

TEACHING SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS IN BOTSWANA: THE CHALLENGES OF CULTURALLY-INSCRIBED SYMBOLISM

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Abstract

In the English speaking world, the teaching of Shakespeare has historically been lauded as a prerequisite for cultural sophistication, and despite the 21st Century's post-colonially sensitive African academia, it remains compulsory on many University curricula. Shakespeare, it sometimes seems, is uniquely transcendent of Western imperialist propaganda of race and culture. Notwithstanding such naivety, when Batswana students study Shakespeare's poetry, they encounter the confusion of culturally-inscribed root metaphor, or put another way, canonical Western literary symbolism. As the eminent postcolonial critic Edward Said argued, many of the major cultural debates of recent years depend upon deciphering the real meaning of metaphor. Focusing on the teaching of Shakespearean sonnets to Batswana students, this article seeks to interrogate the hermeneutic aporia caused by divergent cultural understandings within several specific types of conventional Western literary symbols. For instance, in the category of "the weather", the symbolic connotations of the Shakespearean lexis "rain" are contradictory to those understood culturally by Batswana, regardless of whether it is translated into its equivalent of "pula" [rain] or "go na" [to rain] in the Setswana language or not. Three of the four instances of "rain" in the sonnets function as a synecdoche for *bad* weather and thus a symbol of life's unhappiness – a meaning problematically antithetical to the univocal Batswana understanding of "rain" as a synecdoche for *good* weather, the harbinger of fertile soil, and hence a symbol of life's blessings. The result is exegetical confusion, caused fundamentally not by the problems of translation, or even of language per se, but of cultural symbol.

Keywords: Sonnet, symbolism, culture, imagery, Shakespeare, Botswana

Introduction

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (Shakespeare, 1997, p. 245). Virtually all the world knows and reacts with pleasure to these famous opening lines of Shakespeare's 18th sonnet. But what on earth can they mean to a contemporary Motswana³ reader, in a context so far removed in both time and place from Shakespeare's Elizabethan England? There is nothing "temperate" - meaning moderately warm - about a summer's day in Botswana, as most of us know all

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³A "Motswana" is a citizen of Botswana in the singular form; "Batswana" is the plural term.

too well, and “lovely” is not an adjective often heard to describe the blistering and oppressive heat of that time of the year! And this creates an interpretative problem for a culturally differentiated reader of Shakespeare which is essentially one of the epistemology of figurative language. Literary symbolism functions virtually invisibly through an unchallenged acceptance of predicates which are seemingly universal: the sun invariably symbolises ‘life’ (amongst other things); a fountain ‘refreshment’; darkness ‘danger’ or ‘evil’; a lion ‘royal power’; a smile denotes ‘happiness’; the moon ‘mutability’ or ‘the feminine cycle of menstruation’. But we have become more aware in our current global environment that universality is a rare commodity, and this is readily apparent when interpreting the symbolic tropes of traditional English poetry in a non-Western, African, Botswana, context: does rain symbolise ‘life’s unhappiness’? Is the owl an emblem of ‘wisdom’? Does a summer’s day denote nature’s perfection for man to revel in? And most obviously politically charged, is black ‘bad’ and white ‘good’?

In a rudimentary fashion, Samuel Johnson had interrogated these Western stereotypes through his fictional cultural relativist mouthpiece Imlac in the eighteenth-century novel *Rasselas* (1759) and in his travel narrative *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775). By the twentieth-century, T. S. Eliot had proposed that language was a prime determinant of a cultural world view – that language defined a civilization’s perspective (Shusterman, 1998, p. 180); in Eliot’s quasi-relativistic theory each generation had a different interpretation of each work of literature that was appropriate to its own time (Eliot, 1956, p. 15). But symbolism is a uniquely slippery form of language. Change the culture and the normally unquestioned resonances of literary symbolism at times fail to make sense; or perhaps even worse, create meanings which undermine or contradict the seemingly intended sense of the literary piece. While in a post-structuralist age readers are aware of the philosophical truth that meaning is not reducible to the intentions of an author, albeit Shakespeare himself, yet this does not nullify the problem of misreading. The result can be simply non-sense – an exegetical aporia which leaves the reader confused; or the interpretation can be simply perverse because the reader has not recognized or understood the cultural relativity of literary symbolism. As the eminent postcolonial critic Edward Said has argued in his essay “Literature and literalism” (Said, 1999), many of the major cultural debates of recent years depend upon deciphering the real meaning of metaphorical language in literature.

