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The Shakespeare Salesman

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Introduction

This thesis offers a comprehensive analysis of Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespeare trilogy that consists of the films *Maqbool* (Macbeth 2003), *Omkara* (Othello 2006), and *Haider* (Hamlet 2014). Considering the fact that Bhardwaj finished making this trilogy at the time the thesis was started, and that he has announced no further plans to direct any more Shakespeare films in the near future, this dissertation views the aforementioned films as comprising a neat group that can offer insight into the salesmanship of the film versions of Shakespeare's plays in relation to Bhardwaj, and in relation to Bollywood itself. The trilogy only recently being completed, previous attempts to study Bhardwaj's work have been confined to chapters in books, with their analysis often relegated to the understanding of a greater theme about the industry as a whole, and hence this work intends to accord due space to Bhardwaj's films by making them the centre of the discussion. And not least because the films, in many ways, differ quite significantly from other Shakespeare adaptations in Indian cinema.

Through the course of these three films, it will be shown, Bhardwaj's work is torn between issues of authenticity, fidelity, and originality, often leading to what will later be defined as "narrative crises" that are resolved with thought-provoking and unique results. Hence each of the three chapters, accorded to the respective film being discussed, focuses on the said crisis and the aim of the thesis, on a whole, is to examine, appreciate and do justice to the unique set of complexities and problems that Bhardwaj's method of adaptation produces. By focusing specifically on these aspects the argument does not, by any means, intend to lessen or mis-portray the achievements, contribution and importance of Bhardwaj's work. On the contrary, all the space that this thesis can afford is accorded to these 'problems' precisely because they have hitherto not been aptly discussed, as the *primary* subject, in previous literature regarding Bhardwaj's work. There have, in other words, been enough studies on Bhardwaj's excellent transposition, and differentiation, of the functions of the

main characters, the plot, and the setting in comparison to Shakespeare's play, as well as on the extensive cultural and political diversity displayed by the works. The argument of this thesis, however, does not seek to repeat an analysis of these transpositions (and it is for this reason the chapters do not go into these in detail) but, instead, looks specifically at the inconsistencies in these transpositions, relates them to the aforementioned narrative crises in all three films, and tries to do justice to their uniqueness and complexity.

To offer a brief typology of these 'narrative crises' then: Bhardwaj's relationship with the aforementioned issues is firstly characterized by an enthusiastic and bold liberation from Shakespeare (his plot, characters, or language). He does this by realizing in his films the varying interpretive possibilities present within the texts, whether it be in his bold reshaping of Duncan's character (in *Maqbool*), or in his substitution of caste for race in *Omkara* (2006), or in his interpretation of Hamlet's madness and his consequent actions as terroristic in *Haider* (2014).

This, secondly, is followed by a narrative crisis point: the 'empowered' Duncan's death, which seems to rob the film of its drive.[1] The colour-driven racialization of caste in *Omkara*, proceeding from Bhardwaj's use of lighter skinned actors for upper-caste roles as well as his preservation of colour motifs from Shakespeare's play, which ends up creating an ahistorical and incredible colour-caste fusion that is essentially a non-issue in India. And finally an inadvertent endorsement of terrorism in *Haider* which the narrative of Hamlet as a terrorist was bound to lead to.

The third and final step in Bhardwaj's work, this thesis would argue, involves a resurgence of the Shakespeare text to neatly close the narrative instead of allowing the narrative crises to find their own denouement. In *Maqbool* this process starts immediately

[1] As in the case of the 'empowered' Duncan reference, through the course of this Introduction there will be references to concepts that are discussed in greater detail in the individual chapters where each of Bhardwaj's three Shakespeare films are examined separately. These 'teasers' here exist in order to give the readers an overarching picture of the argument and to also pique their curiosity.

after the empowered Duncan's death which coincidentally happens exactly halfway through the film—the point from which Daniel Rosenthal starts seeing the film as structurally imbalanced (123) and from which Douglas Lanier starts seeing the close parallels with *Macbeth* (217). In *Omkara* this process involves a gradual phasing out of the colour-caste muddle in order to focus on another theme from Shakespeare's play: that of misogyny. However, in *Haider*, Bhardwaj's final Shakespeare-trilogy film, the director does allow the crisis to carry on till the very end but eventually bows to another authority—the government of India—to denounce terrorism, endorse the subjugation of the Kashmiris, and neatly tie up the storyline. "When one authority or an alien is destroyed", one might observe here, à la Greenblatt, "another one takes its place" (9). The movement of the narrative crises form being related to Shakespeare, to displaying a level of hybridity, to finally being completely independent of Shakespeare and—by Chapter III—being related to a new authority like the Government of India is a process that this thesis will examine precisely by taking into account the history of Shakespeare adaptation in India, the complexities of mapping an early modern text into a post-colonial political situation, as well as the financial concerns that prompt Bhardwaj to undertake adapting Shakespeare.

The title of this thesis, and the reference to Bhardwaj as a Shakespeare salesman instead of, say, a director proceeds from an analysis of the distinctive way in which he presents his work which, in turn, calls for a unique approach to the study of Shakespeare adaptation in the contemporary film industry. Instead of catering to an Indian audience, among whom he suspects that the authority of Shakespeare stands eroded ("many have not read it, and most have forgotten"), he says that he turned to adapting Shakespeare because he "wanted to touch a chord with international audiences so there were many commercial considerations in my head. It was not for art or for literature" (Kumar 2014, Sen 2006). Furthermore, despite having produced a variety of non-Shakespeare films Bhardwaj

nevertheless chooses to be credited in the trailer of his latest film *Rangoon* (2017), for instance, not as "the director of *Kaminey*" or "the director of *Makdee*" (his non-Shakespeare films that have done well) but instead as "the director of *Omkara* and *Haider*."[2]

The thesis' title is itself borrowed from the Merchant-Ivory Productions' film *The Shakespeare Wallah* (The Shakespeare Salesman, 1965), which is discussed in the opening part of the Introduction, and from which the crucial "salesman" metaphor of the thesis that draws a relation between the Shakespeare director and/as the Shakespeare salesman has been borrowed. The film documents the life of a British acting troupe (Shakespeareana Company/The Buckingham Players)—and particularly the life of the troupe's head Tony Buckingham—in India after the country's independence from Britain in 1947. Adapted for the screen by Booker Prize winning author Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, it is based on the eponymous memoirs of Geoffrey Kendal who also plays the title character in the film. The movie traces how with the loss of the Empire's colonial power that fostered Shakespeare's reception, appreciation, and celebration it simply begins to die out in the newly emerging Indian film market which Bhardwaj ultimately inherits. "The Shakespeare Wallah can no longer market plays", Thomas Cartelli aptly summarizes, "whose ideological supports have been pulled out from under him" and whose "cultural authority" is in a process of "erosion" (105-6).

In Bhardwaj's case, however, producing acknowledged Shakespeare adaptations catered to "international audiences" turns out to be a "marketing tool" that has paid off quite well (Bhardwaj, quoted in Kumar 2014). Where Kendal, in a way, was one of the many British who came to export Shakespeare to India, Bhardwaj completes the circle by exporting Indian-Shakespeare back to the West. Such an approach is something that needs to be analysed in the contemporary Shakespeare film market because, as Alexa Huang and

[2] See 'Rangoon | Official Trailer | Shahid Kapoor, Saif Ali Khan and Kangana Ranaut.' 2017. 2:20. Available Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-tC0wcIu24 [Accessed: 15th April, 2017].

Elizabeth Rivlin put it, the extent to which these "non-Western" Shakespeare films "act as fetishized commodities in the global film market" is a "pressing question" (1). Not just for the indigenous markets from which these films are produced but also for the real or imagined audiences these films are produced in service of. To cater to "international audiences" of Shakespeare among whom, presumably, the authority of Shakespeare is not eroded or in a process of erosion opens a whole set of questions: "how does Shakespeare make other cultures legible to Anglo-American audiences?", "what does it entail for the British media to judge […] productions of Shakespeare from around the world?", and "what roles do non-Western identities, aesthetics, and idioms play in the rise of Shakespearean cinema and theatre as global genres?" (Huang and Rivlin 1). The presentation of race and caste in *Omkara*, of the Islamic underworld of Bombay in *Maqbool*, and terrorism in *Haider*, are all relevant for the concerns raised here. Of equal importance here is Parmita Kapadia's assertion that "the 'new Shakespeares' emerging from the postcolonial/global community have not dislodged Shakespeare's texts but have *reified them instead*" (56, emphasis added). This reification may be said to contribute to the present functioning of Shakespeare in the West where, as Ton Hoenselaars points out, "Shakespeare [continues] to be the national poet who embodies the Romantic ideal of authorship, activating the concomitant notions of untranslatability, degradation and debasement" (18). It also arguably validates the existence an Anglo-American Shakespeare film industry that largely produces untranslated, original-text film adaptations even though the comprehensibility of Early Modern English is the contemporary world is debatable (see Endnote 1). Thus "to scrutinize the communities" or audiences that these adaptations cater to "as well as what or who is excluded from them, is to keep our sights trained on the broader human stakes" (Huang and Rivlin 17). It is this scrutiny that would be the pivot around which the methodology of the thesis is formed.

Hence, as would become evident from the concerns raised above, and during the course of this Introduction, the methodology used in this thesis involves an intermeshing of the work done in adaptation studies by Linda Hutcheon, Alexa Huang, Elizabeth Rivlin, Margaret Litvin, and M. J Kidnie with the work done in post-colonial studies by Homi Bhabha, Gauri Vishwanathan, Parmita Kapadia, and Ania Loomba. The thesis will primarily deal with films, and the ways in which they adapt *not just* Shakespeare but also the Indian post-colonial reality so to speak. From Hutcheon, for instance, the thesis' methodology will borrow her perception of adaptations as concurrently being "an acknowledged transposition of a recognisable other work or works", an act that involves "both re-interpretation and then re-creation", and finally as "a form of intertextuality" with the adapted work (7-8). By themselves these are important paradigms for examining Bhardwaj's work and a lot of the analyses this thesis offers engage, to give some examples here, with his acts of transposition (of the colour issue with the caste issue in *Omkara*), re-interpretation (of Hamlet's *agon* in the light of terrorism), and re-creation (of a co-protagonist like Duncan who serves as a symbol of mafia authority in *Maqbool*) in the post-colonial situation so to speak. Even more than this, however, what this thesis offers by examining the entire trilogy as a whole is the extent of intertextuality that these films engage in not just with Shakespeare's work but also with each other. For this reason the methodology borrows Julie Sanders' arguments regarding the postcolonial adaptations of *The Tempest* and *Othello*—how these films, "are often as much in dialogue with other adaptations as with the Shakespearean source text" (62). This also leads the thesis towards an exploration of Bhardwaj's own role as a director/salesman of these films and how he ends up being, to borrow Margaret Litvin's phrase, an "unelected representative" of the communities he seeks to adapt and represent. This is something that, in turn, ties into the thesis' exploration of artistic misrepresentations themselves—of the Indian audience's appreciation of Kendal's Shakespeare, of colour and caste in *Omkara*, or of

Islamic communities in *Maqbool* and *Haider*. Audiences in whose service these misrepresentations exist would thus be a chief concern. The approach taken differs from previous approaches—in *India's Shakespeares* (2005) and in *Bollywood's Shakespeares* (2014)—in as much as it focuses solely on Bhardwaj's work instead of an entire industry, centres the trope of the 'salesman' to the discussion and thereby constantly keeps in mind the questions of audience-reception, commercial motives, self-presentation, and adaptive strategies.

Since there has been no previous examination of Bhardwaj's Shakespeare trilogy as a whole (but only examinations of individual films in sub-chapters about Bollywood cinema) it is tough to determine how, in general, this thesis' methodology differs from these specific approaches. In each chapter, however, the argument engages with the specific approaches and takes a stance with respect to them. In Chapter I, for instance, the argument endorses (and then significantly expands on) Rosenthal and Lanier's method of examining the structure, imbalance, and inner-coherence in the film's narrative. By doing this the methodology employed does not necessarily disavow the postmodern celebrations of the imaginative reach of discontinuity, truncation, and apparent contradiction (rather than coherence, integration, and organicity). On the other hand, the argument endorses Rosenthal and Lanier's approach because it brings up crucial questions regarding Bhardwaj's Shakespeare salesmanship including questions of the authority of Shakespeare's text in India as well as the gaze of Bhardwaj's Western audiences…questions that would arguably take a backseat if one were to take the discontinuities for granted. In Chapter II, this issue again comes to the forefront when the methodology questions the colorblind approach taken towards the film by nearly all the previous criticism on it. While this may again be taken for granted in a postmodern approach where contradictions are no deal-breakers the argument in Chapter II sees the contradiction as contributing towards a discourse of caste and color that is highly

problematic, political and definitely something that needs to be talked about. Finally, in Chapter III, the argument questions the methodology used by critics who do not concern themselves with the rather discontinuous and pacifist ending of the film from a fear of "placing an emphasis on a comparison with the putative original and the unidirectional process of adaptation [which] can result in overlooking both an adaptation's political ramifications and its role as an interpretation of the original" (Mookherjee 2016). By examining the problematic ending of *Haider*, and the equally problematic paratext that follows it, the argument in Chapter III goes ahead to show that certain political and aesthetic ramifications (including issues of commodification, stereotyping, and fetishization that are brought in via Huang and Rivlin) can be overlooked if one strictly sticks with either the modern approach or the postmodern one. While the pacifist ending of the film might not have been an issue in India, or in the West, it was certainly an issue in Pakistan, and in Kashmir—crucial stakeholders in the Kashmir issue—which is something that cannot be ignored. Hence the methodology employed seeks to start first from an apparent, visible problem in the narrative, and then uses a series of tools to adjudge the said 'problem.'

Essentially then the methodology employed will pivot on not just the adaptation of the Shakespeare text into film, but also the adaptation of the Indian post-colonial 'reality' into film by the Shakespeare salesman.[3] As the narrative crises in the particular chapters are examined this methodology—because of its dual nature—might at times give the impression that indebtedness to a source—through any recognisable trace of plot, characterisation or text—is bound to disable (rather than empower) any present-day creation. This impression

[3] This applies specifically to Bhardwaj since unlike Kendal, who faced failure because he was selling Shakespeare in an Indian post-colonial 'reality' that he had grossly misunderstood, Bhardwaj happens to be selling not just Shakespeare, but a version of Shakespeare transposed into the Indian post-colonial 'reality' to his Western audiences. Hence the tension, as this thesis will examine through the use of the 'salesman' metaphor, is between the 'universal' value of Shakespeare assumed by the British (including aspects of textual fidelity that are discussed on p. 11) and the value of Shakespeare's theatrical representations produced by the Shakespeare wallahs in India, and reduced to the status of a street-side commodity (as discussed on p. 9).

might be generated because of the repeated indictment of aspects that supposedly fail in the rhetorical and aesthetic range of the films because they involve the director's perceived need to retain a feature of either the source plot or the source text. This might further lead the reader to assume that it is being suggested that the cogency and success of a present-day artefact will hinge on its ability to discard any such indebtedness. Thereby opening the methodology up to a kind of theoretical inconsistency, since all of the key authors cited above are part of a critical/theoretical environment in which indebtedness, transmission, and rewriting are perceived as an inevitability—and, indeed, a precondition of art and culture: derivation as a general condition of all creation. Furthermore, the misperceived argument that these films would be more coherent and convincing if they discarded the lingering presence of a prior (and culturally exogenous) creation could be seen as an ethnocentric plea for monocultural imaginative production—of the kind that would play no tricks with audiences by selling them stuff originating in other cultures and other ages.

In a cumulative way, this may create the sense that what is being written is a thesis on adaptations that is based on a fundamental suspicion of adaptations—a suspicion that these films would be better off if they were 'originals', if they were not plagued by an acknowledgement and incorporation of sources. Gulzar, Bhardwaj's chief mentor, in fact brings up the same point when he asserts "I don't know why [Bhardwaj] is calling [*Omkara*] an adaptation. After I read it I realized that it was as original as it gets" (quoted in Ramachandran 2006). In other words, Bhardwaj's films constantly cross the line between being 'originals' and being 'adaptations' hence any examination of them must similarly traverse through a grey area. To make it clear at the onset of this thesis, however, unlike Gulzar the methodology employed in this thesis does not wish for the films to be 'originals' nor does it criticise the films for preserving elements of the source plot or text even if they are anachronistic or culturally incoherent. Bhardwaj is in fact very good at finding synchronic

and culturally coherent substitutes for an Indian audience (for instance in his substitution of witchcraft in *Macbeth* with astrology in *Maqbool*). On the other hand, the methodology criticises the forceful preservation of certain elements of the plot or text of Shakespeare's play. For it holds that plot or textual elements, if retained at all, should rather be integrated within the narrative of the film in ways that contribute to its perceived internal cohesiveness. In Chapter I, therefore, it is shown that a lot of the plot elements are *forced* and hence incoherent. Similarly, in Chapter II the forceful preservation of the colour theme from Othello leads to an inadvertent racialization of caste. The reason for these forceful insertions is located as being rooted in India's complex relationship with Shakespeare (as will be demonstrated via Kendal and the Parsis in the Introduction) and in Bhardwaj's desire to cater to an international audience since he does not feel that the Indian audience would be able to get these references to Shakespeare's play anyway ("many have not read [Shakespeare], and most have forgotten" quoted in Kumar 2014). However in Chapter III most of the elements from Shakespeare's play are integrated coherently, and no such criticism is levelled. On the other hand, there is a forceful rejection of the ending of Shakespeare's play which itself appears rather incoherent (as noted by various critics that are referred to in the chapter) in as much as nothing within the film's narrative warrants the unexpected change in the ending. In this case, it is reasoned, the authority of Shakespeare's work is replaced concretely by the authority of the government of India which, through its interference via the Central Board of Film Certification, censors the issue of terrorism that is present in the film.

Each of the chapters that deal with Bhardwaj's respective film will furthermore draw upon a variety of sources depending on the problem that is being discussed. In order to formulate these specific problems concisely in the space provided by this Introduction it would firstly be necessary to trawl through the history of Shakespeare film adaptation in India using *Shakespeare Wallah* as a framing tool, followed by a history of Bhardwaj's own

work in Indian cinema—where he did not in fact start as a director but rather as a music composer. Consequently, Section I of this Introduction, *The Merchant of Shakespeare*, picks the case of Geoffrey Kendal to assess the impact of the original-text Shakespeare in the colony and the post-colonial space as well as its specific encounter with the beginnings of Indian cinema. The three fairly distinct roles of of a Shakespeare "wallah" as missionary, educator, and salesman will be explored. The argument will draw on Kendal's experiences—ranging from his interactions with the Indian upper class (Brown-Sahibs), schoolchildren, laymen, and a film actress—in light of the analysis of the context in which he operates as offered by Gauri Vishwanathan, Homi Bhabha, and Parmita Kapadia. Finally, by drawing on Nandi Bhatia's analysis of Indian audiences of that time, including those of Kendal's as well as of other British acting troupes', it will be questioned whether these audiences ever really appreciated Shakespeare to the extent he claims they did. Or whether, as Dennis Kennedy argues, the audience's response was more complex considering the fact that "in Asia the imperial mode tended to bring [Shakespeare] in the original language as a demonstration of the cultural and the linguistic superiority of the conqueror [something that was most evident in] India, of course, where the insertion of the Shakespearean text into native life paralleled the insertion of the power of the master race" (291). Hence the tension, as will be examined through the use of the 'salesman' metaphor, is between the 'universal' value of Shakespeare assumed by the British (including aspects of textual fidelity that we discuss) and the value of Shakespeare's theatrical representations produced by the Shakespeare wallahs in India, and reduced to the status of a street-side commodity. The analysis of this tension holds significance not just for Shakespeare wallahs like Geoffrey Kendal but, as this Introduction would aim to show, it is a tension that manifests itself at the very foundation of Bhardwaj's Shakespeare adaptations as a tension between the assumed universal value of Shakespeare and the value of the fetishized non-Western Shakespeares that Huang and Rilvin

problematize. A tension that, more often than not, contributes to the "narrative crises" of Bhardwaj's films that had been mentioned earlier.

This will be followed by Section II, titled *Jennifer Kendal* (after Geoffrey Kendal's daughter), which will form the bridge between the original-text productions of Section I and hybrid productions of Section III. The framework provided by *Shakespeare Wallah* is important here as well because in Section I what will also be examined is the defining choice made by the Indian character (Sanju) who chooses Manjula (the Indian actress representative of cinema) over Lizzie (the Shakespeare salesman's stage-actress daughter). In reality however Kendal's *second* daughter Jennifer (Lizzie's sister) did in fact marry Shashi Kapoor (Sanju) and eventually contributed significantly to Indian theatre and cinema. Section II hence examines the approach towards adaptation taken by Jennifer who is missing from the narrative of *Shakespeare Wallah* altogether. Instead of presenting Shakespeare to the Indians as a universal value (like her father did), which failed after the collapse of the Empire, Jennifer used the local tradition of the Parsi theatre for her work. The Introduction will show how this changed the Indian response to Shakespeare and influenced Bhardwaj's Shakespeare 'salesmanship.' A lot of the actors who worked at Jennifer's *Prithvi* theatre did, as a matter of fact, go on ahead to work in Bhardwaj's films.

Section III, titled *The Parsi Merchants*, begins with a discussion of the salesmen of the Parsi theatre who were operating contemporaneously with the British acting troupes of Kendal et al. and whose productions seemed to have generated a stronger audience response. The section next goes on to discuss the theatre's influence on early Bollywood films before eventually discussing the history of Shakespeare adaptation in the industry while simultaneously drawing parallels with Bhardwaj's works. Section IV titled *Vishal Bhardwaj* specifically deals with all the work Bhardwaj has previously done for Indian cinema, as a music composer and director, and establishes preliminary links between the themes and

concerns in his work with those that can be see in the three core films of this thesis. Once all this context has been laid Section V introduces Bhardwaj's Shakespeare adaptations, defines the aforementioned 'narrative crises' of these films in greater detail, and charts the course of the chapters that follow. Lastly, Section VI sums up all the concerns raised in the Introduction as a whole in light of the the defining trope of the salesman.

I

The Merchant of Shakespeare

"Why are we here", Geoffrey Kendal ventriloquizes through his filmic alter-ego Mr. Buckingham, "instead of in Sheffield or in Bristol or at least somewhere like that? Did I have to come all the way to India because I wasn't good enough for those places?" (54:20). This question—and the crippling feeling of doubt that it embodies—menacingly lurks behind the narrative of *Shakespeare Wallah.* And in as much as this quasi-documentary film situates itself at the intersection points of the real and the fictional; the old (Shakespeare) and the new (Bollywood); the artistic and the mercantile; the colonial and the post-colonial—the answer to this question holds as much relevance for Shakespeare as it does for Shakespeare in India. Hence during the course of this Introduction crucial scenes from this film will be examined as indices for post-colonial and contemporary Shakespeare salesmanship—and the analysis will then be used to interlink the careers of Vishal Bhardwaj and Geoffrey Kendal. By finding the connecting threads between these 'salesmen' so to speak the ground will be laid for an examination of Bhardwaj's Shakespeare film trilogy.

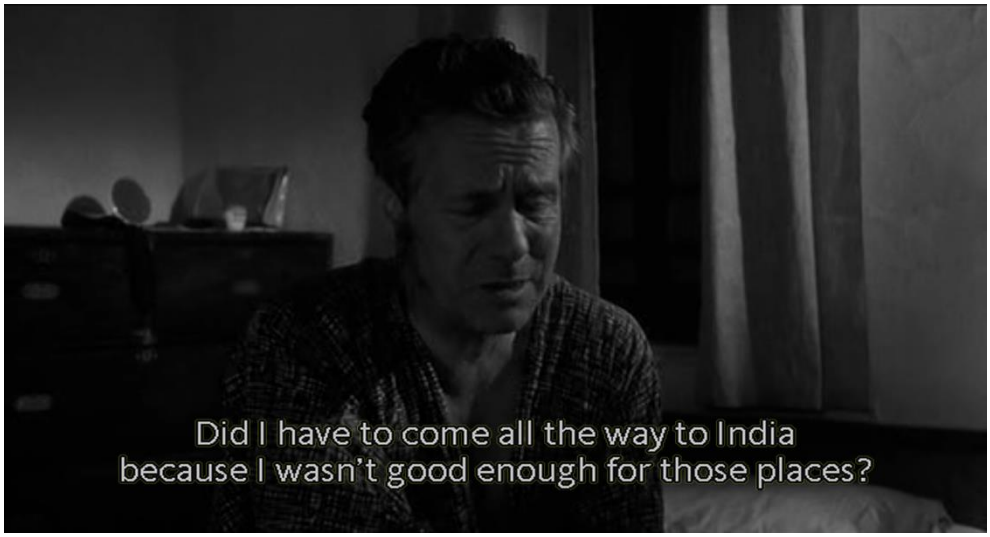

Fig. 1: "For it is between the edict of Englishness" writes Homi Bhabha, "and the assault of the dark unruly places of the world that the colonial text emerges *uncertainly*" (149, emphasis added). Pictured here: Mr. Buckingham (Geoffrey Kendal) begins to question his ideological underpinnings in *Shakespeare Wallah* (dir. James Ivory, 1965). Screenshot.

The aforementioned question that Kendal asks, casting doubt on the reason for his presence in the colony, stems from his inability to determine the cause for this sudden drop in Shakespeare's popularity in post-independence India—from being "the most wonderful audience in the world" to an audience that no longer has any time for Shakespeare (55:00). For why indeed are the Shakespeare *wallahs* in India? An examination of the 'sly civility'-ridden term used to denote them as 'Shakespeare Wallah' might perhaps give one a clue.[4] "Wallah" (वाला) can denote several things—ranging from a "seller" or a "salesman" or a "merchant" to simply "the person of." "Wallah is a seller" says Ismail Merchant the co-founder of Merchant-Ivory productions in an interview, while Felicity Kendal (Geoffrey Kendal's daughter) herself describes it as a "tradesman…I don't think there is an actual word

[4] Quoting the observations of the behaviour of the Indians made by various missionaries in India Homi Bhabha first picks up the term from a certain Archdeacon Potts who writes, "If you urge [the Indians] with their gross and unworthy misconceptions of the nature and will of God or the monstrous follies of their fabulous theology, they will turn it off with a sly civility perhaps, or with a popular and careless proverb" (163). This "native refusal to satisfy the colonizer's narrative demand" (Bhabha, "The Location of Culture" 99) will be a recurrent theme during the Introduction. It will be examined in the context of Manjula's disruption of Mr. Buckingham's performance/narrative, in the coinage of the term "Brown-Sahib", and even with regards to Bhardwaj's catering to the (narrative) demands of a Western audience or evolving beyond these demands in his last film *Haider*. For a detailed explanation of this term also see Bhabha's '*Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817*' (1985).

in English that would, as far as I know, that would do it for you" (Conversations 00:19). The gravitas that might perhaps be associated with the term when one combines it with Shakespeare to make it The Shakespeare Seller or Salesman is however subtly undercut by the fact that the term is commonly used for street side vegetable sellers (sabzi wallah), teasellers (chai walla), maidservants (kaam walli), clothes merchants (kapde wallah) and the like. "Like potato wallah…a salesman of potatoes" chuckles Merchant (00:25). The ideologically buttressed authority and uniqueness of the Shakespeare text is thus reduced and simultaneously overcome by designating it as just another street-side commodity. As will be demonstrated via Gauri Vishwanathan's argument in the paragraphs that follow, there seems to be here a realignment of Shakespeare—and the salesmen of Mr. Buckingham's '*The Shakespereana Company'*—with the old mercantilism of the East India Company in order to overcome the ideological imperialism of the Crown that the text was subsequently put into the service of. This re-viewing of the status of the Shakespeare text as a bare commodity—divorced from its ideological underpinnings—in order to overcome its "inescapable hegemony"[5] is a strategy that this thesis—*The Shakespeare Salesman*—will return to again and again when the commercial returns of adaptations, Bhardwaj's desire to export his adaptations to an international audience for "commercial considerations", as well as the issue of the fetishization of non-Western adaptations that Huang and Rivlin talk about are thrown into examination.

In the opening anecdote of Homi Bhabha's *Signs Taken for Wonders* the natives similarly "challenge the assumption that the authority of the English book is universal and self-evident by underscoring the cultural specificity and relativity of its provenance" as one would do of any commodity in the market (Segovia and Moore 91). Similar to Shakespeare, the 'authoritative' and 'universal' "English book" in question in Bhabha's anecdote is the

[5] This phrase, in the context of Shakespeare, is taken from Hoenselaars (17).

Bible and the salesman/missionary is Anund Messeh, an Indian catechist. Among other things the natives undermine the universality of this text in their refusal to take the Sacrament ("to all the other customs of Christians we are willing to conform, but not to the Sacrament, because the Europeans eat cow's flesh and this will never do for us") and the authority of the text in their aloof attitude towards baptism ("now we must go home to the harvest; but, as we mean to meet once a year, perhaps the next year we may come to Meerut [and be baptized]") (Bhabha 145). The sly civility displayed by them with regards to the Bible is quite comparable—literally and historically—to the sly civility displayed with respect to the Shakespeare text (as will be discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs via Vishwanathan's analysis where she discusses the replacement of missionary activity with the Shakespeare-centred English teaching activity). Except, of course, in the case of the latter, since the authority—Shakespeare—is more of a hegemonic cultural nature rather than a coercive religious one, its effect, along with its subversion by the Indians, is markedly subtler. For instance, while resistance to religious indoctrination was likely to be shadowed by the constant threat of more extreme and sometimes violent action—as in the 1806 anti-conversion insurrection in Vellore which eventually led to a "temporary suspension of the Christianising mission" (Vishwanathan 202)—the resistance to a hegemonic cultural authority like Shakespeare was limited to the correspondingly hegemonic domain of language, as in the case of the vernacular and hybrid Parsi theatre that dragged him down from his pedestal, hybridized his characters, edited his plots, and often performed his plays without acknowledgement. One of the flash-points in *Shakespeare Wallah* does in fact concern language, and occurs between Mr. Buckingham and the headmaster of a school that seeks to cut down on the number of Shakespeare performances they have every year:

> **Headmaster**: This year our founder's day function was very successful.
> **Mr. Buckingham**: Sorry we missed it!
> **Headmaster**: Our guest of honour was the Minister of Mines

> and Fuel…you would have appreciated his speech very much.
> **Mr. Buckingham**: Oh? Full of misquotations from
> Shakespeare no doubt?
> **Headmaster**: No. from our ancient Sanskrit writings (32:00).

Like several other points in the film Mr. Buckingham's high-handedness is only revealed when he is driven into a corner—in this case when he is forced to beg for one performance in a school where "in the old days" his troupe used to be welcome for "seven, eight" performances (31:05). In each of these instances of weakness though Mr. Buckingham lashes out and ends up inadvertently giving one a clue regarding his original question "why are we here?" He is there, of course, to impart/sell the word of *the* bard—just as the missionary Anund Messeh, from Bhabha's anecdote, is there to impart the word of *the* Christian God. Real or imagined tampering with the language of the "English book"—its misquotations and misinterpretations—as in the case of the Minister in *Wallah* and the Indians sitting under the tree in Bhabha's anecdote is what he, like Messeh, finds mockable. Mr. Buckingham is then, as will be shown, the prototypical guardian of textual fidelity and hence a very important semi-historical figure for examining the fidelity discourse that haunts the Shakespeare filmic career of the salesman, Vishal Bhardwaj, that thesis examines. The reference to the "Minister of Mines and Fuel" once again highlights the mercantilism that shapes the ideologies—in this case an ideology that champions the Sanskrit language at the expense of the colonial one. The reference underlines—to return to Cartelli's assessment—the tragedy of Mr. Buckingham's attempt to market a text whose "ideological supports have been pulled out from under him."

To answer Mr. Buckingham's original question then the Shakespeare salesmen/missionaries are in India because, as a matter of fact, the bard did eventually replace the Bible—the original "English book"—as a means of indoctrination in the colony. This is ironically encapsulated quite well in the name he fashions for himself, *Mr. Buckingham* (which is not his real name) of "The Buckingham Players." A name deriving from *The Buckingham Palace* which, he feels, adds "a most noble ring" (08:24) but which

also almost undoubtedly evokes the imperial authority that intervened to replace the Bible with Shakespeare. Vishwanathan's analysis in the *Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India* provides a terse analysis of this eventuality. She notes that "English Literature", as a subject, "had no firm place" in the education system in the British homeland "until the last quarter of the 19th century, when the challenge posed by the middle classes to the existing structure resulted in the creation of alternative institutions devoted to 'modern studies.'" Before this the "'literary curriculum' in British educational establishments", she continues, "remained polarized around classical studies for the upper classes and religious studies for the lower" (207). She attributes two crucial movements in 18th century England—the Sunday School Movement and the Charity School Movement—with aiding the Church in establishing the discipline of religious studies "out of concern for the alarming rise of urban squalor and crime and out of a conviction that unless the poor were brought back into the Christian orbit, the relatively harmonious order that had been carefully laid would be shattered" (206).[6]

Unlike in the British metropolis, though, 'religious studies' could not be instituted as a subject in its colonies in India. For the discipline included not only the Bible, but also "religious tracts, textbooks, parables, sermons, homilies, and prayers" (Vishwanathan 208)

[6] Since her object is to assess why Religious (Biblical) studies did not work as a subject in India (like it did in England) Vishwanathan does not delve into the reasons as to why and how English itself became a discipline in England—besides pointing out that this occurred at some point in the late 19th century. For an analysis of the latter, see Hawkes where he talks about the way in which Shakespeare became a "central feature" of the discipline of "English" in England as well as a part of the discipline's "commitment to the preservation and reinforcement of what is seen as a 'natural' order of things" where "the discourse forged by and for the Elizabethan colonial adventure offered a Prospero/Caliban, man/monster, non-Indian/Indian opposition of this sort which, since 1918 and Sir Walter Raleigh's astonishing reading of it, has made 'English-speaking/non-English-Speaking' a feasible extension of its range" ("Swisser-Swatter" 44). This inter-linkage of English and Shakespeare in the case of England and, as will be shown in the paragraphs that follow, in the case of India is quite important for the argument being developed. With regards to the invention of English literature as a subject see also the first chapter 'The Scottish Invention of English Literature' in Robert Crawford's *Devolving English Literature* (1992).

and the Indians were hostile to attempts at any kind of religious indoctrination. This had become painfully evident to the British after the 1806 anti-conversion insurrection in Vellore which, as has been talked about earlier, had led to a suspension of the Christianising mission. Yet the colonizers nevertheless saw it necessary to indoctrinate some sense of morality into the "ignorance and degradation" of the Hindus and Muslims (Vishwanathan 209). English Literature, consequently, was seen as a perfect blend of secularism and religion to resolve the problem. Citing the 1852-53 volume of the British *Parliamentary Papers* Vishwanathan goes into great detail about how both Thomas Macaulay and Charles Trevelyan "were among those engaged in a minute analysis of English texts to prove the 'diffusive benevolence of Christianity' in them.'" Yet what is most interesting about her findings is how this 'proving' was actually appropriation and fashioning. One of the perfect examples of it, as recorded in the 1852-53 British parliamentary papers, was the 'proving' of "'the sound Protestant Bible principles' in Shakespeare" which, evidently, could aid the British in "effectively [causing] voluntary reading of the Bible" among the colonized while simultaneously "disclaim[ing] any intentions of proselytizing" (210).

Appropriations or misappropriations of "traditional" literary authorities like Shakespeare by Macaulay and Trevelyan—or what Antonio Gramsci would call the vanguard of the colonial hegemony (118)—often misrepresent the extent to which much fresh cultural capital the traditional authority itself imbibes from such acts. Granted, of course, that such appropriations and re-fashionings enable the hegemonic class to maintain power without resorting to direct force—and that this is their initial purpose—so to speak, yet constant re-appropriations simultaneously intensify the canonical status of a text. What is often overlooked then, in the case of British India particularly, is how much the British Indian curriculum in English significantly—and in a way not seen before—contributed to the building of the imperial Shakespeare canon. As Sugata Bahaduri and Simi Malhotra

(following Vishwanathan's lead) tersely point out: all of the aforementioned events regarding religion and secularism ensured that "English literature had no place in the British educational system [in England] till the last quarter of the nineteenth century" since that system "remained polarized around classical studies for the upper classes and religious studies for the lower" unlike in India where "it was taught from the beginning of the century." "Thus", they muse in a footnote with a hint of irony, "English literature as an academic subject is more original to India than to England" (Bahaduri and Malhotra 208). This circle of authority derived from schooling which in turn is used to authorize further schooling in the service of that authority is most tellingly revealed by Mr. Buckingham when he uses curricular Shakespeare as the basic reason for introducing students to extra-curricular Shakespeare. "But surely Shakespeare is still in your curriculum, the performances are very popular in schools and colleges" he protests to the Headmaster, before hastily adding "and very helpful…I'm told" (31:05).[7]

Brown-Sahib (or Brown-Masters) was the term ascribed to the products of such an education system. For it was, in the words of Macaulay, "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (116). A 'buffer' class between the colonizer and the colonized as Vishwanathan puts it or even a class of 'organic intellectuals' in the Gramscian sense of that phrase.[8] This non-coercive "assimilation and conquest", Gramsci explains, "is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals" a process that becomes more and more complex "the more extensive the 'area' covered by education and the more numerous the 'vertical' 'levels' of schooling" (116). Macaulay, however,

[7] Shakespeare does in fact, to this day, remain quite an important and compulsory part of the *Indian School Certificate* examination. With many of his plays being compulsory in the classes IX, X, XI and XII.

[8] The appropriation of Gramsci's work in the context of Post-Colonial studies is not new, one can see it not only in Vishwanathan's aforementioned essay, but also in the critical literature produced by the Subaltern Studies Group that includes, among others, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Gyanendra Pandey, and Gautam Bhadra.

conceded that the Empire didn't have enough resources for such a total task: it is "impossible for us", he writes in the *Minute on Indian Education*, "with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern" (115). Hence the existence of Brown-Sahibs—which, again, is a 'sly civility'-ridden term that simultaneously mocks the native 'masters' and undercuts their authority by referring to them as 'Brown-Masters.'

The Nawab in the opening scenes of *Shakespeare Wallah* is perhaps the best example of such a Brown-Sahib, and the only person in the film who is actually able to appreciate Shakespeare even more than Mr. Buckingham since the latter's appreciation is ultimately founded on—and hence also limited to—the aesthetics and economics of performance. Divorced from such practicalities however the Nawab's knowledge of the bard's works is so abstract, yet thorough, that during the dinner with Mr. Buckingham's troupe he effortlessly quotes Shakespeare as if it were a language, and ends up glossing everything from the fall of the Indian and British aristocracies ("uneasy lies the head that wears the crown"), and the fall of the Empire ("let us sit upon the ground. And tell sad stories of the death of kings"), to what he sees as the conjunctive—and ironic—fall of Shakespearean drama. "Sooner or later we must all come to terms with reality" he observes of Mr. Buckingham's scuppering trade "we're all forced to make cuts in the text written for us by destiny" (12:01). He then ties it all up neatly with a telling account of the coronation of Elizabeth II which he had the good fortune to attend. The ceremony at Westminster Abbey was "theatre…magical…magical in every way", he exclaims, before bathetically adding "yet if you would permit me to say [it] was a trifle on the lengthy side…at least it seemed so to me then…because, you know, I happened to be standing behind a pillar all the time" (8:38).

These astute observations regarding the blending of art and reality—both with respect to Mr. Buckingham's trade and the theatricality of Elizabeth's coronation—strongly

corroborate Vishwanathan's point regarding the ability of the British Indian Education system to create a native mind-set where the Englishman's material presence was substituted by his literary self-representation. "Making the Englishman known to the natives through the products of his mental labour", she writes,

> served a valuable purpose in that it removed him from the plane of ongoing colonialist activity—of commercial operations, military expansion, administration of territories—and de-actualized and diffused his material presence in the process. In a crude reworking of the Cartesian axiom, production of thought defined the Englishman's true essence, overriding all other aspects of his identity—his personality, actions, behaviour. His material reality as a subjugator and alien ruler was dissolved in his mental output; the blurring of the man and his works effectively removed him from history. As the following statement suggests, the English literary text functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state: '[The Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, and form ideas, perhaps higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind' (Trevelyan 1838: 176). The split between the material and the discursive practices of colonialism is nowhere sharper than in the progressive rarefaction of the rapacious, exploitative, and ruthless actor of history into the reflective subject of literature (Vishwanathan 380).

The Nawab is able to gloss Mr. Buckingham and Elizabeth II as effortlessly as one would gloss literary characters—because he does indeed see them as literary characters.[9] Something that also helps explain his obtuseness with regards to his old friend Mr. Buckingham's pitiful financial situation which he has the power to alter (he boasts of his empty palaces going to waste because he has nothing to do with them) but does not because he is conditioned into ignoring the "material reality" of the Englishman since the colonial days. Instead he *literally*

[9] In *A Passage to India* E.M Forster explores a similar theme with respect to the perception of the English in his fictional town of Chandrapore: "a community that bows the knee to a Viceroy and believes that the divinity that hedges a king can be transplanted, must feel some reverence for any viceregal substitute. At Chandrapore the Turtons were little gods; soon they would retire to some suburban villa, and die exiled from glory" (12). The choice of *Mr. Buckingham* as a name is evocative of a similar viceregal substitution on Tony's part whose real surname is never revealed during the course of the film. This building of a *persona ficta* is something that is explored by Vishwanathan as well, in the aforementioned quote, when she talks about the obfuscation of the Englishman's material presence in his literature.

suggests, as had been discussed earlier, that Mr. Buckingham "make cuts in the text written to [him] by destiny." Later in the film after Mr. Buckingham's car breaks down and he and his family are given refuge in tents pitched on the vast grounds of a villa owned by another Brown-Sahib called Sanju, the latter—who had hitherto been profusely apologetic about housing them in tents—is shocked to hear that they "sometimes go to sleep on [railway] station platforms." "When you're tired", explains Lizzie, ironically encapsulating the essence of her father's (Mr. Buckingham's) ideological exhaustion, "you don't mind" (24:34). While Lizzie is quite open about The Buckingham Players' dire financial circumstances Mr. Buckingham—a true salesman—is relatively mute about them. Hence other Indian characters in the film similarly assume that despite his current circumstances Mr. Buckingham—on account of being English—must certainly, inevitably be doing better than they are, and thus at two separate instances his acquaintances come over asking him for money to which he always replies "we'll do what we can" rather than admitting that he is not in a position to help them financially (51:01).

As the film progresses Sanju goes ahead to have a romance with Lizzie, yet the crescendo of his affair with the backstage does not involve Lizzie at all but of course, her father, the Shakespeare wallah himself. He encounters Mr. Buckingham in complete disarray after a performance where the latter had to interrupt himself in order to scold the audience for causing a commotion when a Bollywood actress (Manjula) had walked into the theatre. Removing his makeup backstage, the furious Mr. Buckingham doesn't seem to mind Sanju's presence so much as it gives him an opportunity to vent his anger. "Let's call it a victory of the motion picture over the theatre", he summarizes, before comparing himself to David Garrick—who had similarly lost his temper onstage[10]—and the Indian audience to the

[10] Mr. Buckingham's self-comparison to David Garrick is quite revealing considering the fact that Garrick was instrumental in establishing the second English theatre in India—the New Playhouse in 1775. That is to say—a year after the first English theatre—the Playhouse—ended its rather unfortunately short three-year stint. The

"drunken nincompoops" whom Garrick had to apologise to "on his knees" the next day for his rudeness. "Do you know who [Garrick] was?" he turns around to ask Sanju. The latter shakes his head in silence, an action which Mr. Buckingham dismisses with the phrase "the mummer's lot" (1:37:33). This dressing-down of Sanju—the 'cross-dressed' Brown-Sahib—by a half-undressed Mr. Buckingham at the backstage betrays the fact that despite Sanju's fascination with the backstage there is only a point up till which the Shakespeare wallahs are willing to accept him as one of their own.[11] "People in our profession", Lizzie's mother Carla tells her in a similar vein, "don't always make very good partners for people outside it." Before asking in disbelief "you wouldn't marry him, would you?" (1:28:02). When the said moment finally arrives towards the end of the film, it is Lizzie the Shakespeare salesman's daughter—who had pinned her hopes on escaping the troupe by marrying or rather selling herself off to Sanju—who seems to be at a disadvantage. "For you I would give up anything", she tells him in an intimate embrace at the backstage, "you only have to ask" (1:56:00). The proposal is met with a cold silence by Sanju, which is followed by a mime: she breaks the embrace, walks over to the chair, picks up his coat, dusts it off, hands it back to him; while he fastens his tie, tries to wipe a tear off her brow, which makes her flinch out of reach. The last thing she says to him is "your collar is torn", and in the next scene she is already on the ship to England (1:59:38).

Sanju's reasons for rejecting Lizzie are not really made clear in the film. In the beginning he seems to be undecided when it comes to choosing between Manjula (the Bollywood actress,

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New Playhouse—also called the Calcutta Theatre—was modelled after London's Drury Lane. In a way then Mr. Buckingham sees himself as carrying on the legacy of David Garrick—his archetypical Shakespeare salesman. Hence Sanju's inability to recognize the Garrick reference is for Mr. Buckingham a foreboding of how he too would be similarly erased in the colonized's memory and in their history.

[11] Unlike all the other Indian characters—including even the Nawab—who are wearing traditional Indian clothes through the course of the film Sanju the Brown-Sahib is always seen suited up in Western attire.

who also happens to be his "distant cousin") and Lizzie. Eventually, when Manjula tries to scare Lizzie off, Sanju feels personally responsible for the former's behaviour and gets even closer to the latter. This is the point at which his affair with the backstage starts, which is followed by the scene where Manjula's presence in the theatre causes a disturbance in the performance—and eventually results in Mr. Buckingham's dressing down of him. And towards the end of the film the reason Sanju gives to Lizzie regarding his discomfort in the relationship is that he does not like it when other men ogle and hoot at her when she performs a play. To which, as has been mentioned earlier, Lizzie responds by offering to quit acting altogether. This however has the effect of calling out Sanju's bluff since his silence with regards to the offer betrays that there is some other reason for his lack of commitment to the relationship. Is it the dressing down he received from Mr. Buckingham? Or the condescension of Mrs. Buckingham? Or was he never seriously interested in Lizzie from the beginning?

Or perhaps the reason has more to do with the *character* of the Shakespeare salesman's daughter than that of Sanju. Throughout the film, after all, her parents—who are also the authors of the memoirs this film is based on—insist that she must go/return to England. For them her affair with Sanju seems to lack an authenticity which love in England can somehow provide. "Everything is different when you belong to a place…when it's yours", Carla says—while ignoring the fact that Lizzie, born in India, actually belongs to India. Shortly before he dies her uncle Bob—who also travels with the troupe—similarly warns her "you shouldn't be here, there is nothing left for us here" (1:01:13). All these caveats neatly lay the ground for the predestined conclusive scene of the film—where Lizzie is on a ship to England waving goodbye to her parents.

As neatly tied up as the ending may be it is, however, also a lie. For while Lizzie (Felicity Kendal) did not end up marrying Sanju (Shashi Kapoor) her sister Jennifer Kendal

did, as a matter of fact, marry Shashi seven years before this film was shot. Jennifer, however, is most conspicuously missing from the film altogether. This recourse to a fictional ending to tie up the story of *Shakespeare Wallah* ends up evoking several associations. From Vishwanathan's point regarding the constant misrepresentation of the British in art during the colonial times to the very fact that this film intends to leave a false legacy of the British *departure* from India on the post-colonial psyche. One might add to this the fact that Lizzie's assertion that she was born in India ("Who me? I've never been [to England], I was born here") is also not true since Jennifer was actually born in England. The entire *agon* that results in her being shipped off to England in search of an authentic home that she belongs to but has never seen is itself something that never happened. This intermingling of reality and fiction, and the choice to portray a fictional unrequited romance in place of a real requited one, is quite resonant not just with Vishwanathan's point, but also with the opening of the film that similarly plays with the question of reality and fiction by portraying a scene from Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Critic* (1779) which will be discussed later. The aim of the discussion of the ending here, and the discussion of the biographical careers of Jennifer, Felicity, and Geoffrey in the succeeding paragraphs is to assess the extent of this intermingling of reality and fiction which seems to be a recurring theme of this film based on real events, and enacted by the characters it is based on. The director James Ivory himself stated that he wished for the film to be seen as "a metaphor for the end of the British Raj" (quoted in Kapadia 48) and perhaps such an analysis of its play with reality and fiction might indeed make it stand as a metaphor not just for British Raj, but also for British art. The "film subtly invites viewers", writes Parmita Kapadia, "to sympathize with the Buckinghams—they are gracious, genteel, and cultured whereas the [Nawab] is a ridiculous little man, Sanju a vapid playboy and Manjula a scheming, spoilt celebrity […] Compassion for [them] and their predicament is fully realized when Lizzie, who was born in India and has never lived

elsewhere, goes 'home' to England at the film's conclusion because there is no future and no Sanju for her in India" (57). In contrast, Felicity Kendal's actual fate does perhaps provide an answer to the doubt that troubles her father's otherwise flawlessly tragic narrative "why are we here instead of in Sheffield or in Bristol or at least somewhere like that? Did I have to come all the way to India because I wasn't good enough for those places?" (54:20). The answer to this question is of course 'no.' Since in 1966 Felicity did go back to England and, during the course of her career, proved that she was in fact "good enough for all those places." After playing the lead role in a number of debut productions by Tom Stoppard in the 80s and 90s, she went on to win the Evening Standard Theatre Award in 1989 for her performances in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Ivanov*. Before eventually being made a CBE in 1995 for services to drama. Jennifer's fate is even more interesting, and will be discussed later.

