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**SHAKESPEARE IN CHILE – PABLO NERUDA THROUGH THE EYES OF
DOUGLAS DUNN. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE POSTCOLONIAL
DEBATE AROUND UNIVERSALISM**

by

REBECA ARAYA ACOSTA

Introduction

In Scottish poet Douglas Dunn's autobiographical poetry collection *The Year's Afternoon* (Dunn) one poem stands out. Titled "A Theory of Literary Criticism", Dunn's lyrical homage to his Chilean counterpart, Pablo Neruda, has a simplicity that deceives. Strictly speaking, it is an elegy on the socialist Neruda who died of cancer on 23 September 1973, twelve days after the coup against the government of Salvador Allende, Latin America's first democratically elected communist president and a friend of Neruda's. The violent overthrow of Allende under the head of Chile's military forces, Augusto Pinochet, quickly triggered international displays of solidarity with the ousted government and its persecuted adherents. Working as a professor and poet in residence at the University of Hull at the time, Dunn must have been aware of the local solidarity campaign which included cultural events to raise awareness of the Chilean conflict. It is even likely that some of Dunn's poetry students (if not Dunn himself) participated in them. In this respect, Dunn's remembrance of Neruda in *The Year's Afternoon* can indeed be said to have an autobiographical component, as it works like a reference to the political mood of his time in Hull. However, closer examination betrays a more intimate connection joining Dunn and Neruda. Dunn's collection of poems is transparent about the role models who inspired him, not least Neruda himself. This is where the title "A Theory of Literary Criticism", which subsumes his homage to the Chilean, gains importance.

Going beyond the elegiac gesture of remembrance, Dunn seeks to rescue a lesson in literary criticism that Neruda imparted (albeit indirectly) to him. In Dunn's poetic homage it is not Neruda himself who stands at the centre, but his copy of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. Exploring the implications of this oblique celebration of Neruda, this article advances the claim that, through his focus on Neruda's use of Shakespeare, Dunn preserves and recirculates Neruda's socialist defense of universalism. In light of recent developments in the postcolonial debate over appropriation, Dunn's re-cycling of Neruda's argument about the universal reach of art – indeed, even that of the controversial Bard – achieves two things. On the first plane and through Dunn's updating frame, Neruda rehabilitates Shakespeare's works within the postcolonial setting. Secondly, this rehabilitation is tied together in Neruda with the displacement of the intellectual in favour of Everyman as a consumer, disseminator, and even potential producer of literature. Both the question of cultural appropriation and the solving of the class-determined tension between the art critic as intellectual and the people as both

object and potential consumers of that art are germane to Dunn's own poetics. It is the resolution of these two sites of tension – tensions which unavoidably determine the Scottish poet writing in the wake of Hugh MacDiarmid's "Renaissance" and under the sign of Scottish "New Writing" – that the speaker of Dunn's "A Theory of Literary Criticism" chooses to honour in this elegy on Neruda.

The works of William Shakespeare have borne the weight of postcolonial theory in its claims and contestations like no other. Formerly considered by some intellectuals such as Brazilian Oswald de Andrade as a two-edged sword that could revert the damage of empire through bellicose appropriation – de Andrade frames it in terms of cultural "anthropophagy"¹ – in the twenty-first century the option of appropriating the Bard is increasingly met with scepticism. Indeed, as Andrew Dickson concludes on his global tour of Shakespearean adaptations and after looking into the ambiguous history of the "Robben Island Shakespeare", "the relationship between the British empire's anointed playwright and the peoples on whom his work was imposed remains fraught" (Dickson 2015). Ultimately a form of resistance to and through Shakespeare, this type of resistance has been exposed as a narrative that is unavoidably liable to co-option as an Orientalising script. Matthew Hahn's play *The Robben Island Shakespeare* (2017) is prefaced by an apt testimony from black actor and playwright John Kani. After agreeing to play Othello in a historically unprecedented production of the play in 1987 South Africa, Kani was subjected to intense interrogation by an anxious state police. It suspected a "communist plot" under way due to the play's overt undermining of apartheid rules through its casting choice of a black Othello (Hahn 2017, ix).

The narrative of resistance can also fail irrespective of the good intentions of the narrator. Thus, in his *Hamlet's Dreams. The Robben Island Shakespeare* (2012) David Schalkwyk problematises the role ascribed to the appropriation of Shakespeare in the fight against apartheid. As such, he questions the celebration of the *Complete Works* copy signed by Nelson Mandela and fellow prisoners on Robben Island as a symbol of black empowerment. Schalkwyk's scepticism concerning the political reach of the narrative of appropriation corresponds with recent critiques from the fields of sociology and literary studies concerned with what is believed to be postcolonial theory's much-too-narrow emphasis on difference. The work of sociologist Vivek Chibber and literary scholar Nivedita Majumdar expose with varying foci the fault lines in what Majumdar has termed the postcolonial "master narrative of agency and resistance" (29). The sense that a political automatism of attending to difference has turned the Orientalising violence on the postcolonial project itself pervades Chibber's sociological critique of Subaltern Studies and Majumdar's reassessment of the postcolonial approach to literary analysis respectively. Both Chibber and Majumdar argue that the category of universalism is a much-needed critical tool to better address the postcolonial experience. Moreover, by carefully rehabilitating historical and material continuities with the West, both positions argue, there is better chance of identifying the real issues at stake in a Third World that is just as threatened by the increasingly academicist tendencies of postcolonial theory as it is under the weight of its colonial past.