Let us consider, as an example, the idea of “rain” which occurs four times in Shakespeare’s sonnets. In Sonnet 135 line 9, rain functions simply as a determining component of the sea’s abundance, which is a simile for the mistress’ sexual voracity; accordingly rain in this instance does not have important symbolic connotations in its own right. But the other three instances of rain in the Sonnets perform as synecdoches for *bad* weather and hence function as symbols for life’s unhappiness. This is a

commonplace symbol in Shakespearean drama and a staple of Western cultural attitudes. For instance, at the conclusion of Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*, the song sung by the clown Feste about the unpleasant events of each phase of life, visualizes repetitively this concept in the famous refrain, "For the rain it raineth every day" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 742, V, i, 388). A second well-known example is the pain and suffering of the eponymous *King Lear*, which are symbolized literally in the dreadful rain and wind of the storm on the heath. Similarly, in the second quatrain of Sonnet 14 the poet reveals that he is unable to augur the vicissitudes of bad weather, of "thunder, rain and wind" (6), just as he cannot predict from studying the stars whether "with princes... it shall go well" (7) or not. Sonnet 34 continues the controlling meteorological imagery of Sonnet 33 in which the young man's positive regard is symbolised by sunshine, his betrayal figured by rain from storm clouds. Herein "the rain on my storm-beaten face" (6) is both literally and symbolically the speaker's tears which emblemize the wound caused by the desertion of the beloved. Later in the cycle Sonnets 87-90 return to this theme of the young man's repudiation of the speaker, and in Sonnet 90 Shakespeare restates the meteorological imagery, this time in the guise of a natural proverb: "Give not a windy night a rainy morrow" (7). This proverbial trope proposes that current woe caused by the apparent loss of the beloved, figured by the wind, is contrasted to the greater future woe of the genuine loss of the beloved, symbolised by the rain. What a contemporary English audience might express metaphorically as "out of the frying pan and into the fire", Shakespeare chose to express symbolically as 'today wind, but tomorrow rain'.

However, these Western culturally-commonplace symbolic resonances of the Shakespearean lexis "rain" are directly contradictory to the symbolic values understood culturally by Batswana. This is true regardless of whether the term 'rain' is translated into its equivalent of "*pula*" (rain (n) or "*go na*" (to rain (v) in Setswana, or whether the exegetical process is performed in the original Shakespearean English. Rain as a synecdoche for *bad* weather, and thus a symbol of life's unhappiness, is problematically antithetical to the univocal Batswana understanding of rain as a synecdoche of *good* weather, the harbinger of fertile soil, and hence a symbol of life's *blessings*. That such a symbolic understanding is commonplace in Botswana is illustrated by the name chosen for the currency of the country, the Pula, or 'rain'. But when applied instinctively by a Motswana reader of Shakespeare's sonnets as the symbolic meaning of rain, the resultant interpretation is perversely twisted. What I explained in Sonnet 90 above as the fear of the greater heartbreak forthcoming in the future - "Give not a windy night a rainy morrow" (7) - is therein transformed into the possibility of a future *joyful reconciliation*, a meaning which is absent in the surrounding lines and contradictory to the tenor of the lyric as a whole.