Perhaps then, comparable to the missionaries, their father the Shakespeare wallah—both as Mr. Buckingham and as Geoffrey Kendal—is not in India because he was not good enough for England, he is in India because he was the best of them—the strongest believer in the universality of Shakespeare…come to bring the word of the bard to the colonies. "We were idealists, you and I, both of us", Mr. Buckingham tells his wife in answer to his own aforementioned question. To which she replies "I always followed you" (57:00). The religious analogy used here is quite apt considering the history of the Bible and Shakespeare in India that had been discussed earlier and also because the question with a religion as with an ideology is inevitably that of faith. Carla had faith in him, and he had faith in Shakespeare, and that is why she, and he, are here. *Shakespeare Wallah* works as a tragedy because it is the story of the most faithful and virtuous person of the Shakespeare ménage—Geoffrey Kendal—being subjected to perhaps the most 'pitiful' and 'feared' form of the classic 'reversal of fortune' or *peripeteia*: a reversal of ideology. "Such a rejection of me", he

exclaims to his wife, “everything I am, everything I have done” (55:00). The film works to establish this rejection in phases—the Nawab, the headmaster, Sharmaji (who proposes to leave the troupe because he no longer finds it lucrative), and the disinterested audiences. Yet the decisive blow is dealt not by a purely indigenous force—like the Sanskrit texts the headmaster of the school makes a reference to—but by a fledgling hybrid cinematic sales-industry: Bollywood.

Manjula, the Bollywood actress, is first seen when Sanju—despite having promised to attend Lizzie’s Shakespeare performance—decides to go for the shooting of the former’s dance sequence for a film. Lizzie’s disappointment regarding Sanju’s absence is cut short by the succeeding scene which replaces the darkened and sombre halls of the auditorium with the sprawling expanse of the foothills of the Himalayas where the shooting is taking place. The camera then gradually zooms in to where Manjula is dancing among the birch trees. The script describes the Hindi music that plays as “upbeat Indian pop” undoubtedly evoking the contrast to the presumably downbeat Shakespeare in the previous scene (35:00). Where Lizzie’s audience was fidgety and restless the cast and crew witnessing Manjula’s performance are frozen in admiration. Her attire, like the dance itself, is very traditional and it includes references to the specific Himalayan setting where she happens to be dancing. Carla’s statement that “everything is different when you belong to a place, when it’s yours” rings very true in this context since unlike the Shakespeare salesmen all of Manjula’s similes and metaphors strike home in this setting that belongs to her. While the former had to construct ‘England’ in the space afforded by a stage Manjula’s performance, thanks to specificity and to cinema, is free of such encumbrances. The Shakespeare wallahs’ drive to be universal is then most firmly pitted against cinema’s ability to capture the beauty of specificities.

Fig. 2: The transfixed onlookers of Manjula's perforamnce in *Shakespeare Wallah* (dir. James Ivory, 1965). Screenshot.

The spell of Manjula's performance is broken as abruptly as it was cast. She makes a mistake while dancing and the director orders the scene to be cut. When they start shooting again she exclaims that she is exhausted and wishes to end for the day. "We are behind schedule 17 days", he protests, "yesterday you didn't come" (38:19). All to no avail as Manjula is shortly borne away from the shooting scene in what is literally a palanquin. "Say what you like", one of the onlookers exclaims, "but they have grand lives" (38:43).

Sanju himself quite aptly summarizes this grandiosity when he pins down what Manjula has that Lizzie lacks: an 'aura.' "You don't look like an actress", he tells the Lizzie, "with our Indian actresses one can always tell" (28:00). This cult of the movie star, as Walter Benjamin puts it, is cinema's most ingenious compensation for the actual aura that is lost in the process of mechanical production of a film:

> The film responds to the shrivelling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the 'personality' outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity. So long as the

movie-makers' capital sets the fashion (Benjamin XI).

Benjamin also goes ahead to say how this cult of the superstar provides the most "revolutionary" critique of "traditional concepts of art." That the aura of a theatrical Shakespeare production—fostered by four centuries of accumulated cultural capital and tradition—can be offset by an ephemeral 'spell of personality' fostered by the money of the film industry speaks volumes about the ideological makeup of hegemonic art. This clash of the aura and the cult is also, unsurprisingly, what the narrative of *Shakespeare Wallah* is building towards. It occurs when Sanju—confused by his newfound love for Lizzie, or Shakespeare, or the Shakespeare wallahs themselves—invites Manjula to one of their performances.

It is a performance of *Othello* and Manjula arrives carelessly late—at the murder scene of Desdemona. During the course of the thesis this scene will be examined from various perspectives—in the context of the gaze (in Chapter I) and in the context of Mr. Buckingham's blackface and the issue of colour (in Chapter II). Here, however, it will be examined in relation to the cult of the movie star that Manjula channels in order to examine the effect it has on the Shakespeare salesman in question here. She enters one of the balcony seats, that is to say, during the murder scene and her presence automatically shifts the audience's attention away from the play to her. The entire hall is abuzz with chatter and more interested in watching her eat *paan* than actually focussing on the play itself. Her entrance is in a way a performance—and that is what the cult of the movie star also does: it turns reality into theatre. One is reminded of the Nawab's observation regarding the cult of the monarch: Queen Elizabeth's coronation—the first filmed coronation of a British sovereign—being a performance "theatre…magical…magical in every way" and of Vishwanathan's statement about the "diffusing" of the Englishman's "material presence" in his art—both of which ring

quite true of Manjula here.[12] This performance reaches its pinnacle when the mechanical reproduction that had necessitated Manjula have a cult in the first place replicates its endless cycle as a photographer sitting somewhere in the front rows turns and takes a picture of her, illuminating the entire theatre with the flash. At which point Mr. Buckingham, who had hitherto been ignoring the commotion and faithfully playing *Othello*, steps out of his role, bangs his scimitar on the edge of the stage and scolds the audience "when you're quiet, we'll continue" (1:31:43). The audience immediately sobers up—yet the silence is punctured by a victorious, 'sly civility'-ridden giggle from Manjula. Mr. Buckingham ignores it and continues to play his role. "Put out the light", he begins his lines *Othello*, "put out the light" with an exhaustion that begs for an end to the crumbling Shakespeare phenomenon of his time (1:32:00).[13]

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[12] While Benjamin does not specifically state that the cult of the movie star "turns reality into theatre" this is something that can easily be observed in the way a person like Manjula (endowed with the cult) is able to attract an audience for anything banal that she does. Her real-life actions are more compelling/theatrical than the performance she upstages. People perceive her simultaneously as someone real and perhaps, like the characters she plays, someone part-fictional. This is something quite reminiscent of the Nawab's perception of Mr. Buckingham as a literary character, and his inability to see the latter's real, material and dire financial circumstances. It is also reminiscent of the perception of the Turtons as "gods" in Forster's *A Passage to India*. Cinema—and particularly the cult of the superstar—seems to have given Manjula the power to be almost like the British in India. Encapsulated quite well in the aforementioned quote by an onlooker who sees her being whisked away in a palanquin "say what you like, but they have grand lives" (38:43).

[13] Owing to the constant comparisons Mr. Buckingham makes about himself and the Shakespeare salesmen who have come before him in India this disruption is also evocative of the disruption of the first performance of the role of Othello by an Indian actor at colonial Calcutta's Sans Souci Theatre in 1848. James Barry's production of the play starred the Bengali actor Baishnava Charan Adhya in the title role supported by a cast of English officers. In their article *Moor or Less? The Surveillance of Othello* Sudipto Chatterjee and Jyotsna Singh examine the said performance in light of what they call the "disciplining gaze" of colonial "surveillance" that was perturbed by even the possibility of such a performance taking place. They note how the opening was "abruptly aborted due to the presence of a local military commanding officer, who refused permission for his men to play extras in the production" (75). And how the officers had received "military notices to arrest the well-known amateurs should they have attempted to make an appearance" (76). The play was eventually staged a week later to an ambivalent response from the audience and critics. But the performance was important—and drew significant crowds—because it was the first incident where a member of the colonized group stepped into the title role in the narrative of the colonizer. Despite a mediocre performance Barry's salesmanship managed to attract crowds precisely because because of this spectacle of Othello—the title character as themselves—that it provided to the audience.

Later, backstage, Mr. Buckingham quite aptly refers to Manjula's disruption of his Othello as "a victory for the motion pictures over theatre" (1:36:00). Despite the outburst that follows—where he rages against the audience and dresses down Sanju—what also increasingly becomes evident is that his hate for Manjula is simultaneously dwarfed by his fascination with *something* like her. Unlike the other members of the troupe—particularly the old-fashioned Bobby—who display open contempt towards her and cinema in general, Mr. Buckingham is able to view the situation in a larger perspective—or perhaps as a true salesman. "If the audience gets out of hand", he opines, "it's our fault, not theirs. I shouldn't have lost my temper. I shouldn't have talked to them like that it was wrong of me. I should have apologized" (1:38:00). What he has realized by making this comparison is that the cult that empowers Manjula "fostered by the money of the film industry" is as much of a sales act as the ideology that had empowered him, fostered by the money of the Empire: that he and she are both essentially salesmen. The difference being, of course, that Mr. Buckingham sells his plays whereas Manjula, in order to sell her movies, commodifies her persona: *she sells herself*.[14]

II

Jennifer Kendal

This is a realisation that is in perhaps inherited by his second daughter who is not featured in the film altogether. That is to say Felicity Kendal's sister who did in fact marry Shashi Kapoor (Sanju) and stay in India: Jennifer Kendal. If Felicity sort of provides an answer to Mr. Buckingham's doubt 'are we here because we were not good enough for England' by going back to England and proving that she was good enough, then Jennifer perhaps provides the lasting answer to Mr. Buckingham's first question 'why are we here?' Indeed, Jennifer's

[14] As would be evident from the conflation of the Englishman's presence with his literature that has been discussed via Vishwanathan Mr. Buckingham too seems to sell his persona as much as his plays. Starting from the bare fact of his assumption of the name 'Mr. Buckingham' which, as shown in the film, is not his real name.

fate will reveal that this question itself is mis-phrased. In as much as Mr. Buckingham asks this question in post-colonial India—after Indian independence that is to say—the expected question would rather be "why are we *still* here" rather than "why are we here." For while it is historically obvious that the Shakespeare Wallah was a salesman/missionary for the bard when India was a colony it makes no sense for him to be there after the colony has become independent and there has been an ideological shift. And supposing one thinks of Mr. Buckingham as living in an ahistorical and anachronistic ideological bubble it still makes no sense for him to stay in India when that bubble is pricked most unceremoniously by Manjula. The question one is faced with consequently is: why does Mr. Buckingham only ship off his daughter Lizzie to England instead of going with her himself? Why is he *still* here at that end of the film?

And it is the overlap between fiction and fact in this film that hints at an answer because Kendal's other daughter Jennifer took the steps, and hence perhaps showed him the route, towards integration with India's cinema and culture. Not simply by marrying Sanju/Shashi Kapoor—who like the fictional Manjula was one of the most iconic Indian film actors of his generation—but actually by her "dedication and dynamism" that were instrumental in promoting the local Hindi language Prithvi Theatre in Bombay. A struggling playhouse that was started by her father-in-law Prithivraj Kapoor, and that eventually became successful by emphasising—thanks to her—an audience-friendly approach. In stark contrast to Mr. Buckingham's Shakespeare-friendly and fidelity-driven approach to acting that could be observed through the course of the film Jennifer emphasized that "theatre was meant for audiences" and that "a public show should be for everyone to watch and enjoy." Which did not mean of course that the plays stopped being "good" at the expense of being "popular." The management always had the enthusiasm to stage "bold, new-look plays." Jennifer in fact was considered the "driving force" of the theatre and instrumental in establishing its unique

vision that shunned plays that were too "self-indulgent" (Gangadhar 2003). Prithvi eventually went on to produce a significant chunk of theatre and film actors including Ratna Pathak, Naseeruddin Shah (the Duke in *Omkara* and the Pundit/Witch/Porter in *Maqbool*), Om Puri (the Purohit/Witch/Porter in *Maqbool*) and, of course, Shashi Kapoor himself.

Jennifer was as open-minded with regards to cinema, and Indian culture, as she was to the accessible drama which was performed at the Prithvi Theatre. She went on to act in several iconic Indian cinematic productions including *Ghare-Baire* (*The Home and the World* 1984) based on Asia's first Nobel Prize for Literature laureate Rabindranath Tagore's eponymous novel; and in Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* (1983) as well as *Bombay Talkie* (1970). In the latter, ironically, she seems to end up playing out the narrative about her and Shashi Kapoor that *Shakespeare Wallah* obfuscated by acting the role of an English author (Lucie Lane) who falls in love with Vikram (Shashi Kapoor) while researching on Bollywood. She also played one of the main roles in *Junoon* (1978)—based on Anglo-Indian author Ruskin Bond's novel *A Flight of Pigeons* that presents a more balanced view of the Indian Revolt of 1857 against the East India Company. And finally—like her sister Felicity who won the 1989 Evening Standard Theatre Award—Jennifer won the Evening Standard Film Award and was nominated for the BAFTA Award for Best Actress for her performance in *36 Chowringhee Lane* (1981). Written and directed by Aparna Sen the film once again replicates the concerns of *Shakespeare Wallah* but from an Indian viewpoint—Jennifer acts out the part of a Shakespeare teacher (Violet Stoneham) who—like Mr. Buckingham—has to come to terms with the increasing disinterest of her students in Shakespeare and of her friends in her. Geoffrey Kendal is also present in this film—he acts the part of Violet's brother Eddie who is senile and is confined to a nursing home where he spends his time reading the popular Archie comics. One morning Violet runs into her former student Nandita and her boyfriend Samaresh. She invites them over for tea where the latter requests if he could use her

apartment for writing his novel (he actually intends to use it to meet his girlfriend Nandita while Violet is at work). The arrangement works quite well for Violet since it allows her to finally have some company. Eventually though Nandita and Samaresh get married and no longer have any use for her house. In a poignant incident towards the end of the film they lie to Violet regarding a Christmas party at their house since they feel she would be quite out of place there. They tell her that they would be out of town but she nevertheless decides to bake a cake for them and drop it off at their place—where she discovers that the Christmas party is in full force.

Similar to *Shakespeare Wallah* the narrative of this film too is riddled with references to Shakespeare. Yet unlike the former the complex analogy with Shakespeare's characters is developed not with respect to the accessory actors—whether it be the Nawab or Sanju—but instead with respect to the Shakespeare salesman himself. And where *Wallah* draws upon *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest,* and *Twelfth Night* to gloss the events *Chowringhee Lane* quite deftly draws upon the one tragedy that is conspicuously absent in it but that encapsulates the Shakespeare salesman's drastic reversal of fortune quite well: *King Lear*. Violet in fact ends the film with a Lear reference that simultaneously captures the sly civility she has been subjected to as well as the reversal of fortune that has proceeded form a reversal of ideology:

> **Violet**: Pray, do not mock me.
> I am a very foolish fond old man,
> Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less.
> And to deal plainly
> I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
>
> No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;

> And take upon's the mystery of things
>
> [inaudible]
>
> As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
> In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
> That ebb and flow by the moon (1:37:20).

She recites these lines on the street with a stray dog as her only audience. While somewhere in the background one can hear the laughs of a couple of locals. The reference itself is quite telling considering the fact that her father/brother Geoffrey Kendal/Eddie, like Lear, has literally gone senile. And becoming something like him was her greatest fear through the course of the film—a fear that forced her to open up and interact with the younger generation: their culture, music, and tastes in the first place. "You think I want to end up at an old people's home like…like Uncle Eddie?" her friend Rosemary—who leaves for Australia—chides her, "that's where you'll end up in ten years' time make no mistake" (20:54). Moreover, the use of the quote from *King Lear* in order to find solace in the prison of her isolation is simultaneously buttressed by the fact that she has always already been in a prison of her Shakespeare-ideology. In fact, comparable to Mr. Buckingham, not only has she been a prisoner but also a perpetrator of that ideology to imprison the colonial psyche. For unlike *Shakespeare Wallah* that traces this issue of Shakespeare reception via stars and salesmen—Aparna Sen's choice to locate this *agon* in someone as commonplace as a schoolteacher is quite revealing. It evokes and politicizes the careers of all the fabled Shakespeare teachers in India who were instrumental in promoting the bards works—like Henry Louis Derozio (1809-31) and D.L Richardson (1801-65). The schoolteacher-protagonist theme moreover hits home not only with the argument made by Gauri Vishwanathan regarding the effect of the British Education system on the colonized but one can also locate it in *Shakespeare Wallah's* cursory obsession with the Headmaster of the school Mr. Buckingham tries to squeeze his performances into. This circle of authority

derived from schooling which in turn is used to authorize further schooling in the service of that authority is most tellingly revealed by Mr. Buckingham when—as has been discussed earlier—he uses curricular Shakespeare as the basic reason for introducing students to extra-curricular Shakespeare. "But surely Shakespeare is still in your curriculum, the performances are very popular in schools and colleges" he protests to the Headmaster, before hastily adding "and very helpful…I'm told" (31:05). *36 Chowringhee Lane* does in fact neatly connect the education-entertainment-indoctrination triangle by locating Violet Stoneham's address literally at 'Chowringhee Lane' which evokes the historic Chowringhee Theatre (1813-39) that—along with the Sans Souci Theatre (1839-49)—was the first Shakespeare theatre in colonial India that had a long-lasting tenure.[15]

One controversial scene in *Shakespeare Wallah* perhaps best sums up this connection between the two dissimilar kinds of ideologically schooled *subjects* that one can neatly divide all the people discussed in this introduction into: namely the (post)colonised (Sharmaji, Sanju, Manjula) and the coloniser's children (Lizzie, Jennifer)—both of whom have as a result of historical consequence been subjected to the same imperial Shakespeare ideology. The said scene occurs when *The Buckingham Players'* car breaks down en route Ajmer. As they wait in the sweltering heat on the roadside a monkey trainer happens to pass by. Sharmaji starts a conversation with him and Lizzie is immediately drawn to it. "What does he say", she asks. "He says he is not doing too well nowadays" Sharmaji replies, "people don't care for his art anymore." To which her Uncle Bob snarkily replies "our story exactly." (17:45) The monkey trainer then puts up a performance for the troupe in a dialogue that is not translated into English in the subtitles:

[15] The Chowringhee Theatre was itself named after Mrs. Emma Bristow's Theatre (1789) which was an amateur playhouse located at her own address in Chowringhee road. It was closed down when Mrs. Bristow moved back to England in 1790.

Monkey Trainer: चलो इसको बजाओ ज़रा, मिल के बजाओ ज़रा
(Ok ring these for a while, ring them together)
[Monkey rudely throws the bells]

Monkey Trainer: नहीं, बजाना पड़ेगा, बजाओ इसको, बजाओ इधर बजाओ
(No, you have to play them, play them, play them here now.)
[Monkey throws the bells on the ground again]

Monkey Trainer: यह! नहीं बजाना पड़ेगा देखो, मिल के बजाओ ज़रा, ढंग से बजाओ
(Huh! No you have to play it, you see, and play it together, and properly)
[The monkey and his 'wife' go in circles while playing the bells] (18:15-19:00).

The monkey's refusal to play to the tune of the trainer is quite analogous not only to Lizzie's eventual refusal to play to the tune of her parents—the Shakespeare Salesmen—but also to the Indians' refusal to play to the tune of a Shakespeare ideology in the post-colonial India depicted in the film. If human beings, as Clifford Geertz puts it, are "cultural artefacts" and if "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" then the monkey show here deftly encapsulates the ideology that works as "control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions—for the governing of *behavior*" (51). With the removal of the ideological supports that buttressed Shakespeare it is indeed the *behavior* of the Indian audience (that Mr. Buckingham rails against by referring to them as "drunken nincompoops") and of Lizzie (that Carla tries to correct throughout the film) which displays itself as deliberately aberrant. In fact Bhabha's 'sly civility' is a concept rooted in the behaviour of the oppressed subjects. Similarly, Mr. Buckingham's detestation of Manjula proceeds not primarily from her method of acting but rather from her persona/cult/behaviour.

Fig. 3: The monkey trainer in *Shakespeare Wallah* (dir. James Ivory, 1965). Screenshot.

The comparison to the monkeys is also of course fraught with the entire Civilizing Mission discourse of the colonial age. And does compulsorily evoke Shakespeare's association with the same mission: for Mr. Buckingham might think he is a *mission*-ary for Shakespeare but the bard himself is in effect appropriated as a mission-ary for the Civilizing Mission in the first place. Unlike the other European colonial powers however, it is important to note that the Civilizing Mission was not the long-term aim of the British Parliament and its diktat that money be set aside "for the revival and promotion of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India" in itself clearly meant for the revival of *oriental* literature (Macaulay 113). It consequently required a considerable amount of intellectual acrobatics for Macaulay to later argue that it was not to be "taken for granted, that by literature the Parliament can have meant only Arabic and Sanscrit literature" before waxing eloquent on how impossible it was that the Parliament "never would have given the honourable appellation of 'a learned native' to a native who was familiar with the poetry of Milton, the metaphysics of Locke, and the physics of Newton; but that they meant to designate by that name only such persons as might have studied in the sacred books of the Hindoos all the uses

of cusa-grass, and all the mysteries of absorption into the Deity" (113). In fact, as Vishwanathan demonstrates, the British policy in India underwent considerable changes to arrive at this point…ranging from being in favour of Oriental learning (during Hastings' term) to being visibly neutral (Cornwallis' term) before, finally, stabilizing to assert Anglican hegemonic dominance after Macaulay's 'intervention' during Wellesley's term precisely through the appropriation of the Ideological State Apparatus of Education (Vishwanathan 215-33).

Powered by schoolteachers like Violet Stonehman then the civilising mission derives authority from and simultaneously authorises Shakespeare in India. Surrounding the bard with a unique form of a fidelity discourse—one that relates the extent of fidelity to the extent of being civilized. This is encapsulated quite well in Bhabha's anecdote which has been discussed earlier about the Indians sitting under the tree who perturb the missionary with their selective interpretation of the Bible, or with the misquotations of Shakespeare that Mr. Buckingham found mockable, and in the threat this kind of hybridity/infidelity/impurity poses to the sacred texts of the 'civilizing' authority. The study of Shakespeare's works, writes Ania Loomba, "offered a programme of building a new man who would feel himself a citizen of the world while the very face of the world was being constructed in the mirror of the dominant culture of the West" (Loomba 1989, 21). The question one must ask now, as a consequence, is whether the Indian audiences have ever really enjoyed Shakespeare outside and irrespective of the influence of this complex civilizational/fidelity discourse. Whether or not Mr. Buckingham's assertion that his Indian audience of the past which "always laughed at all the jokes, cried at the right places" and which was "the most wonderful audience in the world" is just another part of his all encompassing, self-deceiving salesmanship (55:00). And if this assertion is not—comparable to the misrepresentation of the English in their literature that Vishwanathan talks about—again an attempt to present a fictional picture of an

uncomfortable truth. Nandi Bhatia examines a whole host of Shakespeare performances in pre- and post-independence India including those of Lewis' theatrical troupe and Herr Bandman's troupe (1872-82) and those of Charles Allen, Harding & Howitt, Matheson Lang, Allan Weekley, and Geoffrey Kendal (1909-65) to come to the conclusion that unlike Kendal's assertion "audience responses were and continue to be segmented along racial, social, economic, linguistic, class, and caste lines and demonstrate that the relationship of spectators to Shakespeare has been extremely complex and constructed" (157). In the case of Kendal particularly the fact that all 879 performances of his company were given to "elite audiences" comprising almost entirely of "schoolchildren" and "royalty" or, in other words, the subjects of the education apparatus (schoolchildren) and the products of it (the Brown-Sahibs like the Nawab) is quite revealing (163). Comparing this to a more heterogenous audience, as in the case of James Barry's 'notable' 1848 performance of *Othello* in Calcutta, she finds the responses of the critics as well as those of the audience so dissimilar and ambivalent that she is forced to conclude that "the changing, contradictory, and contentious (fictionalized and real) responses to these particular performances disrupt the ongoing myth about the authority of Shakespeare" (157). She then goes ahead to examine the selective analysis of these responses by scholars like Christina Mangala Frost who claim that "Indian viewers loved watching these performances and were willing to pay as much as 30 rupees to watch a performance" (158). By showing discrepancies in Frost's analysis and particularly in her wilful misreading of many negative reviews as positive Bhatia concludes that the myth of the authority of Shakespeare "is specially kept alive through educational institutions in India and abroad and through an imaginary construction of audiences' singular love for Shakespeare to support notions of 'timelessness' and 'universality' accorded to [him]" (157).

Bhatia's analysis is particularly useful if one were to examine the kind of Shakespeare salesmanship Vishal Bhardwaj almost always resorts to when he faces narrative crises in the latter halves of his films. "If I don't remain true to the spirit of the play, I'd be a fool", he claims, before adding, "that is what has worked for the past 400 years" (Sen 2006). Although restricted to colonial India Bhatia's analysis quite deftly points out that if one was to examine particular performances, their particular impacts, and particular contexts the aforementioned logic deduced by Bhardwaj has indeed not worked for the past 400 years. This recourse to a fictional past where Shakespeare was simultaneously art-house, accessible, and popular is an issue that is not just relevant in the context of Vishal Bhardwaj (who tires to make his films all three of these) and Geoffrey Kendal (who claims that his Shakespeare performances in the past were that) but even for Western Shakespeare salesmen like Kenneth Branagh and Laurence Olivier (see Endnote 2).

III

The Parsi Merchants

So what has worked for the past 400 years? In the case of India the Parsi Theatre (1850-1930)—largely sponsored by Persian emigrant merchants[16] in India—based in Bombay that translated Shakespeare's plays into Hindi, Gujrati, Marathi and Urdu while at the same time

[16] The Parsis came to India because of religious persecution in Iran. While they initially settled as farming communities in Western India over time, with the arrival of the British, many Parsis began to educate themselves in British schools or moved to the cities in order to find jobs with the East India Company. For more details see Jesse S Palsetia. *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Idenity in Bombay City*. Leiden: Brill, 2001. Eventually however, as Vikram Singh Thakur points out, the term "Parsi Theatre" came to stand for a genre more than the theatre of a particular community: "The phrase 'Parsi theater' signifies the playhouses built and operated by the Parsi community, along with Parsi playwrights, Parsi dramas, Parsi stages, Parsi theatrical companies, Parsi actors, Parsi directors, and so on. Also included are those playwrights and actors who were not Parsis, but who worked on a salaried basis for the Parsi theatrical companies. Further, those companies, owners, and actors are counted who, while not being from the Parsi community and not being residents of Bombay, added the words 'of Bombay' to their theater companies in order to show their connections to the Parsi theater. (Gupt, quoted in Thakur 23-24).

incorporating Indian folk, mythological, music, and dance elements seems to have had the response that Kendal claims for his productions. In the case of the Marathi language, for instance, there were around 65 "free adaptations" of Shakespeare between 1867 and 1915—and most of the times the adaptations would not even acknowledge Shakespeare as the author. The audiences here comprised not just of "British officials, the military, wealthy Parsi merchants [and] educated professionals" but also "textile workers, small traders, and artisans" (Hansen 130). "It would not be an exaggeration to assert" write Trivedi and Bartholomeusz, "that Shakespeare was popularized, commercialised, and insinuated into the psyche of these audiences—without them knowing that it was Shakespeare—through the transformations effected by the Parsi theatre" (16). To give just one example here Agha Hashar Kashmiri—often regarded as the pioneer of the Parsi theatre movement—produced works that freely expanded the comic subplots of a number of Shakespeare plays (*Murid-a-shak*: *The Winter's Tale*, 1899; *Safed Khoon*: *King Lear*, 1907) in order to effect a more balanced tragicomic output that would simultaneously be put into relief with ingenious music. His other notable works include, *Said-e-Havas* (*King John*, 1908) and Kwab-e-Hasti (*Macbeth*, 1909).

Not only were Shakespeare's plays reworked to make them more tragicomic but in some instances resisting the tragic ending became a form of protest itself. As in the case of Mehdi Hasan Ahsan whose *Bazm-e-Fani* (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1890) included a happy ending thereby "completely running the original upside down" (Gupta 92). The theatre would eventually go ahead and give rise to Hindi cinema—Bollywood—where the *masala* film tradition, comparable to the Parsi theatre, tends to mix a variety of genres including action, comedy, romance, drama, and melodrama into a single film. It is then quite apt that Ania

Loomba characterizes the Parsi theatre as both "the product" as well as the "producer" of a "hybridity that was the hallmark of urban colonial India" (Loomba 1997, 122).[17]

Comparable to the Parsi theatre the first generation of Bollywood Shakespeare films hardly acknowledged the bard in the credits. Shakespeare was hence seen as "a rich source to be mined but not revealed" (Verma 285). The first few adaptations hence literally descended from their Parsi Theatre counterparts—*Hathili Dulhan* (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 1932), *Khoon ka Khoon* (Hamlet, 1935), *Zan Mureed* (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1936), *Dil Farosh* (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1937), *Zalim Saudagar* (*The Merchant of Venice*, 1942), and *Pak Daman* (*Measure for Measure*, 1940). Inclusion of song and dance, tragicomic elements, and finally the Indigenisation of names being some of noticeable traits of the Parsi Theatre that are visible in these films. All these traits would play a formative role in laying the groundwork for Bhardwaj's films as well since all his films display indigenized names (Maqbool/Macbeth, Omkara/Othello, Haider/Hamlet), tragicomic elements and inclusion of song and dance. In addition to this, two of his films are set, quite like these Parsi adaptations, in Muslim communities. Unlike the Parsi adaptations that belonged to these communities in Bhardwaj's films these communities are gradually demonized as will be shown in Chapter I and III. The only exception in the aforementioned list of Bollywood films descended from Parsi Theatre is *Khoon ka Khoon* (Blood for Blood) where the director Sohrab Modi credited

[17] This position is however contested by Vikram Singh Thakur who maintains that the Parsi theatre is not "hybrid" in Bhabha's sense of the term. The "theatre's 'hybrid' Shakespeare", he writes, "does not subvert the Shakespearean authority by 'appropriating' it since it does not recognize that authority in the first place. It 'appropriates' Shakespeare not because Shakespeare is great but because Shakespeare seems to cater to the melodramatic nature of Parsi theater which, in turn, was determined by the audience's craving for a spectacle that had song, dance, declamation, action, and thrill" (35). While providing a fresh perspective on the nature of the Parsi theatre Thakur's analysis ought to be taken with a pinch of salt since he does not seem to take into account the historical, commercial, and imperial circumstances surrounding the mere presence of Shakespeare in the colony in the first place. To say that Parsi theatre was somehow divorced from these circumstances and did not "recognize" the (inescapable, hegemonic) authority of Shakespeare but merely chose him out of an act of free will would be a gross understatement in a country "where the insertion of the Shakespearean text into native life paralleled the insertion of the power of the master race" and "a demonstration of the cultural and linguistic superiority of the conqueror" (Kennedy 291).

Shakespeare along with the screenwriter Mehdi Hasan. In a manner comparable to Modi's Bhardwaj also credits Shakespeare in all of his films and also gives extra focus to The Mousetrap scene in his *Hamlet* adaptation. Bhardwaj in fact goes a step further and integrates—in the Parsi vein—both the Mousetrap scene and the Gravediggers scene with a song and dance sequence as will be explored in Chapter III.

The next big Bollywood Shakespeare adaptation took not just the Parsi theatre as a source but also Hollywood. Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954) drew from Sohrab Modi's adaptation, from Laurence Olivier's adaptation, and from the Parsi Theatre's thereby producing a new degree of hybridity. In this film one can detect two important traits that Bhardwaj replicates. The first, is its recourse to Hollywood as an alternate source of authority than the Shakespeare text (the film can actually be seen as more of a point-for-point adaptation of Olivier's than of Shakespeare) and the second is its replacement of Western mythologies with Indian ones. The Hamlet/Ophelia relationship here is formed on the Krishna/Radha archetype from Hindu mythology. This is something that is with careful complexity developed and replicated in Bhardwaj's *Omkara* where the Othello/Desdemona relationship is modelled on the Rama/Sita as well as the Krishna/Radha archetype. The use of the mythology in *Omkara* eventually extends beyond the title characters—through the secondary characters, the major themes, as well as through the institution of caste. The film hence eventually ends up testing the limits of hybridity when Shakespeare's racial themes intersect with caste and Indian mythology to present an ahistorical picture of caste. While the incest angle of the Hamlet/Gertrude relationship is absent in Sahu's adaptation in Bhardwaj's adaptation it takes the centre-stage. So much so that Ophelia is relegated to the sidelines. Bhardwaj also chooses to cast Tabu—who played the title role of Lady Macbeth in *Maqbool*—as Gertrude in Hamlet whereas the role of Ophelia is played by a relative

debutante. As will be explored in Chapter III Bhardwaj also alters the plot of the film and Gertrude plays a crucial role in the ending.

While all of these films were successful at the box-office their grosses still pale in comparison to the films that came after them. A slew of adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* on the one hand (*Bobby,* 1973; *Bombay*, 1995; *Ek Duje Ke Liye* (For One Another)*,* 1981; *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (From Doom to Doom), 1988; 1942: *A Love Story*, 1994; *Dil Se* (From the Heart), 1998; *Ishaqzaade* (Doomed in Love), 2012; *Ram-Leela*, 2013) and *The Comedy of Errors* on the other (*Bhool Bholaiyan* (The Maze) 1933; *Do Dooni Chaar* (Two Times Two: Four), 1968; *Gustakhi Maaf* (Insolence Forgiven), 1969; *Angoor* (Grapes), 1982; *Anari No. 1* (Ignoramus No. 1), 1999; *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan* (Big Brother, Small Brother), 1999). The *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations display a lot of characteristics that can be seen in the films of Bhardwaj. In *Bombay*—set of course in the same city as Bhardwaj's *Maqbool*—the agon of *Romeo and Juliet* centres around the fact that the titular couple are Hindu and Muslim. This is a formula that is also replicated in *Ishaqzaade.* In *Maqbool*, similarly, Duncan's daughter Sameera/Malcolm (who is Muslim) is wedded to Banquo's son Guddu/Fleance (who is Hindu) despite opposition from Maqbool/Macbeth who uses religion as an excuse to oppose the marriage even though his real fear is that Guddu would inherit Duncan/Jahangir's underworld empire if he became his son-in-law.

Of the aforementioned *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations *Qayamat se Qayamat Tak* and *Ram-Leela* are the only ones that stick to the original tragic ending of Shakespeare's play. The rest of them, quite in the vein of the Parsi theatre, alter the plot in order to establish a happy ending. In Bhardwaj's case too there are significant plot alterations towards the end of his films: Maqbool and Nimmi die but their newborn son survives and is taken under the protection of Guddu/Fleance and Sameera/Malcolm; Emilia/Indu kills Iago/Tyagi at the end of *Omkara*; and finally Gertrude/Ghazala prevents Hamlet/Haider from taking his revenge in

Haider. Some of these endings are in the service of poetic justice whereas the others are in response to the narrative crises that his films develop as will be explored in the subsequent chapters.

Of the adaptations of *The Comedy of Errors* Sampooran Singh Kalra's (better known as Gulzar) *Angoor* is the one that stands out as the most influential for Bhardwaj. Unlike the aforementioned adaptations, *Angoor* not only acknowledges Shakespeare as its source, but it does so in quite a bombastic manner…the opening sequence of the film has the narrator proudly announcing: "This is William Shakespeare. He was a famous playwright of the 16th century. He is still considered to be the greatest" (00:39). Bhardwaj himself refers to this scene in an interview where he says "but I am not the first one to give credit to the great writer. In Gulzar sahib's Angoor, we get to know that the film is based on *Comedy of Errors* only when Shakespeare winks from a photograph. In fact it made me realise that Shakespeare was not all that boring as I used to think. That he wrote such comic double roles. Even after that I didn't go to bookshop to buy *Comedy of Errors*" (Kumar 2014). All three of Bhardwaj's films similarly exhibit that they are adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in the opening sequences as well as in their trailers. Bhardwaj also works with Gulzar in writing the lyrics of the songs in *Omkara* and adapts, as will be seen in Chapter II, a variety of themes from *Othello* within the verses of these songs.

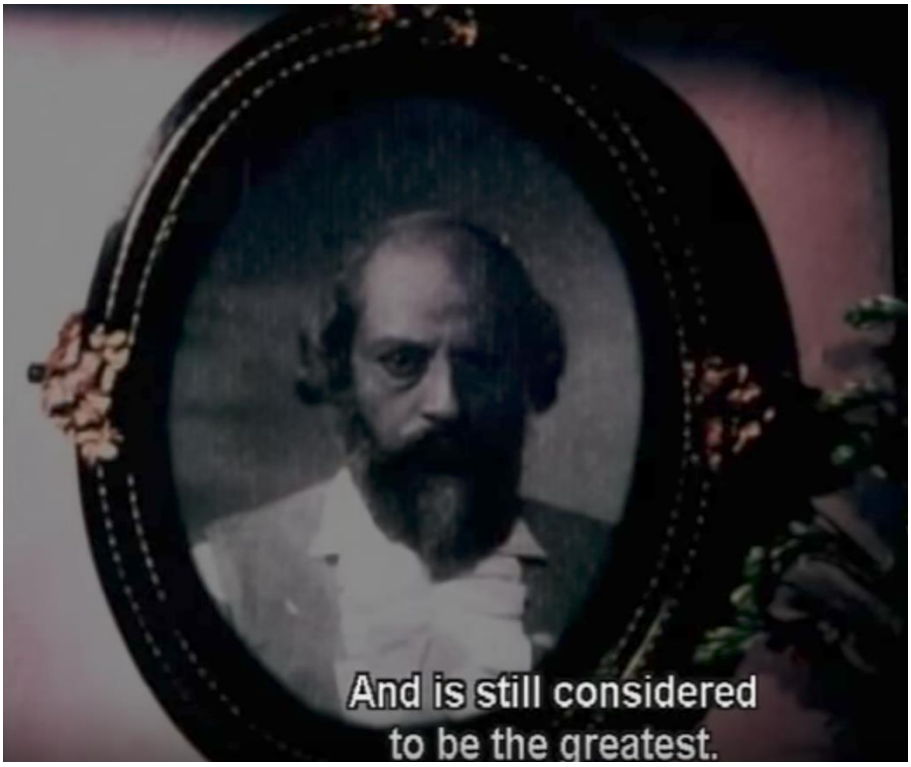

Fig. 4: A portrait or a mirror image of Shakespeare in *Angoor* (dir. Gulzar, 1982). Screenshot.

Lastly *The Taming of the Shrew* has been another popular, well-adapted play. *Purab aur Pschim* (East and West), 1970; *Manchali* (Headstrong Woman), 1973; *Ponga Pandit*, 1975; *Betaab* (Restless), 1983; *Naukar Biwi Ka* (The Wife's Servant), 1983; *Mard* (The Man) 1985 are just some of the adaptations. Most of these films focus on the taming of the Westernized heroine. Either heroines who were brought up abroad and hence were 'corrupted' or 'polluted' by Western values or heroines that, being brought up in India, seemed to copy Western attitudes. The treatment accorded to Dolly/Desdemona in Bhardwaj's *Omkara* seems to particularly mirror the theme of these films. As will be seen in Chapter II the ahistorical race/caste fusion in the play leads to a situation where Dolly is mistrusted more because she is fair-skinned and well-educated—in a manner comparable to Kesu/Cassio who in fact is called a firangi/foreigner during the film. It thus becomes easy for Tyagi/Iago to link the two together based on their foreignness.

The extent to which these free-translation masala films—with their mixture of a variety of genres including action, comedy, romance, drama, and melodrama mishmashed in a single narrative—eventually ended up bringing Shakespeare truly to Cinema, on equal terms, is an observation that has been made, among countless others, by the director of the highest grossing Shakespeare film ever made: Baz Luhrmann. His first and only Shakespeare film *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) employed a whole host of masala traditions to great success. "When I was in India", he writes,

> "researching Midsummer Night's Dream, we went to this huge, icecream picture palace to see a Bollywood movie. Here we were, with 2,000 Indians watching a film in Hindi, and there was the lowest possible comedy and then incredible drama and tragedy and then break out in songs. And it was three-and-a-half hours! We thought we had suddenly learnt Hindi, because we understood everything!
>
> [Laughter]
>
> We thought it was incredible. How involved the audience were. How uncool they were - how their coolness had been ripped aside and how they were united in this singular sharing of the story. The thrill of thinking, 'Could we ever do that in the West? Could we ever get past that cerebral cool and perceived cool.' It required this idea of comic-tragedy. Could you make those switches? Fine in Shakespeare - low comedy and then you die in five minutes."
>
> (Geoff 2001)

Romeo + Juliet (1996) does in fact make the constant comic-tragic switches from low comedy to tragedy and vice-versa. It also channels in on the film industry's cult of the superstar by casting Leonardo DiCaprio in the lead role. Nevertheless, it does undo itself precisely at the level of language which should not come as a surprise considering Luhrmann's aforementioned statement "we thought we had suddenly learnt Hindi, because we understood everything!" devalues the importance of language in effecting drama. The Indian audience was "involved", "uncool" and "united in this singular sharing of the story" in exactly the way as Luhrmann—observing the audience's response rather than the film whose

language he did not understand—was not. It is no surprise then that *Romeo + Juliet* faced its greatest criticism with regards to language. Cartelli and Rowe state that the original text dialogue, despite Luhrmann's attempt to "flatten" it to suit a contemporary audience, is on an "anachronistic collision" with the rest of the film (11). Whereas Roger Ebert writes that "much of the dialogue is shouted unintelligibly while the rest is recited dutifully, as in a high school production." His criticism heaps blame on the actors who Ebert claims are "in over their heads" with the Shakespeare source text and that, despite their failure, there is in fact "a way to speak Shakespeare's language so that it can be heard and understood" (Ebert 1996). Needless to say, Ebert offers no explanation as to what this way is.

IV

Vishal Bhardwaj

Bhardwaj's films then borrow from all these movies that have preceded him, and his relationship with the unique fidelity discourse surrounding Shakespeare in India is quite complex. Born into a middle-class family in Chandpur, Uttar Pradesh in 1965 (ironically the year in which *Shakespeare Wallah* was released) Bhardwaj was initially interested in playing cricket. His family lived in Najibabad and in Meerut for the greater part of his childhood, all three of the aforementioned cities are in Uttar Pradesh where his adaptation of *Omkara* is set. His father was a sugarcane inspector but "when not supervising sugarcane licencing, Ram Bhardwaj wrote poetry and lyrics for Bollywood" including for lesser known films like "*Ahimsa* [Non-Violence], *Shuruaat* [The Beginning], *Kanoon Meri Mutthi Mein* [The Law is in my Fist], *Khoon ka Badla Khoon* [Blood for Blood] and *Chhota Baap* [Little Father]."[18]

[18] All the following quotes regarding Bhardwaj's career, unless mentioned otherwise, are from the biographical interview of Vishal Bhardwaj in *LiveMint* by Neelesh Misra. '*Vishal's World*.' 2011. Available Online: http://www.livemint.com/Leisure/yi8lU2eamGLdnSakVfG5ZP/Vishal8217s-world.html [Accessed: 14th of April, 2017].

Eventually however he came to work with some leading names of the industry including "music composers Kalyanji-Anandji, and singers Asha Bhonsle and Usha Khanna." After breaking his thumb in a cricket practice a day before the tournament Vishal received a huge setback with regards to his cricket ambitions. Inspired by his father Bhardwaj instead took an interest in music and composed his first song at the age of 17 which, thanks to the efforts made by his father, was incorporated in the 1985 film *Yaar Kasam* (Friend's Oath). Two years later he was already recording his first song with the playback icon Asha Bhonsle.

It was also the same year that his father died and that effectively ended Bhardwaj's connection to the music industry. Hence what followed were "years of waiting and frustration" as the stint with Bhonsle did nevertheless not lead to any breakthrough in the industry. "I struggled a lot" Bhardwaj admits before recounting how he returned to focussing on cricket where he was an all-rounder—"a leg-spinner and a batsman." Cricket helped him get admission into the prestigious Hindu College in Delhi via the sports quota.[19] At the University of Delhi he was torn between two groups—friends who would go ahead and make their name in theatre (such as Ashish Vidyarthi and Piyush Mishra) and friends who would go ahead and make their name in cricket (Maninder Singh and Manoj Prabhakar). "Vishal Bhardwaj as a music composer", writes Dilip Vengsarkar, the then national cricket selector, "is a big loss to Indian cricket" (quoted in Misra 2011). Nevertheless, after breaking his arm during the second year of college Bhardwaj gave up on cricket altogether. Eventually he got some work at TV programmes including the national programme *Doordarshan* where he played the "harmonium with friends who were *ghazal* singers." This was followed by a job

[19] Founded in 1899 by Krishan Dassji Gurwale in order to provide nationalist education to the youth in the context of the struggle against the British the college also aimed to counterbalance the authority of the Christian St. Stephen's college in Delhi. The college was a central platform for political debate during the Quit India Movement and in general throughout the freedom struggle. Through the course of the Quit India Movement the college effectively stopped all functions, participated in non-cooperation against the British, and had several members of its staff arrested. Its Student Parliament, established in 1935, also hosted prominent nationalist leaders including Subhas Chandra Bose, Nehru, Annie Besant, Jinnah, Gandhi, and Motilal Nehru. See more at: http://hinducollege.ac.in/ab-history.aspx [Accessed: 4th of April, 2017].

with the music company CBS as "an artiste and repertoire manager." He moved to Mumbai around the same time, met Gulzar who would become his mentor, and married Rekha Bhardwaj who would herself become a notable singer for Bollywood.

Bhardwaj next composed music for many notable films. Including *Maachis* (Matchstick, 1996, directed by Gulzar) two songs from which *Chappa Chappa Charkha Chale* (The Spinning Wheel goes *Chappa Chappa*) and *Chod Aaye Hum Who Galiyan* (We have now left those Streets) became the iconic songs of 90s Bollywood and earned him the Filmfare Award for Best Music Direction. The film itself is based on the Sikh insurgency that preceded and succeeded Operation Blue Star—in which the Indian Army blasphemously entered the holiest shrine of the Sikhs in order to capture the separatist Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. This film in fact bears a lot of resemblances to Bhardwaj's *Haider*—visually (it too is based in the foothills of the Himalayas) and thematically (in both cases the insurgents are the protagonists). The actress Tabu—who plays the role of Lady Macbeth in Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* and the role of Gertrude in *Haider* is also the female lead here. Unlike the insurgent protagonists of this film however, who do in the end get to take their revenge, the protagonist of *Haider*—the script of which was also approved by Gulzar—is deliberately hamstrung as will be explored in Chapter III. Whether or not this happens because the insurgents are Muslim in the case of Haider and whether that is something significant enough to call for an alteration of the ending of Shakespeare's play is something that will be explored.

A year later, in 1997, he composed the songs for *Chaachi 420* (Aunt 420), a Bollywood remake of a Tamil film which in turn was loosely based on *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993). In 1998 he finished the soundtrack for Ram Gopal Verma's film *Satya* (Truth). This film, that features in CNN-IBN's *100 Greatest Indian Films of all Time* list, effectively gave birth to the Mumbai *noir*. Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* bears many resemblances to *Satya* and

includes gang rivalries, police 'encounter' killings[20], audacious police superintendents, corrupt politicians, and a Bollywood film industry that is inseparably intertwined with the underworld. 1999 saw Bhardwaj receive his first National Film Award for Best Music Direction for the film *Godmother*. The film is inspired by the life of Santokben Jadeja who ran the Mafia in Porbander, Gujrat (the same town where Gandhi was born). Traces of Shaban Azmi's interpretation of the role—that won the National Film Award for Best Actress—can similarly be seen in the interpretation of Duncan's role by Pankaj Kapur in Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* where the said character is enormously empowered and is a don in the Mumbai underworld. Finally, in 2001 Bhardwaj made the music for a blockbuster film *Love Ke Liye Sala Kuch Bhi Karega* (That Idiot will do Anything for Love). Despite all this, Bhardwaj felt that "as a music composer, my career was getting over. I had done 8-10 films as a composer but now I wasn't able to make hit songs." What is most interesting in this regard is the specific problem that, according to him, was driving his career down: "I tried to remain honest to the situation (in the script), I took myself too seriously, And when you do that you lose the plot" (quoted in Misra 2011). This coincidentally forebodes the situation that will arise in all three of his Shakespeare adaptations with respect to his fidelity to the Shakespeare text. To give just one example here: the ahistorical intermixing of caste and colour in *Omkara* can be seen as a product of this. Even the songs in the said film—that Bhardwaj composed in collaboration with Gulzar—borrow a multitude of themes from *Othello* and end up racializing caste.