¹ See de Andrade's "The Cannibalist Manifesto" (1928).

In this sense Pablo Neruda becomes an interesting case study, not only for Dunn. Neruda had acted as government consul in the interwar period and was a militant member of the Chilean communist party from 1945 until his death. Informed by this personal and political trajectory, he sought to advance a global vision of the literary craft to further a notion of transnational affinities and historical-materialist continuities. It is this understanding of the creative art, especially as it relates to poetry, that Dunn's speaker celebrates in "A Theory". In Schalkwyk's sense, I read Dunn's commemoration of him, and by extension of his Shakespeare reception, in terms of a more adequate contextualisation of the Shakespearean material in light of Chile's colonial history and the concomitant social issues that in turn permeated Neruda's writing and political activism. A clear reconfiguration of agency separates Dunn's Neruda from de Andrade and his bellicose take on Shakespeare, insofar as Dunn attends to Neruda's celebration of a universalism that became discredited in the wake of the postcolonial charting of Third-World literature.

Rehabilitating Universalism

Rick J. Santos opens his introduction to *Latin American Shakespeares* (2005) with a claim that has become iconic for Postcolonial Studies: "Shakespeare in Latin America is as mixed as the people themselves" (11). Though restricted to the Shakespeare reception, what is at the core of this assertion is nothing other than the postcolonial culturalist reflex. The assumption is that a product of the Western literary canon will elicit different responses outside of the Western cultural sphere. More to the point, it will be aligned with the shifting background of its recipients. This results in a form of cultural 'mestizaje' which Santos is quick to associate with de Andrade's image of cannibalism:

It is worthwhile to highlight that Latin America [sic] philosophical tradition is based on 'cultural cannibalism', a concept introduced by Oswald de Andrade in the 'Manifesto antropófago' ["Cannibalist Manifesto"] (1928), which describes a resistant method to absorb information from First World countries without losing cultural autonomy. (Santos 11)

While the ideal of cultural cannibalism did have its proponents in Latin America, it would be misleading to suggest that it is the basis of something like a Latin American philosophical tradition. This is especially the case since he does not elaborate on his later claim that cultural cannibalism allows the recovery of agency for "those traditionally excluded and marginalized" (Santos 12). It is not clear whom Santos means by the excluded and marginalised. If what he has in mind is Latin American writers, then the question that crops up is whether the cannibalistic imperative ever meant anything beyond the domain of the Latin American intellectual, or even whether said agency could not have been regained on the basis of relatability rather than radical cultural alienation.

These are questions inspired by one branch of critical engagement with postcolonial theory that seeks to rehabilitate a "modest" form of universalism for analysis (Vanaik 2017, 2). The general assumption is that, as Achin Vanaik puts it, "our human similarities of *minimal common* rationality/needs/instincts/capacities/emotions provide enough resources for cross-cultural learning and behavior" (2017, 12, emphasis in the original).

As such, these approaches depart from the conventional postcolonial narrative à la Santos in that they favour similarity over difference to account for questions of postcolonial state formation and development. By so doing, these theorists also understand themselves as subjecting the role of the postcolonial academic to revision. Coming from the sociological perspective, Vivek Chibber draws our attention to the historical inconsistencies generated by the postcolonial differential style of argumentation (3-4). Concerned with the concrete case of postcolonial India, Chibber expands on his criticism by directing it at the increasingly textualistic tendencies of the field, a property which, under the aegis of poststructuralist and cultural theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said, helped increase its academic popularity at the cost of sociological inquiry. Chibber posits that arguing from difference and through the evocation of a master narrative is in and of itself not wrong given the postcolonial agenda. It only becomes objectionable once this logic is used and later invariably applied to other contexts without being backed each time by historical evidence. Thus, Chibber reads key figures of the Subaltern Studies collective as guided by the differential logic and thus overlooking important commonalities that can better account for the current political condition of former colonies.

Continuing the discussion of the differential logic, Nivedita Majumdar puts the problem down to the unresolvable tension between localism and universalism which drives the postcolonial critical method (5). Revisiting the literary sources celebrated as paradigmatic for postcolonial literature, Majumdar finds examples that work in analogy to Chibber's interrogation of Subaltern Studies. Just as Ranajit Guha had idealised the European bourgeoisie in his eagerness to highlight the extent of alterity in regard to its Indian 'deficient' counterpart (Chibber 2013, 90–91) – a construction created to fit the postcolonial differential paradigm – Majumdar outlines how Spivak herself can be faulted for her preference for alterity at the cost of engaging the actual issues complicating postcolonial development. In both cases achieving the latter would have meant attending to those similarities subaltern subjects bear even with their Western counterparts, namely the material pressures all individuals are subject to under a capitalist system (Vanaik 2017, 14).

However, such a move to economic relatability does not sit well with a postcolonial theory that is increasingly hostile to the socialist project, as Chibber and Majumdar have diagnosed the current trends in the field to be. Too deeply ingrained is the association of universalising claims with the tools of empire to allow for the postulation of wider-encompassing issues and crises. A similar issue in the postcolonial argumentative logic can be observed with the Shakespeare reception. In fact, it is precisely this concern over the cultural vestiges of empire that drove de Andrade's call to "cannibalize" Shakespeare. Nevertheless, and after having considered Chibber and Majumdar's objections to this logic of cultural alienation, the question remains whether such a type of appropriation can keep faith with the postcolonial promise of representing a certainly non-academic section of Latin Americans and their socioeconomic predicaments. In the case of the Robben Island Shakespeare and South Africans, Schalkwyk finds that the question must be answered in the negative. This failed appropriation will be discussed as a contrastive example to Dunn's Chilean Shakespeare.

