“Fortune reigns in gifts of the world”: Appropriation and Power in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s International Collections

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In her contribution to Susan Pearce’s influential volume, *Museum Studies in Material Culture* (1991), Adrienne L. Kaeppler appropriates one of Shakespeare’s most famous lines to begin a discussion about the importance of museum objects and the stories they can tell. Kaeppler doctors the well-known lines from the second Act of *As You Like It* to ‘All museums are stages, and all the artefacts merely players’. In doing so, she demonstrates the ways in which information held in archives and storerooms is ‘synthesized from a particular point of view into scripts,’ and that museums not only house the proscenium arches for the exits and entrances of the artefact players, but hold much of the material for piecing together the drama of ethnohistory (83; 85). Kaeppler uses Shakespeare’s words to illuminate her point about cultural performance and the creative work that goes into cultural narratives to oppose any assumption that museums present neutral narratives based on ‘fact’. In doing so, Kaeppler draws on Shakespeare’s cultural capital to provide intellectual legitimacy to her analogy. Having evoked Shakespeare to establish what Marjorie Garber terms ‘cultural literacy’(81), the essay closes with an invocation to museum curators and researchers to finally ‘show how a society's cultural past influences how that society operates in the modern world. It is time to show how all nations of the world are culturally and socially equal - with no implication that some societal groups are somehow the remnants of earlier stages of civilisation’ (87). Kaeppler thus addresses Western ethnographic museums’ curatorial habit of reinforcing Eurocentric Darwinian-informed ideas about the relative progress of distinct factions of humanity through displays of cultural artefacts from the Global South and East. However, the initial evocation of Shakespeare’s language in this piece betrays a lack of awareness that 'Shakespeare occupies a privileged place both in the white male canon and in the history of colonialism. His works were marshalled in the interests of empire, often

celebrated as evidence of Anglo cultural supremacy, and used as part of "civilizing" colonial projects' (Gillen and Jennings).[1] As such, not only does Kaeppler's edited Shakespeare quotation assume this authority, but the choice to use it plays a part in the establishment and maintenance of the cultural and social inequalities the author aims to advocate against.

This essay – which, self-consciously, also begins with an appropriation of a convenient line from *As You Like It* – addresses the combined function of museum-authority and Shakespeare-authority to create and circulate specific narratives through a discussion of German and Indian items from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's (SBT) collections. Housed in the Shakespeare Centre, adjacent to the Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon, the SBT's archive, museum, and library collections represent a fruitful opportunity to investigate the meaning of Shakespeare in the world through abundant acquisitions and gifts. These gifts represent an international community of admirers of Shakespeare's works and/or cultural importance. This essay explores the ethical implications of the SBT's interpretation of its international items by asking: what does it mean for a British institution – which is explicitly invested in promoting Shakespeare's appeal at home and abroad – to interpret and curate items related to poets from other and Othered places that have complex cultural roles and specificities of their own? It considers how the items might offer the opportunity to understand Shakespeare in ways that countermand the pervasive focus on him as a timeless and universal genius and symbol of (white) British cultural superiority. In querying what 'fortune' it is that historically and presently 'reigns in gifts of the world' to the SBT (Shakespeare, 1.2.32) , this essay traces the oscillations of power in evidence through the appropriation of Shakespeare's cultural capital by international visitors and by the Trust. In

[1] See also Jyotsna G. Singh, *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (2019); Miles Grier, 'Are Shakespeare's Plays Racially Progressive? The Answer Is in Our Hands', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (2021); Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (2002).

doing so, it troubles the notion of a neutral institutional stance by revealing the traces of imperialism within the SBT's interpretation habits. Thus, the essay demonstrates how the SBT uses international gifts and Shakespeare's cultural capital to promulgate the ideal of a 'universal' Shakespeare while also maintaining a clear sense of Stratfordian ownership.

Barbara Hodgdon has described the SBT's collecting policy in terms of its development from 'a moment in the history of Western possessive individualism in which identity itself is a kind of wealth and collecting a strategy for proving its authenticity' (203). Hodgdon thus indicates how the SBT's museum and collections echo the ideological purposes of the imperial British museums and collectors: establishing its own authenticity, asserting its own authority, and ultimately accumulating and commanding the power to determine the narrative of Shakespeare's legacy. The authority of the Trust was shored up by the fact of its being understood to be the birthplace of Shakespeare, the house functioning as an 'umbilical' connection that 'proves' Stratford-upon-Avon's ownership of Shakespeare and his legacy. The introduction of religious language around the time of the Birthplace's sale in 1847 to describe its importance as a site of cultural heritage – as 'shrine', 'hallowed', 'monument', 'place of pilgrimage', and 'relic' – deepened the sense of its 'right' to be understood to be an authentic space through the creation of an 'intimate, even supernatural, connection with Shakespeare' (Thomas, 43-44). As Hodgdon explains, 'authenticity is not about factuality or reality, it is about authority, which is produced by and through cultural assemblages that gesture beyond the realm of particular objects or artefacts toward myths of contact and presence' (203). Such myths, of a genuine mode of connection to Shakespeare, transform the Birthplace and its collections into 'signifiers within an artificially constructed frame, gaining symbolic content as they figure a line of descent or situatedness of time and place' (Hodgdon 203). Thus, the Birthplace functions as a space in which connection to

Shakespeare can be imagined in varying and creative ways that constitute appropriations of the works, the cultural capital, or both.