Bhardwaj next started touring film festivals with Gulzar. "I saw pulp fiction and it messed up my head…it showed me the power of storytelling…and that violence can be so entertaining." "I wanted to be a director", he says of those days. His first film as a director

[20] "Encounter killings" were extra judicial killings conducted by Mumbai cops in the 90s in order to purge the city's underworld and usually involved planting weapons on suspects after shooting them in order to claim self-defence.

was *Makdee* (The Web of the Witch/Spider, 2002) a children's movie about a witch that turns people who enter her mansion into animals. The lead actress Shweta Prasad won the National Film Award for Best Child Artist and the film was also screened at the Critics' Week at the Cannes Festival in 2003. A year later, in 2004, he had adapted *Macbeth* into the critically and commercially successful *Maqbool*. On being asked why he turned to adapting Shakespeare Bhardwaj quite candidly replies "when I came in contact with Gulzar and saw his films, I realised Angoor was a brilliant adaptation of *A Comedy of Errors*. Also, I wanted to touch a chord with international audiences, so there were many commercial considerations in my head. It was not for art or for literature" (Sen 2006). His first foray with *Macbeth* moreover was via Charles and Mary Lamb's abridged versions of the plays "in those days, incidentally I was travelling with a kid who was carrying a copy of *Tales of Shakespeare*", Bhardwaj writes, "an abridged version for children. I happened to pick it up (laughs) and the first story I read was Macbeth. I found it so dramatic, so right. I wanted to make a film on the underworld, but a human story. Everything somehow fell into place with Macbeth" (Sen 2006). He goes on further "after reading Macbeth, I thought this was a work of genius! (Laughs) Who is this William Shakespeare? I then read all his plays and thought I could live my life making films on his plays. If you're even a little intelligent, you can't go wrong by adapting his work" (Ibid).

Two years later, in 2005, Bhardwaj adapted Anglo-Indian author Ruskin Bond's *The Blue Umbrella* into a full length film. Set in the foothills of the Himalayas it is the story of a village girl named Biniya who comes into the possession of a beautiful blue umbrella that an evil shopkeeper called Nand Kishore Khatri tries to steal from her. Bond's story is largely narrated and has minimal dialogue—Bond writes about Indian characters, and describes their dialogues in English—and hence Bhardwaj manages to adapt it much more freely than one could say of his adaptations of Shakespeare. In 2006, Bhardwaj had finished his fourth film

as a director: *Omkara*. Opening to huge critical acclaim the film nevertheless had a luke-warm response at the box-office (it did manage to recoup its budget but did not become an expected national blockbuster even though it had high earnings internationally).[21] This was evidently surprising for Bhardwaj who had, on being asked whether he thought the film would work for a "non-Shakespeare" mass audience, responded with positivity: "I think it will, because it has a hardcore humour and language, and the street characters have a lot of masala in them. The gist of the characters and the drama is very profound, but it is performed by the street folk, which is entertaining. My Omkara is a very vibrant, funny Othello" (Sen 2006). It may be interesting to note, in the context of the argument regarding the importance of language for effecting drama which is discussed in the endnotes, that one of the reasons given for the poor box-office performance was the "hard to understand dialect."[22] The dialects are particular to Uttar Pradesh which, as noted earlier, is Bhardwaj's home state: "I wanted a violent backdrop, and I think UP and Bihar are states of abject lawlessness. Moreover, I am from that place, I belong there and know that dialect. These people have not been seen in our mainstream cinema…the characters of small towns, the little mafias, the street fights over girls…it's that crazy, Wild West kind of place" (Sen 2006). *Omkara* was nominated for the Filmfare Award for Best Director and went ahead to win the Special Jury Award at the National Film Awards.

Three years later, in 2009, Bhardwaj took another dig at the Mumbai *noir* with his cult film *Kaminey* (*Rascal*). Unlike *Maqbool*, whose latter half, as will be discussed in Chapter I, turns into a narrative quagmire, *Kaminey* is better structured and also has a happy ending with which Bhardwaj—in a manner comparable to the Parsis—seems to feel more at home. Shakespeare apparently "was very much looking over [his] shoulders" during the making of this film. "Once you fall in love with Shakespeare", says Bhardwaj in an interview

[21] See Rediff.com, 'Critics Hot, Box Office Cold Over Omkara' Available Online: http://www.rediff.com/movies/2006/aug/01box.htm [Accessed: 15th of April 2017].
[22] Ibid.

for *Kaminey* "you cannot get him out of your mind." Before defensively adding "Shakespeare also wrote plays with happy endings" (Pais 2009). The film received 10 nominations at the Filmfare Awards, overperfomed at the box-office, and was adjudged as the Best Film of the year in many Indian newspapers. Bhardwaj's next film *7 Khoon Maaf* (Seven Murders Forgiven) came two years later, in 2011. It was another adaptation of Ruskin Bond—this time of his short story *Susanna's Seven Husbands* which more or less has a Wife of Bath like plot. Bond in fact rewrote the 4 page short-story into an 80-page novella on Bhardwaj's request. Like *Omkara* the film delivered another setback to Bhardwaj's adaptation-streak when it underperformed at the box-office despite being critically acclaimed. His next film *Matru Ki Bijli Ka Mandola* (2013) was based on an original script but similarly underperformed at the box-office and had mixed reviews. The comedy film stars Pankaj Kapoor (Bhardwaj's Duncan) as a rich businessman who aims to transform his village into a self-sufficient economic powerhouse but meets resistance from the villagers because in order for construction to happen they would need to sell their land to the government.

2014 however saw Bhardwaj being brought back into the spotlight with his adaptation of *Hamlet*: *Haider*. Primarily because it was a Shakespeare-adaptation but also because it was an adaptation set in Kashmir and—at first appearance—sympathetic towards the plight of the terrorist-protagonist. The film was a huge critical and commercial success and won five National Film Awards including Best Screenplay, Choreography, Music Direction, Costume Design and Male Playback Singer. A year later, in 2015, Bhardwaj won his second National Film Award for Best Screenplay for *Talvar* (directed by Gulzar's daughter Meghna) based on the 2008 Noida murder case where a girl and her servant were found murdered and the parents were regarded as chief suspects. The film portrays the parents as innocent and condemns the proceedings as a trial by media. It too was a critical and commercial success. Two years later, in 2017, he directed, co-wrote, and co-produced *Rangoon* based on the life

of Mary Ann Evans—an Indian stuntwoman who was deployed to the front to entertain the soldiers during World War II. This film was a critical and commercial failure.

V

Bhardwaj's Shakespeare Films

Bhardwaj's ability to make such diverse films has surprised many. "In Indian cinema" writes Misra, "he is one of those rare straddlers whose work is often rooted in the dust and grime. His nuanced characters and layered screenplay are arthouse, but he has won accolades also as a commercial director—most of his movies have mass appeal." This is, moreover, in addition to the fact that he is not merely directing these films but is involved in other aspects as well. "Bhardwaj is a true Renaissance man", continues Misra, "—he directs, composes music, writes scripts and is a singer who also writes lyrics." Unlike Kendal then perhaps it would be unfair to label Bhardwaj as a 'Shakespeare' salesman specifically yet the fact that he chooses to be remembered as such is quite telling—in the trailer of his last film *Rangoon*, as discussed earlier, he is not credited as "the director of *Kaminey*" or "the director of *Makdee*" but rather as "the director of *Omkara* and *Haider*."[23] And this is in addition to the fact that he claims that "Shakespeare is always looking over [his] shoulders" or that his favourite film character is Jahangir/Ducnan from *Maqbool* or that the toughest song he has ever had to compose is Bismil (The Mousetrap) from *Haider*.

Film	Budget (₹)	Worldwide Gross	Net Profit
Maqbool (2003)[24]	32, 500, 000	36, 200, 000	3, 700, 000
Omkara (2006)[25]	250, 000, 000	1, 059, 522, 268	809, 522, 268
Haider (2014)[26]	240, 000, 000[27]	1, 240, 000, 000	1, 000, 000, 000

[23] See 'Rangoon | Official Trailer | Shahid Kapoor, Saif Ali Khan and Kangana Ranaut.' 2017. 2:20. Available Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-tC0wcIu24 [Accessed: 15th April, 2017].
[24] *Maqbool*, Best of the Year, Available Online: https://bestoftheyear.in/movie/maqbool/ [Accessed: 14th May, 2017]. See also http://ibosnetwork.com/asp/filmbodetails.asp?id=maqbool [Accessed: 14th May, 2017].
[25] *Omkara*, Box Office Mojo. Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=omkara.htm [Accessed: 14th May, 2017].

Net Profit	522, 500, 000	2, 335, 722, 268	1, 813, 222, 268

Table: Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespeare filmic career.

Focussing specifically on his Shakespeare films then one can see elements of all the three stages of response towards Shakespeare that have been discussed in this introduction till now. An audacious irreverence (as in the case of Manjula), an organic hybridity (as in the case of Jennifer Kendal, Parsi Theatre) and finally a textual submission (as in the case of Mr. Buckingham). Bhardwaj's relationship is hence, firstly, characterized by an enthusiastic and bold liberation from Shakespeare: by realizing the varying interpretive possibilities present within the texts. In his first film *Maqbool* (2003) he begins with an unprecedented reshaping of the character of Duncan—empowering him to re-establish the 'cult of the monarch' (explained in greater detail via Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* in Chapter I) that he would have had as a King. The translated dialogue works in Bhardwaj's favor—allowing his Duncan to deftly use language in order to fashion his character. For "Self-Fashioning", as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, "is always, though not exclusively, in language" (9). Stripped off this crucial tool of language—by being restricted to a speech that arguably does not make sense to a modern audience—the Duncans one can see in performances of Macbeth that use Early Modern English are significantly hamstrung in their ability to recreate this cult. Bhardwaj's Duncan, on the other hand, uses a combination of verbal and non-verbal factors like the gaze to build his cult. The gaze dynamic present in the film, it is argued, leads Bhardwaj's Macbeth to develop an "anxiety" generated from the "loss" of a "degree of autonomy upon realising that he or she is a visible object" (Lacan 1998, 73; Levine 118). Duncan's death also ends up becoming such a momentous, watershed moment in the film that

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[26] *Worldwide Collections of Haider*, Bollywood Hungama, 2014, Available Online: http://www.bollywoodhungama.com/news/box-office-special-features/worldwide-collections-of-haider/ [Accessed: 14th May, 2017].

[27] 'Why Bang Bang vs Haider is not a Clash of the Titans' *NDTV Movies*, Available Online: https://web.archive.org/web/20141027151540/http://movies.ndtv.com/bollywood/why-bang-bang-vs-haider-is-not-a-clash-of-the-titans-672374 [Accessed: 14th May, 2017].

it robs the narrative of its protagonist, so to speak, leaving the second half of the movie in a lopsided state. In a manner comparable to Arthur Laurent's *West Side Story* (1961) and Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) Bhardwaj also merges his film into the *film noir* genre in order to make it more credible as well as appealing for a modern audience.

In his second film *Omkara* (2006) Bhardwaj dexterously reads certain elements of the agon surrounding race in *Othello*—elements like endogamy for instance—as essentially casteist in nature. His adaptation thus seeks to boldly substitute race with caste altogether. This ultimately necessitates a whole lot of rewriting with respect to the characters, their lines, and the plot itself which Bhardwaj seems to be able to do admirably well. Unlike the salesman discussed earlier—who mostly had a negative approach to Manjula—instead of shunning this cult of the superstar Bhradwaj utilizes it to empower his narrative and promote his film. He does so by incorporating the concept of the Bollywood 'Item Song.' An Item Song or an Item Number is usually a song that is performed in a film by a 'superstar' but that does not contribute to the film's narrative in any way whatsoever. The clip is often released before the film in order to promote the film. In the case of *Omkara* however Bhardwaj—with the help of Gulzar—uses the item song to transform the revelries in *Othello* 2.3, where Cassio gets drunk, into a carnivalesque dance sequence. The accessory character of Bianca—who will eventually contribute towards Cassio's downfall—is played by a celebrity actress Bipasha Basu who gets to perform this Item Song that is woven into the narrative of the film and is crucial to getting Cassio drunk. This enables the film to simultaneously increase its popular appeal without really compromising on its narrative.

In his third film *Haider* (2014) Bhardwaj switches the Christian context of *Hamlet* with an Islamic one and changes the location from Denmark to Kashmir. Where Shakespeare's play addressed mythical political events between Norway and Denmark Bhardwaj's film charges the narrative with live, contemporary political events while

simultaneously exploring the deep-seated Islamophobia of sections of his Indian and international audiences. Once again the language of the script lapses into Urdu at various points—drawing on elaborate Sufistic metaphors and similes relevant to the context. The 'Item Song' in this film coincides with the performance of The Mousetrap and is hence further interwoven into the narrative of the film. Unlike *Omkara* the song here is sung by the protagonist himself and employs an extended metaphor to illustrate not just the Claudius/Gertrude relationship but also the India/Kashmir one.

"I think [Shakespeare] is one of the best dramatic writers ever", claims Bhardwaj in an interview, portraying Shakespeare more or less as a salesman "he was sharp, cunning—*ek shaatir kisam ka insaan* (a cunning man). Othello was written by somebody else, but he took it and rewrote it in such a way that people forgot the original. Shakespeare knew how to use characters to give a twist to the story. He was a genius" (Thevar 2014). All of these audaciously irreverent approaches to Shakespeare's plays have led other Indian Shakespeare film-makers, including Gulzar (who wrote and directed *Angoor* 1982, an adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*) to claim, "I don't know why he is calling it an adaptation. After I read it I realized that it was as original as it gets" (Ramachandran 2006). On being asked how his work differed from Gulzar's "loyal and simplistic adaptation" Bhardwaj replied, "…my intention is not just to adapt the play. My intention is to adapt it and make it look like an original work. After a point I forget that Shakespeare has written this. I start believing that I have…" (Sen 2006). A bold approach like this does eventually however lead to crisis points within all of his films where the narrative builds a massive momentum of its own and poses demands that Bhardwaj is quite simply unable to meet.

In the case of *Maqbool* this narrative crisis point—as will be explored in the chapters that follow—occurs immediately after Duncan's death. This is so because he ends up becoming a character so enormously empowered that his death quite simply robs the film of

its momentum. This of course calls for a massive restructuring of the characters in the latter half of the film since Shakespeare's play can no longer be used to fill the vacuum that has been left by his death. In *Omkara* the attempt to identify and then adapt the casteist elements from the racial *agon* of *Othello* conversely ends up racializing caste. This occurs due to the presence of a colour hierarchy that is needlessly preserved in the film—Desdemona is of an upper caste and fair-skinned, whereas Othello is of a lower caste and dark-skinned. The hierarchy also extends onto the other characters in the film (The Duke, Iago, Cassio—are all fair-skinned) leaving one to conclude that the colour contrast exists as a form of fidelity to Shakespeare's dialogue (since references to colour are present within the text) which Bhardwaj does preserve to an extent. In *Haider*, finally, despite the bold steps taken to engage with contemporary politics and to confront Islamophobia the narrative consistently falls short of acknowledging the mad, and revenge obsessed, Hamlet for what—in Western political discourse—he does eventually become—a 'terrorist.' The crisis point then occurs towards the end of the film where the action, themes, plot and the characters of Shakespeare's play all momentously charge towards a conclusion where Hamlet must get to take his destructive revenge. A revenge which—if taken—would arguably legitimize 'terrorism' via Shakespeare.

To have utilized Shakespeare in order to even arrive at these truly thought-provoking, original, and provocative problems regarding contemporary Indian (and Western) societies is a commendable feat. And to expect anything more from Bhardwaj would of course be unfair. This thesis will however go further in order to examine his works in light of the Shakespeare salesmen that have come before him. Where Olivier and Branagh's response to their Shakespeare productions' commercial failures was an abandonment of their efforts to bring Shakespeare to cinema or the masses Bhardwaj's response has consistently been a

hybridization of pop-culture and art-house cinema.[28] In his response to the crises that the narratives of these films develop however one can detect a hint of the same resignation that can be seen in the aforementioned salesmen. In the case of *Maqbool* Bhardwaj chooses to ignore the crisis via a recourse to *Macbeth* instead of developing the characters independently of the bard's text in the latter half of the film which—as had been discussed earlier—necessitated a massive reworking in order to compensate for Duncan's momentous death. It is no wonder then that Douglas Lanier classifies the latter half as "closely parallel[ing] Macbeth in plot, motifs, and character" (217) and Daniel Rosenthal reads it as uneven (123). In *Omkara* Bhardwaj similarly submits to Shakespeare's text in order to side-step the entire race/caste fusion altogether. The play chooses instead to focus on misogyny without providing any explanations or resolutions for the ahistorical racialization of caste that has taken place. The English language subtitles of the film, presumably authorized after the film's completion, use race and caste interchangeably. However, in *Haider*, Bhardwaj's final Shakespeare-trilogy film, the director does allow the crisis to carry on till the very end but eventually bows to another authority—the Government of India—to denounce terrorism, endorse the subjugation of the Kashmiris, and neatly tie up the storyline. "When one authority or an alien is destroyed", one might observe here, à la Greenblatt, "another one takes its place" (9).

VI

A Tragedy Rehearsed

[28] It is important to note here that Branagh might just be taking a pause from Shakespeare in his film career since his last Shakespeare film was released 17 years ago in 2000 (Love's Labour Lost). In 2006 he however directed *As You Like It* which was only released on TV. And Olivier similarly deflected some of his efforts for the screen to television, and that included TV film versions of *The Merchant of Venice* (1973) and *King Lear* (1983).

"My films are inspired by Shakespeare's works" claims Bhardwaj in another one of his interviews, "but are not meant for Shakespearean scholars. I try to identify with the spirit and essence of the play by giving it a twirl that appeals to the Indian audience" (Srivastava 2013). This pre-emptive shunning of the opinions of the critics—in favour of those of the audience—is quite telling. It not only contradicts Bhardwaj's earlier statement that he turned to adapting Shakespeare in order to touch a chord not with an Indian but instead an "international audience" (Sen 2006) but also reveals a lot about the gaze of the by no means monolithic constituency of Shakespeare 'critics' that affects him. This ties into Huang and Rivlin's question regarding the fetishization of non-Western Shakespeare adaptations. Both these concerns will be explored together by examining Bhardwaj's use of the gaze in *Maqbool* (which will later be compared to the gaze of the Western audiences), the issue of the Othello complex that can be seen in Bhardwaj's storytelling in *Omkara* (Chapter II), and the issue of stereotypes about communities in *Haider* (Chapter III).[29]

As for the purposes of this Introduction Bhardwaj's recourse to the audience as an authority of judgement evokes another scene from *Shakespeare Wallah*—at the very beginning—when Mr. Buckingham is performing Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Critic: Or, A Tragedy Rehearsed* (1779) for a hamstrung audience comprised once again of disinterested Indian school kids. The movie stages the scene in order to effect a comparison between Mr. Buckingham and the role he is playing—that of Mr. Puff: how, in a manner

[29] There is, of course, no definitive answer to Huang and Rivlin's question regarding the extent to which these films act as fetishized commodities, the best we can do during the course of this thesis is bring it up in each chapter to examine what the analysis of the film in question adds to this issue. The issue of the 'gaze' for instance does not by itself explain this fetishization, but it does however throw some light on it. "The imperial gaze", write Bill Ashcroft et al. "defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness […] it corresponds to the 'gaze of the *grande-autre*' within which the identification, objectification and subjection of the subject are simultaneously enacted" (Ashcroft et al. 207). This method does however, as discussed earlier, pose the danger of perceiving the process of adaptation as a narrow power struggle between those that gaze and those that are gazed at, those that have an Othello complex and those that do not, and finally those that stereotype and those that are stereotyped which is something that needs to be kept in mind.

comparable to the latter, Mr. Buckingham is enwrapped in his own discourses and ideologies of what drama and Shakespeare ought to be. In the case of Mr. Puff the caricature is so extreme that he is able to offer sophistic explanations—however ridiculous—for any criticism he encounters from his friends (and critics) Mr. Sneer and Mr. Dangle. The film (by drawing a visual parallel with the title character) suggests that this inability to step outside his own worldview while laughable in the case of Mr. Puff is what leads to the similarly 'tragic' situation of the Shakespeare wallah Mr. Buckingham. It is also, as this Introduction proposes, what leads to the tragic situations of the Shakespeare salesmen who have been discussed till now—whether they be Kendal or even Violet Stoneham who herself used a similar Lear metaphor to gloss her situation.

Fig. 5: Mr. Buckingham as Mr. Puff in a performance of *The Critic* for Indian schoolchildren pictured in the background in *Shakespeare Wallah* (dir. James Ivory, 1965). Screenshot.

The scene from *The Critic* that is performed in the film is also the last scene of the play where the Spanish armada battles against the British fleet and loses—to Mr. Puff happily chanting "Britannia rules the waves." Ironic as it is in a post-colonial Indian context the irony is exacerbated by the fact that this scene occurs at the very beginning of the film—at a school decorated in the English style with statues of Victorian women as silent onlookers standing

behind the schoolchildren. Sheridan furthermore ends *The Critic* with Mr. Puff saying "we'll rehearse this piece again tomorrow" (2.1.338). This double ending—that is to say the ending of the play-within-the-play with the play itself—signifies that the vanities and delusions witnessed in the performance will similarly rehearse themselves in the real world that resumes when the play ends. There will, that is to say, forever be characters-types like Mr. Puff, Mr. Sneer, and Mr. Dangle. That the narrative of the film *Shakespeare Wallah* in fact begins immediately after this scene from Sheridan's play allows one to look at Mr. Buckingham's character as indeed having traits of Mr. Puff. Yet unlike the latter Mr. Buckingham is not a comic, but rather a tragic, figure because he is eventually—in the classical sense of the term—able to *recognise* (as evident from the quote below) the flaws in the discourse that buttresses his Shakespeare performances. And he is able to do so precisely by opening his worldview beyond a 'what has worked for the past 400 years' thinking and to see what his audience wants—"if the audience gets out of hand", one might recall him as saying, "it is our fault, not theirs. I shouldn't have lost my temper. I shouldn't have talked to them like that it was wrong of me. I should have apologized" (1:38:00). To balance the opinions of his critics with the opinions of his audiences is something that Mr. Puff is not able to do because despite a rather bombastic appearance to the contrary he is too much influenced by his critics: Mr. Dangle and Mr. Sneer. Yet even though they constantly make fun of him throughout the play they themselves are not spared Sheridan's satire who debunks their viewpoints precisely by recognizing the audience as an equal authority on judgement. "The public is their critic", Mrs. Dangle rebukes her husband, "without / whose fair approbation they know no play can / rest on the stage, and with whose applause they / welcome such attacks as yours, and laugh at the / malice of them, where they can't at the wit" (1.1.114-18). Completely debunking one or the other viewpoint—that of critics versus that of the audience, film versus theatre, 'what has worked for the past 400 years' versus 'what

interests audiences now' is exactly what has led to the crisis in Shakespeare performance discussed in this introduction. The tragedy of the Shakespeare salesman then, comparable to the theme of Sheridan's play, is *a tragedy rehearsed* through all the salesmen that have been referred to till now. The chapters that follow then question whether or not this tragedy gets rehearsed with respect to the focal Shakespeare salesman of this thesis: Vishal Bhardwaj.

Introduction – Reflective Notes

1. In his Introduction to *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation* (2004) Ton Hoenselaars cites Umberto Eco's phrase "translations age" to call attention to the ever-accumulating language barrier with respect to Shakespeare. He begins by discussing the translations, and then further translations, of Sonnet 66 in German. Any study of which easily reveals that the "continuing development of the German language called for new renderings of the poem and, as later translations rejected German words and phrases that had become archaic or otherwise undesirable, it became apparent that Shakespeare's sonnet was capable of generating new linguistic potential" (11). Extending this argument to English—a language that has similarly undergone rapid changes since Shakespeare's time—Hoenselaars argues that "this diachronic accumulation that we witness here brings into focus the continual task and endeavour of the translator to present the verse in the language of his own contemporary audience or readership." Hence we can "see that Shakespeare's early modern work is really a fixed product in a 'foreign' language that no one speaks any more" and thereby "one could argue that Shakespearean translation may hold its own alongside the original." Therefore, as far as communication goes, Hoenselaars maintains, "the translation may have the edge over the original Shakespeare text." "For if there is a language barrier anywhere", he concludes, "it does not operate between Shakespeare and non-native readers or audiences of his work in translation, but rather separates native speakers of English from their own early modern writer" (13). In their book *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen* (2007) Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe similarly conclude that "no matter how vividly present the

architecture of a cinematic Venice or Verona may seem, characters speaking Shakespearean verse (particularly in the classic British acting tradition) may sound stuffy and mannered, if not downright foreign to modern American audiences" (97).

Hoenselaars furthermore questions the "relative lack of interest displayed by Anglophone readers and scholars" to the issue of Shakespeare-translation. "Why should there be such a great investment in Translation Studies, or in monitoring the translation of foreign literature into English?" he ponders when at the same time interest in translating Shakespeare from Early Modern English into modern English remains minimal. "This state of affairs warrants the assumption", he concludes, "that Shakespeare may well continue to be the national poet who embodies the Romantic ideal of authorship, activating the concomitant notions of untranslatability, degradation and debasement" (18). To illustrate his point, he cites two precursors of the Emma Rice debate that we will discuss in the Conclusion. First, Susan Bassnett who argued that "it was time we translated Shakespeare into good modern English" against Tom Deveson's assertion that "if we break the verbal links to the usages we inherit, we lose contact with a vital dimension of ourselves" (quoted in Hoenselaars 19). Second, A.S Byatt who attacked Stanley Wells for even "raising the question of Shakespeare translated into modern English." Hoenselaars maintains that Byatt's argument "had every appearance of xenophobic anglocentricism" in as much as she argued that Wells—quite as this thesis will aim to show via the impact of Bhardwaj's Shakespeare—"even suggests that foreigners who have good translations have easier access to the master than his compatriots" (19).

2. "Shakespeare is box-office poison—or so the saying goes", writes Daniel Rosenthal (in a promotion article for his book *100 Shakespeare Films* in *The Guardian*) before qualifying the statement by asserting that he is nevertheless "the saviour of cinema" considering the fact that a lot of "blockbuster epics, westerns, and rom-coms are based on his works."[30] However "most original-text Shakespeare has struggled at the box office", he concedes, "between 1929 and 1936, Hollywood spent small fortunes on star-laden versions of The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream and

[30] See David Rosenthal's article *The Bard on Screen* as published in *The Guardian*. All subsequent quotations without references in footnotes are from this source. Available Online: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/apr/07/stage.shakespeare [Accessed: 5th June 2017].

Romeo and Juliet, whose disappointing grosses prompted Variety to conclude in 1936 that the value of Shakespeare to the screen is more strictly in the creation of prestige for the individual production company than in the accumulation of receipts." In short while Shakespeare might not have literal capital in the late and post-Empire world (Rosenthal maintains that the aforementioned "assessment has held true for the past 70 years"), it still has a brand value. The biggest indicator of this being that even notable, well-established film-makers are ready to "gamble by retaining the original language, no matter how savagely edited—Zeffirelli cut more than 60% of *Hamlet*."

Film	Director	Budget ($)	Worldwide Gross	Net Loss ($)
The Tempest (2010)[31]	Julie Taymor	20, 000, 000	346, 594	19, 653, 406
Coriolanus (2011)[32]	Ralph Fiennes	7, 700, 000	1, 000, 000	6, 700, 000
Much Ado About Nothing (2012)	Joss Whedon	Undisclosed	5, 000, 000	NA
Romeo and Juliet (2013)[33]	Carlo Carlei	17, 000, 000	3, 000, 000	14, 000, 000
Cymbeline (2014)	Michael Almereyda	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	NA
Macbeth (2015)[34]	Justin Kurzel	20, 000, 000	16, 000, 000	4, 000, 000

Table 1: Performance of original text Shakespeare films in the last 5 years.

And while Rosenthal furthermore concedes that "in mainstream film-making the bard's reliance on 'words, words, words' is his greatest commercial liability, erecting a language barrier for the vast majority of viewers" this is a position that is contested not only in theatre but also in Shakespeare studies (as shown by Hoenselaars as well as Cartelli & Rowe). The effect of this debate is quite evident in the careers of the Shakespeare directors we will refer to during the course of this thesis. One can see it

[31] *The Tempest*, 2010, Box Office Mojo, Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=tempest10.htm [Accessed: 14th May 2017].
[32] *Coriolanus*, 2011, Box Office Mojo, Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=coriolanus.htm [Accessed: 14th May 2017].

[33] *Romeo and Juliet*, 2013, Box Office Mojo: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=romeoandjuliet2013.htm [Accessed: 14th May 2017].
[34] *Macbeth*, 2015, Box Office Mojo: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=macbeth15.htm [Accessed: 14th May 2017].

in the career of Geoffrey Kendal, discussed in the Introduction, where he is unable to explain the drop in his productions' popularity in post-Independence India. It will also be visible in the narrative crises of the films of this thesis' focal director Vishal Bhardwaj, who believes that being loyal to the bard is what has worked when it comes to Shakespeare adaptations— "if I don't remain true to the spirit of the play, I'd be a fool", he claims, before adding, "that is what has worked for the past 400 years" (Sen 2006). Finally, it will be evident in the discussion of the untimely resignation of *Shakespeare's Globe*'s new artistic director Emma Rice who turns to Bollywood's Shakespeare in order to buttress her stance on the same issue. For "Bollywood", writes Vijay Mishra, has come to "function as something more than popular Indian cinema produced in Mumbai […] as a word, Bollywood is used to catch the flavour of the Indian popular" (6). Rice, who Bollywoodized[35] her productions to argue with the *Globe* establishment about Shakespeare's inaccessibility ("once you have learned [Shakespearean English], you get it but if you haven't, it's a problem, I'm having that argument at the *Globe* now"), had to eventually herself "learn not to say that [she] sometimes found Shakespeare hard to understand" and resign (Lambert 2016 & Rice 2017). All of the aforementioned "forms" of the fidelity discourse that Linda Hutcheon terms as being based on "degrees of proximity to the original" (7) will be a chief concern of the chapters that follow.

Unlike Kendal, however, Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh did not have to go all the way to India to prove Shakespeare's universality—Cinema itself came to them to disprove it. For if we were to take a close look at their Shakespeare films we can spot a pattern of accelerating monetary loss—which is, if not worth anything else, a definitive measure of audience disinterest—and draws our attention back from an overarching narrative about the universal reception of Shakespeare to the specific primacy of the individual's negative reception of filmic Shakespeare:

Film	Budget	Worldwide Gross	Net Profit/Loss
As You Like It (1936)	Unknown	Unknown	NA
Henry V (1944)	2, 050, 000[36]	1, 500, 000[37]	550, 000

[35] Press Release: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare's Globe. Available Online: http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/theatre/whats-on/globe-theatre/a-midsummer-nights-dream-2016 [Accessed: 17th June 2017].

[36] Unlike Branagh's films, there is a lack of official records regarding the performance of Olivier's. These references hence also include news articles and the like.

Hamlet (1949)	2, 347, 373[38]	3, 250, 000[39]	902, 627
Richard III (1955)	18, 000, 000[40]	3, 640, 000[41]	14, 360, 000
Net Loss	22, 397, 373	8, 390, 000	14, 007, 373

Table 2: Laurence Olivier's Shakespeare filmic career.

Film	Budget ($)	Worldwide Gross	Net Profit/Loss
Henry V (1989)[42]	9, 000, 000	10, 161, 099	1, 161, 099
Much Ado About Nothing (1993)[43]	11, 000, 000	22, 549, 388	11, 549, 388
Othello (1995)[44]	11, 000, 000	2, 112, 951	8, 887, 049
Hamlet (1996)[45]	18, 000, 000	7,367,765	10,632,235
Love's Labour Lost (2000)[46]	13, 000, 000	299, 792	12, 700, 208
Net Loss	62, 000, 000	42, 490, 995	19, 509, 005

Table 3: Kenneth Branagh's Shakespeare filmic career.

Sidestepping the question of the films' expensive promotion of an eroded, once-dominant, and by no means benign Shakespeare ideology (the movie that launched Olivier's Shakespeare filmic career—*Henry V*—was literally made at the behest of the British Ministry of Information) Philip Auslander tries to justify their losses by

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Robert Murphy, *Realism and Tinsel: Cinema and Society in Britain 1939-48*, p. 55. Available Online: https://books.google.com.au/books?id=xtGIAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA34&lpg=PA34&dq=%22ted+black%22+producer&source=bl&ots=MTsSWidYzA&sig=yoAkLzf1-59YEFo3ZKLXUlUnxzA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiL4O2HpbvMAhWl2aYKHb7kD4MQ6AEILzAE#v=onepage&q=%22ted%20black%22%20producer&f=false. Accessed: 24th March, 2017.

[37] '$8,500,000 British B.O in U.S', *Variety*, Nov 20, 1946. Available Online: https://archive.org/stream/variety164-1946-11#page/n122/mode/1up/search/8%2C500%2C000 Accessed: 24th March 2017.

[38] Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the United States*, p. 110. Available Online: https://books.google.cz/books?id=9UfqDAAAQBAJ&pg=PA110&lpg=PA110&dq=hamlet+1949+budget&source=bl&ots=vSIGwMErnY&sig=nNXN8dS2NnOzIV0Tp2RpP3OsrJw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj6-J_ap9PTAhVDECwKHbmiDHIQ6AEIQjAI#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed: 24th March 2017.

[39] 'Top Grossers of 1948', Variety, January 5, 1949. Available Online: https://archive.org/stream/variety173-1949-01#page/n44/mode/1up. Accessed: 24th March 2017.

[40] Brian McFarlane, The Encyclopaedia of British Film (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2013), p. 422.

[41] Ibid.

[42] *Henry V*, Box Office Mojo, Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=henryv.htm. Accessed: 25th March 2017.

[43] *Much Ado About Nothing*, Box Office Mojo. Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=muchadoaboutnothing.htm. Accessed: 25th March 2017.

[44] *Othello*, Box Office Mojo, Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=othello95.htm. Accessed 25th March 2017.

[45] *Hamlet*, Box Office Mojo, Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=hamlet96.htm. Accessed: 25th March 2017.

[46] *Love's Labour Lost*, Box Office Mojo, Available Online: http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=loveslabourslost.htm. Accessed: 25th March 2017.

maintaining that they are selflessly geared towards "challeng[ing]" the audience and the (new) "dominant culture" that the "market and media" represent as well as "the regime of cultural production that supports them" (quoted in Kirwan 174). Peter Kirwan builds upon Auslander's argument and similarly lays blame for the "crushing failure" of Branagh's Hamlet at the box-office to "the lack of cohesion with contemporary box-office practices" (183). Validating Mr. Buckingham's anxieties about the apparent "victory of motion-picture over theatre" he then goes on to argue that British Shakespeare films consciously "overstate their theatrical influence or embrace the cinematic with a self-consciousness that leads to parody" due to an "anxiety around questions of authenticity that roots ideas of authority in the country's theatrical history" (185). While dabbling with the issues of "authenticity", "authority" and even "fidelity" Kirwan nevertheless does not—at any point—broach the question of Shakespeare's own inaccessibility and incomprehensibility that we have discussed in the previous endnote: for it is one thing to accuse the audience of being ideologically subsumed in a (supposedly) less worthy dominant culture than the preceding one, and quite another to expect them to understand an Early Modern English play written almost half a century ago. In her article *Welcoming Shakespeare into the Caliban Family* (1996) Margo Jefferson echoes the Caliban/Prospero binary and its linguistic extension (non-English speaking/English speaking) that Hawkes proposes to provide an apt counter to the aforementioned arguments that seem to be rooted in a subtle privileging of Shakespeare over Cinema:

> Shakespeare must meet America at the movies, and on equal terms. Combative, experimental, and mutually seductive, whether in a mass-culture smash or a quirky art-house "docudrama" like Al-Pacino's current "Looking for Richard."
>
> […]
>
> Shakespeare must adjust to city and street suburban mall English, constantly reinflected by different regions, neighbourhoods, races, ethnicities, and classes (Jefferson 1996, also quoted in Cartelli & Rowe, 97).

Chapter I

An Empowered Duncan

This chapter takes into consideration *Maqbool* (2003), Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of *Macbeth*. The crucial thing about this adaptation is the liberties that Bhardwaj takes while adapting the Duncan character (Jahangir). Thus, through the core of this chapter, the implications this has for the development of the themes and the plot of the film as well as the adjustments that are made to the other characters, the action, as well as the tone of the film will be examined. The discussion itself begins with an examination of the peculiarly filmed assassination of Duncan in Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015) which is then contrasted to the assassinations in other significant film adaptations of *Macbeth* (Roman Polanski's in 1971, and Orson Welles' in 1948). The gaze dynamic present in the assassination of Kurzel's Duncan, it is argued, involves not just the King's act of silently staring at his would-be assassin but also the assassin's "anxiety" generated from the "loss" of a "degree of autonomy upon realising that he or she is a visible object" (Lacan 1998, 73; Levine 118). It is then contrasted with the gaze dynamic present in the assassination of Jahangir where Maqbool, the assassin, shuts his own eyes. It is reasoned that due to a combination of verbal and non-verbal factors (like the gaze) the latter's death ends up becoming such a momentous, watershed moment in the film that it robs the narrative of its protagonist, so to speak, leaving the second half of the movie in a lopsided state. Hence, when midway through the film, in accordance with Shakespeare's play, Jahangir/Duncan is killed off by Maqbool/Macbeth the narrative of the film seems to end up rather confused—the director incorporates scenes from Shakespeare's work that fail to assimilate with the narrative, before finally closing the story off with a series of *deus ex machina* devices that are deployed in order to position Maqbool

or Boti (Macduff) in situations where they can meet the witches' prophecies from Shakespeare's play.

The inconsistencies in the latter half of the film have been noted by other critics, Douglas Lanier sees the said half as "closely parallel[ing] *Macbeth* in plot, motifs, and character" (217) and Daniel Rosenthal reads it as having a "structural imbalance" (123). This chapter however examines these inconsistencies from two angles pertinent not just to the film in itself but also to Bhardwaj's work in general. Firstly, from the perspective of the fidelity discourse—by arguing that even though the film liberates itself from textual fidelity (most of the dialogue bears little resemblance to Shakespeare's) it is nevertheless caught up in other forms of fidelity like plot-centric, theme-centric, and character-centric ones (to use Lanier's terms). These "degrees of proximity to the original" to borrow Linda Hutcheon's phrase, will become a chief concern of this chapter (7). For after the liberties taken with Jahangir's character in the first half, that ends up making the narrative about him and not Maqbool, returning to Shakespeare's work in the second half seems rather counterproductive since the latter's narrative was probably meant for developing Macbeth's character and not Duncan's.

Secondly, but also proceeding from this point, what will be examined is the reason as to why Bhardwaj felt it necessary to return to Shakespeare—or streamline the narrative via a recourse to Shakespeare—in the second half. Drawing on the larger context of the arguments that have been made in the Introduction, as well as the narrative crises of his other Shakespeare adaptations that have been discussed, this chapter will question whether this was in fact done to cater to the real or imagined expectations of the "international audiences" for whom he turned to adapting Shakespeare in the first place (Sen 2006). His statement that if he does not remain "true to the spirit of the play" he'd "be a fool" since "that is what has worked for the past 400 years" (Sen 2006), it will be shown, raises issues not just relevant to the fidelity discourse but also to the real or imagined *gaze* of his international (Western)

audiences that shapes his work. "The imperial gaze", write Bill Ashcroft et al. "defines the identity of the subject, objectifies it within the identifying system of power relations and confirms its subalterneity and powerlessness […] it corresponds to the 'gaze of the *grande-autre*' within which the identification, objectification and subjection of the subject are simultaneously enacted" (Ashcroft et al. 207). There is, to borrow Lacan's quote from earlier, a similar "loss" of a "degree of autonomy" for Bhardwaj when he is subjected to this gaze. A loss that is reflected in the movement from the free-rein first half of the film to the restrictive second half. Hence, has being loyal to the spirit of the play, or any such form of fidelity, unquestionably "worked for the past 400 years" is something that will be put to question. What will also be examined is whether all the scenes from Shakespeare's play that are forcefully inserted into the narrative in the latter half serve as token nods to Shakespeare that are meant for these international audiences who will be able to recognise them unlike the Indian audiences of whom, Bhardwaj says, "many have not read [Shakespeare], and most have forgotten" (quoted in Kumar 2014). Connecting this to the trope of the salesman from the Introduction the chapter will finally examine the effect of the gaze of Mr. Buckingham's audience, as portrayed in *Shakespeare Wallah*, that affects his Othello performance in relation to the gaze of Vishal Bhardwaj's audience that affects his narrative too.

I

Kurzel's *Macbeth*

"Duncan's eyes softly FLUTTER OPEN", reads the script for *Macbeth* (2015), "taking in Macbeth above him. The daggers" (33). This is a stage direction that would be very tough to realize in theatre for the simple fact that the audience would not be able to see Duncan's expression while he is supine. In Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*, however, as the protagonist prepares to strike the sleeping Duncan the camera effortlessly closes up on the latter's face.

There is a total focus on Duncan while Macbeth is rendered irrelevant—somewhere outside the scope of the camera lens. And then Duncan's eyes softly flutter open: not in shock, or fear, or something similar—but in a chilling serenity. Seemingly petrified, Macbeth painstakingly advances his hand to prevent Duncan from screaming, but he need not have bothered: for it seems that Duncan does not intend to scream at all. He just lies there, fixing Macbeth with his serene, imperturbable—royal—gaze.

Fig. 6: Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) advances his hand in a mistaken expectation of Duncan's (David Thewlis) scream in *Macbeth* (dir. Justin Kurzel, 2015). Screenshot.

Kurzel's interpretation of Duncan picks up the elements and themes present within Shakespeare's play to illustrate a scene that the bard—for political or perhaps aesthetic reasons—decided to not stage. Perhaps, that is to say, an act of regicide could not be staged in Early Modern England or perhaps Shakespeare felt that the act made a greater impact if the details of its execution were left to the audience's imagination.[47] Perhaps, one might even imagine, Duncan had not been able to recognise Macbeth before he was murdered since this

[47] This is a contentious point since Shakespeare does stage (or at the very least narrate) regicide in the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet.* While the acceptability of the staging of regicide during Shakespeare's time remains contested recent research shows that staging regicide was definitely common by 1611 (five years after Macbeth was first performed). See Kristin M.S. Bezio, "Sudden Deaths": Regicide, Theatricality, and Anti-Absolutism in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy'*, *Early Modern Studies Journal,* 5 (2013): 57-76. Available Online: http://www.uta.edu/english/emsjournal/articles/bezio.html [Accessed: 8th October 2017].

is quite certainly what the play seems to indicate. For Macbeth enters Duncan's bedchamber without a torch and Shakespeare takes pains to illustrate that in 2.1 only Banquo and Fleance are carrying a torch ("Enter BANQUO, and FLEANCE bearing a torch before him") and that Macbeth enters with a servant carrying a torch ("Enter MACBETH, and a Servant with a torch") but later dispenses off that servant ("Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready, She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed" 31-33).[48] There is consequently a strong possibility that Shakespeare's Macbeth might feel guilt for killing Duncan, but in as much as the act was not observed by anyone—including most importantly the beacon of authority Duncan himself—he feels relatively less or no shame. Even if one takes the dichotomy between shame and guilt to be relativistic (considering the fact that shame tends to succeed the feeling of guilt), a large portion of Macbeth's lines arguably tilt more towards guilt than shame. As is evident in his monologues at 1.7 ("and pity, like a new-born babe"), 2.1 (thou sure and firm-set earth, /Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear /Thy very stones prate of my whereabout, /And take the present horror from the time, /Which now suits with it") where his guilt-ridden brain imagines not human but superhuman and inanimate terrestrial forces as being in-the-know about his deed.[49]

Kurzel's Duncan on the other hand is sleeping in a tent lit by a dim fire and does indeed get to see who kills him. The director then plays on this regicide-taboo so to speak to show the trauma that its breaking entails. Thereby pinning down Macbeth's mental instability

[48] Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth.* Penguin, 2016. All references to this edition including act, scene and line numbers are in brackets in the text.

[49] The feeling of guilt can also be identified in the following instances in the play: 1.4.58-60 ("Stars hide your fires!, let not light see my black and deep desires"), 1.7.12-14 ("First, as I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then, as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself"), 2.2.42-48 ("Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep"—the innocent sleep, / Sleep that knits up the raveled sleave of care"), 2.2.70-73 ("Whence is that knocking? / How is't with me when every noise appals me? / What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes. / Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red"), 3.4.48-51 ("Here had we now our country's honor roofed, / Were the graced person of our Banquo present, / Who may I rather challenge for unkindness / Than pity for mischance"), 3.4.162-164 (I am in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er), 4.1.93-94 ("that I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies, / And sleep in spite of thunder"), and 4.1.123 ("Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo. Down! / Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs").

in all the following acts to this single traumatic moment in the play where he is violently exposed to Duncan's gaze. For the imperturbable gaze itself bespeaks a self-fashioning, a "seizure of symbolic initiative", as Greenblatt would have put it. Yes, Duncan "may be crushed" but his silent "martyrdom," not murder or assassination, "will only confirm his construction of reality" (79).[50] Shakespeare's original audience might have been left to imagine how this deed was executed behind the curtain, but Kurzel's audience—which stands implicated in as much as it too is caught silently gazing at a regicide—must imagine something equally tremendous and daunting: what must be running through Duncan's and Macbeth's mind when they *both* accomplish this deed in complete awareness and a simultaneous silence?

Backtrack to 1971, where Roman Polanski's Duncan similarly opens his eyes, absorbs the situation, screams, and tries to escape. Unlike Kurzel's Duncan then Polanski's Duncan has given way to Macbeth's narrative, broken his own composure, his regal dignity, and let his shock show. Moreover, there is nothing left for the audience to imagine, everything is dictated out in the scene itself. In as much as the breaking of the regicide taboo is screened, and in as much as Duncan's response is bathetically *human* Polanski's decision to screen the regicide scene achieves a significantly different impact than Shakespeare's decision to not

[50] In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* Greenblatt initially examines the 'seizure of symbolic initiative' not in the context of a King but instead in the context of another 'murder' or 'execution' or 'martyrdom': that of the Lollard Sir John Oldcastle. He then connects it to William Thorpe before eventually connecting it to the symbolic appropriation involved in Elizabeth I's *self-fashioning*…something quite important for Duncan's cult of the monarch, the kind of kingship portrayed in *Macbeth* for a Jacobean audience, as well as for Duncan's self-fashioning that is discussed later: "The queen's power was linked with fictions in a more technical sense as well: her reign, according to Ernst Kantorowicz, witnessed the first major secular elaboration of the mystical legal fiction of 'the King's Two Bodies.' 'I am but one body, naturally considered,' Elizabeth declared in her accession speech, 'though by [God's] permission a Body Politic to govern.' When she ascended the throne, according to the crown lawyers, her very being was profoundly altered; in her mortal 'Body natural' was incarnated the immortal and infallible 'Body politic.' Her body of flesh would age and die, but the Body politic, as Plowden wrote, 'Is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies.' Her visible being was a hieroglyphic of the timeless corporate being with its absolute perfection, just as, in the words of Coke, 'a king's crown was a hieroglyphic of the laws.' She was a living representation of the immutable within time, a fiction of permanence. Through her, society achieved symbolic immortality and acted out the myth of a perfectly stable world, a world which replaces the flux of history" (167).

stage it and leave it to one's imagination (the latter can be seen faithfully adapted for cinema in Orson Welles' *Macbeth* 1948). Yet both of these effects are still markedly different from that achieved by Kurzel's Duncan with his serene and controlled response. This is something that makes one wonder whether Shakespeare did not stage Duncan's death in order to keep the play's focus on Macbeth. For Caesar's death is staged, in what might perhaps be the pivotal scene of *Julius Caesar*, and the titular character is not forgotten through the course of the play. "Appropriations", write Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin, "like translations, conjure different interpretive possibilities that already inhabit Shakespeare's texts. Far from reinforcing Shakespeare's self-unity, the process of appropriation attacks its illusion and reveals multiple Shakespeares, or to put it differently, a Shakespeare perpetually divided from itself"[51] (8). The varying interpretive possibility present within *Macbeth* proceeds from the question—deriving from Shakespeare's own oeuvre: why is it *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* and not *The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus* if in the case of Macbeth it is *The Tragedy of Macbeth* and not *The Tragedy of Duncan*? There are of course several aesthetic and political answers to this question but Kurzel's Duncan—in his refusal to give in to Macbeth's

[51] Huang and Rivlin delineate their choice to use the term 'appropriations' in addition to and sometimes in conjunction with the term 'adaptations' in detail in the Introduction to their book *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*. Their definition seems particularly apt for what eventually happens during the course of Bhardwaj's *Maqbool*—with relation to hybridity, self-fashioning and, of course, the appropriation of the narrative by Duncan. "In choosing appropriation" write Huang and Rivlin, "over adaptation, the most common alternative, we do not pretend that these two terms are mutually exclusive—indeed, the term adaptation appears in the introduction and several of the essays—but seek to highlight the active potential of appropriation and the openness of its forms, which encompass cultural deployments in addition to discrete works. Combining our three title words, the volume considers the following questions: What are some ways to describe and define the ethics of Shakespearean appropriation? How do ethics intersect with aesthetics, authority, and authenticity? What can the 'ethics of appropriation' add to the analysis of Shakespeare's afterlife?" (2). The parallels with hybridity are clear—in as much as Huang and Rivlin, like Diana Henderson, believe that "Shakespeare 'collaborates' with and intervenes in appropriations […] precisely because appropriation carries strong undertones of agency, potentially for the appropriated as well as for the appropriator it can convey political, cultural, and in our contention, ethical advocacy" (2).

narrative, in his unbroken self-fashioning, silent martyrdom, and in his seizure of the symbolic initiative—hits the nail right on the head. "Et tu Brute!" says Caesar appropriating the narrative of his own assassination as a willing martyrdom, "then fall Caesar" (3.1.84).[52] Just like Kurzel's Duncan, Shakespeare's Caesar too "may be crushed" but his silent "martyrdom" and not murder or assassination, "will only confirm his construction of reality" (Greenblatt 79). For both Macbeth and Brutus have been subjected to "the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control"—by Duncan and Caesar's self-fashioning, that is to say, which reciprocally also involves an "attempt to fashion other selves" (3). It is no wonder then that after stabbing Duncan more times than was necessary Kurzel's Macbeth lies down beside him, on the bed, foreshadowing his own fate as a King, before finally sinking down to the floor besides the bed, all disoriented, almost as if waiting to be discovered by someone. And when Malcolm does indeed discover him—still in Duncan's tent, a considerable time after the murder was committed—Macbeth lets him escape, consciously contributing to his own downfall.