The Shakespearean text in Africa

These questions of the role of the Shakespearean text in the context of Botswana have a complex history and some brief analysis is appropriate here. It is inevitably tied up with issues of Western neo-colonialism manifested through hegemonies of culture. In the English speaking world – and due to colonization this includes much of Africa - the teaching of Shakespeare has historically been lauded as a prerequisite for cultural sophistication. Despite the 21st Century’s post-colonially sensitive African academia, Shakespeare remains compulsory on many University curricula, and has been a catalyst for contentious discussion concerning the retention of an essentially English canon of texts in the African classroom, or its replacement with African authored texts either in English or in indigenous languages. Shakespeare, although sometimes appearing as uniquely transcendent of Western imperialist propaganda of race and culture, is in fact the location of its most crucial battleground. This is best illustrated by the two East African countries of Kenya and Tanzania which, like Botswana, gained independence in the 1960s and confronted the issues of a total “Africanization” of the high school literature syllabus. By 1985, Shakespeare remained the only non-African writer taught as English-language literature in Kenya, until finally the nationalistic pressure for reculturation removed even this bastion of colonial literature from the syllabus in that year. Ngugi wa Thiong’o traces the beginnings of a “counter-Shakespeare revolt” (Ngugi, 1986, p. 39) in Kenya to the 1950s when the anti-colonial struggle was at its peak, but ironically it was in part the threat of Ngugi’s radical writings as perceived by the Kenyan state that instigated a return to a pseudo-colonial literary curriculum. This culminated in a public address on 25th July 1989, reported in the Nairobi newspaper *The Daily Nation* the following day, wherein President Arap Moi of Kenya “paid tribute to Shakespeare as a literary genius of universal acclaim, and directed that his works be accorded a permanent place in the country’s education (Mazrui, 1996, p. 64).” This is rather paradoxical, at least according to a 2003 interview with Ngugi, who argues that Shakespeare’s works are inherently radical and not simply the organ of Western neo-colonialism, yet they are transformed by a repressive post-independent Kenyan regime into a prop for conservatism:

Angela Lamas Rodrigues: Can you expand on some of the forces capable of co-opting this revolutionary potential of art in your country?

Ngugi wa Thiong’o: It has been done sometimes by killing people, by ignoring their works, or sometimes by normalizing art as an object of worship, as an icon. Take Shakespeare for instance. His work is very dynamic. The problem of social class, the movement of history, the clash of social forces, all is here. But by iconizing Shakespeare, his very revolutionary potential tends to be killed or ignored. Shakespeare the icon, the bad Shakespeare, is the one who is talked about as a great writer, a genius (Rodrigues, 2004, p. 165).

Yet ironically and interestingly for the thesis of this article - at precisely the moment in which the teaching of Shakespeare was being purged from the Kenyan English-language literature curriculum, Shakespeare translated into Swahili was thriving in Kenyan schools. The first Swahili translations of two of Shakespeare's plays were published by Julius K Nyerere, the first president of the Republic of Tanzania. This occurred in the 1960s when cultural nationalism in East Africa was still at its peak, and Nyerere's Swahili-language translations of *Julius Caesar* (*Juliasi Kaizari*, 1963) and *The Merchant of Venice* (*Mabepari wa Venisi*, 1969) were published in Kenya by Oxford University Press, no less, and they were followed by a Swahili translation of *Macbeth* (*Makbeth*) by the Tanzanian S. S. Mushi in 1968. Whilst the well-rehearsed arguments for the merits and demerits of studying literature in translation is not the purpose of this article, it does shed some interesting light upon our present concern with the problems of the ambiguity of cultural symbolism. This is because the linguistic problems of translating a text from a dominant culture into the terms of an indigenous culture are analogous in some ways to the hermeneutic difficulties I have been discussing. The act of interpreting a Shakespearean text by a non-Western educated African reader realizes many of the problems confronted by translators. In the introduction to the first edition of his Swahili translation of *Julius Caesar*, Nyerere acknowledged that the lexical and aesthetic capacity of his indigenous language is strained by being forced to carry the cultural worlds of a foreign people, and yet this he hopes may have a positive effect on the development of Swahili:

I will be very happy if this translation will assist fellow students in advancing their Kiswahili studies so that they could speak and write it more proficiently. Kiswahili is a rich and beautiful language. But its beauty and richness can be augmented only if put to novel uses (Mazrui, 1996, p. 72).