The Goethe Wreath

<INSERT FIGURE 8.1> The SBT's museum collections are full of diplomatic gestures in the form of gifts and communications that indicate a desire for representation, both on the 'world stage' of the annual Stratford-upon-Avon Birthday celebrations and as part of Shakespeare's legacy – that which is maintained by the SBT's museum and collections. The desire to 'buy in' to Shakespeare's cultural capital and legacy was most explicitly demonstrated through a wreath and an illuminated scroll that were presented to the Trust at the 1864 tercentenary celebrations by representatives of the Goethe house in Frankfurt, the English Circle, and the *Freie Deutsche Hochstift*, an institution that was established with the aim of unifying Germany through culture and education. The wreath and scroll were presented at the moment of the establishment in Weimar of the *Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, the first international Shakespeare Society in the world, and indicate the role of Shakespeare in the creation – if not restoration – of Germany's national culture and identity prior to its unification in 1871. The wreath, presented by Sebastian Alexander Schneidel of the English Circle in Frankfurt, was delivered with an explicit request (in the letter that can be seen inside the wreath) that it 'may be deposited in the house of Shakespeare and there remain as a memorial'. Presenting a gift into the collections at the Birthplace conveys the givers' respect for Shakespeare and forges a connection to him. It also – depending on the potential narrative of the object – constitutes a new piece, or branch, perhaps, of Shakespeare's legacy. It amounts to representation within the collections, which function as a stage on which nations perform their admiration of Shakespeare and thus signal

their congruence with, and consequently endorsement of, his cultural capital.[2] It is in this sense that the gift 'buys in' to Shakespeare's legacy, as becoming a part of it consigns cultural capital and confers cultural authority on the giver.

<INSERT FIGURE 8.2>The 'branch' metaphor is particularly apt for this oak-leaf wreath, which was presented a few days after the illuminated scroll. The scroll, presented by G.W. Leitner of Kings College London and the *Hochstift*, offers an address in German. The address, for which a translation was provided by the *Hochstift*, draws on the writings of Herder, Lessing, and others of the *Sturm und Drang* movement of the late 1760s to early 1780s who saw lost German traditions recovered in Shakespeare's plays and poems, who created the idea of *Unser Shakespeare* (our Shakespeare), and eventually made Shakespeare 'a third German classic' alongside Schiller and Goethe (Dickson 25; Höfele 3). The address works to institute a mythologised connection between Shakespeare and Goethe and therefore England and Germany. It describes an ancient tree of humanity where 'Sprung from one stem, two separate branches have developed into a separate and perfect growth' - the English language on one and the German language on the other, Shakespeare and Goethe springing from each respectively. The tree imagery is emphasised through the figurative chorus of acorns that adorn the border and the seal. The acorns are complete with roots and shoots that symbolise the growth of great things from small beginnings, as well as the ancient tree that bears the cousin-branches of Shakespeare and Goethe. The richness of the symbolism in this gift suggests deep awareness of the ways in which museums maintain narratives of identity, and what would be necessary to authenticate Germany's claim to Shakespeare's legacy and cultural capital. <INSERT FIGURE 8.3>

[2] Initially this representation would have been in the Birthplace Museum only, per the *Hochstift's* request, but as the collection has grown and the technology developed, the online catalogue allows stored collection items, as well as those on display in the museum, to be represented through the online search facility. Technology has thus, to some extent, restored the expectations of nineteenth-century donors that their gifts will be on some form of permanent display.

The wreath, too, is studded with acorns. These, along with its oak leaves, signal a departure from the more typical tribute for a poet, the laurel wreath. Instead, this is a *corona civica*, the traditional crown of oak that was awarded to a civilian who saves the life of a fellow citizen in battle. In Roman tradition, the crown had to be presented by the person who was saved, and once bestowed, that person was to treat their saviour with the same reverence and respect they would their father. This expectation would apply regardless of the rank or status of either party and could therefore produce potentially monumental power shifts (Maxfield 71). Although it is possible that this connection is a coincidence, the oak leaves simply indicating the analogous might and endurance of the oak tree, the address also presents a saviour narrative in which the diverging English and German 'branches' are brought back into contact with each other through acts of martial and intellectual heroism. Here, the Germanic Saxons, Jutes, and Angles first save Britain from the Romans, and then Shakespeare saves Germany from a cultural invasion of 'Latin races and influences', that is, the French neo-classicist ideals that nearly wiped-out Germanic cultural traditions before the *Sturm und Drang* movement. The nature of the wreath as a *corona civica* complements this narrative, then. But whether the act of giving the wreath, and declaring Shakespeare the saviour of Germany, was intended to humble Germany to Britain, or perhaps just Goethe to Shakespeare, is less clear. It is more likely, perhaps, that the invocation of the initial Germanic "saving" of Britain from the Romans was intended to level any implied hierarchies while also substantiating the mythologised shared history that legitimised the German claim to a share in Shakespeare's cultural capital.