Bound by "forms" of fidelity—based on what Linda Hutcheon calls "degrees of proximity to the 'original'" including, of course, an attempted fidelity to the playwright's perceived intentions as regards plot and characterisation—Kurzel's Duncan still has one thing in common with Polanski's and the bard's, namely that he has a measly allowance of 70 lines to make an impression on the audience (7). This is significantly less than Macbeth's (715 lines), a little more than someone as insignificant as the English Doctor (48 lines) and equal to Lennox's (70 lines). The impact of the assassination is then perhaps limited because of this constriction. If one was to then look for adaptations of Macbeth relatively free from the forms of fidelity to Shakespeare's play that set out to make use of this varying interpretive

[52] Shakespeare, William. Julius Caesar. Penguin, 2016. All references to this edition including act, scene and line numbers are in brackets in the text.

possibility present in the text one would have a tough time before one eventually ended up in translated Shakespeares. This should not perhaps come as a surprise considering Huang and Rivlin's argument, which this chapter had begun with, derives directly from Barbara Johnson's work in translation studies. Appropriations *like translations* conjure different interpretive possibilities that already inhabit Shakespeare's texts—the "stress [is] on translation's performative possibilities" which have "shifted" the "emphasis on fidelity" (8). Susan Bassnett makes the same point when she argues that "Shakespeare is the only named writer that English schoolchildren are required to study, and any attempts to modernize the language of the plays or any productions that appear too controversial are subject to harsh criticism. It is therefore much easier for directors working in languages other than English to experiment with Shakespeare's plays, because they are not bound by the canonical status attributed to the texts in English" (57).

What would the impact of Duncan's assassination be if his character was indeed developed without fidelity-driven restraints?[53] Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003) where Duncan's character is similarly empowered might give one a clue. Pankaj Kapoor, who plays the role of Jahangir Khan (Duncan) went ahead to win the Filmfare Award for Best Actor as well as the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actor for his performance. His role tries to re-establish the cult that a king would have had around him by certain tactically placed scenes that use language as a tool for self-fashioning. This cult, as will be examined later, is so powerful that, comparable to Maqbool (Macbeth), the audience too cannot *conceive* what killing Jahangir would be like: thereby allowing the film to recreate the regicide-taboo archetype in its full breath-taking force. The director then plays on this entire in-

[53] As explained in the Introduction, this ought not to be taken to mean that indebtedness to a source—through any recognisable trace of plot, characterisation or text—is bound to disable (rather than empower) any present-day creation. Instead, the methodology only criticises what it sees as the *forceful* preservation of certain elements of the plot or text of Shakespeare's play. Plot or textual elements, if retained at all, should rather be integrated within the narrative of the film in ways that contribute to its perceived internal cohesiveness.

conceivability related gaze dynamic during Duncan's assassination scene by making one aware of the one gaze—in all these adaptations—which has been quashed so thoroughly that its presence is almost undetectable: Macbeth's gaze. Maqbool shoots the sleeping Jahangir point blank but he is so ashamed of what he is doing that he cannot—must not—*conceive* a situation where Jahangir knows that it is Maqbool who killed him. He thus turns his head sideways and shuts his eyes while committing the deed. After firing the gun he turns to look at Jahangir who, after a momentary pause, opens his eyes and looks directly at Maqbool, before attempting to rise from the bed and falling down dead on its side. Crucially, though, he falls down dead with his eyes open: branding Maqbool with his blank gaze.

Fig. 7: Where Shakespeare decided to 'shut' the audience's eyes, so to speak, by not staging Duncan's assassination in Bhardwaj's adaptation the protagonist shuts his own eyes while shooting Jahangir. *Maqbool* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003). Screenshot.

To reiterate, it is not just the assassination scene that single-handedly delivers this impact, but it is primarily the entire build up to the said scene. Everything related to language: from the names of the characters, to their dialogues, their contemporary jokes, their relatable similes and metaphors work towards establishing the impact. Bhardwaj also teases on the audience's expectations—as well as the entire gaze-dynamic that is present in the assassination scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*—by means of a series of assassination scenes

that involve Duncan in one way or the other. This section thus explores these bold, yet credible, displacements that Bhardwaj manages to make to *Macbeth* thereby strongly realizing a varying interpretive possibility inherent within the text. Displacements that become credible precisely because they empower language to work in concordance with plot and character. A magnificent feat for a first-time Shakespeare director that does, however, end up in disarray because of certain scenes from *Macbeth* that Bhardwaj chooses to forcefully insert within the narrative out of what one could only read as a misplaced sense of loyalty to the bard. Particularly in the latter half of the film which, as discussed earlier, Lanier classifies as carefully paralleling *Macbeth* in plot, motifs, and character and which Rosenthal reads as structurally uneven. But which, as this chapter would try to show, proceeds from Bhardwaj's complex relationship to the unique fidelity discourse that surrounds an imperially co-opted author like Shakespeare. Bhardwaj's relationship, as discussed in greater detail in the Introduction, is firstly characterized by an enthusiastic and bold liberation from Shakespeare: by realizing the varying interpretive possibilities present within the texts whether it be in the reshaping of Duncan's character, or the reading of the caste problem that is inherently present in the race discourse in *Omkara* (2006), or the interpretation of Hamlet's madness and his consequent actions as terroristic in *Haider* (2014).

This, secondly, is followed by a narrative crisis point: Duncan's death, which robs the film of its drive; the colour-driven racialization of caste in *Omkara*, which ends up creating an ahistorical and incredible race-caste fusion that is essentially a non-issue in India; and an inadvertent endorsement of terrorism in *Haider* which the narrative of Hamlet as a terrorist was bound to lead to. The third and final step in Bhardwaj's work involves a resurgence of the Shakespeare text to neatly close the narrative instead of allowing the narrative crises to find their own denouement. In *Maqbool* this process starts immediately after Duncan's death which coincidentally happens exactly halfway through the film—the point from which

Rosenthal starts seeing the film as structurally imbalanced and from which Lanier starts seeing the close parallels with *Macbeth*. In *Omkara* this process involves a gradual phasing out of the race/caste muddle in order to focus on another theme from Shakespeare's play: that of misogyny. However, in *Haider*, Bhardwaj's final Shakespeare-trilogy film, the director does allow the crisis to carry on till the very end but eventually gives way to another authority—the Government of India—to denounce terrorism, endorse the subjugation of the Kashmiris, and neatly tie up the storyline. "When one authority or an alien is destroyed", one might observe here, à la Greenblatt, "another one takes its place" (9).

II

'Bollywood's' *Macbeth*

Before entering the examination of these phases in *Maqbool* though a quick summary of the displacements Bhardwaj has introduced in his film is necessary. Jahangir/Duncan and his brother Lalji are joint 'rulers' of the Mumbai underworld. Mughal (Macdonald), the leader of another gang, concocts a plan to assassinate them both.[54] Lalji is killed but Jahangir manages to escape after killing the ACP (Assistant Commissioner of Police) Maurya who had been sent to kill them both. The film opens after these episodes when two policemen Pundit and Purohit (the Witches) tease out Mughal's location from one of his associates and inform Maqbool of it. Maqbool consequently manages to find Mughal and kills him. Guddu (Fleance) is tasked with killing Boti (Macduff) who is Macdonald's son in this adaptation,

[54] Although not stated explicitly in the film itself the character of Mughal largely overlaps with that of Shakespeare's Macdonald. He appears in the tumult of the first few scenes—comparable to the reference to Macdonald in the play. He similarly collaborates with the Thane of Cawdor/Don of Bollywood to overthrow Duncan/Jahangir. There does however seem to be a phenomenon in Bhardwaj's films in general where one character acquires elements of multiple characters from Shakespeare's play. Mughal—in that sense—seems to have the uncanny ability to prophecy. So he does somewhat fill in the role of the third Witch as well who is otherwise missing from this play.

but he cannot make himself do it so he brings him to Jahangir who forgives him in return for the name of the spy in his own gang who had betrayed his location to Mughal. The spy turns out to be Jahangir's brother-in-law Asif—the Don of Bollywood (Thane of Cawdor).[55] Maqbool is consequently named the new Don of Bollywood (as was prophesized by Pundit and Purohit) and begins harbouring hopes of replacing Jahangir himself one day. Nimmi, Jahangir's concubine, is in love with Maqbool and, like Lady Macbeth, entices him to assassinate Jahangir. After the assassination there is a rift in the gang because the supporters of Kaka (Banquo) suspect that Maqbool killed Jahangir. Maqbool invites Kaka's gang for a reconciliation banquet but sends his assassins to kill them off en route. Kaka is killed but Guddu escapes. When Kaka's dead body is brought to the reconciliation banquet Maqbool imagines it opening its eyes and gazing at him, and slips into delirium before being calmed down by Nimmi. This and several other actions lead to the tide turning against Maqbool, and Guddu and Boti unite against him. Maqbool seeks assurances from Pundit and Purohit, like Macbeth does in the original play. They assure him that no harm will come to him until the sea itself reaches his house. But this eventually comes to pass when the coast guard investigates Maqbool's businesses and sends a cordon to arrest him. Maqbool escapes but is killed by Boti on his way to the hospital where Nimmi's child was birthed.

To begin with, one might notice a mix of Hindu and Muslim names that have been used here. Duncan is named after Jahangir (literally: the conqueror of the world) who was the fourth Mughal emperor of Early Modern India. He was the son of the emperor Akbar but revolted against him in 1599 in his impatience to come to power. His rebellion was, however, subdued by Akbar and he had to wait until 1605 to automatically inherit the throne. His eldest son Khusrau—who was Akbar's favourite to ascend the throne before his courtesans

[55] The Don of Bollywood is a position in Jahangir's Mafia empire for the person who collects the *haftas* (underworld taxes for protection) from film production studios. Pundit and Purohit (who stand for the witches) prophesize that this position will go to Maqbool in the same way as the position of the Thane of Cawdor is prophesized for Macbeth.

convinced him in favour of Jahangir—staged a coup against him in the first year of his reign but Jahangir managed to subdue it. Jahangir's rebellion against Akbar is widely regarded as setting the precedent of sons rebelling against their fathers during the course of the Mughal dynasty. It was not merely Khusrau who subsequently rebelled against Jahangir, but even his heir-apparent Khurram rebelled against him in the final years of his reign leading to a severe destabilization of the empire. Khurram did eventually ascend to the throne after Jahangir's death but he was, in turn, imprisoned by his son Aurangzeb during the final years of his reign.

The director plays on the historical resonances of these names through the course of the film. Macdonald, who seems to have been named 'Mughal' after the entire dynasty of Timur (Tamerlane) of which Jahangir was a part as well displays a veritable knowledge of how Jahangir's underworld dynasty would come to an end. When Maqbool asks him "Which one of us [the people in our gang] committed the betrayal" he refuses to divulge Asif/Thane of Cawdor's name and instead replies "you did" (06:20). This happens immediately after the scene where Pundit and Purohit (literally: 'learned man' and 'priest') determine that on Mumbai's horoscope scroll it is not the name of Jahangir that is written, but that of Maqbool.[56] Pundit and Purohit's names are again significant since they are Hindu names

[56] Pundit and Purohit are also policemen by profession and are always dressed in a uniform. While they prophesize events at various points in the play (coinciding with the points the Witches appear in *Macbeth*) they also curiously echo the Porter scene in the events leading up to the murder of Jahangir. It is unclear why Bhardwaj chose to replace the Witches with corrupt, clairvoyant policemen. Perhaps it was done to add more credibility in a realistic, film-noir adaptation that has no supernatural elements. Their ability to prophesize is not located in some grand, fantastical power that they possess but instead in their ability to read the horoscope (which a significant part of the Indian population considers credible). The fact that Pundit (learned man) and Purohit (priest) are Brahmins (Priest caste) also adds to the legitimacy of their readings of the horoscope. The choice to cast them as policemen in a film-noir can perhaps be located in the thorough knowledge of the rise and fall of mafia gangs that they seem to possess—they have been there before Jahangir, and they will continue to be there after Maqbool; and hence they can foretell how these gangs will rise and fall even without possessing any fantastical powers. However, it is important to note here that witchcraft was perceived negatively by Shakespeare's audience whereas astrology is perceived in a positive light by the Indian audience hence the effect achieved by the witches in the bard's play differs considerably from the effect achieved by the use of astrology (Levin 2016, and Ramachandran 2004). However, Bhardwaj integrates these changes coherently

which indicate that they belong to the upper castes. Their two trademark phrases which roughly translate as "controlling the raw power/balance of power" (शक्ति का संतुलन) and "the fire should constantly be afraid of water" (आग के लिए पानी का डर बना रहना चाहिए) represent the attitude of the fickle Hindu Rajputana rulers. These rulers would accede to the Mughal Empire in order to keep Jahangir's brutal ravaging of the Indian subcontinent under control, but would also keep seceding from the empire every time there was another succession crisis and the power of the Mughals was weak. Comparable to Shakespeare's Fleance, Guddu—who is promised the underworld's throne—heralds a change of dynasties. Like his father Kaka (Banquo)—who is a loyal supporter of the Muslim dominated Mumbai underworld—Guddu is Hindu and his eventual ascendancy signifies a shift of power from Muslims to Hindus in an underworld that has failed to catch up with the realities of post-Mughal India. Finally, the Assistant Commissioner of Police who killed Jahangir's brother is called Maurya. He seems to be named after the (Hindu) Maurya Empire which was the only empire in the subcontinent's history that was larger than the (Muslim) Mughal Empire.

The betrayal by the Don of Bollywood specifically triggers a wide range of significations. For in its beginnings Bollywood was not 'Hindi' cinema as it is widely regarded to be now but, in fact, Urdu cinema.[57] This is so precisely because of the enormous

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(perhaps by making the policemen corrupt and thus adding some negativity) and the overall effect that is achieved is quite commendable.

[57] Most of the celebrated dramatists of the Parsi Theatre, which eventually gave rise to Bollywood, wrote in Urdu. "Although Parsi theater used English initially and then Gujarati", writes Thakur, "[it] adopted Urdu/Hindustani for its productions keeping in mind its audience that largely comprised the working classes from the neighboring areas of the Grant Road Theatre. This explains the change of language from English to Gujarati and then to Urdu by an 'elite' theatre company named Parsi Elphinstone Dramatic Club (later transformed into a commercial company called the Elphinstone Theatrical Company), with Shakespeare as its most favored playwright" (25). Notable dramatists who wrote in Urdu include Narayan Prasad Betab who wrote the *Gorkshadhandha* (*Labyrinth*) which was based on *The Comedy of Errors* in 1909. Mehdi Hasan Ahsan who in 1905 wrote *Bhul Bhulaiyan* (Labyrinth) that was partly based on *The Comedy of Errors* and partly on *Twelfth Night* and was set in a Tatar country and again in a Muslim context.

cultural influence of more than 300 years of Mughal rule (when Persian was the court language, and Urdu the spoken language) on the largely Hindu country before it was supplanted by the British for around 150 years (when English became the official language). Turko-Persian art, literature, and music played a crucial role in the industry during its inceptive years and still play a conspicuously noticeable part till today partly because of a cultural lag and partly because of cultural hybridity. To this day most of the big names in the 'Hindi' Bollywood cinema (Shahrukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Salman Khan, Saif Ali Khan) are Muslims, and so is the star cast of this film with Irfaan Khan playing Maqbool and Tabu playing Nimmi.

The aforementioned betrayal by the Don of Bollywood which ultimately generates a series of events that lead to an economic shift of the underworld from Muslim rulers to Hindu ones is then symbolic of Bollywood's own historic self-betrayal—or what one might rephrase as the (originally Urdu) Bollywood's 'self-fashioning' as *Hindi* cinema. A slippage that is easy to achieve considering the only difference between Urdu and Hindi—languages that are mutually intelligible when spoken—is that of the script. And yet it is a slippage that is still noticeable precisely because Urdu—like Bollywood—adopts stronger Persian, Turkish and Arabic influences whereas Hindi's literary bonds and lexis are grounded more in Sanskrit.

Maqbool in fact makes a reference to this entire phenomenon of Bollywood's self-representation during a crucial scene where Pundit and Purohit mention the veteran Bollywood actor Dilip Kumar when they want to explain Jahangir's self-fashioning. Described by Satyajit Ray as "the ultimate method actor" (Chaudhury 2016)—in an industry which is otherwise dominated by the *rasa* method of acting (where the emotions are *conveyed* rather than *embodied* by the actor)—Dilip Kumar holds the record for the most

number of Best Actor wins in Bollywood,. His name is specifically brought up in this film to draw a linkage between his method acting—a complete emotional identification with the parts he plays—and Jahangir's building of an cult around himself by exactly the same means: 'to play the king' so to speak. Before, finally, both their performances are revealed to be hiding a deeper truth. For Bhardwaj's specific choice of Dilip Kumar as a reference point is bound to bring up the fact that Kumar not only method-acted his way to Bollywood's accolades but also, in the first place, acted his way into Bollywood itself. That is to say, when he entered the industry he adopted a Hindu sounding name 'Dilip Kumar' instead of keeping his Muslim name Muhammad Yusuf Khan and played primarily Hindu characters in his films. A fact that is underscored by Pakistan's claim to the iconic actor—and by default to the entire culturally appropriated industry of 'Hindi' Bollywood—when they awarded him the country's highest civilian honour Nishan-i-Imtiaz in 1997.

Similarly the deeper truth that lies beneath Jahangir's self-fashioning is revealed during his daughter Sameera's (Malcolm) wedding to Guddu (Fleance).[58] Kaka (Banquo) brings up Jahangir's brother Lalji in a conversation and Jahangir displays a veritable show of grief for his cruel death while blaming Pundit and Purohit (who are policemen by profession) as being members of a community that is fundamentally untrustworthy. Shortly afterwards, in

[58] Malcolm's sex is perhaps changed in this adaptation so that the bloodline of Banquo's sons intersects with Duncan's sons (in this case Duncan's daughter) when they marry thereby making the Witches' prophecy more credible for an Indian audience. The prophecy that "Banquo's sons shall be kings" presents a problem in Shakespeare's play where one might expect the rightful heirs to be Duncan's sons (the alternative argument regarding Shakespeare's portrayal of the Scottish monarchy as tanist, and not hierarchical, is contestable not least via textual evidence but also because of the fact that Duncan's great-grandfather ended the tanist mode of succession; see Michael J. C Echeruo, 'Tanistry, the 'Due of Birth' and Macbeth's Sin.' *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 23. No. 4. 1972 and also the catalogue entry on *The True Law of Free Monarchies* [https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-true-law-of-free-monarchies-by-king-james-vi-and-i]. Without the historical context of James I being descended from Banquo, that does seem to provide a sense of closure but that is a context which no modern adaptation can draw upon since no modern audience can be expected to know the uncorroborated lineage of a 17th century British monarch—the Witches' prophecy regarding Banquo's sons is rather counterproductive and confusing. In Kurzel's *Macbeth* too the director chooses to end the film with a set of scenes foiling Malcolm (brooding in the throne room) against Fleance (running into the smoke of the alight Birnam wood) to take into account the unfulfilled prophecy. There have also been numerous spin-offs of the unfinished Fleance storyline in pop-culture.

an aside with Maqbool, Pundit and Purohit exclaim that Dilip Kumar's career would have been in jeopardy if Jahangir had decided to take acting instead of being in the underworld. When Maqbool enquires why they subtly hint to him that it was under all probability Jahangir who killed Lalji since Lalji, ACP Maurya, and Jahangir were alone in the room where the murders happened and Jahangir was the only one who made it out alive. That there is a precedent for the act of succession via assassination in the family is perhaps one of the reasons Maqbool finally caves in to Nimmi/Lady Macbeth's plan to assassinate Jahangir.

III

Jahangir's *Macbeth*

This crucial plot-twist—midway through the film—comes as a surprise not only to Macbeth but to the audience as well. This is again a testimony to the powerful performance delivered by Jahangir that allows him to usurp *Macbeth*'s narrative as his own. Years later, before the release of his film *Haider,* when Bhardwaj was asked which actor—among all his films—had surprised him the most he replied that it was Kapur: "he took [Duncan's] role in *Maqbool* to another level. The small gestures he added to his performance, the little things he did, the way he got Abbaji's walk, he stunned me. Pankajji is the kind of actor who takes from your work, adds his own brilliance to it and shows how great your work is" (Singh 2014). Unlike Shakespeare's Duncan whom one encounter for the first time in a besieged situation where he exercises his power to punish the rogue Thane of Cawdor ("go pronounce his present death, And with his former title greet Macbeth" 1.2.63) the first time one encounters Jahangir is when he exercises his power to forgive Boti/Macduff ("it will take time for these wounds to heal" ज़ख्म भरने में समय तो लगेगा मिया 14:36). The setting itself is important as well since it takes place at Mughal/Macdonald's funeral which, to everyone's surprise, Jahangir chooses to attend. This ability to humble oneself by participating in the religious burial rites of his adversary—who he himself got assassinated in the first place—

and to simultaneously bring oneself to forgive the co-conspirator Boti shows how Machiavellian Jahangir can be.

That the question is of appearances—whether of power, remembrance, grief, or forgiveness—is something that is explored in a parallel scene later in the film during Jahangir's own funeral where Maqbool similarly displays grief for Jahangir in the presence of his 'courtiers' (the scene is the equivalent of the Banquet scene in Macbeth). During the course of the funeral Kaka/Banquo's dead body is brought before Maqbool by the police. Comparable to Macbeth, Maqbool is incapable of sustaining the appearances that are expected of him and thus a contrast is established between Jahangir's serenity and his ability to hold his narrative together as opposed to Maqbool's incompetence here. While Shakespeare's Macbeth sees a ghost of Banquo in the banquet scene, Maqbool on the other hand is presented with the actual body of Kaka by the police and, as he examines the features, he imagines Kaka's eyes opening and looking directly at him. It is a stark reminder of the gaze Jahangir had branded him with before dying and throws Maqbool into a delirium. What Shakespeare does choose not to stage in *Macbeth* but what is nevertheless understood—and also hinted in Lady Macbeth's speeches—is the reactions the courtiers would have had to the banquet scene. In *Maqbool*, immediately after the said scene, Boti—who had begged Jahangir for forgiveness during his father Mughal's funeral—is the one who now questions whether Maqbool's display of grief is genuine or not. Pundit and Purohit highlight the fact that just like Maqbool and Jahangir the courtiers too must keep up appearances in order for the "balance of power" to work. "Don't needlessly boil your blood" they tell Boti, "within themselves everyone knows [what Maqbool has done]" (1:31:45).

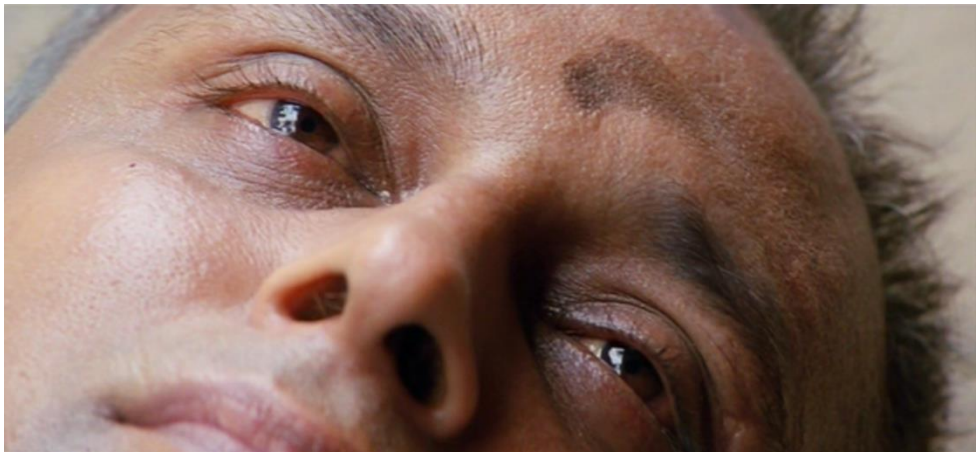

Fig. 8: The dead body of Kaka (Piyush Misra) opens its eyes to brand Maqbool with its gaze in *Maqbool* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003). Screenshot.

This question of appearances is again something that ties up neatly with the tensions that underpin Duncan's assassination scene in *Macbeth* since this question derives from the relativistic dichotomy of shame versus guilt. As discussed earlier there is a strong probability (as evident from the ending of 2.1) that Shakespeare's Duncan never even got to know who killed him—and hence while his Macbeth might feel guilt for his actions he perhaps feels little or no shame (as discussed earlier). Both Kurzel's and Bhardwaj's Duncans however are specifically depicted as dying with the knowledge of who killed them. And the significance of this knowledge is something that is developed on through the course of *Maqbool* by exploring the theme of shame. In one of the scenes preceding the assassination, the new Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Devsare issues an arrest warrant for Jahangir. In an unprecedented *display* of dominance he intercepts the latter's car on a crowded street and proceeds to arrest him. Maqbool tries to talk him out of it, and even tries to bribe him, at which point Devsare slaps Maqbool in front of all the onlookers. Jahangir, who had been calmly observing the proceedings till then, voluntarily lets himself be arrested. He is, of course, bailed out the next day and uses his political contacts at the Chief Minister's office to demote and transfer Devsare from the district.

Maqbool, however, is not satisfied, and feels that his shaming on the street needs to be repaid in kind. Kaka tells him that Bhosle, the Chief Minister of the State, would never

give them permission to hurt the Deputy Commissioner of Police and that the act would nevertheless lead to an all out war between the police and the underworld. At which point Maqbool loses his cool and bursts out saying "Then will Bhosle be ready to take a slap from me in the middle of a market" in order to satisfy the debt (तो फिर मेरा लाफा खाएगा बीच बाजार में भोंसले?). At this point Jahangir—who has been trimming his moustache while Maqbool and Kaka have been having this argument—calmly puts his mirror down, grabs Maqbool by the hand, escorts him outside to the street and, in the presence of onlookers, tells him: "Here, hit me. Hit me now!" before continuing, "let your fire burn out, because if it does not it will burn us all to ashes." (तेरी आग तो बुझे मिया वरना इस आग में हम सब जल के राख हो जायेंगे). Maqbool bends down in forgiveness and Jahangir explains "that slap did not land on your face, but on mine—Jahangir's—face" (वोह लपड़ आपके गाल पे नहीं, हमारे--जहांगीर--के गाल पर पड़ा था). This entire segment (32:00-35:17) serves to highlight the power of the factors of shame and loyalty thereby laying the framework for the assassination scene where both of these play a crucial role. The importance of appearances is paramount—whether by Devsare who brings a small battalion of police to arrest Jahangir or even in something as small as Jahangir's trimming of his moustache (a status-symbol) in front of a mirror while Maqbool fumes over his public-shaming.

Fig. 9: Jahangir (Pankaj Kapoor) trims his moustache while Maqbool (Irrfan Khan) fumes over his public shaming in *Maqbool* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003). Screenshot.

Jahangir also lands a crucial pun on the word "hit" during the course of this sequence which stands in stark contrast to the noticeable dearth of puns in Shakespeare's play. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for instance, was the first to note "the fact of the absence of any puns in Macbeth" in order for what he saw as Shakespeare's attempt to make the play "wholly and purely tragic" by avoiding any trivialities (157). The choice to freely translate Shakespeare's language, however, allows Bhardwaj to tap the resources of the Urdu language in order to empower the dialogue by the use of puns that, instead of trivializing the situation, heighten its ominousness. As in the following lines:

> **Jahangir**: Here, hit me. Hit me now!
>
> [**Maqbool** bends his head in shame]
>
> **Jahangir**: Let your fire burn out, because if it does not it will burn us all to ashes.

The pun here is on the word "hit" (मार/maar) which simultaneously can mean "to strike" and "to kill" thereby foreshadowing the events of the assassination scene. It is also a pun that recurs at various points in the film. In one instance Nimmi/Lady Macbeth tells Maqbool "you can die for me, can you also kill for me?" (मर सकते हो हमारे लिए, और मार भी सकते

हो?) (24:44). Here the pun is again on "मर/mar" (to die) and "मार/maar" (to kill). Similarly, to strike, to kill, and to die are three meanings that are again linked together to the trope of the gaze by Pundit and Purohit (The Witches) who use the euphemistic phrase "to encounter" (Latin: in front of) when they kill someone. 'Encounter killings', as discussed in the Introduction, were extra judicial killings conducted by Mumbai cops in the 90s in order to purge the city's underworld and usually involved planting weapons on suspects after shooting them in order to claim self-defence. This stands in contrast to the manner of Jahangir's assassination where Maqbool shuts his eyes so that he does not have to encounter the situation. And, finally, it foreshadows the two pivotal Encounters that happen in the film: the first, where Nimmi shoots Jahangir's bodyguard in self-defence after claiming that it was he who killed Jahangir. And the second, which will be discussed later, where Macduff/Boti shoots a defenceless Maqbool towards the end of the film even when the latter refuses to re-cognize/acknowledge the former.

In a similar manner Bhardwaj introduces a second tease regarding the assassination scene earlier in the film. The said sequence takes place between Jahangir and Asif (Thane of Cawdor) after the former has figured out that the latter was the one who betrayed him. The episode is nothing short of a private shaming of Asif where Jahangir goes through the photographs of the latter's wedding to his sister reminding him of the familial bonds that held them together. The camera then cuts in to Maqbool, Kaka, and Jahangir's bodyguard who are sitting in the room downstairs playing cards. All of a sudden they hear a shot ring out, they rush upstairs to find that, overwhelmed by shame, Asif has shot himself in front of Jahangir. The sense of shame, in this case, was so strong that even when presented with the opportunity Asif chose to kill himself rather than Jahangir. Scenes like this one thus contribute towards making the eventual assassination of Jahangir in-*conceivable* not only for Maqbool (who literally shuts his eyes while killing Jahangir) but for the audience as well.

The scene also serves to highlight the bonds that hold Jahangir's retinue together. Unlike Shakespeare's Duncan, who is arguably portrayed as a character with hierarchical claim, Jahangir has no hierarchical claim to the underworld. He is not literally a king and hence all the loyalty-inducing hegemonic power that the institution of monarchy carries with it—whether it be the Divine Right of Kings or any such form of political legitimacy—is not available to Jahangir. He must establish his power on other foundations. And in the manner of modern adaptations of *Macbeth* like *Men of Respect* (1990) or even to an extent *House of Cards* (1990/2013) this foundation is built on one of the basic hierarchical institutions of *alliance*—the family—that had underpinned monarchies.[59] Jahangir's purpose, in the aforementioned scene, where he is poring over the photographs of Asif/Thane of Cawdor's marriage to his sister is to remind the latter that they are, in fact, brothers-in-law. And that after her death she had left Asif with Jahangir as an "inheritance" or "heirloom" (the word used in the film is an Urdu adaptation of the Persian word amanat/امانت) (15:49). "An inheritance must not be something that brings the owner's world to an end", he concludes—a sentence that holds signification not only with respect to the Don of Bollywood but also with respect to the culturally appropriated industry of Bollywood—before tearing up the photographs (अमानत में ख़यामत नहीं होती मिया) (15:57). In the first scene of the film Pandit and Purothit (The Witches) highlight the same fact when they kill one of Mughal/Macdonald's men for breaking the rules of the game:

पंडित: धंदे का पहला उसूल याद है की भूल गया?

आदमी: फैमिली मेंबर को टारगेट नहीं करते साहिब.

[59] Foucault also speaks about "relations of alliance" (The History of Sexuality I, 110) and their "deployment." Later, as will be shown, it becomes evident that Nimmi disrupts the relations of alliance by deploying the relation of "sexuality." Contrary to Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) where the focus remains on the relations of alliance.

पुरोहित: क्यों उड़ाया अब्बाजी के भाई को फिर?

Pandit: What is the first rule of the game?

Man: That one does not target family members, sir.

Purohit: Then why did you kill Abbaji [Jahangir's] brother? (3:16)

Moreover, just like Pandit and Purohit here, everyone in the film addresses 'Jahangir' not by his name but instead as Abbaji/अब्बाजी ('respected father'). Maqbool is similarly addressed as Miyan/मियां throughout, an endearment that one uses only for male family members. And while one is made aware of Maqbool and Jahangir's real names through marginal characters (the first time Maqbool's name is taken it is by the Witches, and the first time Jahangir's name is uttered is by DCP Devsare when he produces the arrest warrant under the former's name) one is never made aware of the real name of Banquo—the film's most loyal character—since throughout the film he is only addressed as Kaka/काका or 'uncle.' This familialism of Jahangir's retinue is so thorough that *Maqbool* does indeed acquire some elements that make it more of a domestic tension *driven* political drama like *Hamlet*, rather than a political drama like *Macbeth*.

The relationship between Maqbool and Jahangir is hence built on similar grounds. And there are countless instances in the film where the latter emphasizes this point. In one instance, he tells his bodyguard, "this is Maqbool's house, I'm as safe here as in my mother's womb" (यह मकबूल का घर है, मा के पेट की तरह महफूज़) (1:11:23). Only people thoroughly familiar with Shakespeare's text would realize how Bhardwaj has rearranged elements from the phrase within Shakespeare's play "Macduff was from his mother's womb/ Untimely ripped" (5.8.15) to add additional re-cognitive and ominous value to this dialogue.

It is precisely because of dialogues like these—as the film progresses—that it does, in fact, become easy to forget that there is no actual familial connection between Maqbool and Jahangir. And Nimmi/Lady Macbeth—who is initially one of Jahangir's concubines in this film—seizes on this exact anomaly to drive home her point:

> **निम्मी**: किस मुहं से घर जायेंगे वापस...सब को मालूम है जहांगीर की रखेल है हम...नंगा कितना खिलौना लगता है...हमारे बाप की उम्र का होगा कम से कम.
>
> **मक़बूल**: मेरा बाप है वो. इस घर में मैं बच्चों की तरह पला हूँ, समझी?
>
> **निम्मी**: घर में तो कुत्ते भी पाले जाते है मियां.
>
> **Nimmi**: With what face will I be able to go back home [now that Jahangir has a new mistress]…everyone back home knows that we used to be his mistress…how disgusting he looks when he's nude…must be the age of my father at least.
>
> **Maqbool**: He *is* my father! He has brought me up like a child in this house, understand?
>
> **Nimmi**: Even dogs are brought up in a house, Miyan. (1:10:04)

Nimmi's attack on Maqbool's loyalty here is twofold. She firstly exposes the fact that there is indeed no familial connection between Maqbool and Jahangir just as there is no familial connection between the latter and his concubine. That while Maqbool might think that he has been brought up in Jahangir's house like a child, he is no better than a pet dog or even a rakhel/रखेल which is the Urdu word for a concubine but which also literally translates as "that which is kept." The point being that one might keep a dog, or a concubine, but that does not mean that one is related to them or that they are indispensable like a family member. Secondly, Nimmi also strips apart Jahangir's cult, and his self-fashioning, with a single phrase "he looks so disgusting when he is nude"—an image that is bound to strike home with

someone like Maqbool who is in love with her.[60] One might be reminded here of King Lear's phrase "thou art the thing itself" which he uses for naked Edgar on the heath (3.4.114). This is the moment, then, when Jahangir's similar regality is stripped apart and he is rendered human for Maqbool. Nimmi even dares to use Jahangir's real name in the aforementioned dialogue instead of addressing him with familial honorifics. And she finally strikes at the core of Jahangir's familial[61] self-fashioning when she sheds scorn on the respect people accord to him as a preserver of family ties and values—when they address him by the familial honorific (Abbaji/respected-father)—by highlighting that she is forced to please the desires of this same man who is almost of "the age of her father." Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth might have, among other things, based her argument on Macbeth's ambition; Kurosawa's Asaji/Lady Macbeth bases it on Washizu/Macbeth's fear that Yoshiaki/Banquo would reveal the prophecy to Tsuzuki/Duncan who might retaliate; but Bhardwaj's Nimmi uniquely channels her efforts into rendering Duncan/Jahangir human and fallible enough to portray his death as an unremarkable event to Maqbool. All three of these are of course varying interpretations of probabilities that are already present within Shakespeare's play, and the choice to emphasize one at the expense of the others allows the director to focus on a theme that innervates and works in concordance with the thematics of his film.

Maqbool and Nimmi have also been having this conversation at the place where goats are butchered for the upcoming wedding of Guddu (Fleance) and Sameera (Malcolm): the heirs who will indeed establish a legitimate familial relationship. Once Maqbool and Nimmi have left the scene the butchers begin the *halal* of a goat whose blood slowly trickles down the drains. The scene thus draws on the trope of the scapegoat. One is left wondering though

[60] For the overlaps between cult and 'self-fashioning' see footnote 49.

[61] Greenblatt maintains that the inheritance (or the absence of an inheritance) of "a title", "an ancient family tradition", or a "hierarchical status" that "might have rooted personal identity in the identity of a clan or caste" is one of the factors quite important for self-fashioning (9).

whether having this scene immediately after the aforementioned conversation between Nimmi and Maqbool ends up portraying Maqbool as a scapegoat—the ancient tragic hero—or whether it does not instead end up making Jahangir—whose death/sacrifice is being concocted here—the real scapegoat.[62] Nimmi holds no personal grudge against Jahangir—and nor does Maqbool—but they realize that Jahangir must be sacrificed in order for both of them to avoid *shame*—in Nimmi's case the shame of going back to her village where everyone knows she is a concubine, and in Maqbool's case the shame of "grovelling" (1:10:11) behind his subordinate Guddu once the latter becomes the new don. In fact Nimmi begins the aforementioned scene by putting a garland on the goat that needs to be sacrificed before retreating to a corner with Maqbool, putting another garland on herself, and saying "sacrifice me as well" (हमारी भी क़ुरबानी कर दो) (1:09:20). She does, also, crucially end the conversation with a similar ultimatum "you will have to kill one of us: me…or Jahangir" (किसी एक को मारना होगा तुम्हे: हम...या जहांगीर) (1:10:24). Unlike Shakespeare's Macbeth then where the protagonist and his wife had nothing to lose by not assassinating Duncan both in Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* and in Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* the protagonists are put in a position where they do have something to lose. This opens up the question, specifically in the case of *Maqbool*, whether the play is indeed not Jahangir's—the real scapegoat's—tragedy.

[62] Not all tragic heroes are necessarily scapegoats. See Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (2005). It is important hence to note here the difference between the ancient tragedy with a distinct ritual background and the modern tragedy, where the function of scapegoat is mostly absent. The symbol of a scapegoat may function in *Maqbool* but may not entirely work in *Macbeth*.

Fig. 10: Nimmi (Tabu) puts a garland on the sacrificial goat as Maqbool (Irrfan Khan) looks on in *Maqbool* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003). Screenshot.

Returning to Nimmi's assertion, though, one must agree that except for the familial connection between Asif/Thane of Cawdor and Jahangir who are indeed brothers-in-law the rest of the connections are, of course, false. And that it is Jahangir himself who severed the last true family connection he had (his brother) by clandestinely killing him to become the don himself. This lack of 'true' connections is something that is explored from the beginning of the film via the crucial character of Guddu (Fleance) who will eventually become the new ruler of the underworld after marrying Sameera (Malcom) and thereby making a legitimate familial alliance. When he is first introduced in the film it is in the context of shame: he feels ashamed to execute Boti/Macduff (who was one of the co-conspirators with Asif/Thane of Cawdor and Macdonald/Mughal) in front of his father Kaka/Banquo. "You are ashamed of shooting him in front of your father?" exclaims Kaka (मेरे सामने शर्म आएगी उसे गोली मारने में?) before he agrees to let Guddu carry out the execution by himself (5:03). When Guddu does arrive at the scene though he is unable to kill Boti because the latter's children are also present. He thus takes Boti to Jahangir so that he can ask for forgiveness instead of being executed. In *Macbeth*, one might recall, the killing of Macduff's children was the final act

that addressed the issue regarding the extinguishing of family lines that form the backbone of a monarchical institution: "the due of birth" as Shakespeare puts it (3.6.29). An issue that is omnipresent in the play from the point the Witches prophesize that Banquo's "children shall be kings" (1.3.89) which, in turn, makes Macbeth feel that he has a "fruitless crown" and a "barren sceptre" (3.1.66-67). In *Maqbool* the displaced scene where Guddu forgives Boti because of the presence of the latter's children seems to highlight once again the contrast between this scene and the parallel scene where Maqbool orders father and son—Kaka/Banquo and Guddu/Fleance—to be assassinated together.

Guddu's final act towards the preservation of family lines happens at the end of the film when instead of killing Maqbool's and Nimmi/Lady Macbeth's child he decides to raise it up as his own. An unexpected act of kindness which prompts Maqbool—who is lying in wait to kill Guddu—to drop his arms and his trademark shawl and quietly retreat. As he exits the hospital though, completely baffled, he walks past Boti without recognizing him. In a sense then he *encounters* Boti but does not actually *see* him. Boti shouts at Maqbool to stop and turn around but the latter pays no heed. In the end he still 'Encounters' or shoots the defenceless and uninterested Maqbool who despite being shot does not even have any desire—like Jahangir—to turn around to see who killed him. The camera becomes Maqbool's gaze at the point he is shot and one sees the world through his eyes: slowly turning red as he falls down, watching a bird hover in the skies, before fixating the gaze at the sky itself. Next, the camera shifts the perspective to focus on Maqbool's eyes as they gradually close in tranquillity. One might argue that there is no no desire—at this point—by the protagonist to see whether the prophecy was fulfilled or not or who indeed was the assailant who managed to fulfil the prophecy. Jahangir may have had an overwhelming desire to brand his assailant with his gaze, to not give up his self-fashioning even till his dying breath, but Maqbool—whose control over the narrative has progressively stuttered through the banquet scene and

beyond—by this point simply does not care. This is markedly different from the way in which Kurzel's Duncan had serenely cast his gaze on Macbeth, recognised his assailant, recognized what narrative he was going to become a part of, and then nevertheless refused to give up his self-fashioning till the very end. Coming back to the analogy that had been made to *Julius Caesar* at the beginning of this chapter: unlike Brutus who still manages to contest the position of the real protagonist of the play precisely by refusing to give up his self-fashioning till the very end by killing himself instead of being chained, "led in triumph/ Through the streets of Rome" (5.1.111), and giving in to Caesar's narrative, Maqbool has reached a point where he is no longer interested in shaping the narrative or even knowing who puts an end to it. And again in a complete inversion of Jahangir's assassination scene where the assailant was ashamed of being recognized, the assailant here, Boti, shouts at Maqbool to acknowledge/recognize him because his revenge is rendered fruitless if Maqbool does not acknowledge it. In this carefree death perhaps then Maqbool has finally overcome shame, but the manner of the death seriously puts to question his status as the protagonist of the narrative.

Fig. 11: The dead body of Mabool (Irrfan Khan) with its exhausted eyes finally closed in tranquillity in *Maqbool* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003). Screenshot.

On the other hand, and especially in light of the way the plot unfolds in the latter half of the film, one could argue that Maqbool dies all baffled and in such a clueless way, so to speak, because he is placed in a rather baffling position by the director. This will become more evident once the number of implausible plot twists he has been put through in order for him to be present at the hospital to be killed by Boti in the first place are examined. To comprehend this, one must first examine what is happening in the latter half of the film on a whole. As Douglas Lanier notes, the second half largely corresponds to the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (217). Maqbool/Macbeth is delusional at the banquet scene, Kaka/Banquo is murdered but Guddu/Fleance escapes, Maqbool seeks out the Pundit/Purohit/Witches for more prophesies, Nimmi/Lady Macbeth dies because of her trauma, the prophesies are met, and finally Boti/Macduff kills Maqbool. The characters moreover have not been reshaped in this part to accommodate the significant changes that Bhardwaj made to Duncan's character or the manner of the assassination, they largely correspond to the ones from Shakespeare's play. Consequently, as Rosenthal points out, the part does indeed come across as structurally imbalanced (123). This is compounded by Bhardwaj's need to cram in as much from Shakespeare's play as possible into these last 45 minutes. Something that is quite evident by the way in which individual scenes fade out into darkness before the next scene begins. Bhardwaj's need to accommodate as much from the 'original' work as possible is perhaps what causes him to be unable to find connecting elements between the scenes or the time to accommodate them and instead he chooses these swifter transitions that involve fading into black but that do, however, destroy the narrative momentum of the film.[63]

[63] Such an argument risks making the assumption that films, in some sort of necessary or normative way, abide by protocols of montage and time management that make pauses of the kind mentioned here irrelevant. Yet the use of these pauses in *Maqbool* seems to bear no conceivable relevance to the narrative of the film. On the other hand, the pauses conspicuously seem to connect a scene not there in Shakespeare's play with a scene in Shakespeare's play or vice-versa. The first such pause occurs after Duncan's murder…the scene that succeeds

One of these glaringly unnecessary additions is the adaptation of the Witches' last prophecy that Macbeth shall never vanquished be "till Birnam wood do come to Dunsinane" (4.1) which is reworked as 'till the sea itself comes to Maqbool's house.' Instead of the sea though the coast guard sends a small battalion of troops to Maqbool's house because his men are caught smuggling contraband. Yet this poses a logistical problem for the director because ironically for the prophecy to work *both* the sea *and Maqbool* must be in the latter's house. And it makes no sense for Maqbool—who by this point is wanted for the murders of Kaka, Jahangir and others—to be casually strolling about his own house in broad daylight…this is after all a house in contemporary Mumbai and not a fort in medieval Scotland. So in order to make the prophecy work Bhardwaj employs a series of ingenious plot-twists that involve Maqbool sneakily passing through police cordons in order to reach his house so that he can wait for the sea to reach his house (the official reason is that he came back to his house to collect his passport). That is however not the end of it since while a small battalion of the coast guard—representing the sea—does indeed reach his house Maqbool still has another prophecy to meet: namely that he will be killed by Boti/Macduff. So, of course, he miraculously runs into Pundit and Purohit who whisk him out of his own house—which, all this time, is surrounded by the coast guard—and drop him off at the hospital where he is eventually killed by Boti/Macduff who just happens to be making a visit there. It is perhaps then not so surprising, as pointed out earlier, that a baffled Maqbool passes by Boti without recognizing him—for a man who just passed through two police cordons and the coast guard must by this point, of course, be literally invisible.

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the pause involves a gang confrontation that is not there in Shakespeare's play. Another pause, at 1:36:56, moves from a scene that is not there in Shakespeare's play (Samira's anger at Maqbool) to a scene that is characteristic of *Macbeth* i.e. Lady Macbeth's delusions. The pause at 1:59:59 moreover entirely exists so that the prophecy (till Birnam wood come to Dunsinane) is fulfilled, this pause denotes a passage of time that is necessary so that the arrival of the Coast Guard fits into the time-sequence of the film while not compromising the time allotted to the extra-scriptural scene where Nimmi dies in Maqbool's arms.

Jahangir's death, moreover, is such a momentous occasion that it forcefully plunges the rest of the film into a gravitas from which there is no escape. Affected by Jahangir's powerful narrative then Bhardwaj too is unable to make the shift from tragedy to comedy like Shakespeare does in the Porter scene which immediately succeeds the assassination. Yet he still has an overwhelming need to stage the Porter scene—hence the said scene takes place right before Jahangir's assassination. Lasting barely a minute the scene shows Pundit and Purohit—who are policemen by profession—urinating behind Maqbool's house while muttering their trademark phrases "controlling of raw power" and "the fire should constantly be afraid of water" (1:15:20). Like Shakespeare's Porter they are both drunk and have problems urinating but except for these token references the scene does not really contribute to the narrative in any manner. On the other hand, in Shakespeare's play the Porter scene serves to cash in on the tension that has been accumulated in the audience after Duncan's assassination which has yet not been 'discovered' by the characters in the play itself. Hence the build-up of the suspense regarding this 'discovery' generates a tension that is periodically released in the form of nervous laughter at the Porter's black humour.