Yet one of the fundamental questions regarding the process of literary translation is the dichotomy between aesthetics and fidelity. Like John Donne's mistress in his famous lyric "Go and catch a falling star", if a translation is faithful to the original's meaning, it is necessarily unattractive; yet if the translation is beautiful, it inherently lacks faithfulness to the original. This is true of language per se, but the problem is particularly acute with regard to symbolic language and metaphors which are culturally untranslatable. In this sense translation, or what Lawrence Venuti calls 'transtextualisation' - the "active reconstitution of the foreign text mediated by the irreducible linguistic, discursive, and ideological differences of the target-language culture" (Venuti, 1992, p. 10) - is analogous to the hermeneutic process undertaken by a culturally foreign reader of an English-language Shakespearean text. He or she must translate the irreducibly Western symbolism into their own cultural 'language' as an act of comprehension; the result of which may be non-sense. Of the two Swahili

translators of Shakespeare just mentioned, Nyerere seems to desire to chase this dream of beautiful and accurate fidelity of meaning, while Mushi appears resigned to regulate merely the 'effects' of the process of translation, or what Mary Louise Pratt calls 'transculturation' (Pratt, 1992, p. 6). Transculturation is a term used "to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own and what they use it for" (*Ibid.*):

In the introduction of his translation of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, S. S. Mushi reminds us that his work was guided less by the imperative of fidelity to the original than by the principle of sensitivity to the Swahili lingo-cultural milieu (vi-vii). Mushi's compatriot, Julius Nyerere, on the other hand, claims to have undertaken a revision of his translation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* partly because of certain 'errors' he had supposedly committed in the first edition (vi). Nyerere too, then, seems to regard translation as a search for some cross-lingual equivalence in meaning, and seems to presuppose the possibility, and perhaps even the desirability, of an 'errorless' translation that is faithful to the original (Mazrui, 1996, p. 73).

However, these pertinent issues have in fact their genesis in the confrontation between the English Shakespeare and the Southern African language of Setswana. The first translation of Shakespeare into any African language was Solomon Plaatje's 1930 Setswana rendition of *The Comedy of Errors*, entitled *Diphosphoso*. According to the editor's introduction to the 1958 edition of *Diphosphoso* published in Lobatse, Botswana, Plaatje translates the Shakespearean language "in the authentic colloquial idiom" (Sandilands, 1958, p. 5) of a natural Setswana speaker, and the play remains faithful to the original only as far as content is concerned. The result is a highly successful artistic creation, both as a foreign-language translation of Shakespeare, and as an amusing, beautiful, and witty comedy in Setswana. A major component of this success was Plaatje's decision to translate freely and not literally the Western cultural idioms, symbols, jokes and metaphors into their natural and equally idiosyncratic Setswana equivalents, which as we have discussed, is challenging: "[*The Comedy of Errors*] abounds with puns, allusions and images that are very difficult to relate to the world of Batswana ...and most of the comic elements are culture bound, making sense only to a specific audience acquainted with such a culture" (Shole, 1990/91, p. 59). This act precludes, obviously, the precise epistemological problems with which I am concerned with here. Plaatje's translation has already confronted and interpreted on the reader's behalf Western root symbolism into contemporary and colloquial Southern African symbolism. But of course the fact remains that the Motswana reader is reading a translation of a Shakespearean play, not in English verse but in Setswana

prose, which has already been interpreted by a South African, and is not confronting as closely as is possible the text of Shakespeare itself, notwithstanding all the complex issues of textuality and authorship which such a statement raises.