The use of a Roman system of honour somewhat muddies the intent to establish German cultural identity through the dichotomisation of Teutonic and Latinate, but the oak leaves have a deeper symbolic connection to German identity that may explain their use in spite of this. Indeed, by 1864, the oak had been established as 'the tree symbolizing the

national character of the Germans: sturdy, reliable and strong. Like an oak the German nation had its roots and it grew; it germinated, matured, and came to fruition' (Berger 65). Furthermore, an oak tree in Ettersberg, Germany, was associated with Goethe through the legend that he wrote his poetry beneath it. 'Goethe's Oak' became a site for literary tourism and a symbol of German endurance, as Peter Young explains: 'people believed that as long as the oak survived, Germany would flourish'; a notion that became particularly pertinent when, after Buchenwald Concentration Camp was built around the tree in 1937, it was incinerated by an Allied bomb in 1944 (128). As a final example of the significance of the oak leaves, when the Weimar monument to Goethe and Schiller was erected in 1857, the sculptor, Ernst Rietschel (1804-1861), added an oaken tree stump behind the two poets as a 'widely recognised' symbol of Germany to emphasise their national importance (Quinn 143).

In this way, the placement of the German oak leaves within the Birthplace potentially offers a more powerful nationalist statement even than the black-red-gold ribbon of the wreath, which was in 1864 more symbolic of republican ideology than the nation itself. However, the ribbon conveys its particular purpose and meaning in terms that are striking in their urgency when compared to the ambiguity of the wreath's other constituent parts. The ribbon is a clear signifier of the undecided state of Germany in the moment of the wreath's presentation that adds a nationalistic concern to an object that might otherwise have symbolised only the literary link between Goethe and Shakespeare. The ribbon reinforces the nationalist connotations of the oak leaves and assures that the wreath is received as a gift from the (as yet wished-for) state of Germany as much as the *Goethe-haus*.

As such, the gesture of presenting the wreath to the SBT places a piece of Germany within the ratified space of the Birthplace – in which all items are promised a part in the future story of Shakespeare in the world. Likewise, the choice to present the address on a scroll, rather than verbally, indicates the desire for permanence and displays an investment in

the written word as documentation that will be saved in the archive, rather than the spoken word which can be lost in an instant. These gifts were designed to ensure that the sentiments expressed will endure as long as Shakespeare's legacy does. As such, the gifts become symbolic acorns themselves, planted in the Birthplace soil, carrying the legacy of Shakespeare and Goethe forward, ever drawing on the legitimizing narrative that was presented with them. The idea of the shared German/English roots is authenticated in turn by the authority of the official Shakespeare Museum, and Germany's cultural identity is bolstered through Shakespeare's cultural capital. These items illuminate the capacity of the Birthplace Museum to establish and maintain specific hegemonically decided identities and the ways in which the authority of the museum can be appropriated through a gift to it. They also suggest the ways in which a gift could be appropriated by the museum as a sign of Shakespeare's universality.

The Tagore Tablet and Bust

Germany is only one of many nations who have forged links to Shakespeare's legacy and the SBT through their own celebrated poets. India also did so through Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), with a number of items donated in his honour. Tagore was an artist, theatre director, educationist, and writer of novels, short stories, plays, essays, travel diaries, autobiographies, and, most prolifically, poems and songs, producing well over two thousand in his lifetime, many of which responded to the oppressions and injustices of the Raj. According to Amit Chaudhuri, it was through Tagore's writing that Bengali first emerged as literary language; this had such a profound effect on the Bengali people that the adjective *Rabindrik*, derived from his first name, came to encompass 'an entire generation, an outlook, that came into being with the poet's work' (Chaudhuri xx, xix). In 1905, Tagore provided the anthem for Bengali unity when the Raj sought to diminish the large province's power by partitioning it. The song later became Bangladesh's national anthem at its constitution in