IV

Bhardwaj's *Macbeth*

The displacement of the Porter scene from after the assassination to before the assassination, as well as its insertion as a token reference that does not really contribute to the narrative, perhaps serves as the first indicator of a resurgence of the source work, so to speak, in *Maqbool*. And occurring, as it does, around the critical moment when Jahangir is assassinated it does make one wonder that perhaps it is Jahangir's death that causes a narrative crisis in the film which the director eventually resolves via a recourse to Shakespeare (whether it be in the implausible fulfilment of the prophecies, or the casual encounter between Boti and Maqbool that has been discussed earlier). Comparable to his

other Shakespeare adaptations that will be discuss in the succeeding chapters, the narrative crisis in this film—coupled up specifically with the gaze dynamic discussed earlier—opens up broader questions regarding Bhardwaj's Shakespeare salesmanship. Jahangir's gaze, and later the imagined gaze of Kaka, brands Maqbool and affects his subsequent attempts to regain control of the narrative in a manner that ironically replicates itself in the way Bhardwaj's narrative is affected by the real or imagined gaze of his international (Western) audiences—"I wanted to touch a chord with an international audience", he says, on being asked why he turned to adapting Shakespeare in the first place (Sen 2006).

This is so because comparable to Macbeth who could be read as a character who ends up assassinating Duncan in a surge of bravado ("vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself/ And falls on th' other" 1.7.27) Bhardwaj too liberates himself from the Shakespeare text in a surge of bravado—via his Duncan-character—before ultimately giving in to its authority to perhaps please his imagined audience. "Obviously, if I don't remain true to the spirit of the play, I'd be a fool", he observes, "that is what has worked for the past 400 years" (Sen 2006). Bhardwaj has clearly taken the hegemonic discourse of faithful Shakespeare adaptations 'doing well' in cinema for Western audiences at its face value. Failing thereby to take note of the questionable returns of the Shakespeare filmic productions of Laurence Olivier, Kenneth Branagh and others as demonstrated in the endnotes to the Introduction. Consequently, the Western audience Bhardwaj intends "to touch a chord with"—the audience that supposedly proves that being loyal to the spirit of the play works—does not arguably exist.

Furthermore, comparable to Duncan's gaze, the gaze of this imagined audience functions almost like what Jacques Lacan calls an "Ego-Ideal"—the "authority" whose gaze makes one become aware of being constantly "perceived", the authority which the self tries to "please", the Other that the self tries to unsuccessfully actualize, and that entices one to constantly aim better (Lacan 671). The "imperial gaze" of this Western audience hence

"corresponds to the 'gaze of the *grande-autre*' within which the identification, objectification and subjection of the subject are simultaneously enacted" (Ashcroft et al. 207). This recourse to Shakespeare by a forceful insertion of scenes—like the in-credible fulfilment of the prophecies or the chance encounter between Maqbool and Boti—does not contribute to the narrative but does indeed betray what Lacan would call the "loss" of a "degree of autonomy" upon Bhardwaj's realisation that he is a perceivable post-colonial entity, subject to the gaze of his international (Anglophone) audiences (73).[64] To link this issue of the imagined audiences to Greenblatt's self-fashioning, and to the cult, it is essential to return to Gauri Vishwanathan who had been discussed in the Introduction. She traces the issue back to colonial India and pins it down to the British "strategy" that recognized "the importance of self-representation" (380). What one could crudely term as the *Occidentalism* that surrounds Shakespeare's texts. "The strategy of locating authority in these texts", she writes, "all but effaced the sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance." Bhardwaj's unpleasable imagined audience is the inevitable result of this strategy:

> Making the Englishman known to the natives through the products of his mental labour served a valuable purpose in that it removed him from the plane of ongoing colonialist activity—of commercial operations, military expansion, administration of territories—and de-actualized and diffused his material presence in the process. In a crude reworking of the Cartesian axiom, production of thought defined the Englishman's true essence, overriding all other aspects of his identity—his personality, actions, behaviour. His material reality as a subjugator and alien ruler was dissolved in his mental output;

[64] In *Macbeth* the encounter between the protagonist and Macduff is not a chance encounter, but something that is credible once one take into account the setting (a battle). On the other hand, for Boti to merely run into Maqbool in a city of 18.4 million people seems rather incredible. This is further exacerbated by the fact that Maqbool is whisked into, and then out of, his house to be able to do so. To repeat, the chapter's concern with the fulfilment of the prophecies is not that Bhardwaj replaces Birnam wood and the army with the coast guard and the Arabian sea. This displacement is very credibly and coherently instituted in the film. The concern is that Maqbool is forcefully whisked into his house (by bypassing the coast guard's cordon) and then later whisked out of it (by again magically bypassing the coast guard) so that he can meet the second prophecy and be specifically killed by Boti/Macduff.

> the blurring of the man and his works effectively removed him from history. As the following statement suggests, the English literary text functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state: '[The Indians] daily converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their works, and form ideas, perhaps higher ideas of our nation than if their intercourse with it were of a more personal kind' (Trevelyan 1838: 176). The split between the material and the discursive practices of colonialism is nowhere sharper than in the progressive rarefaction of the rapacious, exploitative, and ruthless actor of history into the reflective subject of literature (Vishwanathan 380).

When it comes to Shakespeare film adaptations then the question is not merely of *the* fidelity discourse, but *a* fidelity discourse around a specific author whose authority was unimaginably magnified, and blurred with imperial power, during the Colonial Age. For today, barely 70 years after the collapse of the British Empire, perhaps because of a cultural lag, or perhaps because of the adoption of this strategy by Anglophone neo-colonial powers, Vishwanathan's point still holds firm. Bhardwaj's imagined audience comprises, after all, of nothing other than the "English literary text that [functions] as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state." This timeless audience of surrogate Englishmen is unpleasable not merely because it is by default the "best and the wisest" but also because, in as much as it does not really exist, it overrides—as Vishwanathan puts it—all material "commercial" or "administrative" concerns. Hence when the argument asserts that the "structurally imbalanced" narrative of the latter half of *Maqbool* is the result of a loss of autonomy effected by the gaze of his international audiences, it means to draw on the aforementioned discussion from the Introduction, and call attention to the real *or imagined* gaze of those real *or imagined* audiences—including the imagined audience of surrogate Englishmen.

The role of the gaze of this imagined audience takes one back to the traumatic moment in what one could see as the pivotal Shakespeare film of this thesis: *Shakespeare Wallah*. The moment occurs during Geoffrey Kendal's (who plays himself in this film)

particularly painful enactment of Desdemona's murder scene in front of an Indian audience. The camera cuts in on the scene where Mr. Buckingham (Kendal), in blackface as Othello, is reciting his soliloquy right before Desdemona's murder. When he reaches the third sentence of the soliloquy a Bollywood actress walks into one of the gallery seats. The effect caused by her presence is electric. Nearly everyone's gaze automatically shifts from the stage to her.

Fig. 12: The audience turns to look at Manjula, the Bollywood actress, *Shakespeare Wallah* (dir. James Ivory, 1965)

So much so that the audience's distraction penetrates the third wall and interrupts Mr. Buckingham's performance. Causing him, in his turn, to shift his gaze from Desdemona to the darkened halls of the audience. Except, of course, the floodlights prevent him from actually seeing the audience and he is left standing awkwardly on the stage, shielding his eyes from the blinding light:

Fig. 13: Mr. Bukingham shields his eyes from the floodlights,
Shakespeare Wallah (dir. James Ivory, 1965)

Not only is this an ironic reminder of the fact that he has never actually before this bothered to see (or perform for) his real, concrete, flesh-and-blood audience but it also brings to mind Plato's allegory of The Cave since here the imperial colonizer is himself blinded by the reality he had wrapped up in his discourses. [65] For it is only much later in the film that he *sees* that the audience his performances were meant for didn't really exist except in a discourse. And that with the loss of the Empire's material forces—which fostered this discourse and Shakespeare's consequent reception, appreciation, and celebration—it simply begins to die out in the market. "We should have gone home in 1947", he thus reflects towards the end of the film,

> "…when they all went. But we were so sure…we thought we always had our audience here in India…that they would always love us, and they did…they did…they always laughed at the right jokes, cried at the right places, the most wonderful audience in the world." (01:45:34)

[65] Irrespective of whether the director intended to make these connections or not there have been a large number of differing interpretations of the scene including, among others, by Nandi Bhatia (164) and Parmita Kapadia (55). This is one of the reasons why during the course of this thesis the argument explores the scene from three different perspectives to highlight the issues that are raised in different chapters.

The traumatic moment discussed earlier is crucial to Mr. Buckingham's awakening. For after being unable to see what exactly in the audience is causing the disruption he eventually loses his patience, gazes blankly into the audience, and rebukes them, breaking midway through the script ironically at the end of Othello's line which runs "If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,/ I can again thy former light restore." In what can be read as a frantic attempt to regain his own "former light"—that has similarly been "quench[ed]" in post-independence India by the mere presence of a Bollywood actress—Mr. Buckingham steps out of his role as Othello and bangs his scimitar on the edge of the stage. The camera closes up on his face at this moment to focus on the blank gaze of this imperial colonizer who furiously scolds the audience for their incivility and philistinism with the phrase "when you're quiet, we'll continue" (01:31:01-48).

Fig. 14: "When you're quiet, we'll continue"
Geoffrey Kendal as Othello in blackface, *Shakespeare Wallah* (dir. James Ivory, 1965)

Most of the audience members immediately sober up, an act which ends up plunging the theatre into an eerie silence that is painfully broken by a giggle from the Bollywood actress as Mr. Buckingham steps back into his role. In what can be read as perhaps the most concrete cinematic representation of Homi Bhabha's concept of 'sly civility' the stray giggle is a slippage that betrays the fact that the audience too, all this time, has been

performing…performing their interest, performing being a good audience, and performing their appreciation of this Shakespeare missionary's 'universal' authoritative text. And most unlike Kurzel or Bhardwaj's Duncans who had refused to give in to Macbeth's narrative till the very end Mr. Buckingham—by stepping out of his role—by giving up his hegemonic power with a direct show of coercive force has given in to the audience's narrative. He has, quite simply, acknowledged that the audience's interest is a performance. And he might of course step back into his role as an actor or Othello or the imperial colonizer or all three but the spell and the Macbethian-regicide-taboo equivalent here has already been broken. There is really no going back. Highlighted particularly by the fact that when Mr. Buckingham backtracks a couple of lines and tries to begin again he ironically ends up at the phrase *put out the light*. "Put out the light", he thus says as Othello, "put out the light," he repeats, with a resignation that begs for an end to the crumbling Shakespeare phenomenon of his time.[66]

This scene from *Shakespeare Wallah* does then, in fact, throw light on the core issue of *performance*. Reiterations of *Macbeth*, without any significant changes, progressively entrench the authority of Shakespeare's work. On the other hand deviations, distortions, and explorations of the "alternative interpretive possibilities" already present within the text (like Bhardwaj does in the first half of his film) performativity dilute the bard's authority. Challenging the narrative of Macbeth that Shakespeare presents, and via that move exposing it for what it is—a narrative—is what *Maqbool* really achieves. For there are, of course, several ways of telling the story of Macbeth: whether in Holinshed's *Chronicles* where, as Greenblatt puts it, "Duncan is a relatively young and feeble ruler, and Macbeth, having

[66] Mr. Buckingham's Othello-character lines have been interpreted in many ways by critics, for one interpretation that differs from ours see Kapadia (55-56). She writes "we hear Othello say, 'If I quench thee thou flaming minister / I can again thy former light restore,' but the words now apply to Manjula's literal disruption of the production and metaphorical destruction of the theatre (V, ii, 8–9). Whereas Othello believed that killing Desdemona would her 'former light restore,' Manjula acts to 'quench' the romance between Lizzie and Sanju" (55).

dispatched him, goes on to reign brilliantly for ten years" (Greenblatt 2008, 2569). This is something that gets adapted by Shakespeare into a play where Duncan serves as an old, virtuous, and noble foil to the upstart, ignoble, and sinful protagonist Macbeth. And finally in Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* where Duncan is old, yet cunning, effective and powerful…serving as a foil to Maqbool who eventually turns out to be ineffective and only capable of bravado. Understanding the narratives of these stories—the characters and self-fashioning*s* they choose to empower and disempower—opens up broader questions regarding whose eyes these narratives are meant for. Holinshed's—for perhaps the 'neutral' gaze of the historian. Shakespeare's—for the gaze of James I who claimed descent from Macbeth's foil Banquo. And Bhardwaj's—for the gaze of a post-colonial Indian audience? Or perhaps for the gaze of a post-colonial Western (international) audience? The narratives of these versions of King Macbeth's story—whether they be Duncan's *Macbeth* or Macbeth's *Macbeth*—thus, all of them, fit into a larger historical or political narrative once one takes into account the audiences they are meant for. And whether or not they fit into these greater narratives in their service or disservice is a question that is essential to the study of adaptations. "To scrutinize the communities a new appropriation builds", as Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin aptly put it, "as well as what or who is excluded from them, is to keep our sights trained on the broader human stakes" (17).

Chapter II

A Hybrid Othello

The approach taken by Vishal Bhardwaj to adapting *Othello* for Indian cinema seems, at first glance, straightforward: in his film *Omkara* he substitutes caste for race, so that Othello is of a lower caste than Desdemona, setting the scene for the tragedy. As the film progresses, however, one realizes that in addition to being of a higher caste, Desdemona's skin is lighter than Othello's—a fact that could be dismissed as coincidental (caste, after all, has nothing to do with the visual markers of race) were it not for the fact that it gradually becomes apparent that a lighter skin tone is shared by the Duke, Iago, and Cassio[67]. Once this

Fig. 15: Ajay Devgan as Omkara and Kareena Kapoor as Dolly in *Omkara* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2006).

has been realized, the film's strong colour hierarchy, mapped as it is onto caste hierarchy, is inescapably apparent.[68] Given colour's longstanding prevalence in adaptations of *Othello*, it

[67] Through the course of this paper colour is taken as being just one of the markers of race. A marker that is emphasised upon in Shakespeare's play (see footnote 74 for a detailed analysis).

[68] A recent study titled 'Genotype-Phenotype Study of the Middle Gangetic Plain in India Shows Association of rs2470102 with Skin Pigmentation' published in the Journal of Investigative Dermatology "suggests" that the social structure defined by the caste system in India has a "profound influence" on the "skin pigmentation patterns of the subcontinent." The study however only takes into account a cohort of "1,167 individuals" from

should not be surprising that the colour hierarchy evidenced in Bhardwaj's film has been overlooked in criticism. Alfredo Modenessi, for example, confuses caste and race completely, at times even using them interchangeably:

> Omkara is identified as a "half-caste," and his *racial* status contributes to the spite that [Brabantio], the [Duke's] lawyer […], feels for him.
>
> […]
>
> despite the evident concern that Omkara is defined as a "half-caste" may cause among Indian viewers, his *racial* status does not seem to bear overly on what brings about the film's fatal ending. (4) [emphases added]

It is, however, Omkara's *caste* status that irks Raghunath (Brabantio), and not his "racial status." Nor is Omkara (Othello) referred to as "half-caste" during the course of the film, where he is described instead as "half-priest" (आधा-ब्राह्मण). The difference between

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15 districts in the lower half of the "the Middle Gangetic Plain" which essentially comprises an area of 130,695 km² out of the 3.287 million km² total area of India (less than 3%). The conclusion derived is further limited by the fact that the researchers "found that the social category and associated SNPs [Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms] explain 32% and 6.4%, respectively, accounting for a total of 38.4% of the variability in skin pigmentation. Of the 32% of phenotypic variance explained by the social category, 37.4% is due to variation in pigmentation among the social categories (akin to 11.97% of the total variability)." In short, only 11.97% of pigmentation variation in the cohort taken into examination is seen due to the "social category" factor. The majority 88.03%, the study acknowledges, is due to the widely accepted "UVR [ultra violet ray]-based selection model." The results are further compromised by the definition of "social category" used here. They write that "the comparison of skin colour measurements among the four social categories (general, scheduled caste, other backward classes, and religious group) assessed in this study indicates that the general category (traditionally comprising of the upper and middle castes in the caste system) shows the lowest average MI." The phrase "traditionally comprising" used here is problematic, and not just because it betrays the fact that this is no longer true in modern India. In other words, these results are not strictly based on the caste that people belong to but instead on modern "social" (class, caste, and religion based) categories "General", "SC" (Scheduled Castes), "OBC" (Other Backward Classes) and "RG" (Religious Groups). In these categories caste related overlaps are widespread since many people who have climbed up the social ladder do not declare their caste and since the Other Backward Classes category, like the General category, is constantly changing because castes and communities can be added or removed from it depending on the political climate in the country, and on social, educational, and economic factors. The recent (2015) Patidar reservation agitation for inclusion in the OBC being a case in point. As will be shown in the section of the chapter which deals with the history of the religious and scientific imposition of racial features onto caste such attempts have by and large been dismissed, culminating with the Government of India's decision to not bring up caste-discrimination in the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban.

the two terms is crucial since the first implies that Omkara is half-outcaste whereas the second implies that he is within the caste system but a mixture of the Priest caste and a lower caste. Modenessi's confusion might perhaps be attributed to the fact that the colour hierarchy has been mapped so thoroughly onto the caste hierarchy in the film and its foreign language subtitles that, to 'non-Indian eyes' at least, caste and race might indeed seem interchangeable. This, in turn, is followed by criticism that is technically correct in terms of caste but nevertheless remains colourblind, flirting with the question of Omkara's skin colour without ever directly addressing it. Susanne Gruss for instance notes how Omkara is characteristically a "dark and brooding hero" (230) while ignoring how he is literally a dark-skinned hero. Then there are critics who recognize that Omkara and Dolly have a markable colour contrast, but negate its significance nevertheless. Lalita Pandit Hogan even goes as far as discussing the extent to which Omkara's darker skin alludes to the dark skinned figures in the Hindu mythic corpus while simultaneously overlooking the implications it has within the dynamics of the film itself. "Ajay Devgan (the actor who plays Omkara) is black", she duly acknowledges, "and Kareena Kapoor (who plays Dolly/Desdemona) has a near-white complexion" before arguing that this seeming coincidence merely helps in preserving the "colour motif" of Shakespeare's play while maintaining that *Omkara*, as a film, "is not concerned with the race issue" (54). In contrast, lastly, there is Poonam Trivedi who refuses to acknowledge the presence of this colour motif in its entirety and maintains that Omkara is "not very dark skinned" (346).

This chapter would instead try to suggest that it is perhaps what Linda Hutcheon calls the "fidelity discourse" (4) driven instinct to preserve the 'colour motif' of Shakespeare's play that accidentally ends up *racializing* an institution like caste in this film. The haphazard allusions to Hindu mythology further end up buttressing the racialization of caste by creating the illusion of a history which validates colour mapping onto caste. Moreover, the drive to

preserve this 'colour motif' originates perhaps from the drive to preserve the language of Shakespeare's text and is hence possibly a problem of an attempt at translation that is haunted by a fidelity discourse, which is to say, a discourse that places primacy on fidelity to Shakespeare's 'original' text and sets this fidelity as a benchmark for the value of an adaptation. To bring such a charge against Vishal Bhardwaj—a director who has perhaps shown the most audacious irreverence towards the 'original' Shakespeare text in his works—would at first indeed seem a bit odd. However, one might argue that it is precisely in the films of someone like Bhardwaj that the deeper issues of the fidelity discourse—issues beyond the overtly evident factors of language, or setting, or even plot—can be sufficiently explored.[69] In order to substantiate this point, the argument will first trawl through a brief history of blackface Othellos on screen, which will be followed by an examination of the adaptations of the play in Indian cinema. This, in turn, will be succeeded by an analysis of the caste/colour conflation in *Omkara* along with its reception by Indian and Western audiences.

Omkara of course is not the first film to try to replace something else for the race issue in *Othello*. Nor is it productive to assume that the race issue is essential to *Othello* and hence to any adaptation of it. Instead, as Thomas Cartelli argues, what one sees in the play is the acute manifestation of an anthropological complex. For "Othello", he writes, "has not only failed to unsettle or dislodge established racial stereotypes but has played a formative role in shaping them" (123). He shapes them, as Stephen Greenblatt argues, by a constant self-construction or fashioning that bespeaks his "submission to narrativity" as much as his submission to stereotypes (237). On a whole this "Othello complex", in the words of Cartelli,

[69] As stated in the Introduction the aim of the thesis, on a whole, is to examine, appreciate and do justice to the unique set of complexities and problems that Bhardwaj's method of adaptation produces. To accord space to this, the argument of this thesis does not seek to repeat an analysis of the transpositions (including transpositions into a mafia local/political film-noir) or character/plot differentiations that Bhardwaj employs (these have amply been discussed in previous literature on the film). Instead, the argument looks specifically at particular, unaddressed inconsistencies in these transpositions (like the glaring inconsistency regarding caste), relates them to the narrative crises in all three films, and tries to do justice to their uniqueness and complexity.

"functions as an 'anthropologized' racial construction in which the 'assimilated savage' predictably 'relapses into primitivism under stress'" (123). For internalized racism is evident in various instances of his incessant construction of self-exoticizing narratives whether it be "a round unvarnish'd tale…/ Of my whole course of love" (1.3.90-91) or his colourful "travels' history" (1.2.142).[70] So much so that as fond as he is of telling tales (ranging from his productive concision in 1.2, his eloquence in 1.3 all the way to his deranged logorrhea in 3) Othello, the 'subaltern'—endowed as he is with "rhetorical extremism" (Greenblatt 235)—does not actually ever manage to 'speak' during the course of the play. Greenblatt demonstrates this quite aptly in his examination of Othello's storytelling in front of the Senate:

> So too Othello before the Senate or earlier in Brabantio's house responds to questioning with what he calls his "travel's history" or, in the Folio reading, as if noting the genre, his "traveler's history." This history, it should be noted, is not only of events in distant lands and among strange peoples: "I ran it through," Othello declares, from childhood "To the very moment that he bade me tell it." We are on the brink of a Borges-like narrative that is forever constituting itself out of the materials of the present instant, a narrative in which the storyteller is constantly swallowed up by the story. That is, Othello is pressing up against the condition of all discursive representations of identity. He comes dangerously close to recognizing his status as a text, and it is precisely this recognition that the play as a whole will reveal to be insupportable. But, at this point, Othello is still convinced that the text is his own, and he imagines only that he is recounting a lover's performance (237-38).

By examining the narrative of *Omkara* and the responses to it this chapter will question whether Bhardwaj's narrative, moulded by the expectations of his international audiences, also reaches a point, comparable to Othello's, where one can no longer be sure whether the "text is his own" or not. "To what extent" ask Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin "do non-Western Shakespeare productions act as fetishized commodities in the global

[70] Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. E. A. J. Honigmann, ed. London: Methuen, 1996. All references to this edition including act, scene and line numbers are in brackets in the text.

marketplace?" (1). Desdemona's, as well as the Senate's, consumption of Othello's stories ("and with a greedy ear / devour up my discourse" 1.3.149) might provide one with an apt analogical answer.

I

White Skin, Black Masks

Orson Welles' *Othello* (1951) arguably comes close to being the first screen production which ends up focusing more on the so called 'Othello complex' than on Othello's race as such. Unlike theatrical performances where a white actor could be cast in the role of Othello in blackface, early black-and-white films faced some difficulty in articulating the said contrast between a white-actor-cast-as-black and other white actors because of the amount of lighting required to illuminate the set that would, inevitably, destroy the darkening effect achieved by the makeup. Consequently, Welles—who cast himself as Othello in his production—is racially indistinguishable from other actors including Desdemona through a majority of the scenes of the film:

Fig. 16: Orson Welles and Suzanne Cloutier in *Othello* (dir. Orson Welles, 1951). Screenshot.

So much so that the race issue, at least through its visual markers of colour, seems to have been obfuscated in the production. Opinions on the extent to which this was intentionally done by Welles vary from Deborah Cartmell merely stating that "race is hardly perceptible in

Welles' film" (145) to others, like Peter Donaldson, taking it further by contesting that the film consciously and "consistently underplays any sense of racial difference" (97).

There is not, however, any concrete agreement as to what replaces the racial difference between Othello and Desdemona. Age and beauty seem to haphazardly emerge as the top contestants in a battle that is quite frankly won by a process of elimination rather than that of merit. Once put together with the anxieties inherent in the play and the film-noir ambience of the production, both age and beauty combine to fashion Suzanne Cloutier's Desdemona as the typical Wellesian femme fatale, trapped in a marriage to a man heavily mismatched to her in either aspect and plotting an escape à la Rita Hayworth in the *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947). Welles' fidelity to Shakespeare's work, however, significantly weakens this manifestation of an 'Othello complex' with respect to age and beauty. For literal inclusion of scenes like the following from Shakespeare's text is detrimental to any multidimensional characterization of Desdemona as a femme fatale:

> **DESDEMONA**: I have heard it said so. O, these men, these men!
> Dost thou in conscience think,--tell me, Emilia,--
> That there be women do abuse their husbands
> In such gross kind?
> **EMILIA**: There be some such, no question.
> **DESDEMONA**: Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?
> **EMILIA**: Why, would not you?
> **DESDEMONA**: No, by this heavenly light! (4.3.45-51).

Owing to budget deficiencies it took Welles around three years (1949-51) to shoot the film. Years which, incidentally, coincided with the advent of Eastmancolour in cinema that heralded the widespread commercial production of colour films in the 1950s (Merritt 1). As ironic as it sounds then this last notable black-and-white production of *Othello* ended up deemphasizing race precisely because of a lack of technology; and right before the advent of colour in cinema reemphasized race once again. For three years later the next significant adaptation of *Othello* directed by Sergei Yutkevich who similarly went on to win the Best Director at the Cannes stars Sergei Bondarchuk as Othello in blackface. In ways more than

one Bondarchuk prefigures Lawrence Olivier's Othello who, in a complete reversal of Frantz Fanon's Black-Skin-White-Masks metaphor, wanted to fashion a black self or as he himself puts it wanted to be "Black…I had to be *black*. I had to feel black down to my soul. I had to look out from a black man's world" (Little 95). So much so that his makeup comically ended up smudging Maggie Smith's Desdemona's face towards the end of the film.

Fig. 17: Sergei Bondarchuk as *Othello* in blackface, *Othello* (dir. Sergei Yutkevich 1955). Screenshot.

Fig. 18: Laurence Olivier as Othello in blackface, *Othello* (dir. Laurence Olivier 1965). Screenshot.

One of the observations made about all these blackface Othellos is that the makeup hardly ever manages to hide their unmistakable racial features. Nicholas Jones, for instance, remarks on Welles's Othello's "unmistakably Caucasian nose" as a case in point (10). For despite everything darker skin does not, in fact, make them look black. It does, at the most, make them look like the South Asian branch of the Caucasoid race. In short: it makes them look Indian. Whether or not *Omkara* as a film does indeed preserve the "colour motif"

(Hogan 54) is definitely up for debate, but Ajay Devgan's Othello nevertheless most ironically ends up channeling the history of blackface Othellos.

Fig. 19: Ajay Devgan as Othello in *Omkara* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj 2006). Screenshot.

Black Othellos on stage preceded screen in this regard and it wasn't until 1962 though that a black actor (Paul Harris) was first cast as Othello in *All Night Long,* a modern reworking of *Othello.* This was followed by a string of adaptations that reemphasized race by casting black actors in the lead role including *Catch My Soul* (1974) and *Othello* (1995) starring Richie Havens and Laurence Fishburne as Othello respectively. With the exception perhaps of a little noted but critically acclaimed film *Jubal* (1956) which transposed *Othello* into a Western setting with an all-white cast replacing the race-issue purely with an emphasis on jealousy, sexuality and misogyny. With its inaccurate and consequently at times unbelievable representation of caste *Omkara* too, as would be shown later, ends up nullifying the caste (and race) issues. Unlike *Jubal* however, where this nullification is done intentionally in order to cast Mae/Desdemona—comparable to Welles' Desdemona—as a

femme fatale, in *Omkara* this is not the case.[71] Irrespective of intent both films nevertheless end up, as Ania Loomba puts it of productions of *Othello* that "erase the racial politics", "flatten[ing] [the play] into a disturbingly misogynist text" (161).

Nor is *Omkara* the first film to replace the issue of colour with that of caste specifically. Jayaraj Nair's Malayalam film *Kaliyattam* (The Play of God) which was released in 1997, almost a decade before *Omkara,* has Kannan (Othello) as belonging to the lower caste and Thamara (Desdemona) as belonging to a higher one. As the film's title (The Play of God) suggests it too, like *Omkara*, abounds with religious metaphors and references. These allusions however have a tighter grasp on the drama because they are integrated through a thematically central element of ritualistic dance. Kannan is a performer of the Theyyam, a ceremonial dance that also serves as a form of worship for the lower caste communities of the southern Indian state of Kerala. His talent earns him the role of the goddess Chamundi in the performance and he is as valued by the village elders as Othello is by the Venetians for his military skills since performing the Theyyam supposedly brings good fortune to the village. The first time he appears on the set in the context of Desdemona's abduction he is dressed as the goddess Chamundi thereby channeling divine sanction to his conduct; a sanction that is constantly underscored by the taunting reference to him as "*devi*" (goddess) by Brabantio (24:45).

Unlike *Omkara* however *Kaliyattam* does not intermix colour with caste with it's use of colour: all the actors present in the film are dark-skinned. The director still seems to playfully hint at the history of blackface Othellos though because the first time Kannan

[71] For a detailed analysis of *Jubal* see Howard, Tony. 'Shakespeare's cinematic offshoots' in Jackson, Russel (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film* (2000): 295-313.

appears on the set his skin-colour causes the customary Othello's-first-appearance shock not because the actor is in blackface but because he is in *orangeface*:

Fig. 20: Suresh Gopi (left) as Othello in *Kaliyattam* (dir. Jayaraj, 1997). Screenshot.

Kannan sports this makeup and headdress because he has just finished performing the Theyyam. The scene nevertheless manages to highlight the extent to which painting the face can create the illusion of a mask. Something that holds true not only for Gopi's Othello but equally for Welles's, Bondarchuk's, Olivier's and even Shakespeare's blackface Othellos. "[Othello's] role", Michael Bristol acknowledges, "must have been written not for a black actor, but with the idea of black makeup or a false face of some kind" (185). Using her analysis of the performance of 'blackness' on the English Stage from the 1500s to the 1800s Virginia Mason Vaughan similarly defends what she terms as Laurence Olivier's "masterful impersonation" in blackface (102). The point being that one sees a black Othello, and one allow that illusion to persist, but at the same time we one is always aware that the actor is white. All of these blatantly counterfeit Othellos then add an alternative dimension to the character which has arguably been consistently present in the performances of the play all the way till the first notable performance of the role done by a black actor (Paul Robeson) which put an end to it.

For “modes of older drama” like false faces and masks establish the primary function, as Raymond Williams puts it, of “symbolic abstraction.” They introduce the “alternative” dimensions “of the mysterious, the inexplicable and the ungraspable” thereby adding a “metaphysical dimension” to the characterization (80). A white actor only symbolically (but not credibly) represented as black then causes an abstraction which enables the tragedy to become universal and not particular to a specific race. Moreover, it enables the drama to focus on “the inexplicable forces which at a level ‘much deeper than society,’” or indeed much deeper than skin-colour, “determine human lives, and are graspable only as symbols, in dramatic or some other artistic forms” (81). Pascale Aebischer elaborates on the same issue from a different angle when she considers, in a manner comparable to Vaughan’s, whether or not Othello ought to be played by a black actor in the first place. She queries whether Oliver Parker’s *Othello* (1995) “naturalizes racial inferiority […] by showing it as embodied, not performed” (150) thereby lending force to Poromita Chakraborty’s assertion, which she quotes earlier, that "while a white actor can be thought able to represent Othello's blackness, a black or Asiatic actor is considered capable only of demonstrating his own negritude” (110).[72]

Kannan’s orangeface inevitably ends up channeling this particular aspect of the blackface which has been erased from all performances of *Othello* that have black actors in the lead. Through the course of the film the potential of his makeup is exploited to the fullest extent. His internal turmoil is symbolically abstracted from its particularities and made universal during a tense scene midway through the film where he performs the Theyyam in orangeface in order to resolve his doubts about Desdemona. The dance itself depicts his dilemma as universal, and not specifically related to his caste. During the performance the

[72] At the same time however one needs to keep in mind that certain phrases in the text itself directly pinpoint to Othello’s blackness. See footnote 74 for details.

gods descend around him and dance before retreating: their answer only graspable in symbols. Speaking of another Indian production of *Othello* that uses Kathakali (one of the descendants of the Theyyam style of dance) Ania Loomba notes how, in the absence of racial issues the form manages to evoke a "'universal' (and therefore understandable) male response to real or imagined female transgressions." This removal of the race issue in Othello, she concludes, reduces it to a "disturbingly misogynist text" (161). The production of *Othello* Loomba is talking about here is one in which, unlike *Kaliyattam*, not only the race but also the caste of the protagonist is ambiguous enough to be irrelevant. This, compounded with the "mask-like make-up", she notes, enables the universalization of the tragedy by preventing any kind of a "naturalistic identification" with the character's race or caste (159).

II

Black Skin, Black Cast(e)s

On a whole *Kaliyattam*, which went ahead to win the Indian National Film Award for Best Director and Actor, displays a multifarious use of colour without at any point intermixing it with caste—something that stands in stark contrast to the mapping of a colour hierarchy onto caste in *Omkara.*[73] This is not to say that there has never been a discourse on race and caste in India. "Whether a tribe or a family was racially Aryan or Dravidian" notes Venkatesh Ketkar in *History of Caste*, "was a question which never troubled the people of India, until foreign scholars came in and began to draw the line. The colour of the skin had long ceased to be a matter of importance" (82). As Carol Upadhya similarly observes, with the emergence of the science of anthropometry in the early 20th century and with the "growing influence of racial thought,"

> "…earlier classification of Indian peoples on the basis of language

[73] The National Film Awards differ from the Filmfare Awards in as much as they take into consideration the cinema of not just the primarily Hindi speaking region, but instead of the entirety of India. *Omkara*, on the other hand, did well at the Filmfare awards and was not as successful at the National awards.

> gave way to racial classifications which included manners, customs and religions as well as physical appearance. In fact, India became a crucial testing ground for theories of race, partly because the caste system was thought to have prevented intermixing. Early 20th century ethnologists engaged themselves in extensive anthropometrical measurements for this purpose. The hierarchical view of race was grafted onto the emerging ethnology of India, such that various groups were seen as representative of 'high' and 'low' races, the high castes, with their Aryan origins, of course being the civilized ones, and the low castes and 'tribals' representing the lower races." (Upadhya 13)

The British Raj's census commissioner Herbert Risley's subsequent assertion that "the social position of a caste varies inversely as its nasal index" came closest to imposing the race discourse onto caste (253). However "the maximum sample size used in Risley's enquiry was 100", notes Crispin Bates, "and in many cases Risley's conclusions about the racial origins of particular castes or tribal groups were based on the cranial measurements of as few as 30 individuals." Noting how this kind of research constitutes scientific racism Bates concludes that "Risley had a clear notion of where his results would lead, and he had no difficulty in fitting the fewest observations into a complex typology of racial types" (21). It was not until 1916 when B.R Ambedkar's work *Castes in India: The Mechanism, Genesis and Development* was published in the 41st edition of *The Indian Antiquary* that the importance of race in the origin of the caste system was completely dismissed. Ambedkar professes instead that it was the singular act of the priestly "Brahmin class [which] enclosed itself into a Caste" by imposing endogamy on its members and enforcing it through the customs of child-marriage, sati (widow sacrifice) and obligatory-widowhood that prompted the other classes to imitate these customs and enclose themselves too (32). In short "classes [became] castes through imitation and excommunication" for "some closed the doors: others found it closed against them" (46).

Following Ambedkar's footsteps contemporary Indian discourse on caste ratifies the irrelevance of the race-issue to caste. Ambrose Pinto, head of the NGO Indian Social

Institute, refers to the racialization of caste as essentially "eurocentric" (2819). Whereas the prominent social anthropologist Andre Beteille maintains that "to assimilate or even relate [caste based discriminations] to 'racial discrimination' will be an act of political and moral irresponsibility" (188). So much so that—recognizing the fact that racial discrimination plays no part in contemporary caste discrimination—the Government of India refused to bring up caste-discrimination in the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban.

Indeed if "endogamy" as Ambedkar argues, "is the only characteristic peculiar to Caste" then the opening scenes of not only *Omkara* but also *Othello* play well into the discourse of caste. For even in Shakespeare's play Iago's "motiveless" (Coleridge 260) attempt to hinder the interracial, exogamous romance (and ultimately marriage) of Desdemona and Othello bespeak nothing other than an attempt to enclose a race into a caste…a *casteization* of race so to speak. In fact it could be argued that caste, separated from race, itself directly plays a huge role at the beginning of the play. For research on Early Modern Venice suggests that as the city's "wealth and power increased there was a firming up of the sense of 'patrician' birth privilege and obligation" and that it became "customary to speak of the 'patrician' caste in Venice" since,

> "By 1315 there was a list of those eligible for election to the Great Council that excluded all bastards or offsprings of a mother not of the noble caste. Naturally, this was followed by an exact register recording noble marriages and their offsprings, the *Libro d'Oro* or Golden Book." (Doody 144)

Othello, in such a society, would not belong to the patrician caste for,

> "A number of wealthy males were left outside this group of 'patricians'; in the second order were the *cittadini* or citizens of Venice. To be eligible to be a proper 'citizen' one must not be a foreigner – though in special cases a foreigner might be admitted after twenty-five years of residence. To preserve one's children's citizen status it was absolutely necessary not to marry a non-Venetian, or one of the lower orders. It became a point of honor for the *cittadino* to be declared free of all taint of mechanical trades, base handicraft, for

three generations." (145)

Endogamy, one can see, is the core principle that preserves and generates the casteist society here as well. *Omkara* then ends up exploiting this rather casteist beginning of *Othello* to the fullest extent. In the opening scene Tyagi (Iago) has been tasked by Omkara (Othello) to prevent the groom Rajju (Roderigo) from reaching the wedding dais where his fiancé Dolly (Desdemona) awaits him. Tradition dictates that the groom, along with his friends and relatives, must travel with a wedding procession (a symbolic substitute for an army) through a significant distance (around 5 km) in order to reach the wedding dais (मंडप) where the bride and her family await. Anyone who has an objection to the wedding must stop the groom from completing this journey. Tyagi however decides to partly fulfill Omkara's orders. He stops the wedding procession but for no conceivable reason (cf. motivelessly) lets the groom Rajju escape.

The marriage between Dolly Misra and Rajju Tiwari would thus have taken place thereby maintaining the endogamy between the upper castes (Misras and Tiwaris) except, by a hard stroke of luck, Rajju arrives too late at the wedding dais; late enough to give Omkara sufficient time to abduct Dolly. As in the original play Raghunath Misra (Brabantio) ultimately takes the matter to the Duke. The Duke though who is known only by a fraternal epithet ("brother-master" भाई-साहब) and whose real name is never revealed during the course of the film is himself a curious figure. All one knows about him is his surname "Tiwari" which designates him as belonging to the upper caste. In addition to this he is the only character in the film who shaves his head in the traditional Brahminical (priestly) manner and wears the Brahmin thread (यज्ञोपवीतं) around his chest. He is, in short, fashioned as the ultimate authority on caste matters. In fact the first time he appears in the film he is

dispensing with business while simultaneously getting his head shaved by a barber in the traditional Brahminical manner thereby invoking both authority and tradition.

Fig. 21: Bhaisahaib/The Duke (Naseruddin Shah) gets is head shaved in the traditional Brahminical manner in *Omkara* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2006). Screenshot.

Unfortunately for Raghunath though the Duke is also corrupt and is, at the beginning of the film, the prime accused in an unbailable murder case. In a bizarre turn of events then the court scene actually happens in the prison where the Duke is in custody. Much to the tune of the Cyprus-crisis in *Othello* the Duke's need for Omkara as a strongman (बाहुबली) consequently exceeds his need for Raghunath Misra or his need to observe caste rules. This, combined with Dolly's testimony—that she was the one who actively pursued Omkara instead of it being vice-versa—effectively seals the matter in Omkara's favor. Dolly thus ends up being betrothed to Omkara in an exogamous act that threatens the institution of caste. Now while the Duke is willing to overlook the caste insurgence he cannot force every single member of the caste to overlook it as well. Hence one has the existence of someone like Tyagi who is unwilling, as Ambedkar would have argued, to dilute his privilege by letting Omkara rise.

"Tyagi's last name", Hogan notes, "designates him as the uppermost sub-caste amongst [North Land] Brahmins [and] diminishes Omkara's authority with regard to [him]"

(55). The name also literally means "sacrificer" (त्यागी) which, along with his first name "Ishwar/ईश्वर" (God), assigns an allegorical significance to his character. For Ishwar Tyagi (God's Sacrificer) ends up becoming exactly that invisible force which "closes the doors" (Ambedkar 40) between castes by scapegoating Omkara and bringing about his characteristically tragic downfall. This of course is not the only use of religious tropes in the film. Kesu (Cassio) means "the preserver" (केसु) whereas Indu (Emilia) who unwittingly ends up being responsible for Desdemona's downfall by the theft of the handkerchief is named after the Hindu goddess of destruction (इंदु). In fact Indu invokes a broad range of religious and mythological metaphors to compare Omkara and Dolly when they first arrive at Omkara's village including:

> "क्या जोड़ी है, बिलकुल जैसे कोयले के लोटे में दूध।"
> (What a couple you both make, just like milk in a pot of coal...)
>
> "जैसे कौए के चोंच में बर्फी।"
> (Just like a snowy-white sweet in the beak of a crow…)
>
> "जैसे अमावस की गोद में चनदल"
> (Just like sandalwood shining in the darkest night…)
>
> "जैसे कारे कन्हैया के होटों पे बांसुरी।"
> (Just like a flute in the mouth of the sooty Lord Krishna…)
> (36:46-37:20).

While these statements gel in perfectly well with the religious tropes used in the film it cannot be ignored that their proverbial tone is lending authority to a supposition that is untrue, namely that caste and skin-colour are related. The entire statement is presented here as if it originates from a tradition or a history that extends all the way from religion (cf. "a flute in the mouth of the sooty Lord Krishna"). Krishna as a matter of fact is a blue-skinned,

and not a black-skinned, Hindu deity who nevertheless has got nothing to do with the lower castes. Similarly, later in the film, Dolly is compared to the goddess Sita (2:05:42) and Omkara, who has abducted her, is compared to Ravana (17:00). Ravana is, in all fairness, the black-skinned antagonist of the *Ramayana* but he is also nevertheless a Brahmin and unlike Omkara does not represent a figure where colour is associated with caste. Statements like the ones quoted above then provide a "religious sanction" (Ambedkar 34) to the racialization of caste by creating the illusion of a mythological past where caste was race. This is something that becomes problematic once one takes into consideration the fact that it might fashion the behavior of both individuals that oppress and those that are oppressed by the vestiges of the caste system in contemporary India. If human beings, as Clifford Geertz puts it, are "cultural artefacts" and if "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" then this particular exchange in *Omkara* forms precisely one of the "control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions—for the governing of behavior" (51).

It is important to note here though that the prime purpose of these statements, when read in order from the first to the last, is to evoke the stark contrast between the colour of Omkara's skin and that of Dolly's. This contrast is also evoked both visually and verbally in *Othello* and is a major trope throughout the play. What Bhardwaj has done in statements like "a snowy-white sweet in the beak of a [black] crow" and "a flute in the mouth of the *sooty* Lord Krishna" is that he has point-for-point adapted the pattern of Iago's visual conjurations of the black-white contrast between Othello and Desdemona in lines like "An old black ram/ is tupping your white ewe", "whiter skin of hers than snow", and "run from her [father] to the *sooty* bosom/ Of such a thing as [Othello]" respectively (*Othello* 1.1.91, 5.2.4, 1.1.73).[74] The

[74] As in *Maqbool*, and *Haider*, Vishal Bhardwaj seems to share the credits for the screenplay with a co-author. In all cases the co-author happens to be a person belonging to or thoroughly familiar with the community in which the Shakespeare adaptation is going to be based. Abbas Tyrewala—the co-author of *Maqbool* which is based in the Mumbai underworld—was born and raised in Mumbai and has worked on the scripts of a lot of films based in the city. Similarly Basharat Peer, the co-author of *Haider,* is a journalist, author and Kashmiri separatist was born and raised in Kashmir. *Haider* is in fact was inspired from his novel *Curfewed Night* which

racialization of caste is merely a product of this rigorously loyal adaptive strategy that extends not only through the verbal but the visual dimension as well. When Dolly recites to the Duke how she fell in love with Omkara she does so accompanied by a song the refrain of which runs:

नैनों की मत मानियो रे,
नैनों की ना सुनियों,
नैना ठग लेंगे,
नैना ठग लेंगे।

Do not believe the eyes,
Do not listen to the eyes,
The eyes will trick you,
The eyes will trick you.[75]

जगते जादू फूंकेंगे रे,
जगते जगते जादू,
नींदें बंजर कर देंगे,
नैना ठग लेंगे।

They will blow magic while you are awake,
While you are awake, magic.
They will make your sleep infertile,
The eyes will trick you. (18:20)

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won the Crossword Prize for Non-Fiction in 2010. In the case of *Omkara* Robin Bhatt and Abhishek Chaubey are both cited as co-authors although their contribution to the script is not really made clear. Chaubey was born and raised in Uttar Pradesh where this film is set—he graduated form the same college as Bhardwaj (in New Delhi) and in the same course (English Literature). Robin Bhatt on the other hand is a veteran Bollywood screenwriter having written the screenplay for nearly 40 other films before *Omkara* including Bollywood blockbusters like *Baazigar* (1993) Gadar (1995), *Raja Hindustani* (1996), *Duplicate* (1998), and *Ajanabee* (2001).

[75] These lyrics seem to echo a song in another of Shakespeare's Venetian plays—*The Merchant of Venice* when Bassanio is in front of the caskets, about to make the choice that will determine success or failure in his bid for Portia and is made to listen to that song ('Tell me where is fancy bred / In the eyes or in the head' 3.2.64-65) warning him that visual knowledge is deceitful. As in the case of *Maqbool* Bhardwaj's films not only intermesh Shakespeare characters with one another but they also seem to intertextually reinforce themes from one particular play by borrowing from another. This is not unique to Bhardwaj of course Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) makes plentiful references to *Antony and Cleopatra* as well as *Julius Caesar* at the ball in the Capulet mansion. Bhardwaj's use of Merchant of Venice might also be based on the fact that it has been an oft adapted play not just in Bollywood but also in the Parsi theatre that precedes the industry. When Bollywood first started adapting Shakespeare *Dil Farosh* (1937) and *Zalim Saudagar* (1942) were both based on The Merchant of Venice.

The entire song, written in collaboration with Bhardwaj, by eminent Indian lyricist Gulzar, singularly adapts an enormous multitude of themes from *Othello* and is relevant not only through the Dolly/Omkara courtship but also beyond. As Poonam Trivedi notes:

> Ranging from an extension of speech and movement, to an amplification of mood and action, to becoming an autonomous detachable entity, the Hindi film song per-forms diverse diegetic and extra-diegetic functions. Moreover, due to its brevity, it forms a very dense and intricate configuration of semiotics from several fields of the literary, visual, and auditory. As Anna Morcom has put it, the song should be seen as 'musical multimedia.' (346)

The obvious associations made in the "dense semiotic complex of signification" (348) that this song is are of course with jealousy "the green-*eyed* monster which doth mock/ the meat it feeds on" (*Othello* 3.3.170-73, emphasis added) that Iago conjures up for Othello and also ultimately with the latter's subsequent demand for "ocular proof" (370) of Desdemona's guilt which does similarly *trick* him into believing she has been unfaithful. Within this multitude of associations, it is highly likely that one might forget the primary association that has been made here: with Brabantio's allegation that Desdemona was somehow *tricked* into falling in love with Othello when he queries "what drugs, what charms/ What conjurations and what mighty magic" the latter used to trick her (1.3.95).

The last association is crucial since being as it is in the first quarter of the film, and in the context of the Desdemona/Othello courtship, the song thus primarily lays the foundation for a strong thematic emphasis on the sense of sight. Within the ambit of caste this would be of no significance since caste distinction carries no visible visual markers on a person (the Duke being the only Brahmin in the film who shaves his head in the traditional manner). Once it is coupled up with race though, and the plethora of colour contrasts that are evoked, the song ends up compounding the effect of the said contrasts. Furthermore, as Hogan observes in her analysis of religious elements in the film, these songs carry the "strains of a […] devotional hymn" (53) which, as has been pointed out in the case of "the flute in the

mouth of the sooty Lord Krishna" lines, allow these songs to borrow authority from religion and present themselves as a part of a tradition that validates a racialization of caste. Trivedi similarly notes how "they utilize largely traditional folk tunes" and hence "embody centuries of history and culture in a single pitch, melody, rhythm or vocal instrumental timbre" (348). The constant repetition of these traditionally *Sufi* strains during the film, and specially towards the end after Dolly's murder, buttress the association of race and caste by fashioning caste, like race, as something discernible by one's नैना (eyes). To top it all even the credits sequence of the film has the strains of this song accompanied by a ritualistic incantation of the word नैना (eyes) throughout.