Shakespearean symbolism and the Motswana reader

While this article does not aim to focus primarily on these issues of an African literary curriculum, cultural neo-colonialism, and English/Swahili/Setswana translation, yet the analogous relevance of these thorny issues do provide contextual understanding to reading Shakespeare in Botswana. But even if we choose to suspend these wider political considerations, it is evident that when Botswana students study Shakespearean poetry they quizzically confront the epistemological problem of culturally inscribed root metaphor. This, I propose, is the irrevocable source of exegetical confusion in a Setswana cultural context. Shakespeare's Sonnet cycle contains 154 sonnets with a plethora of symbolic clusters and resonances, but my argument is concentrated upon three intertwined symbolic groups which clearly illustrate the problem. The first is that of the seasons – spring, summer, autumn, and winter; the second is the weather – sun and sunshine, rain, wind, clouds, stormy and the like; the third is that of temperature – hot, warm, cold, temperate, and their synonyms. The sensual and sociological experience of these climatic features is enormously different in Botswana, a semi-arid Southern hemisphere African country dominated by the Kalahari Desert, than it is in Shakespearean or modern-day England. And this is naturally reflected in the symbolic values and resonances which are understood when encountering such lexis. It is not simply that the Western seasons and their naturally associated weather and temperatures are reversed in the calendar; a Motswana reader would almost immediately realize that when Shakespeare in Sonnet 104 describes “three hot Junes burn” (7) it refers to summer months and not to winter. But as I explained at the beginning of this article, rain, sun, the spring, heat, and so forth, resonate with entirely different symbolic connotations. I shall proceed by exploring the exegetical problems which these symbolic terms create in Shakespeare's Sonnet Cycle, and then focus on an individual sonnet which exemplifies the problem of Western symbolic associations to a Motswana reader.

Spring is undoubtedly the most celebrated of all seasons in Western poetry, and was considered so since the Roman days the *primum tempus*, or “first season”, which underlies Shakespeare's reference in Sonnet 3 to “the lovely April of her prime” (10). In his poem *Venus and Adonis* Shakespeare describes young budding growths as “springing things” and “tender spring” (2005, p. 228 line 417, p. 231 line 656), which illustrates the connection between the season and the verb ‘to spring’, meaning a rise or leap of something, and hence a first onset. So symbolically the spring is the onset of fertility, of natural growth, of blossoming nature, fecundity, youthfulness, and most importantly to poets such as the Pageboys in *As You Like It*, of enriching new love:

“For love is crowned with the prime, / In spring time” (2005, p. 678, V, iii, 35-36). But due to Botswana’s climate these symbolic connotations are entirely alien, for the spring months are not characterized by blooming nature or fertile growth due to the absence of rain, which only finally arrive in late summer. The Setswana word for spring is “*dikgakologo*” which literally means “thawing”, resonating with ideas of an escape from the cold of winter but not with the onset of the rebirth of nature. Accordingly, it does not denote the plenitudes of youthful love - a natural symbolic association in Western thought, as here in Sonnet 102: “Our love was new, and then but in the spring” (5). This is naturally confusing to a Motswana reading Shakespeare’s Sonnets. In the very first Sonnet the male lover is described as “beauty’s rose” who “art now the world’s fresh ornament, / And only herald to the gaudy spring,” (2, 9-10) meaning that in his beauty the young man is a precursor to a spring full of rich ornaments. Without an understanding of Western symbolic conventions, the Sonnet’s criticism of the lover’s rejection of spring’s procreative function as “Within thine own bud buriest thy content” (11) makes little sense. This interpretative problem is abundant. In Sonnet 53 the youth’s beauty is described in terms of “the spring, and foison of the year” (9), meaning natural abundance, and in Sonnet 63 as “the treasure of his spring” (8).