1972. Another song, written in 1911 to promote the idea of 'an ethical community in which the spatial markers of the nation-state are replaced by a common spiritual engagement,' became the national anthem for India following its partition in 1947 (despite its overt anti-nationalist sentiment) (Saha 70). In 1913, Tagore published his English translation of *Gitanjali* and won the Nobel Prize for literature, making him, and Bengali literature, internationally famous and earning him a knighthood in 1915. In 1916, he wrote a poem honouring Shakespeare for Israel Gollancz's *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare*, a collection of tributes from writers hailing from all over the world (excluding Germany and the Central Powers). It is the same poem, 'In Honour of William Shakespeare' that is inscribed (in Tagore's own hand) on the ivory tablet that was presented to the SBT in 1964 to honour Shakespeare's quatercentenary. <INSERT FIGURE 8.4> Its presentation to the Trust was also timed around the event of the opening of the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon and thus suggests the hope that it would be displayed in the new building, if not in the museum. The sense of a desire to add to the 'material' of the Shakespeare/Birthplace buildings echoes that of the German wreath and reiterates the perception of the Birthplace as a place in which other and Othered cultures can be authenticated through association with Shakespeare's cultural capital.

In his memoir, the presiding Director of the SBT (1945-89), Levi Fox, describes the ceremony with which the tablet was presented by the Calcutta Art Society and 'diplomatic representatives from the Indian High Commission'. Fox explains that during the ceremony 'the leader swung a censer, presumably containing sacred oil, to the accompaniment of his recitation, and by mischance spots of the oil fell on Sir Fordham Flower's [chairman of the Trust's] suit. Nothing daunted, he made a most appropriate response to this unusual tribute to Shakespeare' (191). Noting that the only person named in this account is the besuited white man (Flower), Fox's description of the ceremony does many of the things Edward Said

defines as Orientalism – ‘the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it’ (3). Through his dismissive authorial stance towards the names of his guests and aspects of the ceremony that he does not understand (‘*presumably* containing sacred oil’, my emphasis) Fox delineates what he felt would or should be worthy of the attention of his readers: those he imagines to be aligned with himself in a world that understands knowledge and culture as a domain of Anglocentric whiteness. The names of the Indian guests are shown to be less important than the name of the Englishman, and the details of the ceremony are shown to be less important than the *unusualness* of them. This treatment not only trivialises the particularities of the moment but, in more general terms, trivialises the culture of the visitors. It demonstrates the Orientalist desire to understand one's Western self as rational and post-spiritual in 'a world replete with magic, mystery, and spiritual vitality' that is associated exclusively with ‘the East’ (Goto-Jones 1454). This distinction was a foundational tenet for the notion of white European supremacy over colonised territories through the establishment of ‘the European intellectual as the privileged subject capable of rational and scientific endeavors’: hence the description of Flower, who behaved ‘appropriately’ despite the ‘unusualness’ of the visitors’ behaviour (Goto-Jones 1454). In this way, India is figured as mysterious, unknown, and worthy of derision rather than the serious notice of the international community (Hemmat 232). Fox’s description also determines himself and the SBT as being ‘outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact’ (Said 21). The significance of such a positioning, Ayse Ozge Kocak Hemmat argues, is that through the externalisation of the ‘Orientalized’ by Western chronologers like Fox, ‘the Orient is also silenced, exoticized and prevented from entering into a meaningful dialogue with the scholar’ (234). Fox’s account of the event is the only account in existence in the SBT’s collections. The complete absence of Other voices in the collections in relation to this event has allowed

Fox's Anglocentric caricature to prevail, drawing as it does on the combined authority of the Birthplace and its Director.[3]

It is worth noting, however, that in the choices that the visitors from the Calcutta Art Society made for their presentation of the tablet they were able to represent an aspect of Indian culture – the ceremonial use of incense and possible recitation of the *Upanishads* – on their own terms within the walls of a British museum.[4] This is pertinent because in any museum display, the museum holds the curatorial power to decide which elements to emphasize and which to downplay, which truths to assert and which to ignore (Lavine and Karp 1). Furthermore, since the narrative an institution chooses to present emerges from an ideological perspective, it can be biased towards the milieu of the hosts and can thus misrepresent other cultures – especially those that have been marginalised. In the event of the presentation by the visitors from Kolkata, then, the power of the museum to interpret, curate, and narrate was temporarily revoked in favour of the visitors and their own choices. For within its moment, the performance dissolved politically inscribed national boundaries by enacting a cross-encounter of aspects of British and Indian cultures in which the Indian visitors could appropriate Shakespeare's cultural capital without submitting to Orientalising, Anglocentric interpretation. For a brief moment, the museum's power to objectify an Other culture was revoked. Ephemeral as it was, this rupture of imperially established hierarchies should constitute a key element of the tablet's enduring significance. Unfortunately, Fox's

[3] In this way, the archival absences echo those of larger British institutions and history-makers who have exploited the lack of recorded data about marginalised peoples to assert a whitewashed narrative. The prevalence and problematics of this practice have been addressed in recent years by works such as David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016), Stephen Bourne's *Black Poppies: Britain's Black Community and the Great War* (2014), and Imtiaz Habib's *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (2017).