Compounding this, in the second duet between Omkara and Dolly "ओ साथी रे" (*Oh My Partner*), the latter is dressed in blinding white clothes while reciting verses like "let not the shadows touch me" (छाओं छुए ना) and "I will sew myself up in your sooty body" (तेरे काहरे बदन में, सिल जाऊँगी मै) (1.14.00-15.51). Omkara, by contrast, is always wrapped in a black shawl and at one point in the same song playfully throws the shawl at Dolly (who is dressed in complementary white) as she chants the phrase "let not the daylight drown" (दिन डूबे ना) (1.00.00). In a similar vein, while adapting Brabantio's iconic warning to Othello "look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see./ She has deceived a father, and may thee" (1.3.288) the director obscures Dolly's face behind a tinted dark-blue window in the background as Raghunath delivers the following warning in the foreground:

> **रघुनाथ:** बाहुबली, औरत के त्रिया चरित्र को मत भूलना,
> जे लड़की अपने बाप को ठग सकती है वो किसी और की सगी क्या होगी।
>
> **Raghunath**: Do not forget the fickle character of this woman,
> She who is capable of robbing her father can never be related to anyone else. (1.14.00)

The tainting of Dolly's character is thus visually linked to the tinting of her white-ness through the course of the film. It is accomplished by a progress from stark white clothes when she is betrothed to Omkara to the deep red ones she wears on the day she is married to him and subsequently murdered. Marked periodically by incidents like her being engulfed by Omkara's black shawl (01:12:54), being tinted by a dark-blue window (00:20:33), being splattered with turmeric when a dead snake ominously falls into the pre-nuptial basin (02:00:35) and so on. The notion of upper caste "purity" along with the "idea of pollution" (Ambedkar 8) that is associated with the lower castes end up imbibing racial elements when placed within this white/black colour hierarchy adopted from *Othello* where black is similarly associated with being polluted cf. "She [Desdemona] was too fond of her *filthy* bargain" (5.2.169, emphasis added).[76]

Fig. 22: Dolly (Kareena Kapoor) is splattered with turmeric when an eagle drops a snake into the basin in *Omkara* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2006). Screenshot.

One might perhaps assume that the metaphoric and proverbial statements uttered by Emilia/Indu—as well as the colour hierarchy in the film—merely seek to refer to the

[76] While there is white/black symbolism is Shakespeare's play there is at the same time also a strong, literal colour hierarchy in it (see footnote 74 for details).

phenomenon of the privileging of fair skin in contemporary Indian society. As is evident in the widespread prevalence of skin lightening creams as well as matrimonial adverts where many grooms' families insist on a fair bride. However, it might be helpful to consider that even in these advertisements the caste of the bride is not confused with the skin-colour of the bride. That is to say, the advertisements specifically insist on a bride that is fair-skinned *as well as* upper caste (among other things). If Bhardwaj had simply sought to highlight the social (caste or class) unsuitability of the match he might surely have done so without a reference to skin colour which is a poor indicator of both. Alternatively, since there is an inordinate privileging of fair skin in India, Bhardwaj could have made an adaptation of *Othello* on the colour issue: with a fair-skinned Desdemona and a dark-skinned Othello, and with no reference to caste. Such an adaptation would have addressed the issue regarding the aesthetic privileging of fair-skin. On the other hand, if he chooses—as he has done—to make an adaptation that clearly replaces race with caste, to then go ahead and map a racial overtone on it is of course, to say the very least, problematic. It becomes even more problematic, as will be shown later, when the colour issue essentially subsumes the caste issue to become the driving force of the plot (quite like in Shakespeare's *Othello*).

For in the character of Kesu/Cassio—the person who ends up becoming the object of Omkara's jealousy—this racialization of caste reaches its apogee so to speak. Not only is he of an upper caste (Upadhyay) but he is also fair-skinned and educated enough to be referred to as "शिक्षित और सभ्य" (civilized and educated) by Omkara and as a "फिरंगी" (*firangi*) by the relatively undereducated populace of the village (34:00, 33:47). *Firangi* is a derogatory Hindi term for a foreigner, deriving from the Old French *franc*. Historically the term was used for Indian troops who used blades manufactured in imitation of the European style. The word 'rang' (रंग) in 'fi-rang' also literally means 'colour' and when coupled up with the

prefix 'fi' (फि) the entire term can also alternatively signify 'without-colour' or, in short, a white-skinned person. This arbitrary association of a foreigner's fair skin and education with caste not only racializes caste but also evokes Thomas Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) where he explains his idea of fashioning 'brown sahibs' (brown masters)—that is, of fashioning "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (116). Only in this film there seems to be an arbitrary association between Kesu's skin-colour and his caste which is nevertheless presented as natural. Hence more than an educated 'brown sahib' what one sees in Kesu is an educated 'white sahib' or simply a *firangi*. Kesu, who is thus indeed 'English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' (and coincidentally in skin-colour as well) literally ends up being a substitute for the figure of the Englishman in this film. Highlighted specifically in his use of accented English to patronize Brabantio at the beginning of the film (09.19) and in the sequence where he teaches Dolly Stevie Wonder's *I Just Called to Say That I Love You* so that she can impress Omkara (01:07:21).

Fig. 23: Kesu (Vivek Oberoi) teaches Dolly (Kareena Kapoor)—who is dressed here in pure white clothes—Stevie Wonder's *I Just Called to Say That I Love You*—Bhardwaj would later acknowledge this as his favorite moment in the film (Sen 2006). *Omkara* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2006). Screenshot.

This however marks the point where the fidelity-discourse driven racialization of caste backfires by conversely taking the film further away from the source text. For it ends up distorting a key theme in *Othello*, namely that of Othello's otherness. The 'outsider' versus 'community' binary that had played a key role in his character development gets diluted in *Omkara*. Kesu counterbalances Omkara's otherness by himself being an alternative alien/other: the firangi/foreigner. One might even argue that the film ends up reversing the colour hierarchy that is present in *Othello* by making Kesu the white outsider more than Omkara the black outsider/outcaste. This widens the ambit and increases the possibilities of Self-Fashioning within the film. Othello's "self-construction and destruction" which Greenblatt associates with "self-fashioning and self-cancellation" (5) thus end up becoming more complex in *Omkara* since what one now has is, as Greenblatt would have put it, "more than one authority, more than one alien" (9).

Within this multitude of associations it becomes easier for Tyagi (Iago) to link Dolly and Kesu together romantically because they are both white-skinned—and not because they are of an upper caste. In fact, just like Kesu, in one sequence of the film Dolly is associated with being a *firangi*/foreigner because of her skin-colour:

> **ग्रामवासी:** जा, छूके देख ले काकी।
>
> **ओमकारा:** क्या देख रही है काकी?
>
> **काकी:** अरे देख रहे हैं भैया कहीं चुना लगाके तोह नहीं खड़ी है । ऐसी गोरी लौंडिया हमारे देश में ससुरी कहाँ से हो ली।
>
> **Villager**: Go, touch Dolly and see for yourself, kaaki.
>
> **Omkara:** What are you looking for?
>
> **Kaaki**: Oh, I'm trying to see if she is standing here after having dusted chalk all over herself. How was someone as fair as her birthed

in this country? (37:52)

Additionally the name "Dolly" itself makes her seem foreign being as it is an English nickname for probably a longer Hindi name which is never revealed during the course of the film. Her skin colour and her education (she and Kesu, arguably the only well-educated characters in the film, went to college together) are the two associations that Iago develops on in order to prove to Omkara that they had or are still having in affair. "Is it not probable", he prompts Omkara, "that Kesu would have looked at Dolly with a lustful eye during their college days?" (कहीं कॉलेज में उसने डॉली को दूजी नज़र से नहीं देखा होगा 1:23:25). The question of caste ironically gets left out in this. The emphasis, as can be seen, has shifted to race and education—to Kesu and Dolly's firangi-ness. An attempt at casteizing race—at adapting *Othello* for the Indian cinema—has consequently led to a racialization of caste and then, furthermore, to an increased focus on racial elements at the expense of caste.

Fig. 24: "I'm trying to see if she is standing here after having dusted chalk all over herself." From Left to right Dolly (Kareena Kapoor), Emilia (Konkana Sen), Kaaki, and Kesu (Vivek Oberoi) in *Omkara* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2006). Screenshot.

III

'Near-Black' Skin, 'Near-Black' Castes

Hence once one does recentre race, instead of caste, as the prime agon in *Omkara* one arrives at a situation where one can no longer take coincidences for granted. "Ajay Devgan (the actor who plays Omkara) is black", to quote Hogan, "and Kareena Kapoor (who plays Dolly/Desdemona) has a near-white complexion" (54). This is not entirely true. Ajay Devgan is not black but dark brown or at the most of a 'near-black' complexion. While the colour contrast between Omkara and Dolly is still glaringly visible despite this slight displacement it still sheds light on another issue that plagues the film. For seemingly analogous to Othello being referred to as "the moor" (1.3.243) Omkara is constantly referred to as "आधा-ब्राह्मण" (half-Brahmin) through the course of the film. Shakespeare's Othello being arguably black (1.3.25), and not mixed, one might expect Bhardwaj's adaptation to portray Omkara, analogously, as belonging to any of the castes lower than the Brahmin (priest).[77] That is to say by casting him either as a क्षत्रिय (Warrior), वैश्य (Merchant), शूद्र (Laborer) or an अछूत (Untouchable/Outcaste).

Instead Omkara's father is a Brahmin but his mother is a member of the कंजर (kanjar) caste. "But the mistake [of letting you interact with Dolly] is mine as well", the beleaguered Brabantio admits, "I forgot that you are a Brahmin, but only partially. Half of the blood that runs in your body belongs to that *kanjar* woman as well" (पर गलती तो हमारी ही है, भूल गया की तू ब्राह्मण तो है पर आधा. आधा खून तो तेरे बदन में उस कंजरी का भी है) (10:35). The

[77] Shakespeare's Othello is indeed arguably, buy not to a point of sure certainty, Black since a lot of times "black" tends to acquire symbolic overtones in the play and it is hard to determine if Shakespeare also meant it literally. Instances where one can take "black" literally include the one in 3.3.267 where Othello says "haply, for I am black" and in 1.1.88-89 where Iago compares him to an "old black ram" versus Desdemona's "white ewe." Furthermore, the Duke's lines in 1.3.281 where he says "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, /Your son-in-law is more fair than black" would only make sense, within the context of the play, if the character of Othello has darker skin. However, the term "Moor", indicating natives of Maghreb, does not necessarily imply 'black' skin.

Constitution of India recognizes the Kanjars of Bihar as a historically disadvantaged Scheduled Caste (15). The question that one is faced with consequently is whether it is impossible for the director Vishal Bhardwaj to even fictionally construct a credible situation where a Brahmin woman marries an outcaste in contemporary India. For the tale of *Othello*, it could be argued, is not analogous to a 'near-black half-Brahmin' Omkara marrying a 'near-white Brahmin' woman like Dolly. Far from it the tale of *Othello* would be analogous to the untold story of Omkara's father (a pure Brahmin) marrying a *kanjar* woman. Or, as is the case in *Kaliyattam*, the story of a pure outcaste marrying a pure Brahmin woman—a story from which *Omkara* consciously shies away. As evidenced, in fact, by the string of inconsistencies and obfuscations regarding Omkara's lineage. At one point in the film Omkara explains to Dolly:

> **ओमकारा:** शादी से कोई औलाद नहीं जन्मी गयी इस घर में, और फिर बाबा को इश्क़ हुआ और इश्क़ से हुए हम. दूसरी बिरादरी की थी हमारी माँ, इसलिए जात का आधा कहलाते हैं हमें.
>
> **डॉली:** चाँद जब आधा हो जावे न तो भी चाँद ही कहलावे है बस.

> **Omkara:** No child had been born in this house out of marriage, and then my father fell in love, and from that love I was born. My mother belonged to the second caste. Hence they say that I only partially belong to the Brahmin caste.
> **Dolly:** Even the half-moon is called a moon. (51:15)

It is not clear as to what Omkara means by 'second caste.' At the most one can interpret it to mean the caste that ranks second to the Brahmins (priests), that is to say, the Kshatriyas (Warriors). This however is inconsistent with Raghunath Misra (Brabantio's) allegation that Omkara's mother belongs to the *kanjar* caste, an allegation which Omkara concedes is true ("you have identified my caste quite well" "हमारी जात तो आपने खूब पहचानी") (10:40). The difference between these two is important because belonging partly to

the Brahmin and partly to the Kshatriya castes would still include Omkara in the caste system whereas belonging partly to the Brahmin and partly to the *kanjar* caste would make him an outcaste.

Complicating this already ambiguous lineage is once again the adherence to Shakespeare's work which dictates that the film portray Omkara, just like Othello, as the Duke's strongman (बहुबलि). "Omkara", explains Hogan, "has been introduced (through image and song) as the 'great warrior.'" This, she continues, is particularly evident in the eponymous song of the film 'Omkara', "which is a war song [and which] describes him as 'the greatest warrior'" (56) ("सबसे बड़े लड़ईया रे" 00:28:35). This representation of Omkara then is at odds with his half-priest caste. "According to caste Dharmas (codes of conduct and ethics) that adapt the basic ethics of survival in face of threat and danger, only the Kshatriyas (the warrior castes) engage in violence, not members of other castes, definitely not members of the scholar-priest class: the Brahmins" (54). By contrast in *Kaliyattam*, one may recall, Kannan (Othello) belongs to the lower caste community that is made up of performers of the Theyyam. The Venetians' valuation of Othello as a skilled general is transposed to the village's valuation of Kannan as a skilled dancer. Unlike *Kaliyattam,* which thus preserves the concerns of the play without misrepresenting caste, *Omkara* ends up making the protagonist's caste athematic with his occupation.

Keeping these ambiguities aside even the half-Brahmin (आधा-ब्राहमण) epithet that Omkara is constantly referred to by (à la 'the moor' in *Othello*) is problematic (cf. "But the mistake is mine only", Brabantio/Raghunath concedes, "I forgot that you are a Brahmin, but only partially. Half of the blood that runs in your body belongs to that *kanjar* woman as well") (10:35). Ambedkar would argue this act of overlooking or forgetting Omkara's half-Brahmin status by an orthodox Brahmin like Raghunath is a sociological impossibility. "The

recalcitrant members of a Caste," he writes, "are in danger of being thrown out of the Caste, and left to their own fate without having the alternative of being admitted into or absorbed by other Castes" (45). Ambedkar, in short, is professing that there is no grey area like half-Brahmin when it comes to caste: you are either black or white, a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin. For the caste system creates a social force that makes every caste automatically exclude the recalcitrant members. Hence it will always be the case that "some [will close] the door: others [will find it] closed against them" (Ambedkar 40).

This brings one back to the question of Omkara's parents. For Omkara's mother, and not simply Omkara, happens to be the primary "recalcitrant member" of a caste here. Only in passing references does one hear of her, but not of what happened to her. At Omkara's village the only prominent female character is Emilia/Indu but one never catches a glimpse of his mother. The film leaves one in doubt regarding the question whether only her son, and not she—the *kanjar* woman—was accepted into the Brahminical household. Misogyny similarly ends up associating with caste even in the case of Dolly to drive Omkara's plot.

For the racial tinting/tainting of Dolly's character, which has been discussed earlier, does eventually end up being intermeshed with the notion of caste purity during the course of the film. The caste system, as Ambedkar points out, preempts and extinguishes all doubts about purity by enforcing girl-marriage on women even before sexual consciousness has been awakened in them; and it is with respect to this point that *Othello's* theme of Desdemona's purity gets caste-ized in *Omkara*. "A really faithful man or woman", writes Ketkar,

> ought not to feel affection for a woman or a man other than the one with whom he or she is united. Such purity is compulsory not only after marriage, but even before marriage, for that is the only correct ideal of chastity. No maiden could be considered pure if she feels love for a man other than the one to whom she might be married. As she does not know to whom she is going to be married, she must not feel affection, for any man at all before marriage. If she does so, it is a sin. So it is better for a girl to know whom she has to love before any

> sexual consciousness has been awakened in her. Hence girl marriage. (33)

Tyagi/Iago) plays on this caste-consciousness of Omkara when he alleges that if Dolly has committed a "sin" by transgressing caste and having an affair with Omkara while being engaged to Rajju/Roderigo then what proof does he have against the supposition that she may have transgressed her chastity and had an affair with Kesu/Cassio when they were together in college (1:23:25). This negative logic is of course much to the tune of Iago's similar assertion to Othello of Desdemona's aberrance, her "thoughts unnatural" that encouraged her to pair with someone not "of her own clime, complexion, and degree" in a match of "foul disproportion" (*Othello* 3.3.239). It convinces both Othello and Omkara that she has "a will most rank" and hence "must die, else she'll betray more men" (3.3.238, 5.2.6). Casteism, one can see, actively combines with misogyny. This leads Emilia/Indu, towards the end of the film, to conclude:

> **इंदु:** हम अपनी घर, बार, जाती सब त्याग कर आप लोगों के संसार में नंगे हाथ चले आत हैं। अग्नि से भी निकल जावे न तो भी सगे नहीं ठगे ही केहलावें हैं।
>
> **Indu**: We sacrifice home, family, caste everything and come to your world empty handed. Even if Dolly passes through fire to determine her purity, even then you will not be able to accept her. (02:05:42)

And leading Omkara to similarly admit:

> **ओमकारा:** सारा वकत इसके बाप की आवाज कानो में गूंजती रहवे... 'जो अपने बाप को ठग सकती है, किसी और की सगी क्या होगी।'
>
> **Omkara**: All the time her father's voice keeps resonating in my head, 'she who can rob her father can never belong to anyone.' (2:04:00)

One might note here though how casteist Shakespeare's Iago's arguments are. For the rules of caste, itself a heavily patriarchal institution, blend in even more effortlessly with

misogyny than race does. In fact it could be argued, as Loomba does, that racism actually counterbalances and to an extent even obfuscates the misogyny present in Shakespeare's play and hence to erase the racial politics of Othello does indeed end up reducing it to a misogynist text. Caste meanwhile effortlessly fits into not only this section of the play but also into the endogamy-centered beginning of it, which has been discussed earlier, where Shakespeare's Iago's actions bespeak an attempt to enclose a race into a caste. The superimposition of a racial overtone in *Omkara* is therefore altogether unnecessary, and at times even counterproductive: as was evident particularly in the case of the creation of two alternative aliens in Omkara (the outcaste) and Kesu (the foreigner). This colour driven race-caste fusion is also of course ahistorical and displays the same kind of "fashionable" pseudo-hybridity that Loomba finds characteristic of certain "scholarship on Shakespeare and early modern culture [which collapses] different colonial histories and subjects into one another" (149).

*

Substituting caste for race and then mapping colour onto caste could of course be read as a problematic and political manoeuvre. Yet central to the understanding of why a racial overtone, by the means of a colour hierarchy, was added onto caste is the inability to overcome a fidelity discourse. Bhardwaj admits that he wanted "to remain true" to the so called "spirit of the play" (Sen 2006); but it is also equally a question of salesmanship. On being asked why he turned to adapting Shakespeare in the first place Bhardwaj, as discussed earlier, explained that it was because he wanted to touch a chord with international audiences, and that it was done for commercial considerations and not for art or for literature. The addition of racial elements onto caste can perhaps then be similarly understood as an attempt to make caste more comprehensible to a Western audience (in fact in the English language subtitles race and caste are used interchangeably). For *Omkara* did in fact open to critical and

commercial success in the US, UAE, and Australia while also quite surprisingly managing to enter the UK top ten on its release—in the odd company of Hollywood blockbusters like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Superman Returns* (Shahryar 2006). This catering to the demands of a Western audience however stands in stark contrast to the reason why the Kathakali production Loomba talks about and why *Kaliyattam*, to an extent, adapt Shakespeare. "Why does the International Centre for Kathakali play with Shakespeare?" muses Loomba,

> "I have tried to suggest that it is actually not interested in Shakespeare at all, except as a suitably weighty means through which it can negotiate its own future, shake off its own cramps, revise its own traditions, and expand its own performative styles. Only the Shakespeareans in the audience are concerned with its transgressions, or cognizant of those moments in which it either improves upon the original or fails to do justice to it. And even as 'Shakespeare' remains central for my own analysis of this production, the Kathakali *Othello* obliges me to mark the ways in which it 'provincializes' Shakespeare." (163)

What is revolutionary here—not just when compared to *Omkara* but also when compared to the entire Shakespeare filmic canon—is the sheer independence from a fidelity discourse. There is absolutely no concern with "transgressions" from the original or the "moments in which it either improves upon the original or fails to do justice to it." To the extent that quite like Jean Luc-Godard's adaptation of *King Lear* there is not even any "interest […] in Shakespeare at all" except as a means to negotiate the form's own future (163). Unlike *Omkara* which cashes on Shakespeare's cultural capital to cater to an international audience (the film only had a lukewarm response at the Indian box office), the Kathakali production is not concerned with the cultural capital of Shakespeare at all and caters specifically to a local audience. In his comparison of *Kaliyattam* and *Omkara* Mark Thornton Burnett makes a similar point when he asserts that the former shows a movement from the global to the local whereas the latter reverses that same trajectory (60).

The question of such salesmanship, specifically in the context of *Othello*, is also a conflicted question with regards to Bollywood. It almost compulsively evokes *Shakespeare Wallah*, discussed in the Introduction, because that film in fact uses a complex Othello-centred metaphor to trace the declining popularity of Shakespeare in post-independence India as well as the burgeoning presence of Bollywood. To recall, the film documents how, with the loss of the Empire's material forces that fostered Shakespeare's reception, appreciation, and celebration it simply begins to die out in the market. "We should have gone home in 1947", reflects Mr. Buckingham,

> "…when they all went. But we were so sure…we thought we always had our audience here in India…that they would always love us, and they did…they did…they always laughed at the right jokes, cried at the right places, the most wonderful audience in the world." (01:45:34)

He comes to this realization after a particularly painful enactment of Desdemona's murder scene in front of an Indian audience. Whereas this scene had been discussed in the context of sly civility and the cult of the superstar in the Introduction, and in the context of the gaze in Chapter I, here it will be glossed in the context of the issue of colour. For the camera cuts in on the moment where Mr. Buckingham, in *blackface* as Othello, is reciting his soliloquy right before Desdemona's murder. Exactly when he reaches the third sentence of the soliloquy—which most ironically centres on the *colour* of Desdemona's skin ("Yet I'll not shed her blood/ Nor scar that *whiter skin* of hers than snow/ And as smooth as monumental alabaster")—a Bollywood actress walks into one of the gallery seats. The effect caused by her presence is electric. Nearly everyone is distracted. So much so that Mr. Buckingham loses his patience and turns to the audience to rebuke them, breaking midway through the script ironically at the end of Othello's line which runs "If I quench thee, thou flaming minister, / I can again thy former light restore." In a frantic attempt to regain his own "former light"—that has similarly been "quench[ed]" in post-independence India by the mere presence of a

Bollywood actress—Mr. Buckingham steps out of his role as Othello and bangs his scimitar on the edge of the stage. The camera closes up on his face at this moment as his *black* 'mask' is shed to reveal the imperial *white* colonizer who furiously scolds the audience for their incivility and philistinism with the phrase "when you're quiet, we'll continue" (01:31:01-48). In what can be seen as a dramatic reversal of the 'Othello complex' here it is the white man, Mr. Buckingham—surrounded by the Indian audience—who ends up being the outsider. Moreover it is his narrative—once deprived of the Empire's material forces which sustained it—that "predictably relapses […] under stress" (Cartelli 123) when faced with direct unmitigated competition from Bollywood. "Put out the light", Mr. Buckingham continues, stepping back into his role as Othello after chiding the audience, "put out the light", he repeats, with a resignation that begs for an end to the crumbling Shakespeare phenomenon of his time.

The same Othello-centered metaphor with a little reversal can perhaps be used for

Fig. 25: "When you're quiet, we'll continue"
Geoffrey Kendal as Othello in blackface in *Shakespeare Wallah* (dir. James Ivory, 1965)

Bhardwaj as well. For just as in *Othello* Bhardwaj's submission to the fidelity discourse is comparable to Othello's "submission to narrativity" (Greenblatt 237) that had been discussed in detail on at the beginning of this chapter. One may of course maintain that Othello's construction of self-stereotyping narratives—narratives that "[fail] to unsettle or dislodge

established racial stereotypes, but [play] a formative role in shaping them" (Cartelli 123)—is not wholly identical to Bhardwaj's construction of a filmic narrative where casteist stereotypes imbibe racial elements. Yet the drive to preserve this "colour motif"—which has, in instances more than one, been interpreted as having been done to meet the demands of a Western audience (or as Bhardwaj himself puts it to connect with international audiences), to make the production easier for them to comprehend—is a drive that is no different from the one that leads to Othello's exotic self-construction in front of the Signiory and the Duke's court. It is a drive that compels Othello to produce a narrative which caters "to the demands of the senate" as Greenblatt puts it, "sitting in judgment or, at the least, to the presence of an inquiring community." In the case of Bhardwaj, as in the case of Othello in 1.3, it is a narrative of "events in distant lands and among strange peoples" (237) which for instance Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* (sitting in judgment) predictably dismisses as being "flawed" but still redeemable only because it is a "worthwhile attempt to transfer Othello to the modern setting of Uttar Pradesh in India, and to render the story in a Bollywood style." A style that he most *stereotypically* characterizes as having "ingenuous fantasy and romance" which is again redeemable only because, he continues, it resembles "a late Shakespeare play." "Perhaps the poetry of the original is neglected", Bradshaw concludes of the film in an observation that almost mirrors the Venetian's attitude towards the assimilated savage Othello, "but not its fervency" (Bradshaw 2006).

Coming back to Huang and Rivlin's question regarding the extent to which non-Western Shakespeare productions act as fetishized commodities in the global marketplace one could say that *Omkara* might give one an apt answer. For even though it fails to capture the 'Othello complex', the process of its production, its salesmanship, and its submission to the fidelity discourse which ultimately leads to irresolvable complications in the film's

narrative—including the confusion of race and caste, and the introduction of two opposing aliens—perhaps displays Bhardwaj's own susceptibility to the 'Othello complex' to some extent.

Chapter III

A Hamstrung Hamlet

This chapter examines *Haider* (2014), Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of *Hamlet*. The film, set in the Muslim community of Indian administered Kashmir, turns Hamlet into a terrorist-like figure. And—as the plot and the themes of Shakespeare's play begin to mature by the fifth act—the production essentially finds itself in a tight spot. The sympathy that the genre of tragedy evokes on behalf of the protagonist—in this case the potential terrorist-protagonist—is perhaps not palatable for the target audience of the film and this is what the chapter considers to be the narrative crisis of the said film. To resolve it, it is argued, Hamlet is deliberately hamstrung by the director and denied his revenge towards the end of the film. This is followed by a credit sequence that begins by absolving the Indian military presence in Kashmir, obfuscating the uninviting attitude of the Kashmiris towards the film cast and crew, commending the rise of tourism in the state, and finally acknowledging the film as an

adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The obvious questions this raises regarding adaptation and (mis)representation form the core of this chapter. Unlike the narrative crises in the previous chapters—in response to which Bhardwaj had ended up taking recourse to Shakespeare's 'original' work—in this chapter the resolution of the crisis seems to happen by giving way to the authority asserted by the government of India which ends up replacing the authority of Shakespeare.

The discussion begins by examining Bhardwaj's choice to cast Hamlet as a 'terrorist.' The chapter questions whether this has again been done to cater to Bhardwaj's "international audiences." Trawling through a list of adaptations that arguably cash on stereotypes about certain communities or nations the chapter problematizes the extent to which the expectations of Western/Anglophone audiences leads to the production of films that are less than fair towards the marginalised communities that they represent. Drawing on Douglas Lanier's critical use of the notion of the 'rhizome', which he derives from Deleuze and Guattari, the argument also examines how these films, at times, tend to borrow each other's adaptive strategies without much heed to Shakespeare's original work (Lanier 2014, Deleuze and Guattari 21).[78] This eventually leads one to another adaptation of Hamlet that seems to have had an influence on *Haider*—Sulayman Al-Bassam's *The Al-Hamlet Summit* (2002). Margaret Litvin sees Al-Bassam's adaptation which, like Haider, is also set in an Islamic context, as catering to "a new audience" that comes into being after 9/11 and that has an increased appetite for terrorism-related productions (107). She also problematizes the director Al-Bassam's role by seeing him as an "unelected" representative of the community he seeks to represent. The chapter draws on Litvin's arguments to shape its discussion of the audiences that led to the production of *Haider* and the audiences who stand excluded from the narrative—as becomes evident in The Mousetrap scene where blurred-out Kashmiris can be

[78] The concept of the rhizome is discussed in greater detail on page 161.

seen in the background of the performance. Similarly, the chapter draws on Litvin's "unelected representative" argument to scrutinize Bhardwaj's choice of Basharat Peer (a Kashmiri) as a co-writer of the film. Proceeding from these two concerns it finally examines the objectivity of adapting Hamlet as a terrorist in the first place as well as the pressing issue about the denial of his revenge which is something that happens not only in *Haider* but also in *The Al-Hamlet Summit*.

*

"The guy from Cannes" notes Ing Kanjanavanit, grinding out her cigarette, "said: 'why are you making such an unimaginative adaptation.' If I had made Macbeth a pimp and set it in a Bangkok red-light district, Lady M as a whorehouse madam, the Witches transvestite drag queens, it would have gone everywhere" (Dickson 2014). Instead Kanjanavanit made *Shakespeare Must Die* (2012), a loyal adaptation of *Macbeth*, that was banned in Thailand, and went 'nowhere.' It was banned, that is to say, for "content that causes divisiveness among the people of the nation." Since the title character bore too much of a resemblance to the Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Kanjanavanit unfortunately ended up hitting that magical controversy figure where the film was not controversial (and "imaginative") enough to become famous internationally but still controversial enough to be banned domestically (Dickson 2014). Quite unlike her previous film *Citizen Juling* (2007) which documents the murder of a teacher who had been assaulted by Muslim women in Thailand…a film that passed the censor board and went all the way at the Berlin and Toronto film festivals.

To return to Huang and Rivlin's query regarding the extent to which non-Western Shakespeare productions act as fetishized commodities in the global marketplace one can see that Kanjanavanit's cutting awareness of the kind of *formulaic* Asian production of Shakespeare that would have done well internationally (in the commodity market) comes a

long way in answering that question. Thailand apparently has a thriving sex industry hence Macbeth must be a pimp in Bangkok, Japan brings to mind warlords hence Macbeth must be a Samurai (*Throne of Blood,* 1957), China brings to mind *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) hence Hamlet must be all Kung-Fu (*The Banquet,* 2006), India brings to mind the caste system hence Othello must be of a lower caste (*Omkara,* 2006) or even untouchable (*Kaliyattam*, 1997)…the list is unending.[79]

[79] Perhaps the intercultural and intermedial dynamics of adaptation do actually always involve a measure of localisation (or what in translation studies some would call 'domestication'), that is operative in whatever environment—not just Asian or non-western. The history of Shakespeare in non-Anglophone environments (eastern Europe, southern Europe) offers a number of striking examples of such processes, involving stereotypical traits. In her own essay on Chinese Shakespeares in *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* Huang in fact goes ahead to problematize such binaries like "local", "global"; "reverential", "oppositional" and "colonial", "post-colonial" even though she leaves the Western/Non-Western binary quite intact (12). While through the course of this chapter Huang's Western/Non-Western binary is still quoted one might, more correctly, modify this binary as Anglophone/Non-Anglophone.

Fig. 26: Clockwise from top: the posters of *Omkara*, *Throne of Blood*, and *The Banquet*.

One particularly disturbing adaptation that one can add to this list is a theatre production of *Hamlet* originating one year after 9/11, from British-Kuwaiti director Sulayman Al-Bassam (*The Al-Hamlet Summit*, 2002). The play claims to be "an 'Arab' rewriting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" that represents "a composite of many Arab concerns that affect peoples from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic and beyond" (Litvin 107). These so called blanket "Arab concerns" are then presumably Hamlet turning into an Islamist terrorist, Ophelia into a suicide bomber, and Claudius treacherously supplanting his brother's Dictatorship with his own.[80] In her essay 'Theatre Director as Unelected Representative: Sulayman Al-Bassam's Arab Shakespeare Trilogy' Margaret Litvin questions "whether Al-Bassam's adaptations explode Western stereotypes of the Arab region, as the playwright asserts, or merely reproduce and exploit them." She further contests whether the play is a "representation in the political sense (to channel the voice of, as a subject)" or "representation in the artistic sense (to portray, as an object)" thereby problematizing Al-Bassam's claim "to voice the concerns of 'Arab…peoples' as a whole" (107). And contesting, further, that the play's representation of "Arab politics and culture as refracted through Shakespeare threaten to become just another spectacle or commodity for Western audiences" (Huang and Rivlin 11). Throughout her analysis Litvin is self-conscious of her own status in questioning Al-Bassam's motives…something that becomes evident when she quotes Peter J. Smith's concerns regarding the play:

> Might not *The Al-Hamlet Summit* be endorsing the very

[80] As mentioned earlier this chapter does not seek to go into great textual detail regarding the extent to which, if at all, there is a tension in Al-Bassam's play between stereotyping and "a vital and much-needed expression" of "today's Arab concerns" as Graham Holderness puts it. Even though he himself acknowledges that "for some *The Al-Hamlet Summit* was the work of a Westernised traitor that falsely approximated between Islam and the propagation of violence" an approximation that will also be hinted in the case of *Haider* (Holderness 2013). This chapter will only pick up textual details from Al-Bassam's play that are relevant with respect to the film examined—*Haider*. For a detailed analysis of the aforementioned tension in Al-Bassam's play, and of the position that this chapter more or less endorses, see Litvin, Margaret, 'Theatre Director as Unelected Representative: Sulayman Al-Bassam's Arab Shakespeare Trilogy.' In *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin (eds.) New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014.

> stereotypes that *The Evening Standard* was culpable of upholding? On the other hand, who am I as a non-Muslim, non-Arabic speaking Englishman to tell Sulayman Al-Bassam how to write and direct his adaptation? Or might my responsibility as a professional Shakespearean provide me with an alternative position of authority from which to challenge his appropriation or at least interrogate it? (111).

On a whole Huang and Rivlin read Litvin's critique of the *Al-Hamlet Summit* as suggesting "ultimately that we consider *consumption* as a metaphor for Al-Bassam's double-edged texts, which may end up devouring themselves rather than achieving their stated ends" (11). This observation is not just true of the *Al-Hamlet Summit* where the explosive subject matter makes it easy to spot the extent to which that which is represented has been 'objectified', 'commoditized' or turned into a "spectacle" for "Western audiences" (Litvin 107). It is also true (albeit too subtle to pinpoint) of the film-adaptations that have been listed above and that, as Kanjanavanit would have argued, would have done well at Cannes (*Omkara*, for one, did end up going to the 2006 Cannes film festival).

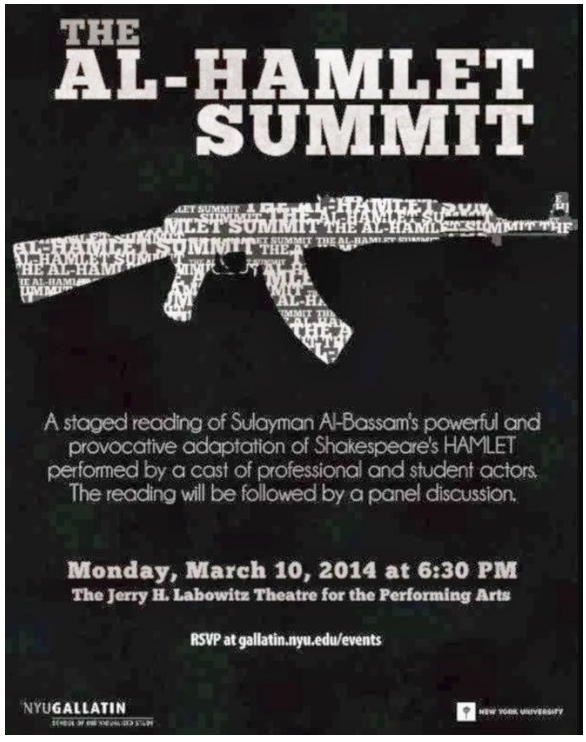

Fig. 27: The poster for a public reading of *The Al-Hamlet Summit* at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

Which is not to say though that these adaptations are 'bad', or 'unethical', or without any 'value.' On the contrary, the production of these films is crucial to the existence of what Douglas Lanier calls the "rhizome" of Shakespeare adaptations. In his essay *Shakespeare Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value* Lanier discusses the idea of the rhizome, a structure that "has no single or central root and no vertical structure. Instead, like the underground root system of rhizomatic plants, it is a horizontal, decentered multiplicity of subterranean roots which cross each other, bifurcating and recombining, breaking off and restarting." They may form "temporary tangles" that may later "break apart and reassemble into other nodes" some that might lead to "dead ends" while others that lead to completely "new directions of thought." This model, Lanier asserts, has "no central organizing intelligence or point of origin" and may be entered at any point. The "decentered" structure of the internet being the best case in point. Lanier encourages one to look at Shakespeare adaptations as forming such a rhizomatic complex. To decenter the 'original' Shakespeare text, to treat it as just another element in the structure, and to focus instead on "the vast web of adaptations, allusions and (re)productions that comprises the ever changing cultural phenomenon we call 'Shakespeare.'" Within this plethora of permutations and combinations though adaptors consciously and often unconsciously end up playing with, alluding to, replicating, and often replacing one element of the rhizome with another (Lanier 2014).

The Bollywood film *Ram-Leela* (2013), for instance, is not as much an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* (as it claims to be in the credits) as it is of another film *Ishaqzaade* (2012) which, in turn, bears more resemblance to *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Romeo Must Die* (2000) than to Shakespeare's play. And *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), a separate node in this rhizome, derives heavily from *West Side Story*'s (1961) interpretation of the 'original' play. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), professes that the adaptor is constantly

accused of "tampering", "interference", "violation", "betrayal", "deformation", "perversion", "infidelity", and "desecration" with respect to the 'original' text, and that instead of defending himself against these labels he must own them in their full capacity as the substance of adaptation (2).[81] In fact not only must he own these labels with respect to the original text, but also with respect to every adaptation that has proceeded form the original. For a lot of these films, of course, plagiarize and steal from each other which Hutcheon sees as ultimately contributing to "Western culture's long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories" (4).

Within such a jumble of permutations and combinations, then, it is not surprising if an adaptor actually or accidentally ends up borrowing and then recombining the elements in the aforementioned films in order to end up making a moral statement that is exactly the opposite of the statement made by the work that has inspired the adaptation. From a harmless desire, perhaps, of making something novel and "imaginative," as Kanjanavanit would have put it, that would end up at the Cannes Film Festival. But ending up, nevertheless, by taking elements from the films which turn their subject matter into a "spectacle or commodity for Western audiences" (Huang and Rivlin 11) and recombining them into a film that is their polar opposite.

Vishal Bhardawaj's *Haider* (2014) is one such film. Comparable to Sulayman Al-Bassam's *The Al-Hamlet Summit* this film too caters to what Litvin calls "a new audience" that comes into being after 9/11 (107). Except it somehow ends up reshuffling *The Al-Hamlet Summit* into a production that is, to borrow a phrase from a newly passed French law, an

[81] It could be said that Lanier's rhizomatic model, which he derives from Deleuze and Guattari, reduces the importance of 'historicity' of an adaptation. Similarly, Hutcheon's gesture of accepting certain labels representing the adaptor's relationship to the hypothetical original does not solve this problem either, because 'sharing stories' does still not open the question of historicity. This chapter's argument does not mean to discount the importance of historicity—it takes into full consideration the diverse historical contexts that have determined *Haider*—but rather seeks to use both Lanier's and Hutcheon's arguments as stepping stones in liberating ourselves from the demands of the special kind of fidelity discourse—empowered once again by historicity—that restrains and restricts Shakespeare adaptations in post-colonial India.

"apologie du terrorisme" (Chapon 2014). Or, in other words, it is a film that "defends, condones, and provokes" 'terrorism' (Chrisafis 2015). Unfit for Western consumption, the film is as far away from being a "spectacle or commodity for Western Audiences" as one could imagine. It still though claims to be an "adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*"[82] So the question one is faced with, as a consequence, is whether Bharadwaj's appropriation is a case of "aggressive seizure" or "forced possession" of the Shakespeare text…and whether Shakespeare is indeed "a signifier that can be seized and deployed—against Shakespeare's will, as it were" (Huang and Rivlin 2). The tropes of forceful possession, itself reminiscent of the Latin root *plagium* (kidnapping, selling free men as slaves), combined with the use of translation as a tool to do so, and particularly in response to the need of Western audiences to *consume* these films almost compulsorily evokes Oswald de Andrade's statement: *Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question.* In his *Manifesto Antropofago* Andrade proposes cannibalism as a trope for cultural consumption and a way to resist European cultural dominance (Andrade 1991). Hence the aforementioned statement celebrates the Tupi who had been literally accused of cannibalism while the statement also simultaneously eats into Shakespeare. Collapsing different post-colonial histories and cultures into one another like this is of course problematic but one might, at this point, quite beneficially revise Huang's Western/Non-Western binary into an Anglophone/Non-Anglophone or hegemonic-culture/non-hegemonic cultures one (see footnote 76 regarding the need to modify Huang's binary).

However, one might even maintain that the argument that Shakespeare might be deployed against his 'will' so to speak presupposes that it is clear what Shakespeare's will in the 'original' text was. On the contrary appropriations, like translations, are capable of

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[82] *Haider Trailer (Official) | Shahid Kapoor & Shraddha Kapoor | In Theaters October 2nd*, 1:46, Available From: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xakmvJ0WPa4 [Accessed 17th march, 2016].

summoning different interpretive possibilities present within Shakespeare's texts and hence, as Huang and Rivlin put it, end up revealing multiple Shakespeares or "a Shakespeare perpetually divided from itself" (8). Bhardawaj's adaptation in fact ends up showing the extent to which *The Al-Hamlet Summit's* interpretation of *Hamlet* is conservative, so to speak, and how an unrestrained modern interpretation of *The Tragedy of Hamlet* in the the context of 'terrorism' will almost inevitably end up associating the Aristotelian emotions of 'pity' and 'fear' with the act of 'terrorism' which, in itself, is an act geared towards evoking precisely 'pity' (for the victims) and 'fear' (of the perpetrators).[83] "In staging suffering as an aesthetic spectacle", writes Slavoj Žižek, "there is something abusive at tragedy's very core" (2001, 87). In his examination of the tragic genre Terry Eagleton too refers to Žižek's aforementioned quote and furthermore asserts, as this chapter would try to show as well, the determining power of the tragic form—its ability to conjure sympathy for the protagonist without any concern for the prevailing morality of the age. For yes the terrorist-tragic-protagonist in Kashmir does in fact emerge as pitiable by the end of this film. Pitiable that is to say by a film-audience that legitimizes tyranny in Kashmir and is responsible for his predicament and hence is an audience that is comparable to Sidney's "abominable tyrant who had pitilessly murdered a great many people, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy" (quoted in Eagleton, 170). What will be explored then is the extent to which *The Al-Hamlet Summit* censors *Hamlet* in order to not end up endorsing 'terrorism' and, on the other

[83] One might argue here that the Aristotelean definition of a tragedy is quite outmoded in the context this chapter reads it in. Fate, revenge, and repentance are perhaps no longer considered legitimate emotions in a rational and secular society. In *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* Terry Eagleton contests against a similar position held by both George Steiner and Mikhail Bakhtin regarding the redundancy of the tragic genre in modern times by proposing instead that the modern tragic hero is torn between the globalized society's incessant insistence on freedom and the corresponding alienation and loneliness it generates (116). Haider's rebellion against the police-state in Kashmir in order to be 'free' as well as his eventual association with Kashmiri separatists can be read in the same light, and as something that proceeds from the loneliness and melancholia that he is thrown into after his father's death. The staging of *The Mousetrap* perhaps best captures Eagleton's idea of sweet violence…where the suffering at the heart of the Kashmiri society (something is rotten in the State of Kashmir) is aestheticized using a beautiful Sufistic spectacle of a dance sequence.

hand, the trouble in which *Haider* gets with the *Central Board of Film Certification* of India for dangerously flirting with the possibility of endorsing 'terrorism' before, at the end of the film, using what is clearly a *deus ex machina* to debunk the endorsement.

I
The Reluctant Fundamentalist

"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem," writes Albert Camus in *Absurdism and Suicide*, "and that is suicide." *To be or not to be*. "Judging whether life is or is not worth living," he continues, "amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy" (3). The first half of *Hamlet* can be read as the protagonist's delay in confronting these fundamentals by distracting himself with "words, words, words" or by "thinking too precisely on th' event" until he finally reaches the pivotal moment in 3.1.[84] And this holds equally true of Bhardwaj's title character Haider. Hamlet's broodings are, of course, triggered quite literally by an encounter with the *absurd*…Old Hamlet's ghost. Camus states that on encountering the Absurd one has three options: to commit suicide, to commit a philosophical suicide, or to continue to live in the Absurd world constantly aware of its absurdity (10). In both Hamlet's and Haider's case one tends to see a fluctuation between a suicide (to be or not to be) and a philosophical suicide (the delusion that 'justice' is something that can be achieved in the present moment by revenge). Haider's broodings however are not triggered by a ghost, but instead by an encounter with (for the lack of a better term) a jihadist recruiter. And therein lies the rub. For Haider must confront the fundamental questions of religion as well. Yet to an extent, if one follows Stephen Greenblatt's reading in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Hamlet too must confront the question of religion. Shakespeare's Ghost's legitimacy rests on the doctrine of Purgatory based on a Catholic interpretation of the Bible (that is later

[84] Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Harold Jenkins (ed.) London: Methuen, 1982. All references to this edition including act, scene and line numbers are in brackets in the text.

reinterpreted and dismissed by the Protestants). Jihad, similarly, is one of the twelve fundamental practices of the Twelver Shia Islam.[85] And is often disputably claimed as the sixth pillar of the religion (Fadl 122). The interpretation of which as literal violence against non-believers is again a fundamentalist interpretation. In both *Hamlet* and *Haider* then the protagonist's questioning of the legitimacy of The Ghost and the Jihadist recruiter along with the consequent legitimacy of their claims about what happened to their fathers can be said to constitute the prime *agon* of the play. Hamlet's internal turmoil and his external actions are consequently mirrored in Haider's inner/greater Jihad (jihād akbār) and external/lesser Jihad (jihād asghār). Hamlet's paralysis of will—his inability to take any action—becomes Haider's inner jihad (realized most concretely in Arshia/Ophelia's statement "अपने आप से लड़ना बंद करो" "stop fighting with yourself" 21:12), which the jihadist recruiter skilfully channels into an outer/external jihad by convincing Haider to take an action against the State that is responsible for what happened to his father.[86]

[85] See *Islamic Practices,* in Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project. Available From: http://www.al-islam.org/invitation-islam-sayyid-moustafa-al-qazwini/part-2-islamic-practices. Accessed [17th March, 2016].

[86] To effect a comparison between Jihad and Purgatory—two completely different doctrines of equally different religions—is of course, to say the least, problematic. This chapter however effects the comparison only to fathom the way in which Shakespeare's play as well as Bhardwaj's adaptation deal with these key doctrines around which their respective *agons* end up formulating. And though the argument here does not see Purgatory as a 'fundamentalist' doctrine it is helpful to note that The Purgatory, first discussed by Hippolytus of Rome, is a doctrine aimed against the pre-Christian ideas of the punishment of souls in the Hades. It can perhaps be argued that St Hippolytus was a 'fundamentalist', since he wrote against heretics of his day and was against the softening of punishments for religious transgressions. However, the doctrine of purgatory, as it had been established throughout the Church of Rome during the middle ages, was embraced by all believers and not just by some 'fundamentalists.' Purgatory, moreover, is not the only Catholic doctrine that is attacked in the play, Greenblatt takes sufficient pains to demonstrate how the doctrine of transubstantiation with regards to Christ's body being the bread and wine during Mass is similarly mocked by Hamlet's reasoning of how "a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (4.3.23-26).

Fig. 28: Irrfan Khan, who played the eponymous protagonist in *Maqbool*, plays the role of the Roohdar who convinces Haider to turn vioent in *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bahrdwaj, 2014).

For Hilaal Meer (Old Hamlet) has been seized by the Indian police when they receive a tip-off about the fact that he is providing medical assistance to a 'terrorist' in his house. The *Armed Forces Special Powers Act* (AFSPA) passed by the Indian government allows the police in Kashmir to

> "arrest, without warrant, any person who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence and may use such force as may be necessary to effect the arrest."[87]

The Act was passed partly in response to a separatist insurgency in Kashmir that lasted roughly from 1987 to 2004. Under Muslim rule since 1339, the state was annexed by the Sikhs in 1820 and was subsequently passed onto the British Indian Empire in 1846 when they defeated the Sikhs in the First Anglo-Sikh War. It was then bought from the British by a Hindu King (Gulab Singh) and became a princely (subsidiary) state of the British Empire. When British India became independent in 1947 its largely Muslim areas became a part of

[87] *The Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act* (1990), as published in The Gazette of India. Available From: http://www.mha.nic.in/hindi/sites/upload_files/mhahindi/files/pdf/Armedforces_J&K_Spl.powersact1990.pdf [Accessed 18th March, 2016].