With the Robben Island Shakespeare, the scenario of appropriation outlined by Santos in the past section is continued. Shortly before his release as a political prisoner on Robben Island, Sonny Venkatrathnam circulated his copy of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* among his fellow inmates and asked them to sign a passage of their choice. Among them was Nelson Mandela, whose signing of Caesar's reply to Calpurnia's foreboding, "Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once", fired up the Robben Island narrative of appropriation. In *Hamlet's Dreams* Schalkwyk traces how this act of signing quickly became a red herring for postcolonial scholars who were eager to see a full-bodied act of anti-apartheid appropriation of the Bard in Venkatrathnam's initiative. As he quotes from later interviews with some of the signers, Schalkwyk reveals how shaky the foundations of such an understanding of the Robben Island Shakespeare are. With some of the interviewees not recalling why they chose a particular passage or even openly expressing incomprehension at the importance attributed to their signings, Schalkwyk arrives at a similar conclusion to Majumdar's. In assessing the value of this particular copy of the *Works* there is disproportionate attention paid to an idea of resistance as connected to the act of selecting and signing the passages that seems to be completely disconnected from the reality of the event.

Countering Tom Lodge's claim in his Mandela biography about the great number of prisoners who 'universalised' their experience through the reading of the Robben Island copy, Schalkwyk reminds us of the fact that Venkatrathnam's Shakespeare only made its rounds in section B of the prison, where only thirty-four inmates were kept. The remaining prisoners, thousands of whom were illiterate, would have been in a separate section and certainly not uniformly thinking of Shakespeare as their first recourse to describe their condition of captivity. Their knowledge of the playwright, if at all existent, would have been restricted to whatever small contact English school curricula had afforded them (Schalkwyk 13). Moreover, delving into the act of signing itself, Schalkwyk exposes the several layers of signification involved in the process:

[T]here the signatory is signing himself against another name – 'Shakespeare' – and that name is multiplied in the names of the multiple characters who speak, both on their own behalf and in his name. Shakespeare is held hostage by the characters who appear in his name, and who therefore divide him from himself. Anyone who pledges himself against Shakespeare's characters thus gives himself up to being hostage both to the characters and to Shakespeare – and to the accumulated other signatures that 'Shakespeare' had acquired over almost half a millennium. The depths of complexity here are almost dizzying – but they may be encompassed or, perhaps better, signaled by the notion of the unconscious, which suggests a difficult relation of simultaneous singularity and generality, agency and passivity, individuality and institutionality. (Schalkwyk 22)

Needless to say, such an entangled understanding of the signature complicates the seemingly straightforward story of resistance that had been weaved around the Robben Island Shakespeare. Such a story presupposes the primacy of subjective identity over and beyond any other consideration. Which is why, when considered on these grounds alone, it is not as long lasting as postcolonial scholars would have hoped. "What is this 'Robben Island Bible'? What is it that people want to do? The quotation mentioned there was not chosen by me" (Mlangeni qtd. in Hahn), a confused Andrew Mlangeni states when interviewed by Hahn when gathering material for his play about the Robben Island

Shakespeare in 2010. Former fellow inmate Kwede Mkalipi echoes Mlangeni's statement by admitting that he would even choose a different passage if given a second chance (Mkalipi qtd. in Hahn). And some of those who stand by their choice do so despite knowingly undermining expectations about the political meaning of such a selection. Here Schalkwyk draws attention to Eddie Daniels 'internalisation' of Macbeth's speech about the futility of the future: "Striking, though, is the fact that the exemplary life [Daniels] sketches is not the self-sacrificing prisoner on Robben Island, but rather the comfortable bourgeois ideals of South Africans in the twenty-first century" (Schalkwyk 35).

Examples like these unsettle the notion that the individuals in question were approaching Shakespeare with a political agenda in mind. Rather, they were individually reacting to what could have been questions of aesthetics, as possibly conveyed through the vestiges of British colonial schooling, questions of personal sympathy or even attending to spontaneous impulses which made them prefer one passage over others.

On these grounds expecting the signers to become Robben Island 'eaters' of Shakespeare is unrealistic given the either filtered or limited access to the playwright most of the signatories had, let alone the non-signatories. The expectation is also out of place. Rather than attending to the particular postcolonial experience of these prisoners, such a logic generalises their plight into a culturalist formula. Schalkwyk's examples serve to expose the limits of the universalist argument when applied to a narrative of resistance. Rather than applying this wider lens to highlight actual problems affecting global communities alike, it is used to construct a homogeneous story of contention that can only speak to academics and hence represent little more than a discourse. What Schalkwyk's findings show is that as fighters against racial and the concomitant economic oppression, these prisoners struggled to see resistance within what was ultimately a different power paradigm.