[4] The likelihood of this being the recitation has been indicated by Obhi Chatterjee, Tagore expert and Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Council member, on seeing the photograph of a seated man reading to the assembled company that accompanies the account in Fox's memoir. Chatterjee also made a point of advising that the idea of censer being swung would have been, borrowing Fox's term, unusual, lending further doubt to the veracity and fairness of Fox's account of the event. By private email communication 10th September 2019.

memoir account eliminates the potential of this reversal of narrative power and re-appropriates the moment into an assertion of Anglocentric cultural superiority. In diminishing the potential of this visit and gift, Fox's memoir, carrying the credence and authority of his role as Director of the sanctified space of the Birthplace, constitutes an uncomfortable indictment of the mode and reach of Anglocentric curatorial practices at the SBT. It indicates the ways in which it works to maintain cultural and racial hierarchies, which is especially noticeable given the German gifts' emphasis on 'shared heritage' and the lack of resistance encountered there.[5]

<INSERT FIGURE 8.5>The cultural significance of the Tagore tablet became properly apparent twenty-seven years later, however. In 1991 the Vice-President of India, Shankar Dayal Sharma, and the High Commissioner for India in the UK, Dr L. M. Singhvi, visited the Birthplace and were invited to see the ivory tablet. Dr Singhvi was so moved by the object that he was inspired to follow up that tribute to Tagore and Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon with another. With the assistance of the Chief Minister for West Bengal, Jyoti Basu, a bronze bust of Tagore was presented in 1995. Tagore's poem for Shakespeare, in his original handwritten script, is engraved into the base with his own English translation on the other side, and on the front are the names of the prominent Indian figures involved – the donors providing, in effect, their own label for their gift to the museum. As in the case of the German wreath, it is thus possible to determine a sense of desire for representation within the SBT's collections: for Tagore and his works to be affiliated with Shakespeare's legacy as Goethe's have been.

[5] The SBT's German collection shows that the 'shared heritage' mythology was reiterated in the subsequent centuries, and often drew on notions of 'Anglo-Saxonism' and the 'Aryan race', thus making Shakespeare an icon of white supremacy while establishing him as the property of the 'Anglo-Saxon' nations. For an overview of the ways in which 'Anglo-Saxon' is imbued with white supremacy see Mary Rambaran-Olm and Erik Wade, "What's in a Name? The Past and Present Racism in 'Anglo-Saxon' Studies (2022).

Despite the donors' attempted narrative input, the interpretation panel that stands next to the bust was written solely according to SBT prerogatives. It does name Dr. Singhvi and the acclaimed Kolkata sculptor Debabrata Chakraborty, but it fails to mention any of Tagore's polymathic achievements aside from the one poem he wrote about Shakespeare. It does not mention his Nobel Prize and that he was the first non-European to be awarded one in any field. It does not mention that he wrote in almost every genre imaginable, in several languages, and was prolific beyond Shakespeare's dreams. It does not mention that he travelled the world, virtually created Bengali literature, and is the writer of two national anthems - the only person to ever do so. It does not mention that he received, and renounced, a knighthood. The Anglocentrism of the panel may be the result of the limited character allowance for the board, as well as the admittedly complex question of how to balance informational focus in a museum that is dedicated to one person in its remit. However, it is striking that the fact that he wrote one poem about Shakespeare is privileged over all of these things. The implications of the SBT's curatorial power becomes vital once more, and that this can especially circumscribe the Other's desire for Shakespearean cultural authority and engagement is felt from the evident contrasts between the Indian and German gifts discussed in this essay. The SBT exploits both gifts to bolster Shakespeare's cultural capital and 'universal' appeal, but, in the case if the Indian gifts, it does so while offering an Anglocentric interpretation that consequently enacts the fundamental flaw in the very concept of Shakespeare's universality: that it is grounded in the historic imbrication of Shakespeare as white property through white authority.[6]

[6] See Arthur L. Little Jr., 'Re-Historicizing Race, White Melancholia, and the Shakespearean Property' (2016); Ian Smith, 'We Are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies' (2016); Ambereen Dadabhoy, 'The Unbearable Whiteness of Being (in) Shakespeare' (2020).