Discussion of the season of summer invokes ideas of sunny weather and hot temperatures to both an indigenous English reader of Shakespeare and a Motswana one. But the symbolic connotations are confusingly divergent. In the Sonnets, summer is a time of nature’s supreme bounty, described in Sonnet 104 as “summer’s pride” (4), and in Sonnet 54 “When summer’s breath their masked buds discloses” (8), which compares the blossoming of the roses in summer and their scent, with the lover’s immortal preservation in the poet’s verses. In Sonnet 98 the “summer’s story” (7) describes literally the perfect time of “the lays of birds” and “the sweet smell / Of different flowers in odour and in hue” (5-6), but also functions as a metaphor for any cheerful narrative of wonderful life. Frequently summer is personified as the perfection of the natural world; examples being “summer’s honey breath” (5) in Sonnet 65, or “The summer’s flower is to the summer sweet,” (9) in Sonnet 94. In Sonnet 97 summer is personified as courtiers who attend the lover – “For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,” (11) as if he is a King. Summer is welcomed with eagerness in Sonnet 56 because of the bountiful reception which it provides us – “summer’s welcome thrice more wished, more rare” (14) – being all the more “rare” or valuable due to its short duration. Of course the natural cycle of the seasons is the central metaphor to articulate the natural cycle of the life of the poet’s lover; accordingly summer is the consummation of human life, the quintessence of beauty, or what Sonnet 5 calls “summer’s distillation” (9) in which “their substance still lives sweet.” (14). Such is the cyclicity of the seasons which forms a paradox in a sonnet *cycle* of poetry: the superlative nature of *the season* of summer is expressed in many sonnets as temporary – “beauty’s summer dead” (14) in Sonnet 104, “for never-resting time leads

summer on / To hideous winter” (5-6) in Sonnet 5; but paradoxically summer is immortal as a metaphor for the poet’s lover himself – “Thy eternal summer shall not fade” (9) in Sonnet 18, for instance, for he is encapsulated in the poet’s “eternal lines” (12).

Symbolically this is confusing to a Motswana’s experience of summer. In Setswana the term for summer is “*selemo*”, derived from the verb “*go lema*” meaning “to plant”. This refers to the beginning of the agricultural cycle of growing crops - the initial stage of planting seeds - for which one must wait for the rains which are expected towards the end of summer. Summer is hence a time of praying for rain to initiate what one hopes will be future natural abundance. It is not the apotheosis of the meaning of life, a time of blooming flowers and singing birds. It does not symbolize the perfection of nature and therefore does not represent human beauty, fulfilment, consummation, and happiness. It is instead a time to endure the stifling temperatures and oppressive sunshine. The Setswana for the sun is “*letsatsi*” and it carries connotations of drought, of fear for its destructive power, and protection or shade is sought to avoid its ill effects, amongst which are exhaustion and burning. Indeed, the famous opening line of Sonnet 130, “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” (1), which functions as a satire upon tired Petrarchan symbolic clichés by reversing conventional Western aesthetic values, would make no sense to a Motswana. In this culture the sun is not a complementary symbol for beautiful eyes, and the reader may well be relieved instead of insulted by the comparison, thereby destroying this clever conceit and undermining the meaning of the poem as a whole. In short, the natural elements of summer in Botswana are not a metaphor for the apotheosis of human life: no Motswana wishes for an eternal summer which shall not fade!

And so let us complete our examination in detail of this most famous of Shakespeare’s sonnets, number 18, which is so frequently read/studied by Botswana students. “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate” (1-2). As I discussed at the start of this article, a Botswana summer is certainly not lovely or temperate, and therefore the direct symbolic association between a beautiful person and the summer fails. This symbolic understanding is essential for the reader to grasp in order to contextualize the poet’s next argument, which is to elevate the perfected lover above the possible imperfections of physical natural seasons, weather and temperatures. That is why the summer is the ideal symbol for a Western writer to utilize. The reader immediately understands the iconic connotations of lover and summer and expects the answer to be in the affirmative: yes, we should compare them, as they are inter-related consummations of beauty. Only then will the poet startle us with his surprising denial of conventional analogy by criticizing the ephemeral world of nature as imperfect in comparison to the lover “whose eternal summer shall not fade” (9):

Shall I compare thee to a rose? Too thorny. To a dawn? Too brief. To a Spring day? Too uncertain. What is the most beautiful thing, the *summum bonum*, in an (English) world? A summer's day. And then we see that by taking the pinnacle of perfection as his standard of comparison, the poet/lover, convinced that nothing can outstrip or even equal his beloved, must begin to denigrate his perfect metaphor: ah, but a summer's day could have a wind, could be hot, could be cloudy (Vendler, 1997, p. 121).