Addressing this divergence between the notion of power in traditional power relations and the new understanding of power as introduced by cultural politics, Majumdar draws from Sri Lankan British writer and former director of the London Institute of Race Relations, Ambalavaner Sivanandan (Majumdar 211). In his insightful analysis of the emergence of the British New Left, Sivanandan outlines just how much a departure from the socialist project of the British Left was owing to Labour's electoral pressures. In the face of the Thatcherite reconfiguration of the working 'social bloc' as aided by the quick development of information technologies and accompanying service industry, Labour's options for its constituencies also underwent a transformation and with them the notion of a vertical power struggle determining class relations was also changed:

There is, that is, not just one power game any more but several, and not just one political line but a whole lot of political positions – and hence 'a politics which is always positional'. And personal. Because the personal is the political. And personal politics is also about the politics of consumption, desire, pleasure – because we have got choice now. (Sivanandan 13)

Even though Sivanandan's analysis of this shift in the British Left is restricted to the particular political dynamics Britain was undergoing at the time, it is useful to think of this divergence between the Old and the New Left as equally shaping postcolonial rhetoric and the expectations regarding the forms of expression of the formerly

colonised. Both Chibber's and Majumdar's issues with postcolonial theory rest precisely on such a turn to a politics of identity that disavows the importance of the economic question. Thus, returning to Schalkwyk's argument and when considering the act of signing, much is made of these prisoners' choices in terms of their minoritarian identities. But this is while bypassing the common cause they espoused, namely, resistance to apartheid as a multi-layered system of oppression where race was only one of the components. Accordingly, the fetishisation of the Robben Island Shakespeare is grounded on the assumption that choice would have been recognised by Venkatrathnam's inmates as a political opportunity. That this was not so has been proven by the various gaps in this story of resistance.

Signing for all. Neruda and Shakespeare

With Dunn's "A Theory" readers find the opposite of fetishisation as the poem both exalts and relativizes in their importance the names of both feted artists, Shakespeare *and* Neruda, in favour of the transcendental act of creating poetry. On the surface the poem has the air of commemoration. The lyrical speaker introduces Neruda as the owner of a copy of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* which is then – upon his death and the subsequent raid on his property – sent into circulation as what seems like a metaphor for Neruda's oeuvre. Persecuted for his political views and affiliations, Neruda became a special target decades before the coup. The poem translates this biographical trajectory through images of recurring tension between the physical realm of censure where books are stolen and destroyed and an ideal world that negates even the possibility of annihilation. One interpretation would position the memory of Neruda and his literary influence in this ideal world, and thus regard the poem as a mere act of homage giving. However, upon closer inspection, and bearing in mind the programmatic title, the poem reveals greater depth. Thus, the speaker opens the poem with a seemingly simple act of signing that, as Schalkwyk would argue, is anything but simple:

In 1930, on the island of Java,
Pablo Neruda purchased Shakespeare's *Sonnets*
Into which he wrote his name and the date. (Dunn, 11, l. 1–3)

Although the informed reader knows about the biographical foundations of these lines – Neruda himself mentioned this transaction² –, this is more than just a reference to that event. As will become clear, Dunn uses the Shakespearean *Sonnets* owned by Neruda as a pretext to introduce Neruda's poetics of the socialist artist:

After he died, his houses were plundered.
What became of his book, his treasure of four decades?
Whether stolen, or cast aside, it circulates

From Batavia to Chile by the long way round
Across the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic,

² See Neruda's speech "Shakespeare, Prince of Light": "My name is written in my copy of the *Sonnets*, along with the day and the month in 1930 when I bought the book on the island of Java" (1983, 163).

From Chile to Batavia across the Pacific.

It goes like an albatross and they cannot kill it.
 Out of the fires of burning books rises the perfect replica.
 From hand to phantasmagorical hand (l. 4–12)

In lines 5–6 the equivocal nature of Neruda's *Sonnets* book is established. The answer to the whereabouts of his "treasure of four decades" (l. 5) (i.e., the book) is as indeterminate as it is nonsensical: "whether stolen, or cast aside, it circulates" (l. 6). Here the reader witnesses a transformation of the historical object – Neruda's *Sonnets* by Shakespeare – into a metaphor based on an abstract "it". An "it" that circulates across the globe following Neruda's consular travels ("From Batavia to Chile [...] / Across the Indian Ocean" l. 7–8) before being likened to what sounds like Samuel Taylor Coleridge's albatross from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: "It goes like an albatross and they cannot kill it" (l. 10). It is tempting to suspect that the "it" stands for Neruda's Shakespeare-inspired literary legacy. After all, the travels described do match his, even if the chronological order of the trips "From Batavia to Chile" (l. 7) and "From Chile to Batavia" (l. 8) should be inverted. Moreover, the paradox of circulation despite impairment in line 6 ("whether stolen, or cast aside, it circulates") conveys a sense of resistance worthy of de Andrade's "Manifesto". After having internalised Shakespeare, Neruda's oeuvre can defy and withstand violence.

However, how does the speaker's association of the "it" to an albatross (which, unlike the mariner's, "cannot [be] kill[ed]", l. 10) fit in? In Coleridge's ballad it is the death of the albatross that generates the mariner's need to atone through compulsive retelling:
 Since then, at an uncertain hour,

That agony returns:
 And till my ghastly tale is told,
 This heart within me burns.