The opportunity for a greater level of detail on Tagore's cultural significance was eventually afforded by the advancement of technology and the widespread use of QR codes in museums, linking to websites, digital programmes, articles, and blog posts. In 2014, a QR code was appended to the bottom of the Tagore bust interpretation panel. The blog it led to is more detailed and gives an impression of most of the significances I have outlined above, although Shakespeare and the honorific installation of the bust for *him* is still the priority. In the final sentence of the blog, however, Tagore's renunciation of his knighthood is explained away as a protest against 'British policies in the Punjab'. In this, the SBT elides more than a few names or the specifics of a ceremonial presentation of a gift. Tagore's rejection of all ties to the British Empire, including his knighthood, came after the massacre of hundreds of unarmed people at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, on 13th April 1919, when Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer ordered his soldiers to open fire on peaceful protestors in an enclosed garden. As Kim A. Wagner explains, the shooting was a pre-emptive strike prompted by fear of a repeat of the violent uprisings of 1857, and the massacre remains the most well-known occurrence of exemplary violence – that which was designed to terrify colonial subjects into compliance – that was repeatedly enacted by British rulers during the Raj (204). Thus, even with the opportunity to extend and broaden the narrative that was brought by the use of QR codes, the SBT still circumvented one of the most the vital aspects of Tagore's relationship with Empire to ensure against contamination of Shakespeare's legacy and, in effect, to maintain the cultural supremacy that was built into the ideology of the Raj.

However, the Tagore bust creates a connection between the legacy of Shakespeare and the biography of Tagore, of which the massacre is an incontrovertible element. Consequently, the routine sanctioned violence of the British Empire in its colonies also becomes an incontrovertible element of the SBT's collections. The decision to avoid engaging with this aspect of Tagore's biography is far from unusual: institutions have for

many years consistently chosen to sanitise aspects of British history that do not conform to preferred narratives of Empire in which it can be taken as a source of pride for British patriots. The SBT is not a museum of Empire, and it has a clear remit to memorialize Shakespeare. However, a deeper commitment to understanding its international collections (indicated by my own collaborative doctoral project with the SBT) has illuminated points of connection between Shakespeare and Tagore (in this instance) that could create exhibitions that do justice to both poets and both cultures. By exploiting these points of connection, and not just aspects that maintain Shakespeare's cultural consequence, the SBT could model the sort of interpretation that is in keeping with current discourses of decolonisation and anti-racism in the UK culture and heritage sectors. For example, in a fascinatingly meta coincidence, the choices made by the SBT about how to engage with the story of Tagore's knighthood can themselves be illuminated by one of Tagore's critiques of nationalism. Tagore called the idea of the nation:

> one of the most powerful aesthetics that man has invented. Under the influence of its fumes the whole people can carry out its systematic programme of the most virulent self-seeking without being in the least aware of its moral perversion - in fact feeling dangerously resentful if it is pointed out (Tagore 57).

The kind of resentment Tagore refers to here will be familiar to many who have attempted to dissuade proud patriots from their illusions about the 'benefits' of the British Empire for its colonized subjects, and who have met with vehement resistance. As a charity that is almost entirely dependent on ticket sales, the SBT tries to avoid taking any political stance that would prompt such resistance and alienate the donors and visitors that enable it to do the important work of maintaining the Birthplace museum, library, and archives. However, as oppressive ideas are sustained by the status quo, taking a passive 'neutral' stance and avoiding challenging them effectively serves to maintain them. The SBT must begin to find a

way of engaging with the colonial past without inadvertently maintaining inequitable colonialist principles.

Resistance to critique of British imperialism is perhaps unsurprising given that, as Mirjam Brusius explains:

> The vestiges of Empire extend beyond standard conventions of physical control and coercion. In Europe's museums, empire persists and proliferates in the present through material representations and celebrations of the past. Colonial exploration is still largely rendered as a triumphalist and heroic narrative, leaving little room for alternative interpretation (106).

Indeed, regarding the late 2010s campaign to decolonize British museums, Subhadra Das appeals for acknowledgement that 'the ways we choose to understand the past […] is what keeps us racist. Like the national curriculum and countless university courses, UK museums consistently avoid this story, as if the objects and specimens they contain do not speak directly to it' (Das). The mythologised 'shared roots' in the object narrative of the Goethe wreath and scroll illuminates the importance of museums as powerful ideological tools since the beginning of the modernist era, 'their collections […] perceived as the principal repositories of primary evidence' and used to create 'meta-narratives, overarching discourses through which objective realities and eternal truths could be defined and expressed' (Pearce 3). Many British museums were built during this period purely for the imperial purpose of communicating British power, and crucially, superiority over the non-European world. The Tagore tablet and bust, then, demonstrate the distinctly hegemonic narrative power held even by seemingly non-political institutions like the SBT, and how evasive or even tentative representations of British history and its 'Others' can serve to perpetuate the sense of cultural superiority that underpinned the British Empire and 'justified' its atrocities. Furthermore,

these objects, and how they have been used, indicate the ways in which Shakespeare can be wielded as a tool of imperialistic white British supremacy through his cultural authority and capital, as well as through the appropriation of his words. Indeed, the discussion of Kaeppler's use of Shakespeare's words at the outset of this chapter exemplifies the evidently inadvertent perpetuation of this problematic authority and thus reflects on the effects of the hegemonic narrative power in question.