It is apparent that none of this makes sense working within Botswana's symbolic epistemes. While the Motswana reader would certainly agree with the poet that "Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines" (5), he or she probably would not concur that a poor summer's day is one in which the sun's "gold complexion [is] dimmed" (6). Nor while waiting impatiently for the heat to subside and for the rains to bring about the abundance of the autumnal harvest would he assent that "summer's lease hath all too short a date" (4). While the poem's speaker deliberately intimates and then refutes the precise comparison between his lover and summer's day, he does so while working within a conventional Western pattern of symbolic resonances which he knows are shared by the reader. Disable these preconceived symbolic associations and the poem loses its dramatic power and the sensitivity of its meaning.

Conclusion

I wish to conclude by reconsidering what I discussed earlier concerning translating Shakespeare in Swahili, and the conjecture that this is one means of avoiding the exegetical aporias caused by cultural symbolic usage. Only a very few of Shakespeare's works have been translated into Setswana (or any other African languages for that matter), but Solomon Plaatje's two surviving translations remain to this day the most highly regarded in Southern Africa. Yet Plaatje's translation of *The Comedy of Errors* was conducted in 1930, and even at this time, "Plaatje was in part concerned with the preservation of forms of seTswana that were falling into disuse with the advent of modernity. In part, then, his translations seek to preserve expressions and proverbs that had already become archaic in his own language" (Schalkwyk, 2006, p. 47). Accordingly, the choice of idioms, symbols and proverbs utilized in Plaatje's translations were even at that time archaic and falling into disuse, possibly non-understandable to the average Setswana reader, and that was almost a century ago! When one considers further that a 1991 study of the impact of rapid industrialization in Botswana has created "a linguistic as well as cultural distance between living members of the same families" (Jansen et. al., 1991, p. 100), such that the differences in speech habits "were so large as to impede smooth communication, the prevalence of idioms, proverbs and difficult words in the speech of the elderly was attributed to this gulf" (Jansen et. al., 1991, p. 110). Indeed, according to this study, changes in life style had so affected oral poetic practices that young Setswana speakers "have not acquired

the capacity to use the poetic style...they never make traditional poetry and they do not speak in proverbs or riddles" (Jansen et. al., 1991, p. 115). In effect it seems that in Botswana we have merely replaced the exegetical problems of an epistemology of a *foreign* culture, with one of our *own* culture which is lost in time.

And to add irony to this paradox, such a conclusion subverts the central thematic concern of Shakespeare's Sonnets themselves, which is the immortality of the speaker's love as communicated in Shakespeare's immortal text. This is the constant refrain of the Sonnets' final couplet, typically expressed here from Sonnet 19: "Yet do thy worst, old Time, despite thy wrong, / My love shall in my verse ever live young." The South African scholar David Schalkwyk in a glowing review of the 2005 Afrikaans translation and production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, argues that "the inevitable historical and cultural distance that all English-speakers experience in their reception of Shakespeare's texts...often to the point of incomprehension", more than justifies the act of translation into foreign tongues. "Translation", he concludes, "may in fact go some way towards enacting what Shakespeare hoped to achieve through his sonnets: escaping the abrasive work of time by transforming the text so that it continues to live in the 'eyes of men'" (Schalkwyk, 2005, p. 47). But as we have perceived with Plaatje's Setswana translations of Shakespeare, translations themselves become linguistically and hence culturally foreign to an audience over the course of time. Time, as much as geographically differentiated culture, is a stumbling block to understanding due to the inevitable evolution of language. Simply ask an English school child struggling to read the English language works of the Englishman Shakespeare. But the addition of genuine cultural differences certainly adds a further layer of difficulty in comprehending canonical Western literary symbolism.

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