



FACULTY OF ARTS
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Saksham Sharda, The Shakespeare Salesman (PhD Thesis, EMJD TEEME)
Supervisor's Report

The thesis is an attempt to write the first book-length study of Vishal Bhardwaj's first trilogy of film adaptations of Shakespeare great tragedies, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* (the second trilogy based on selected comedies and starting with an adaptation of *Twelfth Night* is in preparation). Apart from contributing to the research of Bhardwaj's work and film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, the thesis discusses some problems dealt with in post-colonial and globalization studies. Its brief title, which should be explained by a subtitle, refers both to the late colonial ways of presenting Shakespeare in India (epitomized by Geoffrey Kendal's film *Shakespeare Wallah*, 1965) and to Bhardwaj's way of presenting his Indian adaptations of Shakespeare to the western audiences.

After an overlong introduction (the length and format of this chapter have been subject to an extensive debate, which, I am afraid, has not led to a desired effect), which uses Kendal's film to explain colonial aspects of Shakespearean "salesmanship" and contrasts it with some features of Bhardwaj's promotion and marketing practices, the thesis deals in detail with Bhardwaj's Shakespearean adaptations, *Maqbool* (2003), *Omkaara* (2006) and *Haider* (2014). The approach focusing on "narrative crises" in these adaptations sees Bhardwaj's art as "torn between issues of authenticity, fidelity, and originality" (p. 4). On the one hand, Bhardwaj is viewed as a clever "salesman" whose marketing strategies aimed at western audiences make him relapse to the outmoded "fidelity-driven approach" (p. 36 and elsewhere) to Shakespeare adaptations, which is most conspicuous in the second half of *Maqbool*. On the other hand, Bhardwaj is credited with developing an authentic creative approach to Shakespeare adaptation based on the Parsi theatre and its successor - Bollywood cinema. This interpretation has succeeded in showing the intercultural dimensions as well as political potential of Bhardwaj's approach; however, the latter has been considerably "hamstrung" (p. 154 ff.) in *Haider*, because of the danger of the anti-government implications of the story and its setting.

The main shortcoming of the thesis is the lack of proper analysis which would establish clear distinctions among aesthetic, cultural, social and political traits of Bhardwaj's adaptations. The focus of the interpretation on rather arbitrarily chosen aspects of Bhardwaj's films (the power of the "gaze" in *Maqbool*, the tension between caste and race in *Omkaara* and the question of terrorism in *Haider*) may accidentally reveal some generally relevant features of Bhardwaj's art. Nonetheless, this approach also diverts attention from serious political questions articulated by Bhardwaj, such as for instance, "Is it true that Bollywood is run by mafia?" (*Maqbool*), "What is the role of gangs in Indian local politics?" (*Omkaara*) and "What political message has *Haider* for Indian audiences?" These and many other questions are mostly not even asked. If asked, they are left – wholly or partly – unanswered, though it is evident that they might produce a welcome contrast to the representations of Bhardwaj's "salesmanship".

The standard of the Introduction, Conclusion and three interpretive chapters varies: methodologically the best and most complex one is the *Haider* chapter. Even after many supervisors' comments and recommendations, the Introduction has remained structurally very

heterogeneous: the lengthy retelling of the plot of *Shakespeare Wallah* is an attempt to capture certain aspects of Shakespeare "salesmanship". Yet this attempt fails, because of its interference with a complexity of post-colonial problems. The first drafts of the thesis included attempts to outline a certain genealogy of Shakespeare "salesmanship", but because they were based on reductive assumptions of the box office success and general incomprehensibility of early modern English to recent and contemporary audiences, the author has been discouraged by both supervisors from using them. The main reason for this decision was that this approach was not supported the results of linguistic and sociological research.

Unfortunately, not even the methodology of adaptation studies has been adequately employed. While the use of Huang's and Rivlin's collection of essays *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* had a productive influence, the author has not done justice to other equally important approaches, as for instance M.J. Kidnie's *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (2009) or Lynn Bradley's *Adapting King Lear for the Stage* (2010). Also Hutcheon's theory of adaptation would require closer attention and critical discussion. All this has of course been recommended, yet is not sufficiently reflected in the Introduction.

I will not widely comment on the form of the thesis. One of the formal problems is the repetition of certain quotations in diverse sections and chapters of the thesis. Both supervisors have often pointed that to the author, but unfortunately without much success. I hope that the examiners' reports will contain lists of formal changes, which will have to be carried out by the author and submitted to the examiners for a check before the deadline (19 December 2018), when the thesis is moved to the repository. By the above deadline, the author will have to add the remaining obligatory parts of all theses examined in Prague, namely the two abstracts and the declarations see

http://www.teemeurope.eu/DCA/TEEME%20thesis%20submission_final_03.pdf.

To conclude: although the thesis has a number of shortcomings, it can be still seen as a valuable attempt to research Shakespeare's afterlife in present-day India as well as the problems of appropriation, cultural translation and marketing of Shakespeare in the Bollywood cinema represented by the work of one of its leading directors. I am confident that despite the above described problems **his thesis can be recommended to the viva voce examination.**

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