Gifts and Power

The relative narrative power of the SBT is further underpinned by the gifts *as* gifts. In 1925, in the aftermath of the First World War, Marcel Mauss categorised inter-societal practices of gift-giving in terms of the 'potlatch', which was agonistic, competitive, and ultimately aimed at the destruction of the wealth of the receiver, and 'kula', by which '[t]he objects exchanged […] serve to forge social relationships and enhance trust among separate tribes. Because it is based on a constant process of giving and taking, which creates a permanent connection' (Heins et al. 128). By applying Mauss's configuration of the two types of gift to engage with the modes of appropriation at work in the SBT's collections, we may consider the German wreath as an example of a kula-type exchange, as it sparked a custom in which wreaths have regularly been exchanged between the houses of Shakespeare and Goethe on the writers' birthdays, excluding only the World War years. These periods caused an absolute rupture in the heavily mythologised 'cousin'-connection that was built on German appreciation of the contribution Shakespeare's works made to their efforts to create a unified national cultural identity. This extended to the exclusion of 'enemy' flags at the annual birthday celebrations in Stratford-upon-Avon for several years. Although this decision was based on the list produced by the Court of St James each year that detailed which nations were then 'enjoying ambassadorial representation' in the UK, so the SBT were not solely responsible for the erasure of Germany from the 'world stage' of the birthday flag-unfurling,

the gesture served nevertheless to remind Germany, if not the world, of Britain's 'ownership' of Shakespeare.

The Tagore bust also sparked a tradition – the celebration of Tagore's birthday in the Birthplace gardens every year, and thus adheres not only to the 'kula'-style promotion of friendly relations and trust, but also to Tagore's vision of 'common spiritual engagement' in a global 'ethical community' (qtd. in Saha 16). However, echoing the event of the presentation of the Tagore Tablet in 1964, the sense of genuine multicultural good will that is generated by the performance of Tagore's music, dancing, and poetry in the Shakespeare Birthplace garden once a year is ephemeral: what endures is the Anglo-centric interpretation panel that can be seen by visitors to the Birthplace Garden all year round. Any cultural power or status obtained through the giving of the wreath, tablet, or bust, then, is ultimately obscured by the SBT's demonstration of its greater cultural power in each case.

Gifts, as Arjun Appadurai explains, 'link things to persons and embed the flow of things in the flow of social relations'; unlike the exchange of commodities, which is driven by the accumulation of wealth (11). However, the interpretation of gifts such as those given to the SBT can be complicated by determining the motives of the giver and attending to who gains what in the giving. Consideration of such gifts as a form of commodity in this way intimates that 'payment' or 'repayment' takes the form of role and recognition within the collections as a part of Shakespeare's legacy, and, in consequence, conferred cultural capital. If a gift has any kind of value, and we should assume that the items discussed in this essay did to both giver and receiver, then there is a political dimension to consider that is useful to the discussion of appropriation and power. Appadurai argues that although most exchanges of commodities have 'the routine and conventionalized look of all customary behaviour', they rely nevertheless on a shared understanding and agreement on 'what a reasonable "exchange of sacrifices" comprises, and who is permitted to exercise what kind of effective demand in

what circumstances.' Hierarchies of power, and therefore politics, are thus essential to this understanding, which 'signifies and constitutes relations of privilege and social control.' Furthermore, Appadurai identifies the 'constant tension' engendered by the fact that 'not all parties share the same interests in any specific regime of value, nor are the interests of any two parties in a given exchange identical' (57). In the case of the SBT's gifts from Germany and India, then, the implicitly understood terms were that the gifts would bolster Shakespeare's cultural capital, and that cultural capital would then be conferred on the donors in return. However, bearing in mind Appadurai's warning about the tensions engendered by interests and values, it is vital to question of how far the SBT engages with the expectations of the givers for some kind of reciprocity, and what might be the SBT's ethical responsibilities in a 'social commodity situation' like the ones described in this essay. As this essay suggests, in too many cases the SBT takes the proffered gift but also takes the unproffered cultural dignity of the givers. It appropriates both the gift and its cultural significance and reinscribes its cultural specificity and 'difference' as just another aspect of Shakespeare's cultural capital. The Trust therefore relies on and maintains the hierarchies of power that bring about international and cultural inequity to use the gifts as evidence of Shakespeare's 'universal appeal' and justification for the Trust's existence.