I pass, like night, from land to land;
 That moment that his face I see,
 I know the man that must hear me:
 To him my tale I teach. (Coleridge l. 582–590)

But in Dunn's poem there seems to be a conflation of albatross and "tale" as the next two lines show: "Out of the fires of burning books rises the perfect replica. / From hand to phantasmagorical hand" (l. 11–12). The seamless transition of the "it" from being an albatross to a "perfect replica" (l. 11.) sustains this interpretation. And this is not the only alteration of Coleridge's ballad. The identity of the mariner has also changed. In Dunn's rendition there is no sin calling for atonement and as such, the "phantasmagorical hand[s]" (l. 12) are free of guilt. And yet, their "phantasmagorical" quality seems to insist on the connection to the haunted mariner. If these hands are indeed to be understood in terms of the protectors and disseminators of Neruda's legacy, why should they be ghostly? The answer lies in Neruda's own collective understanding of the arts, where the act of artistic creation requires the involvement of many actors through time and where the Romantic genius or vatic artist is superseded by a creative

community. It is this understanding of poetry which Dunn's speaker offers in adaptation as "A Theory of Literary Criticism."

A highly metareferential poem, "A Theory" mimics the poetic process as Neruda saw it. In a speech delivered at the Faculty of Arts and Letters upon his appointment as Academic Fellow, Neruda reminisces on his poetic becoming, citing the names who influenced him, but more than anything establishing an entangled notion of the writing of poetry:

The world of the arts is one great workshop in which we all work and in which everyone helps his fellow, though he may not know or believe it. And, most important, we are aided by the work of those who came before us: we know there can be no Rubén Darío without a Góngora, no Apollinaire without a Rimbaud, no Baudelaire without a Lamartine, no Pablo Neruda without them all. And it is out of pride, not modesty, that I proclaim all poets my masters, for what would I be without the years I spent reading everything that had been written in my country and in every universe of poetry? (Neruda 1983, 362-363)

These clear statements of interdependence alert the reader to an alternative way of understanding literary influence that does not necessarily correspond with de Andrade's digestive metaphor. Earlier in the speech Neruda even distances himself from the iconoclastic type of writers who "wanted to be the lone respected survivor[s] in the midst of the assembly of the goddess Kali and her murderous cult" (Neruda 1983, 353). Instead, Neruda resorts to the image of flowing water to illustrate the idea of being "aided by the work of those who came before us" (1983, 363). Referring to the influence of Daniel de la Vega on him, he claims "that some drop of those verses still flows in my own stream" (1983, 363).

At this point the elusive nature of the pronoun "it" in Dunn's poem can be understood as paraphrasing Neruda's openly declared interdependencies. The copy of Shakespearean Sonnets owned by Neruda is gradually transformed into a label-less entity, "it", that defies material accidents as it records both the political and creative aspects of Neruda's life, before becoming even more opaque as it is being passed around by "phantasmagorical hand[s]" (Dunn, l. 12). This last transformation could in turn be read as Dunn's own adaptation of Neruda's phrase "aided by the work of those who came before us" (1983, 363; emphasis added).

The fifth stanza of Dunn's "A Theory" features a more explicit quotation of Neruda that helps consolidate his understanding of artistic interdependence:

It visits the 'perfume of pomegranates in Verona',
 'The vulgar voices of parasites and buffoons',
 And touches men and women to the quicks of their lives (Dunn, l. 13-15)

Here the speaker playfully has the "it" "visit" two quotes that are marked as such. They stem from Neruda's speech given in 1964 at the Theatre Institute of the University of Chile on occasion of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birthday. Verona is made prominent by Neruda on account of his Spanish translation of *Romeo and Juliet* which was commissioned to him and the results of which he was meant to present to the public at the Institute. As such, his task entailed giving a statement of relevance, a kind of stock-taking of Shakespeare's importance for the Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America that

would benefit from his translation. The result is diametrically opposed to that of de Andrade:

In every epoch, one bard assumes responsibility for the dreams and the wisdom of the age: he expresses the growth, the expansion of that world. One time he is called Alighieri, or Victor Hugo, Lope de Vega, or Walt Whitman. Above all he is called Shakespeare. (Neruda 1983, 162)³

Neruda evokes in his list of bards the notion of the wandering soul periodically inhabiting individual bodies. The fortuitousness suggested by the temporal adverb “one time” and the disjunctives shifting between names imply that it is the soul holding universal experience rather than its varying encasements that really matters. Even as Shakespeare is given some predominance in relation to the other names, he remains ultimately one among them.

Arguing from a postcolonial perspective it cannot be overlooked that none of Neruda’s bards are Latin American. Neither is there an attempt at selectively processing their contents to suit local demand, as de Andrade suggests should be the case. Rather, in his further consideration of Shakespeare Neruda appeals for the universal reverence to the poet who gave “new universes” to mankind. What is more, he makes the conditions of violence from *Romeo and Juliet* as much a Chilean as a global concern. To this effect he mentions the persecution of his poetic mentor, the Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral, on account of her outspoken pacifism. Denouncing her persecutors, Neruda transposes the violent tendencies of a Tybalt onto his political reality: “One sees that the world and the press continued to be governed by the Tybalts, by swordsmen” (Neruda 1983, 165). The fact that Neruda elsewhere refers to Shakespeare as the “vastest of human beings”⁴ makes it quite clear that he attributed universal validity to his works. However, this enthusiastic literary decoration should not distract from the fact that the Chilean poet still placed him within creative reach. Thus, Neruda closes his speech by directly thanking his “companion”.

