the 'alienated *ability of mankind*' [sic], the '*truly creative power'* [sic] that allows anyone who has it to convert mere thought into action."[37] This leads to commodity fetishism as human agency is given to the commodity.

In *King John,* the Bastard makes the most pointed comment on the efficaciousness of the commodity: "The smooth-fac'd gentleman, tickling commodity, / Commodity, the bias of the world . . . / This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word" (2.2.573-574, 582).

This can be tagged with Georg Lukacs's idea, given in his book, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), that this kind of economic transaction reifies the objects in the same way as the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism.

The crown, for instance, is a good example of both commodity fetishism and reification. We see the usurpers chasing it: King John, Claudius, Macbeth, Prince Bolingbroke, the usurper brothers in the comedies, Duke

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[35] Harris, 88: "The play's title character destroys the object he loves—Desdemona—and this typifies for Klein the way in which jealousy betrays the workings of an envy that is little more than greed stimulated by fear."

[36] Harris, 180: " 'Lady Macbeth's delirium reveals to those 'who have known what they should not' words long uttered only to 'dead pillows'" (Foucault 1973, 30).

[37] Harris, 148.