The SBT, it should be noted, does not court gifts, and is often persuaded by the eagerness of the giver to accept gifts that are far beyond the terms of its collecting policy. Also, it is appropriate that its value is determined by the interest shown in it by visitors, and understandable, as a ticket-sales funded attraction, that it advertises Shakespeare's worldwide popularity. However, as this discussion of the selected international gifts in this essay indicates, the SBT cannot assume a position of neutrality in the acceptance and exhibition of such gifts. The SBT is an institution that is concentrated on an icon of Britishness that has been used to assert cultural superiority over Othered communities and a museum that has

followed the example of the larger British institutions that were built to prop up the devastating imperial efforts of the mid-nineteenth century. As such, it must engage with the ethical implications of its role in the curation of Shakespeare's global cultural appeal. If the ethics of appropriation can be determined through analysing the weighting of profit or benefit towards the appropriator or the appropriated – and I contend they usually can – then the implications of the exchange of cultural property (of representations of national poets and symbols) for conferred cultural capital or recognition as part of Shakespeare's legacy indicate that the profit and power are unevenly weighted in favour of the SBT. Furthermore, the choices it is therefore empowered to make are geared towards the maintenance of its own cultural value and have the potential to inflict damage on the givers.

However, like poetry, objects can possess, yield, and wield manifold layers of meaning, and appreciation of this fact is crucial to disrupting hegemonic museum practices. As Edwina Taborsky reminds us, an object's *signification* is a meaning that is not inherent and fixed, but is 'socially assigned' (51). Significations are therefore malleable and subjective and can be undermined by the inherent qualities of a given object. In the case of the wreath, the oak leaf (*corona civica*) construction muddles the intent of the gift as an honorific for Shakespeare and draws attention to the power struggle between Britain and Germany that became material rather than metaphoric in the wars of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, the ivory of the Tagore tablet interrupts the narrative of Shakespeare as the originator of inspiration by indicating the rich legacy of centuries of South Asian artistry, and the Bengali script denotes pride in a more recent development in literature and art that came into being in defiance of British rule and destruction in India. By its very existence, the bearded head and chest of Rabindranath Tagore standing in the enclosed Shakespeare's Birthplace Garden evokes, for anyone familiar with Tagore's biography, another enclosed garden and the massacre that occurred within. The inherent meanings can be occluded but they cannot be

erased. These ‘alternative’ stories are materially rather than textually present, their materiality lending them the permanence in the story of Shakespeare sought by their givers when they presented them to the SBT.

The appropriation of Shakespeare’s cultural capital that occurs with the giving of international gifts lends the opportunity for the SBT to become a stage for narratives that constitute an anti-colonial engagement with world cultures who wish to demonstrate appreciation of Shakespeare’s works. After all, in a genuine kula-gift, the exchange that takes place is balanced between the parties, with no loss of either wealth or dignity on either side. It is an act of sharing, rather than giving and taking, and thus prompts vital questions. What would it mean for an institution like the SBT to truly share Shakespeare’s cultural capital with the global cultural community? And how would a philosophy of sharing challenge and change the ethics of Shakespearean appropriation? These kinds of questions should be grappled with by all influential ‘mainstream’ cultural institutions with anti- or de-colonial intentions.

To respond to the above questions, the SBT must begin with a revitalised interpretation policy that embeds within all departments and processes anti-colonial thinking developed through consultation with expert scholars and curators with established anti-colonial methods. Indeed, the Trust’s faulty interpretation of the Tagore bust provides an opportunity to open discussions not only about how to avoid misplaced ‘neutrality’ in future interpretation, but to notice and correct Anglocentrism in museum and digital output. This includes consideration of the implications of its reliance on the notion of Shakespeare’s ‘universality’, a concept that is harmful in its elision of different experiences of Shakespeare – from lack of access to the sense of not belonging to the ‘right’ class, culture, race, or nationality to engage with him/it. The ‘universality’ narrative is also harmful in its elision of the ways in which Shakespeare was established as ‘universal’ in a mode of imperialism that

simultaneously classified other forms of culture as inferior, especially those of the colonies of the British Empire. The evident connection between the two forms of elision described here illustrates the fact that Shakespeare's so-called universality relies on assumptions of cultural supremacy that may be found to be exclusory to many members of the international and multicultural communities that the SBT would like to attract. This is a primary but essential step towards reconfiguring the SBT's properties as a 'world stage' on which Shakespeare's cultural capital is used for representation of Othered cultures in which Shakespeare's cultural predominance is not a factor of interpretation unless it is an important aspect of the object narrative.[7] In which case, any complexities and infelicities within that narrative must be acknowledged in order that the cultural specificity and value of the Othered culture in representation is not subdued, stifled, or marginalised by institutional values that have their foundation in imperialistic thought. In this way, if Shakespeare's cultural capital can be used to promote and celebrate poets and cultures that have suffered from the Othering effects of imperialism and broader white supremacy – in engagements that are embedded and permanent and not just ephemeral celebrations of cultural diversity – the Trust's interpretation can become an act of sharing that can begin to redress some of the harms that Shakespeare has been used to inflict.

[7] Object Narrative**:** the story that is revealed through an object's material/ity and provenance, including place and persons and techniques involved in its production, ownership, the circumstances of its arrival in the SBT collections, uses and interpretation by the SBT and collaborators.

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