It is in this image of companionship with Shakespeare that Neruda’s reception of the Bard, as going against the grain of the culturalist logic, stands out. Apart from seeking to preserve his legacy for Latin Americans by translating his works, the Nobel laureate is doing something else. He is exemplifying how the ‘workshop’ of the arts works by not only establishing his dependence on someone who came before, namely the English playwright, but also by passing on his works and universal importance through translation and corresponding praise. The action of passing on entails a third party in the

³ The first sentence corresponds with the translation by Margaret Sayers Peden in the referenced collection. The second is my own direct translation from the Spanish. Peden has taken out the temporal adverb “one time” as well as the recurring disjunctive “or” from the original, both of which are central to my interpretation of the passage.

⁴ Once again, I diverge from the translation by Sayers Peden whose choice of “greatest” (“the greatest of human beings,” Neruda 1983, 165) changes the sense of the Spanish “vasto”, which means, as in English, extensive or far-stretching. Throughout the speech Neruda is making a case for the universality of Shakespeare’s works, hence his “vastness”. The qualifier “great” in association with a figure like Shakespeare takes away this semantic nuance in favour of the sense of exaltation of the artist. See original “Inaugurando el Año de Shakespeare” in Pablo Neruda, *Antología General* (2018), 414–418.

workshop, namely Everyman. And it is this last participant – a collective standing for “the most ignorant and exploited of his contemporaries” (Neruda 1983, 386) – that Neruda particularly has in mind. It is for them he wants to enable the smell of Verona’s “perfume of pomegranates” and it is them that should be “moved to the quick of their lives”.

While the culturalist postcolonial critic might accuse Neruda of condescendence, his eagerness to make Shakespeare accessible to the illiterate worker must be seen in the larger framework of his levelling poetics. Appealing for poets to be humble – as they are not “little gods” (Neruda 1983, 386) – he considers the dedication and sense of communal responsibility of someone like the local baker as the truly poetic craft. “And if a poet could be moved in the same way by such a simple conscience”, he concludes, “that simple conscience would allow him to become part of an enormous work of art – the simple, or complicated, construction that is the building of a society, the transformation of a man’s condition, the simple delivery of his wares: bread, truth, wine, dreams” (Neruda 1983, 386). For Neruda the Latin American poet cannot be an intellectualist in the sense of belonging to an exclusive group of individuals with their own communication channels and agendas. In thinking this he was not alone, but while the postcolonial narrative of resistance does target intellectual exclusion, it can be argued (with Chibber and Majumdar) that it restricts its censure to the colonisers without attending to homegrown intellectuals that might be vicariously deciding on the virtues of Shakespeare on behalf (and to the detriment) of entire communities. Venkatrathnam’s failed signing initiative to mobilise Shakespeare against apartheid would be a case in point.

Dunn’s speaker draws attention to this risk in one of the last stations of circulation of the “it” after it has averted the rigours of fire and censure: “They discuss it in lecture theatres but cannot kill it” (Dunn, l.18). Where the other hindrances to circulation – the raid on Neruda’s houses and the burning of books – are allusions to the reality of persecution under fascist regimes, the next to last thing Dunn’s reader would expect to find here is academic discussion suggested as a potential tool of destruction. And yet, this line is very much on point concerning Neruda’s reservations about intellectualism, or as he called it, “sectarianism” (Neruda 1983, 385). In his acceptance speech for the Nobel prize in Stockholm he frames these reservations in terms of a learned lesson:

[I]t is we ourselves who create the phantoms of our own mythification. From the very mortar with which we create, or hope to create, are formed the obstacles to our own evolution. We may find ourselves irrevocably drawn toward reality and realism – that is, toward an unselective acceptance of reality and the roads to change – and then realize, when it seems too late, that we have raised such severe limitations that we have killed life instead of guiding it to growth and fruition. We have imposed on ourselves a realism heavier than our building bricks, without ever having constructed the building we thought was our first responsibility. And at the opposite extreme, if we succeed in making a fetish of the incomprehensible (or comprehensible to only a few), a fetish of the exceptional and recondite, if we suppress reality and its inevitable deterioration, we will suddenly find ourselves in an untenable position, sinking in a quicksand of leaves, clay, and clouds, drowning in an oppressive inability to communicate. (Neruda 1983, 386–387)

Once more Neruda’s analysis of the role of the Latin American poet marks a departure from the conventional culturalist rhetoric. A warning against self-mythification along

with the possibility of becoming unintelligible to the majority suggests that Neruda is talking from experience.

After having moved in exclusive Modernist circles of artists during his early years as a diplomat, Neruda's refined aesthetic attitudes received a considerable nudge with the outbreak of the Spanish civil war. Resisting the regime that had deprived him of his friend, the poet Federico García Lorca, exacted of Neruda his consular duties in the shape of a special humanitarian mission: the evacuation of two thousand Spaniards on board the ship *Winnipeg* heading for Chile. Reminiscing on this operation years later, he challenged critics to erase all his poetry "but this poem I am recalling today" – referring to said operation – "will never be erased" (Neruda 1983, 254). More humanitarian missions would follow when, back in Chile in the 1940s, Neruda gives up his consulship and joins the communist party. By 1945, a senator representing the socialist cause, he seeks out the working classes and the poor across the country. And once again, his poetry is defined by him in terms of political activism. What he calls his "ars poetica" (Neruda 1983, 365) is comprised of his wandering among remote communities and slums holding poetry readings organised by unions and where his listeners, some of whom wore sacks around their waists for clothing, listened intently.