Pakistan while the largely Hindu areas became India. Except Kashmir, which had a 77% Muslim population ruled by a Hindu King who refused to join Pakistan. Pakistan consequently launched a guerrilla war to scare the king into submission. Who, in his turn, approached India for help, promising to secede to the country if they drove out the guerrillas…which is what eventually happened. Pakistan protested and so a UN mediated ceasefire was established in which it was agreed that India would conduct a plebiscite to ascertain the will of the Kashmiris. India eventually shied away from conducting the said plebiscite, however, insisting that the will of the people could be unfairly swayed by the guerillas who had still not been completely exterminated from the state. Pakistan meanwhile was in favor of the plebiscite, but refused to entertain Kashmiri independence as a third option in the plebiscite, which it maintained should be between the two choices of a) joining India or b) joining Pakistan (Burton Stein 358).

Pakistan consequently funded an insurgency in Kashmir which has been active from 1947 to this day but the bulk of which lasted from 1987 to 2004. The principle groups, at various points, who were involved in this were the Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (Islamic Jihad Movement), Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Righteous), Jaish-e-Mohammed (The Army of Mohammed), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Movement…the word mujahideen is the plural of mujahid which stands for a person committing a jihad) all of which were supported by Pakistan, al-Quaeda and the Taliban.

The film *Haider* opens in 1995, at the peak of the said insurgency. With the arrest of Haider's father Hilaal Meer who, although not directly involved with any of these groups, believes that his responsibility as a doctor extends beyond the subtleties of factions—good or evil. That fundamentally, as a doctor, his loyalty lies with *life* itself:

> **घज़ाला:** डॉक्टर साहब आप जानतें हैं न की आप क्या कर रहे हैं? **हिलाल:** वही जो एक डॉक्टर को करना चाहिए.

घज़ाला: किस तरफ हैं आप?

हिलाल: ज़िन्दगी की (05:29).

Ghazala (Gertrude): Doctor *sahib* you are aware, right, of what you are doing?

Hilaal (Old Hamlet): I am doing what a doctor should do.

Ghazala: On whose side are you?

Hilaal: On life's.

Quite as in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) this constant return to fundamentals—of medicine, or family, or religion, or philosophy or even, as would be evident later, of oedipal drives—is a theme that is built upon through the course of the film.[88] Laertes and Fortinbras, for instance, consider taking revenge for Ophelia and King Fortinbras' deaths a basic, irreducible fact that cannot be marred by the subtleties of the circumstances in which the victims died. Hilaal Meer, similarly, is a doctor who must reluctantly face the basic fundamental Hippocratic obligation of being a doctor and serve anyone in need. Ghazala similarly is the reluctant wife who *must* support her husband even though she considers his actions 'terroristic.' Khurram (Claudius) is the lover who must reluctantly tolerate Haider for his new wife's sake. And Haider himself, a victim of circumstances, must eventually wipe aside all subtleties and compunctions before turning out to become a reluctant fundamentalist when his father is warrantlessly kidnapped ("disappeared" 59:00 or vanished) by the police. In fact, a reluctance to wipe aside the subtleties and confront the basic fundamentals is one of the major themes of Shakespeare's paly. As exemplified not only in Hamlet's to-be-or-not-to-be soliloquy at III.i but also in his encounter with Fortinbras' army at IV.iv. An army, that is to say, which has been mobilized

[88] Hamid's novel similarly plays on the association of fundamentalism and fundamentals when his protagonist Changez is seen as hostile after 9/11, feels unwelcome in America, and leaves his white collar job as a consequence because he no longer wishes to serve the "American Empire" that glosses him as hostile. Comparable to Haider's situation, and Hamlet's, Changez asserts that he did not choose to be what he becomes, it is because after 9/11 the choice had been made for him, and violence had wormed its way into his life.

after Fortibras has found "quarrel in a straw" (4.4.55). For Hamlet his encounter with the army is nothing short of another encounter with the absurd which allows him to finally find a basic—irreducible/fundamental—reason to definitely take action against Claudius:

> How stand I then,
>
> That have a father killed, a mother stained,
>
> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
>
> And let all sleep—while, to my shame, I see
>
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
>
> That for a fantasy and trick of fame
>
> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
>
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
>
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
>
> To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,
>
> My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (4.4.56-66).[89]

Thus even though *Haider*, as a film, diverges heavily from Shakespeare's dialogue it does nevertheless manage to recreate the themes of the play within a different cultural context than that of Shakespeare's. Specially by using, intermixing, and ultimately adapting

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[89] Hamlet's soliloquy at 2.2.509-562 where he contrasts the power of acting and theatrical illusion with his own irresolution and inability to *act* achieves a similar effect with relation to the argument this section makes about the Absurd: "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I! / Is it not monstrous that this player here, / But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, / Could force his soul so to his own conceit […] And all for nothing— / For Hecuba! / What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba / That he should weep for her? What would he do / Had he the motive and the cue for passion / That I have? He would drown the stage with tears / And cleave the general ear with horrid speech, / Make mad the guilty and appall the free […] Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave, / That I, the son of a dear father murdered, / Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, / Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words / And fall a-cursing like a very drab." Camus does in fact compare the actor and the warrior—or conqueror—in the essay as "absurd men" creating and exercising illusory power (Camus 10, 14, 62). The interpretation of this encounter with the Absurd by Hamlet and Haider—which leads them into finally taking action in the service of justice—differs from what an 'Absurd man's' interpretation would be since 'justice' is itself a problematized concept in Camus. As mentioned earlier, Camus states that on encountering the Absurd one has three options: to commit suicide, to commit a philosophical suicide, or to continue to live in the Absurd world constantly aware of its absurdity. In both Haider and Hamlet's case one tends to see the fluctuation between a suicide (to be or not to be) and a philosophical suicide (the delusion that 'justice' is something that can be achieved in the present moment by revenge). See also the Introduction to Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1993) where he talks about Old Hamlet's ghost as well as the impossibility of exercising justice. And *The Gift of Death* (1992) where he talks about philosophical suicide in relation to monotheistic religions.

elements from within the play in novel combinations. For "adaptation is repetition," as Linda Hutcheon puts it—"but repetition without replication."[90] It is a practice that relies overwhelmingly on the pleasures of "recognition", "remembrance", "alignment" and "allegiance" (11). Hamlet's absurd encounter with Fortinbras' army, for instance, does indeed figure in the film, as Haider's multiple encounters with the Indian army. The Indian force, thanks to the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), is omnipresent throughout the film (in addition to the Kashmir police force). Its constant, central, presence is a stark reminder of the dispute over Kashmir and particularly over the Siachen glacier which is the most strategic point in the state and which is claimed by Pakistan and China, but controlled by India. At 18,875 feet it is the highest militarized post in the world and after the Indo-Pakistan war of 1999 it became earth's highest battlefield. More soldiers have died maintaining the military presence on the frigid glacier than in the wars fought over it, which makes the absurd situation highly representative, as Hamlet puts it, of a "fight for a plot/ Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause" (4.4.63).

Haider in fact encounters regiments of the omnipresent, omnipotent, and impervious Indian army at various points in the film. In the beginning, for instance, when he returns to Kashmir after his studies (like Hamlet does from Wittenberg in the original play) where they ask him routine questions at the State's border to which they expect banal routine replies but to which he nevertheless replies with incendiary answers. To the question of what he studies, he replies quite specifically with "The Revolutionary Poets of British India" (poets who were designated as 'terrorists' by the British). And to the question of where he lives, he replies: "Islamabad" (14:51-15:15). Besides being the capital city of Pakistan Islamabad also literally translates as 'the abode of Islam.' Now this is obviously an answer the soldiers are looking

[90] Hutcheon is here teasing the reader by rephrasing her better-known dictum on parody as 'repetition with a difference. See Hutcheon (2006), p. 7.

for, but to have it thrown on their face so openly points to the absurdity of the fact that they actually expect that a 'terrorist' would be naive enough to not have his answers already prepared at the crossing.

Similarly, the second time Haider encounters the soldiers is when he goes looking for Hilaal (his missing father) at detention centers in what appear to be frozen, uninhabited parts of Kashmir ("पूरा कश्मीर कैद खाना है मेरे दोस्त, हर जगह ढूंढूंगा" "the whole of Kashmir is a prison-house, I will look for him everywhere" 37:48). The soldiers of course refuse to cooperate and throw the photographs of his father on his face. This closed impenetrability of the Indian army, its sheer indifference towards the people of Kashmir, is so incomprehensible to Haider that he later organizes protests against the army-occupation with a slogan that is a pluralized reworking of to-be-or-not-to-be: हम हैं, की हम नहीं? (Do we [Kashmiris] exist, or don't we? 40:38):

Fig. 29: Haider (Shahid Kapoor) along with the half-widows and other Kashmiris protesting against the army-occupation with the slogan 'Do we exist, or don't we' in *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014). Screenshot.

II

Ritual, Remembrance, Revenge, and Religion

Unlike Hamlet however these encounters do not galvanize Haider to take an action against the State. They take place during the first half of the film and merely foster his inner-jihad or inner struggle to come to terms with oppression. Channeling it into an external jihad is something that happens exactly midway through the film when he meets the jihadist recruiter Roohdar रूहदार (literally: spirit man). Bhardawaj seems to have borrowed this idea from Al-Bassam's text where too the Ghost is replaced by a more credible human figure. In Al-Bassam's case however it is an English-speaking arms dealer who sells to all factions (Claudius' and Fortinbras') and who gives Hamlet a pamphlet that details how Claudius was responsible for the killing of Old Hamlet:

> **Hamlet**: Are you American?
> **Arms-Dealer/Ghost**: Vast oceans of savagery consume the world, false authority towers from Mecca to Jerusalem…from Jerusalem to the Americas and man is on the edge of a great precipice…
> **Hamlet** [*pointing to* ***Old Hamlet's*** *grave*]: Those are his words…how do you know that?
> [***Arms-Dealer/Ghost*** *Pulls out a pamphlet from his pocket and gives it to Hamlet*]
> **Hamlet**: I can't see, give me a light. [*reads in Arabic*] Forensic evidence leaked from the post-mortem indicates that our great leader was murdered. His cardiac arrest was induced by sodium nitrate injected into his ear via a syringe, under the leadership of his brother and assassin Claudius. Where did you find this?
> **Arms-Dealer/Ghost**: They're everywhere (17:21).

Al-Bassam, as one can see, problematizes the accuracy of the pamphlet's claim and it is hinted that these claims might actually be propaganda from Fortinbras and the Libertarian Front's side and ultimately a tool that the Arms-Dealer/Ghost uses to pit Hamlet against Claudius ("Ah you have a great future", he tells Hamlet, "we would like to develop something with you, promote your agenda" 29:29). Throughout the play, in fact, the Arms-Dealer is portrayed as a cunning, immoral swift-talker who switches from one side to another

when expedient, provides Ophelia with a suicide bomb regardless of the consequences and blackmails Gertrude as well. On a whole in *The Al-Hamlet Summit* the Arms-Dealer seems to become the driver of the plot and hence, even more than Claudius, becomes the prime antagonist. In fact, unlike 3.3 in *Hamlet* where Claudius actually admits his guilt ("O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;/ It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,/ A brother's murder!" 3.3.37-39) Al-Bassam's Claudius, at no point in the play, suggests that he had anything to do with Old Hamlet's death. Even irrespective of the characterization of the Arms Dealer, though, as Hamlet continues to read the pamphlet and its findings (which are evidently no secret since everyone in the city has seen them) the style of the writing becomes more and more propagandistic:

> **Hamlet:** They're everywhere?! [*continues reading*] Whilst Hamlet, the late King's son, continues to lead the life of the Murtad dissolute…gambling and whoring the nation's millions in the playgrounds of Europe. *Oh God!* Liberation Brigade will avenge this sickening murder and will show no mercy to those who weep and mourn, weep and gnash their teeth. The evil forces of Imperialism have found a willing agent in the figure of Claudius…Raise your might and God's holy wrath against the horned Satan that soils our earth and the greater Satan that enslaves our people and the world…we will not rest until God's labors are done. We will not rest until his labors are done (18:48).

This is crucial since even in the original play there is a dubiousness about the legitimacy of the Ghost's claim…whether or not he is "a spirit of health or goblin damned" (1.4.42). And while Al-Bassam has antagonized his Ghost-substitute enough to show him as indeed being goblin damned...such is not the case in *Haider* which seems to resemble Stephen Greenblatt's approach to the question of the Ghost. Greenblatt, in *Hamlet in Purgatory*, argues that the figure of the Ghost re-invokes the trauma surrounding the official abolition of purgatory in 1563…an institution which had held a definitive grasp on the medieval imaginary. As evidence he cites Hamlet's reference to Saint Patrick ("Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is Horatio,/ And much offense too" 1.4.139) who is the patron saint of

purgatory as well as the Ghost's own admission of being in a state that does indeed resemble purgatory:

> **Ghost:** I am thy father's spirit,
> Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day confined to fast in fires,
> Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away (1.4.9-13).

The Ghost, in *Hamlet*, thus becomes more than just a prop that Shakespeare inherited from medieval drama and from revenge tragedies. Instead the play channels and dramatizes the entire debate surrounding the abolition of purgatory (Greenblatt specifically mentions Simon Fish's attack on the said institution in *A Supplication of Beggars* and Thomas More's defense of the same in *The Supplication of Souls*) by having the Ghost's legitimacy questioned by Hamlet. Who must, eventually, stage The Mousetrap in order to ascertain the Ghost's claim.

Greenblatt maintains though that, just like the purpose of the institution of Purgatory, the Ghost articulates—more than a desire for revenge—a desire to be remembered. And that Hamlet's delay in carrying out revenge is triggered by the same. "Sticking a sword into someone's body" however, Greenblatt later admits, "turns out to be a very tricky way of remembering the dead" (225). For souls locked in purgatory usually ask for prayers from the living to speed their ascendance to Heaven and not an "utterly incompatible […] Senecan call for vengeance" (237). He tries to reconcile this contradiction by presenting ambiguity as a theme—that Shakespeare deliberately sought for the Ghost to be seen as an ambiguous figure open to different interpretations, and that this open-endedness is what the Ghost stands for. One might ask though where does the Ghost go towards the end of the play? Peter Goldman maintains that the Ghost is "essentially forgotten" before questioning the interpretation provided by Greenblatt:

> With considerable ingenuity, Greenblatt takes the forgetting of the Ghost as evidence for the play's larger shift away from

> revenge. Yet according to Greenblatt, the shift away from revenge is motivated by the turn to memory, so it does not make sense that the Ghost's emphasis on memory would result finally in his own forgetting. Greenblatt attempts to get around this problem by appealing to Hamlet's request for Horatio to tell his story, another example of remembrance. But the absence of Hamlet's Ghost from the end of the play seriously undermines Greenblatt's main line of argument (Goldman 2001).

There seems to be, quite simply, a whole lot of confusion here. But let us pick up from Greenblatt's point about how sticking a sword into someone might indeed be a way, if not a very tricky way, of remembering the dead. For comparable to the prayers for the souls in purgatory revenge on their behalf also becomes a concrete *act* of remembrance or, in short, a ritual. It is indeed, as Greenblatt admits, "a tricky way" of remembering the dead. But Hamlet has proven, earlier in the play, of his disdain for conventional ways or rituals of remembrance whose only purpose has become paradoxically to ease the forgetting:

> As David Bevington has demonstrated, Hamlet is iconoclastic in relation to traditional rituals (173-187). He does not seem inclined towards the public ceremonies surrounding death, rituals intended for devout recollection. Hamlet, we remember, has "that within which passes show" (1.2.85). Although he dresses in black, he despises the merely ceremonial "trappings and suits of woe," the purely formal "shapes of grief": "For they are actions that a man might play" (1.2.86, 82, 84) (Goldman 2001).

To read these issues via a *contemporary lens* then while keeping in mind the "interpretive possibilities" always already present in the play that Huang and Rivlin talk about one can say that something is indeed rotten in the state of Denmark and it is precisely this forgetting of Old Hamlet. Compounded glaringly by Claudius' hasty marriage to Gertrude during the time of mourning even when, as he himself admits, "the memory [is] green [of] Hamlet our brother's death" (1.2.2). It is a forgetting that is, however subtly, also sanctioned and legitimized by the State of Denmark's information apparatus (The Ghost of Old Hamlet specifically refers to the information circulation "So the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forgèd process of my death / Rankly abused" 1.5.35-40) along with the State's

traditional rituals of remembrance—rituals that are employed in a paradoxical service of forgetting and putting an end to the matter. And all of Hamlet's actions of remembrance that run counter to the incumbent state of things including not only his assassination of Claudius but also equally importantly his 'unfounded' accusations, his 'madness', his 'words, words, words' (2.2.183), and his 'antic disposition' (1.4.173) are—all of them—actions that prevent this forgetting. Actions that—if not in the play itself, but from a modern perspective—*terrorize* not only the Danish court but also the State itself into facing the extent of its own 'rottenness.' The effect is even more compounded in any modern adaptation because Shakespeare, at many points in the play, conflates Hamlet *with* the State of Denmark itself—standing for the people and being subject to surveillance (via Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) by the establishment.[91] These themes have, of course, been explored in many adaptations of *Hamlet*. Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 version (informed by the Stalinist era) and Leopold Jessner's 1926 production (mocking the court of Kaiser Wilhelm) being cases in point.[92]

To understand *Haider* then it becomes necessary here to make an intellectual, anachronistic and perhaps highly unjustifiable leap to adjudge what all of Hamlet's aforementioned actions—including but not limited to the assassination of a Head-of-State—would be glossed as in the contemporary times, in a contemporary adaptation—*Terrorism*.[93]

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[91] It is important to note here that the concept of the "State" as it is known today did not exist during Shakespeare's time and hence his usage of the term differs from ours.

[92] For an analysis of these themes in Kozintsev's *Hamlet* see Moore, Tiffany *Kozintsev's Shakespeare Films: Russian Political Protest in Hamlet and King Lear* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012) where she explores the "Hamlet-mania" in the USSR after Stalin's death and Kozintsev's production that made "pointed comparisons between the 'prison' of Denmark and the Soviet Union and between Claudius and Stalin" (20). For an analysis of these themes in Jessner's *Hamlet* See Marx, Peter W. 'Challenging the Ghosts: Leopold Jessner's *Hamlet.*' *Theatre Research International* 30.1 (2005): 72-87 where he explores the tensions regarding the "anti-democratic forces" in the Weimar Republic that the production laid bare.

[93] While this argument is not necessarily trying to adjudge Hamlet's status as a 'terrorist' singularly by the number or manner of people he killed (the preceding paragraph, and the succeeding arguments, list the other reasons for this comparison), it might be helpful to note here the Hamlet is ultimately responsible for the deaths of 4 characters. Including Claudius (who he stabs with a fencing sword in full knowledge of the fact that the

Crimes that, comparable to regicide, one can't speak about, condone or write about without, as Judith Butler puts it, "raising all kinds of suspicion" (cf. *apologie du terrorisme*) since "readers want to know from the outset that [the speaker] is opposed to the practice" (Butler 00:39-1:38). Establishing a contrast between the phenomenon of war and the phenomenon of suicide-bombing she asserts, echoing Noam Chomsky's *Pirates and Emperors* (2003), that "justified violence is enacted by the State [whereas] unjustified violence is enacted by non-State actors" (30:37). This is why, in our case, the slaying of King Fortinbras by Old Hamlet is an act that is met with "acceptance and even righteousness and triumphalism" while even the thought of the slaying of Claudius by a non-State sanctioned actor like Hamlet is met "with horror" (30:56). This in fact is something that Hamlet himself comes to realize when he muses that perhaps Old Hamlet is in purgatory in the first place because he is, at the end of the day, as guilty of murder for killing King Fortinbras as Claudius is for killing him.[94]

Thus there is *Haider* where Hamlet's father has, literally in line with Greenblatt's argument about 'forgetting', quite simply been "**गायब**" "disappeared" (59:00) by the Indian police state (cf. justified violence or an extra-judicial murder enacted by a State-actor as Butler puts it). These 'disappearances' have moreover become a fact of life of the Kashmiris existence who, as Ghazala/Gertrude points out, refer to the wives of "disappeared people" as "half-widows" (59:10). Later in the film Arshia/Ophelia, who is also a journalist, cites the *Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons* to question the Indian military commander about the disappearance of "8000" (1:00:07) people since the army occupation began. The

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sword is poisoned), Polonius (who he kills assuming that he is Claudius), Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (who he sends to their deaths for betrayal).

[94] The question here is also about the sanctioning (by the State) of certain places, like a battlefield, where it is legitimate to shed blood in accordance with certain rules set by the State once again. In *Haider's* case, however, the State's unilateral decision as to what amounts as a 'battlefield' or whether or not there is a 'battle' at all is what is put to question. The point being that Kashmir on a whole is as much of a battlefield for the oppressed Kashmiris as the heavily militarized Indian border (a state-sanctioned legitimate place for battle) that protects it.

theme of remembrance and of forgetting that Greenblatt so emphasizes upon takes concrete form in this setting because Hilaal Meer is not dead but he is also, for all practical purposes, not alive:

> **घज़ाला:** डिसअपीअरड लोगों की बीवियां आधी विधवा कहलातीं हैं यहाँ। हाफ विडोस। हमें इंतज़ार करना होता है. मैं भी सिर्फ वोही कर सकती हूँ. इंतज़ार।
> **हैदर:** बाबूजी का?
> **घज़ाला:** हाँ.
> **हैदर:** या उनकी बॉडी का? (58:00).
>
> **Ghazala**: The wives of disappeared people are called half-widows here. Half widows. We have to wait. And I too can only wait. Wait…
> **Haider**: …for father?
> **Ghazala**: Yes.
> **Haider**: Or for his dead body?

Haider's consequent 'terroristic' actions are ones taken in remembrance and to make others remember. Actions that are ultimately, as he himself hints, inspired from the 'Revolutionary Poets of British India' whom he studied at a Wittenberg-equivalent of an Indian university. And who during their time were themselves, along with the spearhead of the revolution Gandhi (whose name gets thrown around a lot in this film and on whose birth anniversary this film was released in India) labelled as 'terrorists':

> "In which sense was Gandhi a terrorist? He effectively tried to stop, interrupt the normal functioning of the British State in India…and of course you are trying to interrupt the normal (which is very oppressive) functioning of the information circulation and so on. But the way we should answer to this point, I claim, is simply by another […] endless paraphrase of that wonderful line from Brecht's *The Beggar's Opera* "what is robbing a bank compared to founding a new bank" what is your 'terrorism' compared to the terrorism which we simply accept

> which has to go on day by day so that things remain the way they are. That's where ideology halts us. When we talk about violence, terrorism we always think about acts which interrupt the normal run of things but what about violence which has to be here in order for things to function the way they are. So I think if—I'm very sceptical about it—we should use *terrorism* it's strictly a reaction to a much stronger terrorism which is here." (Žižek 2016, 96).

It is important to note here that comparable to Gandhi's, Haider's actions, in the first half of the film, are non-violently 'terroristic.' All of them verbally try to disrupt exactly, as Slavoj Žižek puts it in the aforementioned quote, the 'functioning of the information circulation' of the State. In the case of Haider it is done by using wit, folly and the guise of an 'antic disposition' to say things they would otherwise not have the license to say. *What is robbing a bank compared to opening a new bank*? and what is Haider's reactionary-terrorism in comparison to a much stronger 'terrorism' which already exists in Kashmir…these are arguments that are more or less captured in Haider's classification of his own actions as "chutzpah" or an extreme audacity which he feels is an appropriate reaction to the numbing everyday chutzpah of the Indian army. A word that Rosencrantz/Salman duly notes also rhymes with AFSPA ("chutzpah…shameless, bold, like AFSPA" "चुत्ज़्पाह…बेशरम, गुस्ताख़, जैसे आफ्सपा" 1:27:50).

Al-Bassam play similarly mirrors Butler's argument regarding 'terrorists' as non-State actors as well as Žižek's argument regarding the problem being essentially that of these non-State actors who try to disrupt the functioning of the information circulation. He has the British/American Arms-Dealer teach Polonius what *term* he should use to designate these non-State actors who pose a threat to the incumbency when he needs to *inform* the people about their actions:

> **Arms-Dealer** [*casually fastening a tie*]: We call them terrorists.

> **Polonius**: I like this word, can you write it for me please?
> **Arms-Dealer**: Of course
> **Polonius**: Yes…terrori…
> **Arms-Dealer**: Terrorist.
> **Polonius**: Terrororo…
> **Arms-Dealer**: *Terrorist*.
> **Polonius**: Terrosa…
> **Arms-Dealer**: TERRORIST.
> **Polonius**: TERRORIST!
> […]
> [**Arms-Dealer** *kisses him on the lips*]
> **Polonius** [*grimaces and points at him*]: Terrorist! (35:13).

One may refer here to the ban on the use of the term itself by major news aggregating agencies like *Reuters* that describe it as being too politically loaded for neutral use:

> Reuters may refer without attribution to terrorism and counterterrorism in general, but do not refer to specific events as terrorism. Nor does Reuters use the word terrorist without attribution to qualify specific individuals, groups or events.[95]

Haider meanwhile is never overtly called a 'terrorist', but only implicitly so. He edges towards this formal classification as a 'terrorist' gradually through the course of the film. In the beginning of the film he puts himself in murky waters when, unlike the rest of the family members of the victims, he questions the use of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act for arresting his father. He quotes Rule 4, Section 5 of the Act to Polonius (who, in this film, is also a Commissioner of the local Kashmir police):

> **Haider**: Any person taken in custody under this act shall be handed over to the officer in-charge of the nearest police station with the least possible delay. Least possible delay, uncle. *It has been 20 days and there is no news of him* [translated].

Pervez (Polonius) however warns him to not put himself at odds with the Indian army by questioning their procedure for 'disappearing' his father. Calling the mere launching of an FIR an abnormal act of daring that might conversely worsen the probability of them ever locating his disappeared father.

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[95] *Reuters Handbook of Journalism*, Available Online: http://handbook.reuters.com/?title=T#terrorism.2C_terrorist [Accessed: 1st of August, 2016].

> **Pervez**: If everything had been according to the law, then today Kashmir would not have been in such a situation. Pundit Nehru promised at Lal Chowk that there would be a plebiscite. Did it happen? Let's forget the plebiscite, the first condition of the plebiscite: demilitarization…that too has not been achieved…neither by India , nor by Pakistan. When two elephants fight, then it is the grass beneath them that gets crushed.
>
> **Haider**: That's all very well uncle, but I would still like to lodge an FIR.
>
> **Pervez**: Do not make the Indian army your enemy. If you launch an FIR the chances of him being found will decrease even more (46:50).

As discussed earlier Haider eventually gathers the people whose family members have been 'disappeared' by the police, and whose legal enquiries are simply ignored by the law, in a peaceful protest with the slogan "do we exist, or don't we" (हम हैं, की हम नहीं? 1:06:53). In fact he turns violent only halfway through the film when he meets the Roohdar (Spirit Man) who informs him that his father's brother Khurram was the one who told the police that Hilaal was harboring a 'militant' in his house.

Fig. 30: Roohdar (Irrfan Khan) reads an article about the disappearences in Kashmir in *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014). Screenshot.

III

The Ghost as a Jihadist Recruiter

The importance of Roohdar, the jihadist recruiter, in the plot of *Haider* is highlighted by the fact that he is played by one of the iconic actors of Indian cinema—Irfaan Khan who, one may recall, also played the titular character of *Maqbool* in Bhardwaj's adaptation of *Macbeth*. The amount of complexity Bhardwaj has endowed his character with is quite baffling—so much so that as the initiator of the *agon* one might even regard him as the protagonist of the film. When one first encounters him he is shown as a helpful and understanding person who helps a traumatized Kashmiri man quite literally find his direction (a foreshadowing of how he similarly gives a brooding Haider direction). The said man is unable to enter his own house because he is so used to being searched and frisked in detention camps that he cannot enter any building without being frisked. The jihadist recruiter hence pretends to be a soldier, frisks him and orders him to go inside. The film Interval also occurs in such a way as to emphasize the character of the recruiter—within five minutes of him entering the scene, dressed in pure white clothes, and as soon as one realizes that he has a message for Haider, the film breaks for an intermission.[96]

Roohdar himself though is a curious figure. Khurram later claims that he is a former Pakistani *Inter-Services Intelligence* spy who was caught by India and detained in the same place as Hilaal. He then made a deal with the Indian Army and turned into a double-agent for them before, however, killing Hilaal because the latter had somehow found out his secret. Haider seems to have serious doubts about Khurram's account not the least because it conveniently comes *after* Khurram finds out that Haider had a secret meeting with Roohdar. But it is not only Khurram's account though that casts doubt on Roohdar's character, the film

[96] What is most striking about Irfaan Khan's interpretation of the role is the calm and composed manner in which he delivers his lines. In her examination of the letter to the 9/11 hijackers that was found in the luggage of Mohammed Atta, Ruth Stein similarly notes how the message of the presumed recruiter, instead of being "a document [..] inciting exhortation, a raging rhetoric of hate, a cry to destroy and annihilate" was composed "by a voice that reassures, calms, calls for restraint and thoughtful control, appeals for heightened consciousness" (Stein 2002).

employs a variety of elements to compound this doubt, including the very use of the name Rooh-dar (spirit-man) which derives from the Quran:

> وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُم مِّن الْعِلْمِ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً
>
> And they ask you (O Muhammad) concerning the Ruh (the Spirit); Say: "The Ruh (the Spirit): it is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little."[97]

Whether or not it is a "spirit of health, or goblin damned" is impossible to tell since mankind simply does not have the knowledge to comprehend its presence (01:04:42). There are however varying interpretations of this verse, and more than one of them is appropriable in *Hamlet*'s context. Yusuf Ali understands the Rooh as not just a spirit, but as a spirit of inspiration. The spirit which, in our case, inspires Haider to take an action or channels his internal jihad into an external one:

> They ask thee concerning the Spirit (of inspiration). Say: "The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord: of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, (O men!)"[98]

It is important to note here that Roohdar is simply an alias that the Ghost-substitute in *Haider* takes upon himself. He is not literally an agent of heaven, and at no point in the film does he claim to be so. His appeal to Haider rests in the sheer rationality of his argument (regarding how and when he met Hilaal Meer), and the vastness of his knowledge. In fact, he even distances himself from religion in order perhaps to make his argument more credible to Haider:

> **रूहदार:** दरिया भी मैं, दरख़्त भी मैं,
> झेलम भी मैं, चिनार भी मैं,

[97] See Verse 17:85 in *The Quranic Arabic Corpus*, Language Research Group of *The University of Leeds*. Available From: http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=17&verse=85 [Accessed: 17th May, 2016].

[98] See the previous footnote.

देर हूँ, हराम भी हूँ,
शिया भी हूँ, सुन्नी भी हूँ,
मैं हूँ पंडित,
मैं था, मैं हूँ, और मैं ही रहूँगा। (01:14:03).

Roohdar: I am the river, and the bank,
I am Jhelum, and Chinar as well,
I am the temple, and the mosque,
I am Shia and Sunni,
I am the pundit,
I was, am, will remain.

These lines begin with nature—a river and its bank—which one might see as universal symbols of hierarchy. These symbols then acquire a particular value when the river is associated with the river Jhelum (also known as the city of warriors, as well as the river on which one of the decisive battles of Alexander's conquest was fought) and the Chinar tree (a symbol of Kashmir, its Persian culture and Islamic mysticism that Haider will later draw upon in the staging of The Mousetrap). These religious associations with Islam are then undercut by the Roohdar's claim that he is both Shia and Sunni as well as the (Hindu) temple and the (Muslim) mosque. His claim that he is a pundit—a religious authority of Hinduism and not Islam—further undercuts the religious associations with Islam. Unlike what one would expect from a jihadist recruiter Roohdar here is perhaps trying to present himself as a person beyond religion, and in the service or possession of a higher consciousness (I was, am, will remain). In her examination of the letter to the 9/11 hijackers that was found in the luggage of Mohammed Atta, Ruth Stein similarly notes how the message of the presumed recruiter, instead of being "a document [..] inciting exhortation, a raging rhetoric of hate, a cry to destroy and annihilate" was composed "by a voice that reassures, calms, calls for restraint and thoughtful control, appeals for *heightened consciousness*" (Stein 2002, emphasis added).

Roohdar tells Haider that he was in the same detention camp as his father. And, comparable to the Arms-Dealer in Al-Bassam's play, provides evidence of actually having met Old Hamlet by reciting a verse from the song "The Empty Birdcage" that the latter really used to like.[99] He then claims that Hilaal and he became quite good friends and one day, quite by accident, managed to catch a glimpse of the government officials who had come to visit the detention center. One of these officials was allegedly Hilaal's brother Khurram. It was then that it dawned on Hilaal that Khurram had been a spy for the army and that it was he who had informed them about the fact that Hilaal had been harboring a 'terrorist' in his house. The rest of Roohdar's story is a bit shaky and involves the two of them being illegally executed by a firing squad on top of a bridge before being thrown off into the river below. And him somehow surviving the ordeal as Hilaal died. He also gives Haider the location where his father's body was buried after being sieved out of the river by fishermen. Haider eventually goes to visit the location and the Gravedigger there points him to his father's grave after giving him a photograph of the dead body that had been buried there. The photograph is indeed of his deceased father.

Roodhar's narrative still manages to acquire some credibility in the film because the director chooses to visualize it while the actor narrates it. Moreover, it is also shown that Khurram's political success is largely due to his backing by the Indian army. And there are scenes where he colludes with the army to illegally execute other suspected 'terrorists' outside the law. Haider however is not aware of this and must, all by himself, adjudge the veracity of Roohdar's claims which he ultimately does by staging The Mousetrap later in the film. Before he stages that, though, he does put on an antic disposition. For the first time Khurram and Ghazala encounter him after his meeting with the Roodhar he seems to have

[99] As mentioned earlier Al-Bassam's Hamlet is astounded ("those are his words…how do you know that", he asks) when the Arms-Dealer recites lines form his father that were only known to him: "Vast oceans of savagery consume the world, false authority towers from Mecca to Jerusalem…from Jerusalem to the Americas and man is on the edge of a great precipice…" (17:21).

gone completely mad. And happens to be performing a 'freak show' with a noose tied around his neck in front of a large crowd of Kashmiris at Lal Chowk (literally: The Red Crossroads) which is the same place where the first Prime Minister of India had promised that there would be a plebiscite in Kashmir regarding their will to join Pakistan:

> **Haider**: UN Council Resolution No. 47 of 1948, Article II of the Geneva Convention, and Article 370 of the Indian Constitution बस एक सवाल उठाता है, बस एक: हम हैं की हम नहीं? हम हैं तो कहाँ हैं और नहीं हैं तो कहाँ गए? हम हैं तो किस लिए और कहाँ गए तो कब? जनाब। हम थे भी की हम थे ही नहीं? चुत्ज़्पाह हो गया हमारे साथ. [trans: they raise one question, just one: do we [Kashmiris] exist, or don't we? If we do, then where are we? If we don't, then where did we go? If we are, then for what purpose? If we are not, then where did we go, and when? Did we even exist or did we not? We have been chutzpah-ed.] (01:26:30).

It is highly unlikely that Haider would have been permitted to say these words at Lal Chowk if he had not put on an antic disposition. As unlikely as it is that this speech actually managed to bypass the *Central Board of Film Certification* of India which asked for 41 cuts to the film (purportedly censoring images of violence perpetrated by the Indian soldiers in Kashmir) but somehow overlooked this. It is important to quote here what exactly Haider says in its entirety to show the extent to which the film justifies his 'terroristic' motives that come after all recourse to "law and order" has supposedly been exhausted:

> **Haider:** *Attention.* Armed Forces Special Powers Act Section V Rule 4.8. 'Any commissioned officer…*जी जनाब!* [tr: yes sir!]…warrant officer…*जी जनाब!* non-comissioned officer…*जी जनाब!* …or any other person of equivalent rank of the armed forces may in a disturbed area (if he is of the opinion that it is necessary to do so for the maintenance of public order and after having given due warning as he may consider necessary) fire upon or otherwise use force even to the causing of death [*fastens his noose*] against anyone acting in contravention with law or order. Law and order. [claps]. Law. Order. Law. Order. Law. Order. Law. Order. Law. Order न लॉ है और न है आर्डर। जिसका लॉ है उसका आर्डर [trans: there is no law, and there is no

> order. The one who owns the law, gives the order]. Lay down order…law and order. इंडिया पाकिस्तान ने खेला मिलकर हमसे बॉर्डर बॉर्डर। [trans: India and Pakistan came together and played the game of borders with us.] (1:27:40).

Madness in the context of the Indo-Pakistan border disputes after their self-partition from British India almost compulsorily evokes the Partition Literature and particularly Saadat Hasan Manto's iconic character Toba Tek Singh who, comparable to Haider, loses all coordinates—geographic, psychic and moral—before literally planting himself on the No Man's Land between the borders of the two countries. Haider's madness driven accusation—at literally The Red Crossroads—that Kashmir has similarly been treated like a No Man's Land by both countries who have "played border border" (01:27:40) or the game of borders with the Kashmiris bears many resonances to Toba Tek Singh.[100]

Fig. 31: Haider (Shahid Kapoor) performs a freak-show at the Lal Chowk in *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014). Screenshot.

It is interesting to note here though that this is the first time Haider portrays himself as mad (by dressing up and performing a freak show), and is called as such by the other characters in the film. And that the director deliberately, by having him speak the aforementioned lines,

[100] Saadat Hasan Manto (1970), 'Toba Tek Singh', *Mahfil*, 6(2/3), 19-23.

blurs the distinction between madness and 'terror.'[101] One is left wondering then whether Haider is really labelled mad because what he says terrorizes the oppressive establishment. Whether the madman's truth is, indeed, an alternative, marginal, unacceptable and ultimately terrorizing truth. The freak show is also crucial in this film because of two other reasons. First because it lays the ground for The Mousetrap which is performed later in the film. And second because it is unclear whether the Bollywood production house employed Kashmiri extras to portray the crowd witnessing Haider performing this freak show. Because if these are indeed people of Kashmir then this would literally be their first appearance in *Haider* which is a film, one must remember, largely shot with mainstream Bollywood actors, directed by a mainstream Bollywood director, and funded by production houses in Mumbai. And while Bhardawaj seems to have co-written the script with the Kashmiri journalist Basharat Peer the duo (as the pacifist ending of the film which will be discuss later eventually shows), comparable to Al-Bassam, are still "unelected representative[s]" (Litvin 107) of a community whose tale they intend to re-present.[102] Especially because contrary to Bhardwaj's assertion that the production went smoothly (the credits sequence makes it a

[101] Haider also blurs the distinction between madness and terror because the 'antic disposition' also allows him to condemn the AFSPA policy at a historic location like Lal Chowk. To be quite specific his words can be read as having the ability to terrorize the AFSPA establishment whose singular goal is to prevent 'unrest' in the valley. Haider's words on the other hand function to incite unrest. The Kashmiris in fact have a history of violently protesting Indian and AFSPA occupation including in 1946-47, 1963-87 and, in recent times, 1988, June 2010, and July 2016 and the government has been persistent in its attempt to quash 'hate speech.'

[102] Bhardwaj had initially intended for the film to be a "contemporary espionage thriller" and he co-authored a script with Stephen Alter, an American-Indian author. They "wrote a 30 page synopsis" which they sent to Gulzaar (the writer-director of *Angoor*, 1982—based on *The Comedy of Errors* and also the lyricist of *Omkara*) to peruse. Gulzar "liked it" but asked Bhardwaj "where is the tragedy of Hamlet in this thriller?" Evidently Hamlet was supposed to be a RAW (Research and Analysis) Agent (RAW is the primary foreign intelligence agency of India). Gulzar's comment made Bhardwaj realize that he could not characterize such a person as Hamlet because he knew nothing about such a person. "How much do we really know about the real life of an agent? The Official Secrets Act is so stringent that it's tough to tell an authentic account of a RAW agent." It was then that Bhardwaj approached Basharat Peer (his wife had been reading Peer's memoir *Curfewed Night* which is set in Kashmir, and which won the 2010 *Crossword Prize for Non-Fiction*) to co-author the script. "The authentic feel in Haider", Bhardwaj claims, "is because of him. There are so many little things in the film which only an insider could bring in" (Singh 2014). Quite as in *Maqbool* (Abbas Tyrewala) and *Omkara* (Abhishekh Chaubey) Bhardwaj shows a tendency to collaborate with local 'authors' to co-write the script, and usually the said co-author happens to be a person belonging to or thoroughly familiar with the community in which the Shakespeare adaptation is going to be based. Beyond this point—of giving the film an "authentic feel"—one cannot see *Curfewed Night* as an adaptive source of *Haider*—it is neither acknowledged as a source nor do the events in the memoir figure in the film. It could even be said that the film's ending, that effectively endorses AFSPA, is diametrically opposed to the politics of *Curfewed Night*.

point to state that the "principal photography for this film was entirely conducted in Kashmir without any disruptions 2:35:00") there were in fact recorded instances of protests by the Kashmiris. Including a disruption of the shooting at the Kashmir University campus at Hazratbal where the students protested to the hoisting of an Indian flag on the set, shouted pro-freedom slogans, dismantled the stage and forced the cast and crew out of the Naseem Bagh (Kashmir university gardens) despite there being heavy security.[103] In another incident, according to a witness, "the shooting was in progress and both the actors were moving towards a Maruti car when suddenly somebody from the crowd threw a kangri [a pot full of coal] which almost hit Irfan Khan. The ash flew into the air and covered both Shahid and him."[104]

The Kashmiris' refusal to be treated as a spectacle for Bollywood and the Indian audience is quite evident from these protests. Merely having a co-author like Basharat Peer to provide an "authentic feel" to the script does not solve this problem either. The extent, then, to which the film itself ends up being a depiction of the blood-spattered 'freak show' of the protagonist Haider for the rest of India—comparable to the way in which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can be read as a quasi freak show leading to the bloodbath at the 'rotten' State of Denmark for the Elizabethan audience—is something that will be explored later in this chapter. [105]

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[103] For details see *The Times of India*. 2013. 'Shahid Kapoor's 'Haider' faces protests, shooting on halt' Available Online: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/bollywood/news-interviews/Shahid-Kapoors-Haider-faces-protests-shooting-on-halt/articleshow/26354179.cms?referral=PM [Accessed: 5th of May, 2017]. Also reported in *The Hindu*. Ahmed Ali Fayyaz. 2013. 'Kashmir University students disrupt shooting of Vishal Bhardwaj film.' Available Online: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/kashmir-university-students-disrupt-shooting-of-vishal-bhardwaj-film/article5387994.ece [Accessed: 5th of May, 2017]. And in *Bollywood Hungama*. 2013. 'Haider shoot in Jammu and Kashmir disrupted.' Available Online: http://www.bollywoodhungama.com/news/bollywood/haider-shoot-in-jammu-and-kashmir-disrupted/ [Accessed: 5th of May, 2017].

[104] Anil Rainal, 2014, 'Coal thrown at Shahid Kapoor in Srinagar?' *The Times of India*. Available Online: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news-interviews/Coal-thrown-at-Shahid-Kapoor-in-Srinagar/articleshow/29533886.cms?intenttarget=no [Accessed: 5th of May, 2017].

[105] In addition to the spectacle of Hamlet's own 'antic disposition', one might also add the spectacle of Ophelia's madness in 4.5 as contributing to such a reading.

IV

Setting a Mousetrap for the Indian Audience

For even though it is unclear whether the crowd witnessing Haider's 'freak show' is Kashmiri or not it is definitely clear, in various interviews that the cast of the film gave later, that the crowd witnessing the performance of The Mousetrap that follows is indeed Kashmiri. The performance itself takes place on the day Khurram finally marries Ghazala and is a part of the proceedings of the wedding ceremony. One can see Khurram, Ghazala, Pervez (Polonius), Arshee (Ophelia), Salman and Salman (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) seated in the audience along with some other people. But, if one observes closely, during parts of the performance one can also see a huge crowd of blurred-out people circling the Martand Sun Temple complex where this performance is taking place:

Fig. 32: Haider (Shahid Kapoor) performs The Mousetrap as the Kashmiris look on in the background, blurred by the director. In *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014). Screenshot.

"We couldn't shoot on the first day," says Vishal Bhardawaj in an interview, "because a huge crowd [of Kashmiris] gathered and we were just unprepared for that."[106] The lead actor Shahid Kapoor agrees, "and the next three or four days…whether it was snowing, or whether it was raining or whether the conditions got extremely cold…we were shooting in minus 15-16 degrees…so the conditions were brutal. But they just didn't leave" (Ibid 03:10).

The entire sequence of The Mousetrap, then, becomes a complex diegetic experiment catered to three different audiences. In *Hamlet,* one may recall, The Mousetrap is a play within a play where the emphasis is on *mimesis*. In *Haider* similarly The Mousetrap is first of all a dance-sequence/performance within a film. Haider himself is performing in this sequence and is the narrator of it hence the emphasis here is on *narration*. Consequently, the arugment will use Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980) to analyse it. Haider narrates the events leading up to Hilaal's death in the manner of a beast fable where all the characters are actually birds. And as he is narrating them the stage fills up with men masked as nightingales and falcons. There are consequently two levels of diegesis here: Extradiegetic (the one in which the film *Haider* is being performed for us the audience) and Intradiegetic (the one in which Haider is performing the dance sequence for Khurram and Ghazala). And both these levels are intentionally and unintentionally torn during the course of this performance. In order to smudge the boundary between reality and fiction and break the fourth wall. "All these games", writes Gérard Genette, "by the intensity of their effects demonstrate the importance of the boundaries they [the authors] tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude—a boundary *that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself*: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world in which one tells, the world of which one tells" (236). Genette calls the act of breaching these boundaries

[106] See *Haider Bismil Song Making | Music: Vishal Bhardwaj | Shahid Kapoor, Shraddha Kapoor*. Available From: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o4JHI5EwHk [Accessed: 3rd April, 2016], 2:28.

metalepsis.[107] And in *Haider*'s case the boundaries are breached not only by the character Haider with respect to his immediate audience within the film, but also by the film *Haider* with respect to its theatrical audience.

Starting with the former first: having the sequence performed as a dance gives Haider the opportunity to use various gestures without being held accountable at the literal level. In the beginning of the performance, for instance, he points at Ghazala as he recites the following stanza:

हैदर: हो.. सुनले ज़माना समझाता हूं,
तेरी कहानी दोहराता हूं.
ए दिल-ए-बुलबुल बुलबुले बिस्मिल,
ए दिल-ए-बुलबुल बुलबुल-ए-बिस्मिल.
इक जोड़ा था नर-मादा का,
भोली थी बुलबुल नर सादा था.

Haider: O Listen, world, as I explain,
Your story, I repeat, [*points at Ghazala in the audience*]
O heart of the nightingale, nightingale of the hurt one.
There was a pair of a male and a female,
The nightingale was innocent, and the male was straightforward (01:46:28).

And halfway through the performance he points at Khurram while referring to the evil falcon in the beast fable "O heart, heart, heart, heart, he lies, lies, this evil-heart lies." (दिल, दिल, दिल, दिल, झूठ कहे रे, झूठ कहे बुज़दिल, 1:48:30). Before finally slicing the gap between Khurran and Ghazala with another gesture of his hand during the verse:

हैदर: मत मिल मत मिल,

[107] Unlike Shakespeare's Hamlet, who offers commentary on the play that is being performed as a (rather disruptive) member of the audience, Haider decides to metaleptically breach narrative barriers in order to 'catch the conscience' of Khurram (as will be shown in the succeeding paragraphs). An act that also makes his performance, unlike that of Hamlet's, unstoppable. This is so because Haider is himself a part of the performance and for Khurram to leave, interrupt, or stop the performance—as Claudius does in 3.2—would be a direct affront to his stepson.

गुल से मत मिल,
ए बुलबुल-ए-बिस्मिल.
ए बुलबुले बिस्मिल.
ए बुलबुले बिस्मिल.

Haider: Do not meet, do not meet,
Do not meet the [poisoned] flower,
O nightingale of the hurt one,
O nightingale of the hurt one,
O nightingale of the hurt one (01:48:32).

Comparable to The Mousetrap in *Hamlet*, moreover, the entire beast fable reflects Khurram's complicity in Hilaal's murder. The falcon (Khurram) charms the she-nightingale (Ghazala) before lopping off the wings of the he-nightingale (Hilaal), "shackling" him, and throwing him off into the same river Haider's father was thrown into (1:49:20). Bhardwaj acknowledges that it was the toughest song he has composed in his entire career "It took over four months to compose. I recorded it in Srinagar, Mumbai and London, but I couldn't get what I wanted. This is 'The Mousetrap' (the play within the play) of Hamlet. This is when Haider re-enacts the murder, but I had to do that while retaining the poetic flavour. It was tough" (Singh 2014). The whole sequence in fact has a heavily allegorical dimension because the dramatic genre, with all its puppets and masks, forms a part of an allegory-infused Kashmiri folk tradition known as Bhand Pather (भांड पाथइर). Originating roughly after the 10th century the genre's primary function (which is deployed here quite deftly in the context of the theme of memory in *Hamlet*) is to enact performances *in remembrance* of Muslim saints. The word Bhand, as mentioned in Bharata's *Natya Shastra* (the Indian equivalent of Aristotle's *Poetics*), literally means a monologue (46).[108] And usually in the context of the Kashmiri folk tradition it is a satirical monologue.