From these new uses of his poetry, Neruda's insistence on a clear and anti-academicist artistic expression can be discerned. At the start of this section, I established how Dunn's poem frustrates the conventional postcolonial interpretation of a Neruda "talking back" to Shakespeare. Indeed, the chance of appropriating Shakespeare via signature and ownership of the copy of *Sonnets* seems as irrecoverable as the historical object itself. Having worked as a librarian before fully turning to poetry, Dunn might have had a professional interest in tracing a book's historical trajectory. But the fact that in the present case tracking is disabled by the object's very elusiveness is not meant as a failure for the librarian but as a failure for the culturalist postcolonial scholar insisting on seeing Neruda's appropriation of Shakespeare behind the copy.

Indeed, the act of inscription spells out a complex personal involvement with Shakespeare, rather than a political statement. Referring to the actual event in his speech, Neruda qualifies Shakespearean poetry as having "kept open a line of communication with Western culture" (1983, 163) during his consular travels through the Indian ocean. Surrounded by a "fabulous multitude of hitherto unknown myths" on Java it was Shakespeare's poetry which provided him with a "crystalline law" to navigate the unknown island (Neruda 1983, 163). Without a doubt Neruda's assessment of Shakespeare is subjective. He was responding to his works as a reader who identified fully with the situations they presented. As such, it was not necessary for him to bring up boundaries of positionality that were simply not perceived and neither was his contribution to the dissemination of Shakespeare's works by translation hindered by this culturalist logic. Through translation Neruda saw himself as another line of communication enabling access to other lines through Shakespeare. He would not have shared this autobiographical reminiscence of signing his copy of Shakespeare had he not thought it pertinent to his translation work and had he not considered the signing a communal rather than a subjective act. Accordingly in Dunn's poetic adaptation, the copy progresses through shifting labels, not being Shakespeare's nor Neruda's for long and surviving the fire of political and not least academic faction.

Neruda's 'keepers of verse'. Poetry as community

"I am a poet patriot, a nationalist of Chile's clay" (Neruda 1983, 364), Neruda declares in a biographical essay. While such declaration may seem to evoke martial tones, also as in the sense of de Andrade's rhetoric, this would be another interpretative misfire. Neruda was wary of such rhetoric. Criticising the colonial epic celebrating the military prowess of the pre-Columbian Mapuches, *La Araucana* (1569-89), the poet exposes the dangers behind such narratives: "[W]e forgot, in spite of *La Araucana* and its mournful pride, that our Indians are to this day illiterate and without land or shoes" (Neruda 1983, 365). In light of such circumstances Neruda's poetics is wider encompassing than the one grounded in the Aristotelian tradition. His is an uncomplicated fusion of the historical material conditions and the social reformist preoccupation with the question of how things could be. In Neruda's view it is not only a question of poetry being more philosophical than history, but also about poetry showing society the way forward.

Resonating with Chibber's and Majumdar's concerns over a postcolonial attitude that is out of touch with a nation's economic reality, Neruda redefined in his autobiography the poetic business of a socialist:

Each and every one of my verses has chosen to take its place as a tangible object, each and every one of my poems has claimed to be a useful working instrument, each and every one of my songs has endeavoured to serve as a sign in space for a meeting between paths which cross one another, or as a piece of stone or wood on which someone, some others, those who follow after, will be able to carve the new signs. (Neruda 1983, 387)

Neruda was not interested in charting the course of his poetry as returning to him in the shape of well-memorised lines. He was interested in its prompting the poetry of others, regardless their background or occupation. Underlying this expectation is once again his understanding of poetry as a common denominator of humanity from which acts are derived.

As though picking up on this nuance, the speaker in Dunn's poem redirects the conventional sense of memory suggested in the penultimate tercet where "keepers of verse" are said to convey the "it" "with memory's astounding patience" (l. 20–21) to fit Neruda's notion of literary reception:

They would write it down for them, in every language.
Anything made can be unmade, but with this exception –
If it exists, it exists, and there is the chance of eternity. (Dunn, l. 22–24)

Without having let the "it" out of sight throughout the poem, the reader knows better by now than to simply assume Neruda's oeuvre behind it. Rather, "it" has stood for the condition of his poetry considering his biography *and* in light of his universal socialist poetics. In this sense writing it in "every language" amounts to the carving of the "new signs" his work was supposed to trigger.

As such, and as has been seen with the negation of the copy's physicality, Neruda did not regard his poetry as self-contained and autonomous. He saw it as just another link in the poetic chain to be succeeded by others, in the same way his poetry had followed Shakespeare's. His theory of criticism presupposed an organic notion of art insofar as the object of art was an open-ended one, constantly susceptible to the interventions of

artists succeeding each other in a kind of assemblage line of personal work and circumstance. The poem closes with a contrast between production and existence that reinforces his notion of organic poetry:

Anything made can be unmade, but with this exception –
If it exists, it exists, and there is the chance of eternity. (Dunn, l. 23–24)

This contrast between being “made” and “exist[ing]” in terms of potential destruction reflects the two different notions of art posited by de Andrade and Neruda respectively. The idea that the West can be ‘eaten’ to give rise to the literature of the formerly colonised, Neruda would say, is an illusion of creation that recalls the jarring juxtaposition of the mythicized Mapuches with the actual reality of Chile’s autochthonous population. Being artificial in that sense, such art can be “unmade”. It is only by bringing the poetic assembly line to the dispossessed Mapuches through an accessible poetry – hand in hand with social reform – that the literary cause of the Americas can be aided.