[108] M.K Kaw similarly notes how "the bhana, a one-actor play described by Bharata is still performed in Kashmir by groups called bhand pather (bhana patra in Sanskrit)" (61). Jisha Menon too recognizes the Bhand Pather as "one of the oldest extant folk theatres in the subcontinent. The first references to [which] are found in

If taken literally however Haider's performance is not satirical at all. Its satirical dimension can only exist if, and only if, the immediate audience sees Khurram as complicit in Hilaal's murder. In other words the only way for the immediate audience to reconcile the lack-of-satire in the performance is if it abandons the version of Hilaal's death that it has been fed and instead sees Khurram as a culprit.

Fig. 33: Haider (Shahid Kapoor) also uses puppets in the performance of The Mousetrap. In *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014). Screenshot.

And despite all this there is a third dimension in which the performance is satirical. In *Hamlet* one might remember that there is an allegorical significance to the play within the play. Claudius murders Old Hamlet by pouring poison quite specifically into his ear. It is an act that is often read as an allegory considering how Old Hamlet is conflated with the State of Denmark altogether.[109] Claudius' act of pouring poison into the ear of Denmark can then be read as giving a false version of the death of Old Hamlet to the country. In the adaptation of

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Bharata's Natyashastra" (156). The word Bhand, one might note here, in Sanskrit also means "clown" or "jester" which is quite apt in the case of Hamlet's 'antic disposition.' It is also an association that is played upon in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* which is again set in Kashmir.

[109] Even The Ghost in Shakespeare's play builds on the literal and metaphorical significance of this act. "Now, Hamlet, hear / 'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard, / A serpent stung me. *So the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forgèd process of my death / Rankly abused*. But know, thou noble youth, / The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown" (1.5.35-40, emphasis added). The reference here may be to the king's two bodies but these associations are present at other instances in the play as well. Laertes, for instance, is determined to have nothing come between him and his revenge but he is easily manipulated/poisoned by Claudius into serving the latter's needs. Quite literally: Claudius poisons his rapier which, eventually, leads to his own death. Similarly the associations are also built in the context of ears and of 'information circulation' as when Hamlet tells Horatio "I have words to speak in thine ear will make / thee dumb." (4.6.25-26).

this theme in *Haider* it becomes, to borrow Žižek's phrase again, a question of the 'terrorism' of the State's totalitarian "information circulation" (96) which Haider counter-terrorizes by offering alternative information. And via the Mousetrap he ultimately ends up conveying this 'alternative' information not only to the immediate audience but also to the theatrical audience of this film.

Now the Bhaand Pather might be allegorical as well as satirical at the basic level—for the audience that comprises of Ghazala, Khurram, Salman, Pervez etc. But due to the presence of the unexpected blurred-out Kashmiri audience which, as Genette would have put it, metaleptically breaches the narrative level, the entire performance becomes allegorical as well as satirical even for the theatrical audience of this film. For the mainstream Indian audience too has been largely given one dimensional information of the state of Kashmir—of how great a job the Indian troops are doing there—by the Indian media. Haider's account of how his father was warrantlessly kidnapped, killed and thrown off into the river by the army is not just an indictment of Khurram, but also equally of the passive Indian audience which is culpable for the Kashmiris' plight. His allegorical figures like the nightingale (who stands for Gertrude), the male-nightingale (who stands for Old Hamlet) and the falcon (who stands for Khurram) consequently acquire new meaning in relation to the Indian audience. For earlier in the film the Indian army had launched a new operation in Kashmir where suspected 'terrorists' were swiftly executed without proper trials by militiamen hired by the army. The army had named this project "Operation Bulbul" (trans: Operation Nightingale) (42:25). In The Mousetrap then it is hard for the she-nightingale/Gertrude to not acquire resonance from Operation Nightingale and stand for Kashmir (which, with its predominantly Muslim population belonged to Pakistan). Similarly Old Hamlet becomes Pakistan (which was driven out of Kashmir by India) and the evil falcon becomes India (who enchants the Kashmiris into giving up any hopes of joining Pakistan).

It would, of course, be a bit of a stretch to claim that the director actively intended to implicate the Indian audience in The Mousetrap. In as much as he was unaware at the beginning that the Kashmiris would be present at the scene one can safely say that the allegory and satire were meant to be limited to the immediate Khurram-Ghazala-Pervez audience within the film. But perhaps the most ironic decision he made, during the course of shooting the sequence, was that the blurred out the Kashmiri audience. In what one can only describe as an iconic instance of Bollywoodsplaning (or Bollywod-explaning) the act of blurring just goes on to show how irrelevant the Kashmiris—their opinions, presence, views—are within the narration of the story of their own State.

The Mousetrap also marks the point from where one, as an audience, is sufficiently alienated from the story of the film…just as the Danish court-audience is supposed to be alienated from the official story about Old Hamlet's death. Alienated enough to question Bollywood's presence in the Kashmiri context in the first place. And ask whether the Bhaand Pather—arguably the only traditional mode of entertainment in the film—is used merely because it is exotic, and not because it accurately represents the Kashmiri culture. If one looks back and examines the various references to Bollywood in the film, one begins to see patterns on how the Indian film industry's cultural domination of the Kashmiri imaginary is closely linked to the Indian army's physical domination of the Kashmir valley. One stage of Operation Nightingale, that is launched by the Indian army to execute 'terrorists' outside the law, involves parading the suspects in front of the screen of private cinema halls located in various parts of Kashmir. These cinemas seem to be playing Bollywood movies as the suspects are paraded in front of the screen…for an audience that comprises of Kashmiri police and the Indian soldiers (who cull out the suspects that should be executed). In fact it is in one such cinema hall (Faraz Cinema, which is playing a film starring the iconic Bollywood

actor Salman Khan, 1:14:48) that Roohdar and Hilaal actually spot Khurram in the audience and are assured of his complicity in Hilaal's downfall.

Fig. 34: Suspected terrorists are paraded in front of the screening of a Salman Khan film in a cinema hall in *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014). Screenshot.

Other references to Bollywood are subtler but still go on ahead to link the cultural domination by the industry with the physical domination of Kashmir. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Salman and Salman), one might remember, are actually named after the aforementioned 'superstar' Salman Khan. Moreover, after they learn from Haider the meaning of the word 'chutzpah' (in AFSPA's context) they use it to sell a copy of a Bollywood film starring the superstar Salman Khan to a couple of British tourists:

> **Salman**: You know…this film was…was chutzpah.
> **Salman 2:** Yeah**.**
> **Salman:** Big chutzpah in India (47:00).

Except for *Haider* though most of the Bollywood films on Kashmir like *Mission Kashmir* (2000) and *Lakshya* (2004) have a largely black and white outlook on the conflict and are unambiguously pro-India. Hence for Salman and Salman to refer to these Bollywood films as chutzpah is a bit ironic. In their partial understanding of the term they think chutzpah means a 'big success.' Whereas the audience, on the other hand, would inevitably end up associating

their claim that 'this film was chutzpah' with the film *Haider* itself which, with its 41 censor board cuts and suspiciously pro-'terroristic' timbre, is more of an act of chutzpah by the director.[110] "Given that Bollywood usually ends up making trashy films around Kashmir", as Sameer Bhatt, writing for a Pakistani news outlet, points out, "Haider indeed sets the bar a notch higher" (Bhatt 2014).

In fact Haider himself makes the ultimate conflation of the Bollywoodian domination of Kashmiri culture with the Indian physical domination of the Kashmir valley when he jokingly links the national capital Delhi to the National School of Drama while mocking Ghazala's ceremonious display of grief:

> **हैदर**: दिल्ली गयी न मौजी तोह एक जगह नौकरी पक्की है आपकी।
>
> **ग़ज़ाला**: कहाँ?
>
> **हैदर**: नेशनल स्कूल ऑफ़ ड्रामा। (48:29).

[110] It is almost impossible to know the extent to which Haider was censored by the Indian Government. The official statement regarding, and detailing the cuts, has—as of May 2017—been deleted from the website of The Central Board of Film Certification of India (even though the entries for *Omkara* and *Maqbool* are still there). When this chapter was first written it was still available: *Haider* (2014) Available From: http://cbfcindia.gov.in/html/uniquepage.aspx?va=haider&Type=search [Accessed: 24th of April, 2016]. Writing for the *Mumbai Mirror* and *The Times of India* Vickey Lalwani records the confusion around the extent to which *Haider* was censored. The CEO of the censor board Rakesh Kumar "who is currently in judicial custody after being accused in a bribery case […] along with the examining committee, not only suggested the cuts but also reviewed the reedited film. According to the rule book, the examining committee cannot view the film after the cuts have been introduced and it's brought back to the CBFC. That's when the revising committee steps in." This differs from Bhardwaj's account, whose spokesperson asserts "The CBFC asked for seven cuts. The film was first submitted to the Board two months before the final edit. When the film came to the revising committee, Vishal along with the film's editor, had made more than 35 cuts to tighten the film. These were not imposed by either the Board or the revising committee." This in turn differs from the account given by Nandini Saradesai a senior board member and chair of the revising committee who maintains that "the film never came to them. 'Kumar saw Haider twice and passed it with a UA certificate. Vishal has apparently agreed to the cuts. But, I don't understand why the revising committee was not approached. That man (read Kumar) was flouting rules'" (Lalwani 2014). It might be helpful to note here that the then Chairperson of the CBFC Leela Samson resigned from the board barely 3 months after *Haider* was released in a dispute regarding another film. She cited increasing government "interference", "coercion" and "corruption" as her reasons. "Recent cases of interference in the working of the CBFC by the ministry", she writes, "through an 'additional charge' CEO, and corrupt panel members has caused a degradation of those values that the members of this Board of CBFC and Chairperson stood for" (Samson 2015). See also Layla Maheswari, 2015, 'India's censorship board in disarray amid claims of political interference.' *The Guardian*. Available Online: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jan/21/india-censorship-board-crisis-leela-samson-msg-messenger-of-god-political-interference [Accessed: 4th of May, 2017].

> **Haider**: If you go to Delhi, mom, you are very likely to get a job in once place
> **Ghazala**: Where?
> **Haider**: The National School of Drama.

In contrast to Bollywood-culture, so to speak, local Kashmiri culture—often conflated with some blanket idea of 'Islamic' culture—is unambiguously linked to 'terroristic' activities in this film. This is true not only of the Bhaand Pather performance—which seeks to justify Haider's anti-establishment view of the death of his father—but also of various references to Faiz Ahmed Faiz that are made through the film. Adaptations of *Hamlet* that replace the Ghost-figure with a more credible figure in modern times usually employ the tools of memory and recognition to assert the legitimacy of the said figure. In *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, as seen already, the Ghost-substitute quotes a phrase from Old Hamlet that reassures Hamlet that he has indeed met his father and is not fabricating the account of his death. Haider is similarly heavily skeptical of Roohdar's claims regarding Hilaal's death until the Roohdar recites a verse from a song that Hilaal really used to like. The song—titled *The Empty Birdcage*—is written by renowned Pakistani ghazali Faiz Ahmed Faiz. And the particular refrain that is used constantly in the film to elicit remembrance of Old Hamlet runs thus:

> گلوں میں رنگ بھرے، بادِ نو بہار چلے
> چلے بھی آؤ کہ گلشن کا کاروبار چلے
>
> Like the new breeze of spring that grants blossoms their color,
> Come already my love, grant the garden permission to go about its business (01:10:45).

Again the horticultural and aviary allegory along with the very title of this song *The Empty Birdcage* lend force to the associations the film has been making with Operation Nightingale—and the Bhaand Pather beast fable. This song essentially passes from one terroristically-inclined character, so to speak, to another. It first appears when the movie shows a scene from Haider's childhood where his father encourages him to recite the song in

exchange for little treats. It is next heard when Roohdar recites a verse in order to convince Haider that he knew his father. And one finally hears it in Roohdar's flashback in a detention camp where Hilaal is singing the song amidst the suspected 'terrorists' in order to alleviate their suffering.

Similarly, Haider's performance of the Bhaand Pather during The Mousetrap is linked to the Sufi musician Zahoor Saeen and also simultaneously to Roohdar. This happens after Haider finishes the performance, jumps across the stage and bows in front of the Khurram. The latter responds by applauding and sarcastically asking:

> **खुर्रम**: कहानी बहुत खूब है तुम्हारे पात्र की. किसने लिखी? ज़हूर साइन ने या रूहदार नें?
>
> **Khurram:** The tale of your character is splendid. Who wrote it? Was it Zahoor Saeen or Roohdar?

The reference Khurram is making here is to the Pakistani Sufi folk singer Saeen Zahoor Ahmed who only came into international recognition in 2006 after being nominated for the BBC World Music Awards by "word of mouth"[111] before eventually going ahead and winning the BBC Voice of the Year[112] award in the same year. He is notable for reciting *kalams* (कलाम) or devotional verses from Mian Muhammad Bakhsh also known as "The Rumi of Kashmir."[113] Sufism itself, often regarded as Islamic mysticism, is considered a "belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God" (Schimmel 1998). From the 13th to the 16th

[111] Robin Denselow (2005), 'Sufi's Choice', *The Guardian*, Available From: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2005/dec/02/worldmusic.classicalmusicandopera [Accessed: 15th May, 2016].
[112] See the BBC article on the same. Available From: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/worldmusic/a4wm2006/a4wm_zahoor.shtml [Accessed 15th May, 2016].
[113] Ibid.

centuries, often regarded as the Golden Age of Sufi literature, a huge corpus of poetry came into being "beginning with charming, short Arabic love poems (sometimes sung for a mystical concert, samā) that express the yearning of the soul for union with the beloved" (Schimmel 1998). Now if one examines once again the beast-fable that Haider sings, about the male nightingale and his beloved female partner, one can easily trace the Sufist elements present within. Especially once one takes into consideration that, comparable to the representation of Ghazala and Hilaal in Haider's beast-fable, "in Indo-Muslim popular mystical songs the soul is the loving wife, God the longed-for husband." The entire use of the avian and horticultural allegory can similarly be seen to have been derived from Sufism:

> Long mystic—didactic poems (maṡnawīs) were written to introduce the reader to the problems of unity and love by means of allegories and parables. After Sanāī's Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqah wa sharīʿat aṭ-ṭariqah ("The Garden of Truth and the Law of Practice"), came ʿAṭṭar's Manṭeq al-ṭeyr ("The Conference of the Birds") and Rūmī's Maṡnavī-ye maʿnavī ("Spiritual Couplets"). These three works are the sources that have furnished poets for centuries with mystical ideas and images (Schimmel 1998).

What is crucial here is that Khurram links Zahoor Saeen to Roohdar, the jihadist recruiter. And that the indigenous culture is perceived here, by association, as not something Kashmiri but something that is inherently 'Islamic'. In their essay titled *Exoticized, Marginalized, Demonized: The Muslim 'Other' in Indian Cinema* Anandam Kavoori and Kalyani Chadha have previously shown the prevalence of this phenomenon in Bhardawaj's adaptation of *Macbeth* (*Maqbool*, 2003). Taking all this into consideration, it is no wonder then that the Kashmiris protested against the film while it was being shot. Margaret Litvin understands this process additionally as an inevitable result of the 'passage through the foreign' or the exotic, which is something that is present in *The Al-Hamlet Summit* as well:

> Al-Bassam did *not* set out to write a *Hamlet* play for an Arab audience. Rather he sought to shock and implicate his *Western*, mainly British audience, by recreating the "voyeuristic thrill" and "sense of strangeness in familiarity" that he sensed Arab

audiences had felt in his earlier productions (112).

Litvin asserts how this approach can be additionally rewarding when it comes to talking about subjects like 'terrorism'…discussions around which—as noted via Butler earlier—have been repressed in the West. "The impulse from another culture", Litvin writes, quoting Antony Tatlow, "is sought and absorbed, because it enables an otherwise difficult, if not impossible engagement with what has been repressed at home." As in the case of the unspeakable/repressed subject of regicide for the Elizabethans (in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*) and its modern equally unspeakable/repressed adapted equivalent in these films: terrorism. "Linking Brecht's *Verfremdungseffect* to Freud's idea of unrepression," she adds, "Tatlow describes how experiencing a moment of theatre from 'another culture' can trigger a vital moment of self-recognition in defiance of local norms via a 'passage through the foreign'" (112).

This passage through the foreign however does pose the risk of—as in the case of *Haider* like noted above—stereotyping. For it requires one to "posit and at least temporarily essentialise—however approximately—two cultures" (112). And it is infinitely hard for a film to maintain the distinction between artistically justified essentialism and stereotyping. Even more so when—as in the case of both *The Al-Hamlet Summit* and *Haider*—the ending of the scripts are catered (and one might even say altered) to satisfying the anxieties of a non-Muslim audience.

V

Hamlet Hamstrung

For the ending of *The Al-Hamlet* Summit goes something like this: The lead actors walk on the stage and fall one by one while a British news anchor's voice narrates the events leading to their death. Hamlet apparently takes refuge in a grand mosque as Claudius sends

his troops to kill him. Gertrude is killed trying to prevent the troops from reaching her son. Claudius' character falls on the stage signifying he's dead. And Hamlet's character falls on the stage after this as well. A United Nations peacekeeping force meanwhile arrives in the said Arab country to maintain order. Fortinbras is made the new ruler.

And the ending of *Haider* goes something like this: Roohdar gives Haider a gun to shoot Khurram with. But Haider is unable to accomplish the deed because he doesn't want to kill Khurram while he is at prayer (मार देता तो तुझ जैसे सूअर को भी जन्नत मिल जाती "if I had killed you at that moment then even a pig like you would have gone to heaven" 1:58:53). He is consequently captured but manages to escape after killing Salman and Salman (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) and making his way to the Gravediggers (who are also insurgents/'terrorists' in this film) for refuge.[114] He however gives away his hiding-spot when Arshi's/Ophelia's corpse is brought in to be buried in the same graveyard and he can't contain his grief. Khurram/Claudius, being notified about Haider's location, sends militiamen to kill him. Ghazala, on somehow hearing about this from Roohdar/Ghost, too arrives at the scene and pleads Khurram to let her go inside the graveyard and convince Haider to surrender. Khurram reluctantly obliges. But Haider refuses to surrender. Ghazala tells him that revenge only breeds revenge and leaves. On her way back to Khurram and the militiamen, however, she takes off her drapes revealing that she has a suicide bomb strapped to her body (evidently given to her by Roohdar). She blows up Khurram and the militiamen

[114] Bhardwaj's choice to cast the Gravediggers as insurgents/terrorists builds into the themes of ritual, remembrance, revenge, and religion that were discussed earlier. Bodies of unidentified individuals taken hostage, and then killed extra-judicially, by the AFSPA are buried by them. But they also are instrumental in covertly burying the bodies of 'terrorists' that ought not to be found by the state so that the state continues to look for them presuming that they are still alive. The ritual of burying and hiding them beneath the ground then in a sense makes these 'terrorists' invulnerable and uncapturable by the state. Even if the state gives up looking for them they would still be imprinted in the collective memory of the State as 'terrorists' that got away. Conversely, in as much as these 'terrorists' are buried in unmarked graves, remembrance is the price they have to pay for being imprinted in the State's memory since unmarked graves are likely to be 'forgotten' by immediate relations.

so that her son doesn't have to take revenge on them and is freed from the cycle of revenge (see Endnote 2). Haider rushes out and finds that Khurram is still half-alive, he had apparently run away from Ghazala and hence the blast only managed to damage his legs. Khurram asks Haider to kill him. But Haider refuses, and leaves.

Both scripts, as one can see, have altered the ending of *Hamlet*. The protagonist does not get to take revenge on Claudius. In the case of *The Al-Hamlet Summit* Claudius is in control of the situation, and dies (one doesn't exactly know how) because of his own arrogance in trying to worm out Hamlet from the mosque. And in the case of *Haider* Ghazala/Gertrude blows herself up to end up convincing Haider that revenge is not worth it.[115] The poetic justice accorded to Hamlet is denied to his counterparts in these productions. Perhaps, one is bound to wonder, because once these Hamlets have been designated

[115] This ending can perhaps be interpreted based on the Oedipal themes present in the film. The scenes from Haider's childhood that Bhardwaj takes pains to illustrate in the film include a crucial moment where Hilaal Meer gives in to Ghazala's demand that Haider be sent off to Aligarh (away from the revolution-oriented Kashmiri youths) for his education. If we were to follow Ruth Stein's interpretation of the phenomenon of suicide bombing in relation to Islamic societies this incident could perhaps be read as follows. The son would take this incident, where his father refused to stand up to his mother on his behalf in a society where the father has the ultimate power, as a refutation of his love by his father. He would then see his needy and love-seeking parts as loathsome (which explains Haider's ultimate indifference towards Arshi/Ophelia). This deprived and unhappy side of his would be further exacerbated by his censured love for his mother in a society where women are marginalised and undervalued. The feelings of sensitivity and want birthed here would thus become a source of shame and humiliation, and angrily sublimated onto others. Ghazala's pre-emption of Haider's motives and her decision to blow herself, and her lover Khurram, up in order to free Haider from the cycle of revenge could then perhaps be read as a solution to the psychological complex he develops. It is a simultaneous assertion of her own needs—to see him happy and free of the desire for revenge—and via this assertion an appeal for him to embrace his needy and love-seeking side. For more information on the father-son and mother-son relationship in the context of suicide bombings see Stein, Ruth. "Evil as Love and as Liberation." Psychoanalytic Dialogues 12.3 (2002): 393-420. See also the interview in The Indian Express of the actress Tabu (who plays Gertrude, and who also played Lady Macbeth in Maqbool) where she asserts that Bhardwaj cast her "as [Haider's] mother because he wanted the oddity of the relationship to come out which wouldn't have come across with a regular aged mother and son combination. Haider shares a love/hate relationship with Ghazala but it's a very passionate emotion. You almost feel odd that these two are mom and son. Haider's predicament is that he doesn't know what to do with his mother—whether to love her, hate her, believe her or kill her" (Singh 2014). Ghazala herself "is torn between her idealistic husband, opportunistic brother-in-law and her innocent and passionate son. Somewhere she feels she has the responsibility to keep everything in control but obviously she can't. Her love for her son is crazy. She is always trying to protect him from being misled and misguided" (Ibid).

'terrorists' according poetic justice to them is something not quite palatable for the target audiences of these productions.

By having the death of Hamlet narrated by a British news anchor's voice *The Al-Hamlet Summit* does however problematize the question of narration that is touched in the Shakespeare's play and in *Haider* as well. "Sticking a sword into someone's body", as Greenblatt puts it, might indeed be "a very tricky way of remembering the dead" (225) but this act of remembrance is in itself incomplete until there is "a last reckoning, a moment, however brief, in which the revenger—agent of what Francis Bacon calls 'wild justice'—discloses the nature of the crime that he has now punished" (227). In Hamlet's case this does not happen:

> You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,
> Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—
> But let it be (5.2.330-33)

…before he urges Horatio whose name evokes the Latin term *oratio* (speech/oration) to report and continue the remembrance:

> —Horatio, I am dead.
> Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
> To the unsatisfied (5.2.334).

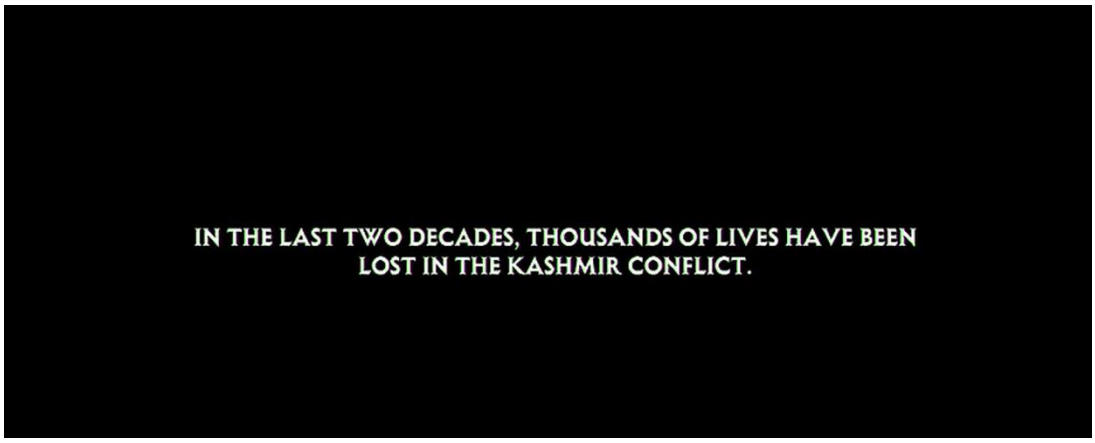
Revenge as a ritual of remembrance is incomplete if there are no witnesses to remember the act of vengeance; to convey its purpose, and its significance. Someone must live to tell the story. Or the revenge must be terrific enough to cause an incomprehensible vacuum in the State's information circulation ("Only through a challenge to dominant media," notes Butler, "certain kinds of lives become visible or knowable in their precariousness" 37:10). A vacuum, that is to say, which the establishment cannot easily explain away. There being no Horatio in *The Al-Hamlet Summit* the British news anchor can only but resort to stereotypes when he tries to explain the events…he glosses over them

presenting a typical vista of a failed Arab State while ignoring completely the subtleties of why Hamlet turned against Claudius. In the case of *Haider*, similarly, it is unclear what the protagonist's future is considering he has already been designated a 'terrorist' by the Indian Police and his coming out unscathed from the massacre in the graveyard is likely to lead to him being pinpointed as the culprit. The audience does not of course know how the events would play out since the film ends at this point. And yet, comparable to Horatio in *Hamlet* and the news anchor in *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, a different narrative takes hold of *Haider* at this point.

For once the scene fades out the paratext of the film, so to speak, takes over the narration for an oddly significant amount of time. During the course of which the director essentially recants and undercuts the entire argument the first three quarters of the film had made regarding Haider's motives in seeking vengeance for his father's unjust disappearance. The credits sequence begins, as expected, with a nod to the director:[116]

Followed by an observation of the devastating effect the Kashmir issue has had on the lives of people:

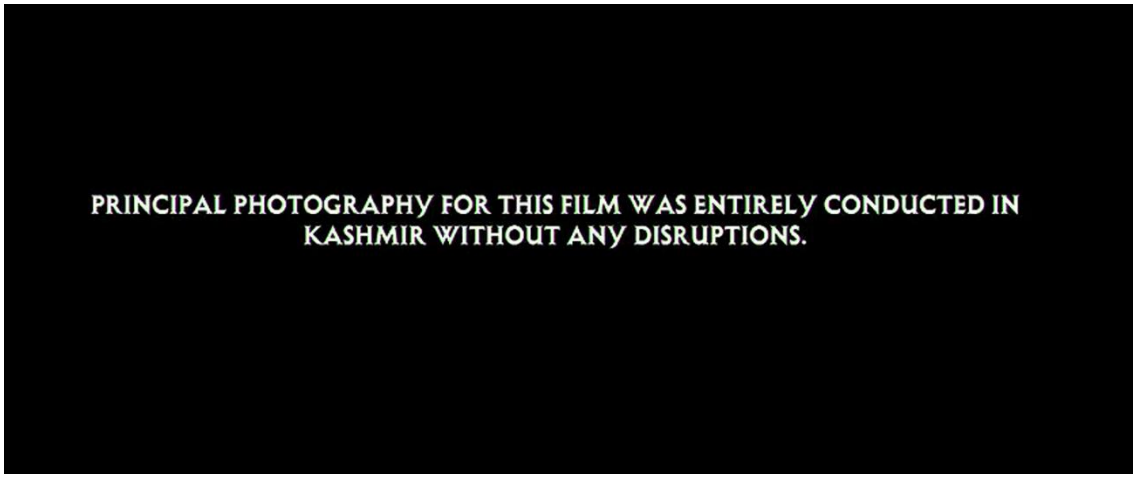
[116] For the next six pictures see *Haider* (2014), from 2:34:50 to 2:35:37.



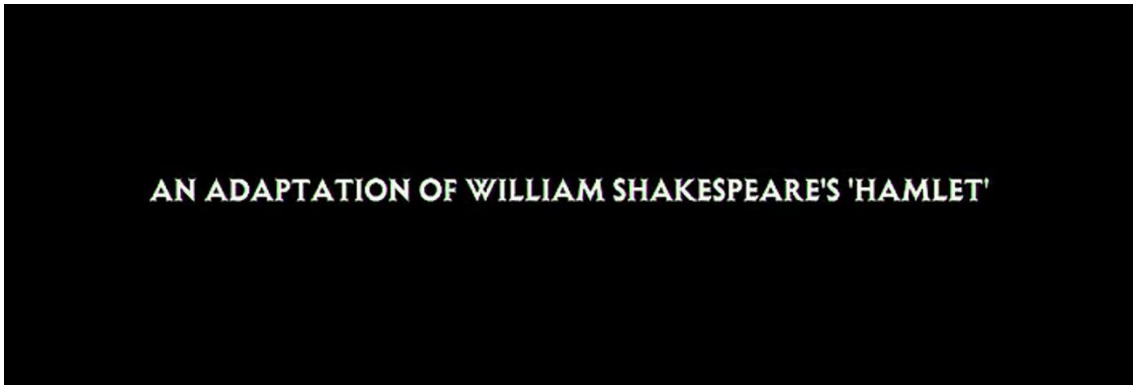
It is interesting to note here how the unilateral military domination of the valley by AFSPA is now being described as a two-sided 'conflict.' This is followed by a supposedly redeeming characteristic of the AFSPA: that it has contributed to the maintenance of a relative peace and stability in the region ever since its imposition which, in turn, has led to increased tourism:

Next comes a complete exoneration of the Indian Police State, the Army and the law of AFSPA (that renders the military immune from prosecution) with a statement applauding their efforts in rescuing people from a natural disaster. And justifying the military presence in the valley on that sole basis:

If saluting the army wasn't enough, the entire message of pacifism in the face of oppression that this film ends up endorsing is legitimized by the following claim (falsely) stating that the Kashmiris had no grievances about this film's message:



And lastly, to top it all, the message of the film is validated by conflating it with the time-tested message of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* while completely ignoring the fact that the ending of the film has been altered, and made extremely pacifist, compared to that of the original play:



Once one takes this paratextual narrative into account the motives for Haider's revenge are completely hamstrung. His very act of questioning the laws of AFSPA is now presented as something that has contributed to the disturbance in the 'relative peace' and the 'increased tourism' of the valley and that is an insult to the humanitarian flood-rescuing soldiers. Even if one were to ignore the fact that the film altered the ending so that Hamlet never gets to take his revenge the effect of this paratext is still pretty damning. Comparable to a hypothetical ending of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where the curtain call is accompanied by messages illustrating how great a ruler Claudius was, and how much peace and stability he provided to Denmark, and how much tourism increased under his rule.

*

The paratext's need to so strongly undercut the argument built by the film in its first three-quarters is foreshadowed by the anti-terrorism *deus ex machina* ending of the film itself. How Ghazala/Gertrude managed to get in touch with Roohdar, get a suicide bomb from him, and walk past the Indian Police into a cordoned off zone with that bomb is as incredulous as her conviction that Haider is going to walk away free after she has blown up everyone in the graveyard. If anything, the bombing by Ghazala to supposedly free Haider from the cycle of revenge ultimately signifies, to the Indian audience, that violence in the service of pacifism is justified (which ironically is the driving logic behind the imposition of the AFSPA in Kashmir and, one might add, the driving logic behind NATO intervention in

Al-Bassam's 'Arab states'). This alteration of the ending is also unprecedented in the play's 400-year-old history. *Hamlet* has, on occasions more than one, been performed to refer to regimes equally, less, and even more obviously authoritarian than the Indian Police State in Kashmir. Starting from 1748 when the Russian playwright Alexander Sumarokov made the play focus on the "prince's duty to set the citizens free of the tyranny visited on them by Claudius" (Dawson 185). To 1926 when Leopold Jessner used the play "as a denunciation of the corrupt and fawning imperial court surrounding the [Kaiser Wilhelm]" (Hortmann 214). And, again, in 1941, when a production of *Hamlet* directed by Bohuš Stejskal in Nazi-occupied Prague "emphasized, with due caution, the helpless situation of an intellectual attempting to endure in a ruthless environment" (Burian 200). All the way till 1964 when Grigori Kozintsev's version of the play was profoundly informed by the Stalinist era. In all of these adaptations, the point being, Hamlet *gets* to take his revenge. The question one might be tempted to ask, then, is whether the regimes of the AFSPA and the ones that haunt Al-Bassam's 'Arab states' are indeed more subtly totalitarian than all the regimes these previous adaptations of *Hamlet* have portrayed. So much so that Hamlet, at the end of both *Haider* and *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, *must not* get to have his revenge even in a fictional, artistic medium.

Even if one were to look at Bhardawaj's previous work the forcefully pacifist alteration of the ending in *Haider* presents a problem. In *Omkara* (2006), for instance (a film that is set in a Hindu community) he specifically alters the ending so that Emilia ends up *avenging* Desdemona by killing Iago. In *Maachis* (Matchstick, 1996), a movie directed by Gulzar for which Bhardwaj served as the music director the plot similarly revolves around Sikh insurgents who, comparable to Haider with regards to Khurram, are on a mission to kill two Indian police commanders called Khurana and Kedarnath. The Sikh insurgents, unlike Haider, are allowed their revenge. The only conclusion one can derive then is, quite simply, that Bhardwaj felt that if *Haider*—based in an Islamic setting—had been loyal to the plot of

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* it would inevitably have ended up endorsing 'terrorism' in the contemporary political milieu. This also seems to be the case with Al-Bassam in *The Al-Hamlet Summit* where not only is Hamlet denied vengeance but is also doubly hamstrung by being presented as someone with a hollow motive. The latter being so because, as one may recall from the discussion on the Arms-Dealer, it is never made clear during the course of the production whether or not Claudius even killed Old Hamlet (unlike in Shakespeare's play where Claudius confesses his crime while praying in 3.3.39).

Catered explicitly for Western audiences, as Ing Kanjanavanit would have put it, these two productions fail to strike a chord amongst the communities whom they claim to represent. Al-Bassam, Bhardawaj and Peer hence, all three of them, become typical 'theatre directors who are unelected representatives' (to borrow a phrase from Margaret Litvin) of those whom they re-present artistically. It is no wonder then that "the only Arab audience ever to see the play", as Litvin notes of *The Al-Hamlet Summit*, "laughed loudly at least through the first two-thirds" (111). There has, similarly, been an equally damning lack of response—emblematic of a refusal to take the movie seriously—by the Kashmiris to *Haider*. Whilst in Pakistan Duriya Hashmi, writing for *Dawn*, points out the narrative crisis when she asserts that "the film rebuts its own narrative [by] taking the moved audience by surprise as the end credits roll saluting the Indian Army for saving the lives of thousands of Kashmiris during the recent floods" (Hashmi 2014). And while the first three-fourths of the film has been praised by mainstream Indian critics—as well as Western critics—for its portrayal of the tyranny of AFSPA nearly all of them seem to ignore the implication of the narrative crisis, of the act of manipulating the ending as well as the effect of the paratext. An ending that might not be odd from a purely cinematic perspective but, as discussed earlier, that becomes glaringly questionable from a scholarly viewpoint once the history of the performance of the play in totalitarian regimes—where the ending has hitherto remained

unchanged—is taken into account. But even though one may question Bhardwaj what gives one the authority to question his Kashmiri co-writer Basharat Peer's approval of this ending? Recalling Peter J. Smith's concerns regarding *The Al-Hamlet Summit* might perhaps be helpful in answering this question. "Who am I", he asks as well, "as a non-Muslim, non-Arabic speaking Englishman to tell Sulayman Al-Bassam how to write and direct his adaptation?" before asserting that the legitimacy of his opinion stems from his position as a scholar of Shakespeare:

> Or might my responsibility as a professional Shakespearean provide me with an alternative position of authority from which to challenge his appropriation or at least interrogate it? (quoted in Litvin 111).

Huang and Rivlin's assessment of Litvin's critique of *The Al-Hamlet Summit* viz. "that we consider *consumption* as a metaphor for Al-Bassam's double-edged texts, which may end up devouring themselves rather than achieving their stated ends" (11) holds even more true then of *Haider* with its manipulated, self-destructive ending. For, at the end of the day, the *Central Board of Film Certification* of India might have made 41 cuts to censor the AFSPA-related violence in the film yet the most peerless act of censorship is, of course, Bhardawaj and Peer's preemptive act of altering the ending of Shakespeare's play.

Conclusion

There are three kinds of narrative crises that have been examined during the course of this thesis. The first, in *Maqbool*, proceeds from a radical interpretation of the Duncan character that, while sustainable through the first half of the film, ultimately necessitates changes in the second half which Bhardwaj was unable or unwilling to make. The second, in *Omkara*, proceeds from the super-addition of the color theme onto the caste *agon* which ends up intermeshing caste with colour as well as creating two opposing aliens in the play (the *white* outsider, and the *black* outcaste). The third, in *Haider*, proceeds from the interpretation of Hamlet as a 'terrorist' in an Islamic context which, while sustainable initially, ultimately leads to a situation where the sheer complexity of Shakespeare's protagonist threatens the pacifist moral statement that the film wishes, or the film is forced by the CBFC, to make.

One might contest that in all these situations the methodology used might itself have, at times, fallen prey to the very fidelity discourse it seeks to expunge. In the examination of the second-half of *Maqbool*, for instance, is the argument not already engaging in a process of comparison with the 'original' when it questions the necessity of including or excluding a particular scene from Shakespeare's play? Similarly, in *Omkara*, how can the argument categorically determine that the presence of two 'aliens'—a white outsider and a black outcaste—somehow disturbs the dynamics of the adaptation? And, most importantly, in the case of *Haider*, what gives the argument the authority to hold the expectation that Hamlet *should* have his revenge? In her analysis of *Haider* Taarini Mookherjee warns against such placement of "an emphasis on a comparison with the putative original and the unidirectional process of adaptation" since that "can result in overlooking both an adaptation's political ramifications and its role as an interpretation of the original" (1).

Yet the concerns raised—by the examination of all these cases—proceed not from any desire to make comparisons to the putative original at all. As mentioned in the Introduction, the methodology employed in this thesis does not merely involve the process of the adaptation of the Shakespeare 'original', but it also involves an examination of that process in light of the adaptation and representation of the Indian post-colonial 'reality' so to speak. The "political ramifications" of an adaptation like *Omkara* are not overlooked but are instead laid bare when the argument takes the examination of the misrepresentation of caste as the central focus.[117] For it is this misrepresentation that leads to the creation of two opposing 'aliens' that are put into scrutiny later in the chapter. Similarly, in the examination of *Haider*, the emphasis is not on whether the protagonist ought to have his revenge—or whether there is no conceivable scenario where an adaptation of Hamlet does not end with revenge—the emphasis instead is on the reasons why a pacifist ending was chosen in a particular context (that of a predominantly Muslim Indian-administered Kashmir).

Finally, in the analysis of *Maqbool,* what is thrown into discussion is the forceful retention of certain elements of the plot from Shakespeare's play that do not coherently integrate within the narrative of the film.[118] At the end of this thesis then it should be evident, as also outlined in the Introduction, that the argument does not suppose that the success of a present-day adaptation will hinge on its ability to discard indebtedness to the original but one

[117] By "political ramifications" the reference here is to issues of political importance in India (like race, caste, and terrorism) and not to the specific portrayal of "politics" in any film (regarding film-noir mafia politics and the like).

[118] When it is argued in the chapter that the retention of the whole "until Birnam wood comes to Dunsinane" prophecy is incoherent the problem is not that Pundit and Purohit prophesy that the sea will itself come to Maqbool's house. This is something that makes sense since Bombay is on the seaside. It is also not problematic that the coast guard comes to Maqbool's house…that is indeed a clever substitution. The problem is that Maqbool's house is not a castle so it makes no sense for him to be there at all when the police force of the entire city is searching for him since he is wanted for murder. So it is rather incoherent that Bhardwaj has Maqbool pass through police cordons to reach his house so that he finds the coast guard there and the prophesy is met. This is further exacerbated by the fact that Bhardwaj has Maqbool whisked out of his house once again (while it is surrounded by the coast guard) so that he can meet the second prophecy and be killed specifically by Boti/Macduff.

might still expect for plot elements be retained as long as they are integrated coherently, and without being forced. The argument has tried to show in these chapters that a lot of the plot elements are forced instead of being there in a coherent manner. Things however get more complicated in the film's narrative when one element of the plot is consciously changed—that is to say, when the Duncan character (Jahangir) is empowered. This change is developed coherently, and the argument commends it for being so in the chapter. The problem however occurs (as Lanier and Rosenthal too point out) midway through the film when Jahangir dies. While a lot of elements from Macbeth would have coherently worked in a film that had retained the 'original' Duncan character, they do not seem to work in a film that does not retain it. Hence, it is argued, there is no point in forcefully preserving them, as has been done in the latter half of the film.

In all these cases the reasons have been located as ultimately proceeding from Bhardwaj's desire to reach out to an international audience as well as in the complex history of Shakespeare in India. Where Geoffrey Kendal, in a way, came to export Shakespeare to the colony Bhardwaj reverses the trajectory and exports Shakespeare back to the Anglophone world.[119] It is the real or imagined expectations of his international audiences that seem to have a concrete effect on his work. Therefore, Huang and Rivlin's question "how does Shakespeare make other cultures legible to Anglo-American audiences?" holds strong relevance for the examination that has been conducted through the course of this thesis (1). Their recurring quote about fetishization of non-western Shakespeare film adaptations was for this reason thrown into discussion from three angles. In Chapter I this was done through the examination of the gaze, and the extent to which it affects the subject who is being gazed

[119] As made evident by the analyses of Bhardwaj's narrative, as well as by his assertion that instead of catering to an Indian audience, among whom he suspects the authority of Shakespeare as being eroded ("many have not read it, and most have forgotten"), he turned to adapting Shakespeare because he "wanted to touch a chord with international audiences so there were many commercial considerations in my head. It was not for art or for literature" (Kumar 2014, Sen 2006).

at. Ashcroft's suggestion that the imperial gaze played a vital role in defining the identity of the subject, and then objectifying it within the identifying system of power relations in order to confirm its subalterneity and powerlessness was taken into consideration. This was done in order to determine the extent to which Bhardwaj suffered a similar loss of a degree of autonomy when he felt subjected to the gaze of his Western audiences. It is a loss that was reflected, as the chapter argues, in the movement from the free-rein first half of the film to the restrictive second half.

In Chapter III the question of fetishization was thrown into discussion immediately in the opening part where the argument examined the implication of Thai filmmaker Ing Kanjanavanit's cutting awareness regarding the kind of formulaic Asian production of Shakespeare that tends to do well internationally. It opened up questions regarding the content of Bhardwaj's films and *its relation* to his need to cater to international audiences. Thailand apparently has a thriving sex industry hence Macbeth must be a pimp in Bangkok, Japan brings to mind warlords hence Macbeth must be a Samurai (*Throne of Blood*, 1957), China brings to mind *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) hence Hamlet must be all Kung-Fu (*The Banquet*, 2006), India brings to mind the caste system hence Othello must be of a lower caste (*Omkara*, 2006), Kashmir brings to mind insurgencies, hence Hamlet must be a terrorist (*Haider* 2014).

In Chapter II, finally, the issue of fetishization had been discussed through Peter Bradshaw's criticism of Bhardwaj's *Omkara*—a film that he felt was "flawed" but still "redeemable" because it was "a worthwhile attempt to transfer Othello to the modern setting of Uttar Pradesh in India, and to render the story in a Bollywood style." Quite emblematic of Huang and Rivlin's concern in the aforementioned quote the only value of the film for Bradshaw seems to be its attempt to make a foreign culture "legible" to him. From an artistic perspective however he felt that it was not poetic at all like the original…"the poetry of the

original is neglected", he says, "but not its fervency" (Bradshaw 2006). The argument had compared Bradshaw's reaction to Bhardwaj's narrative as being analogous to the Signory and the Duke's court's reaction to Othello's narrative. Or what Greenblatt calls a narrative of "events in distant lands and among strange peoples" catered "to the demands of the senate, sitting in judgment or, at the least, to the presence of an inquiring community" (237). A narrative that Othello "runs through to the very moment [Brabantio] bade [him] tell it" thereby coming, as Greenblatt notes, "dangerously close to recognising his own status as his text" even though he fundamentally remains convinced "that the text is his own" (237-38). By examining the narrative of *Omkara* through the two pronged methodology (not just the adaptation of the Shakespeare text into film, but also the adaptation of the Indian post-colonial 'reality' into film) the argument had questioned whether Bhardwaj's narrative, moulded by the expectations of his international audiences, had also reached a point, comparable to Othello's, where one could no longer be sure whether the "text was his own" or not. The whole colour and caste confusion, the argument of the chapter had tried to assert, might have proceeded from his desire to make a foreign culture "legible" (to borrow Bradshaw's term) to an international audience.

Analogous as the aforementioned comparison is to the critics and audiences of Bhardwaj's films it also rightly brings one to the question, at this point, as to where the narrative of this thesis, that examines all these aforementioned narratives, falls. "Who am I", one may recall Peter J. Smith's concerns from Chapter III "as a non-Muslim, non-Arabic speaking Englishman to tell Sulayman Al-Bassam how to write and direct his adaptation?" For who are we to tell Bhardwaj how to direct his adaptation? Smith provides an apt answer when he asserts that the legitimacy of his opinion stems from his position as a scholar of Shakespeare (111). And so does legitimacy of this thesis' argument, not because it caters to any fidelity discourse and questions whether the adaptation does 'justice' to Shakespeare's

work, but instead because it questions, as outlined in the Introduction, whether the adaptation of Shakespeare adequately represents the culture it is set in. It is for this reason that Margaret Litvin's work is brought into consideration in Chapter III when the course of the argument, deriving from hers, examines the extent to which a theatre/film director can be seen as an "unelected representative" of the people or culture he seeks to represent and what the consequences of such a representation might be.

Needless to say that despite all these concerns—that form the bulk of the thesis because of the uniqueness of their occurrence, their complexity, and the importance of the issues that they bring to light—the films themselves display a masterful approach to Shakespeare, and there also seems to be a positive progression in the way Bhardwaj deals with the narrative crises from *Maqbool* to *Omkara* to *Haider*. To understand this progression, as well as its implications, it must first be realised that Geoffrey Kendal's Shakespeare—quite as Homi Bhabha points out with regards to the "English Book"—was a "sign taken for wonders" by the colonized in as much as it evoked the "ideological correlatives of the Western sign—empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism (to use Edward Said's term) that sustain a tradition of English 'cultural rule'" (147). It furthermore repeated

> …the scenario, played out in the wild and wordless wastes of colonial India, Africa, the Caribbean, of the sudden, fortuitous discovery of the English book. It is, like all myths of origin, memorable for its balance between epiphany and enunciation. The discovery of the book is, at once, a moment of originality and authority, as well as a process of displacement that, paradoxically, makes the presence of the book wondrous to the extent to which it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced […] the emblem of the English book-'signs taken for wonders'-[is] an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline… (Bhabha 144).

Yet as was shown in the case of the Parsi theatre and in the films of Bhardwaj—in a neat progression from *Maqbool* to *Omkara* to *Haider*—the authority of the English book was subverted by firstly a bold liberation, this was followed by an organic hybridity, which in turn

eventually led to a situation where this authority reasserted itself in order to tie up the narrative crises. Except, of course, in the case of the last film *Haider* where the authority was replaced by a new authority altogether. "For it is in between the edict of Englishness" writes Bhabha, "and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth, through an act of *repetition* that the colonial text emerges *uncertainly*" (149, emphasis added). Bhardwaj's work forms a rather inevitable stepping stone in the chain of repetition-with-a-difference that starts from the disruptions in Kendal's Shakespeare performances by Manjula, followed by the translations effected by the Parsi theatre and his own daughter, followed by the pop-culture approach taken by early Bollywood cinema, and finally the hybrid approach taken by Bhardwaj himself. Bhardwaj's claim then that his "films are inspired by Shakespeare's works but are not meant for Shakespearean scholars" and his desire to "identify with the spirit and essence of the play by giving it a twirl that appeals to the Indian audience" can perhaps be read as a salesmanship-maneuver to understate the complexity of his work precisely to appeal to a broader audience (Srivastava 2013). What can be seen in the progression of the aforementioned chain is then a complete overturning of Kendal's salesmanship. Instead of presenting Shakespeare to the Indians as a universal value like Kendal did Bhardwaj seems to shun the "universality" and present Shakespeare with his own unique method of salesmanship. A method that inherits some of the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the adaptations/productions of Shakespeare in India that come before Bhardwaj…but also, significantly, a method that produces its own unique set of complexities and problems which this thesis has tried to examine, appreciate and to which, most importantly, this thesis has tried to do justice.

List of Illustrations:

- Fig. 34: Suspected terrorists are paraded in front of the screening of a Salman Khan film in a cinema hall in *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014). Screenshot.

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