Finally, it would be missing Neruda’s point about universalism to restrict this analysis to the poetry of the Americas. As suggested in the introduction, the context of publication of Dunn’s “A Theory” widens the range of application. Not only was this poem published within an autobiographical frame reflecting Neruda’s influence on Dunn, but it also appeared as part of Harry Ritchie’s collection of New Scottish Writing *Acid Plaid* (1996). An anthology seeking to celebrate the Scottish “boom” of contemporary writing, Ritchie is anxious to dispense with the “cliches” that have determined international perception of contemporary Scottish writing as being a reaction to the 1979 failure of devolution (3), or broadly speaking, as fitting a particular political narrative:

To avoid any waffle, I am tempted to ascribe Scotland’s literary boom to the forces of pure, blind coincidence, but perhaps a more persuasive explanation is that one literary achievement encourages another (Ritchie 3).

Taking the controversial Hugh MacDiarmid and his nationalist movement of the Scottish Renaissance as the starting point of artistic flourishing, Ritchie proceeds to draw a line of authors exemplifying literary achievement. At the end of this line is Douglas Dunn himself.

Nevertheless, as ensues from the previous analysis, more than a confirmation of Ritchie’s claims, Dunn’s contribution to the collection, “A Theory of Literary Criticism”, is a corrective. Precisely the national self-mythification Neruda was warning against had been recognized by Dunn in the work of countryman Hugh MacDiarmid whom he disqualified in an interview on account of his fascist affiliations and alienating poetry: “MacDiarmid was writing for some notional, hyper-civilized technocratic being of the future. His audience didn’t exist in his lifetime and perhaps will never exist” (qtd. in Crawford 19). A highly polarizing figure, MacDiarmid saw no contradiction in espousing both Scottish nationalism and the communist cause – even after acknowledging indifference toward the self-same people he claimed to represent in his verse. Speaking in the same interview about MacDiarmid’s legacy, David Daiches refers to a letter MacDiarmid sent him expressing his aversion to being considered a popular

poet: “I don’t have your gift for empathizing with other people. I don’t like people. I think people are one of God’s mistakes” (qtd. in Crawford 19).⁵ In this sense and given his aesthetic “unqualified opposition to the English ethos” (MacDiarmid xii), MacDiarmid’s poetry, which the Modernist Neruda had admired at an early stage of his career (Hubbard 39), can have no place in Neruda’s “workshop” of the arts. Indeed, in its first context of publication in Ritchie’s anthology Dunn’s poem acquires an additional function. Through its consistent blurring of authorial and readerly labels relating to Shakespeare, Neruda, and the “keepers of verse”, it updates Neruda’s warning against a mythic form of nationalism that overlooks the real social issues for the sake of the postcolonial narrative of “talking back”. Rather than belonging to the circulating “it”, MacDiarmid’s work would play the role of detractor. Aligning his philosophy with fascism (Crawford 17), Dunn would sooner identify MacDiarmid’s oeuvre with the burning fires of censure than with the eternal phoenix with which his speaker represents Neruda’s universalist art. Thus, as a component of Ritchie’s anthology, “A Theory” should be read as prompting a necessary re-evaluation of MacDiarmid’s role in Scottish literature.

Conclusion

Through Dunn’s lyricized poetics of Neruda, the poet’s legacy gains concrete theoretical weight. The condensation of his scattered claims about poetry, Chile, and his socialist cause into the image of the circulating “it” helps to position Neruda in the camp of lesser-known postcolonial voices such as that of the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris. These are voices keen on finding resemblances and continuities across cultural and political boundaries who are not afraid of celebrating the universalism of human experience when they see it conveyed through figures like Shakespeare and to a socially enhancing effect. Initially drawn to the intellectualism informing de Andrade’s “Manifesto” during his early years, Neruda was nudged out of it by a Third World confronted with real social challenges. Through his socialist activism and the concomitant redistribution of aesthetic values in favour of the community of readers of Latin America, Neruda’s poetics can be argued to have a more productive postcolonial reach than the more conventional antagonizing approaches. Thus, and extending the application of Dunn’s contrast to postcolonial theory, it could be claimed that, while postcolonial rhetoric can be made, only true postcolonial activism has the chance of eternity.

5 For MacDiarmid’s contradictions as a socialist see also the RTÉ documentary on One “Poetry and Politics – Hugh MacDiarmid”.

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Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht einen besonderen Fall der Shakespeare-Rezeption in Lateinamerika anhand einer Analyse des Gedichts von Douglas Dunn „A Theory of Literary Criticism“. Das Gedicht ist eine Hommage an den chilenischen Dichter und Nobelpreisträger Pablo Neruda, stellt aber zugleich eine Verteidigung der universalistischen These dar, die die Bedeutung Shakespeares über Länder- und Kulturunterschiede hinweg bestätigt sieht. Dabei transponiert der lyrische Sprecher Aussagen aus Nerudas Schriften über Shakespeare, Lateinamerika und die Rolle des sozialistischen Dichters in der Form einer langen Transmigrationsmetapher. Sie beschreibt die posthume Reise von Nerudas Ausgabe der Shakespeare Sonnette, welche der Zerstörung durch die Pinochetistas anheimgefallen sein soll. Durch diese Aktualisierung von Nerudas selbstreflektierter Shakespeare-Rezeption, so legt der Artikel nahe, leistet „A Theory of Literary Criticism“ einen entscheidenden revisionistischen Beitrag zu einer postkolonialen Theorie, die akademistisch zu werden droht.