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LOCALISING TEXT AND PERFORMANCE: AVENUES FOR EXPLORING SHAKESPEARE AND CULTURAL-CREATIVE ADAPTATION

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ABSTRACT

The article comprises three case studies examining Shakespearean productions across varied geographical and methodological arenas, aiming to review and identify promising avenues for new directions in performance research. Through analyses of political adaptations in Greece, cultural hybridity in Malaysian productions, and practice-based research models (involving rehearsal studies) deployed at the Folger Theatre (USA), this article explores the mechanisms by which Shakespeare's works blend into different historical, political, and cultural contexts. In doing so, it advocates for a departure from the conventional emphasis on textual or performative authenticity in Shakespeare studies. By documenting how diverse values, practices, and experiences shape creative processes, it reveals these endeavours as dynamic networks of cultural-creative collaboration. Ultimately, this study transcends traditional geographical and methodological limitations, urging readers to recognise and celebrate the ever-evolving presence of Shakespeare in diverse cultures and media.

Keywords: Shakespeare; performance; culture; adaptation; production; theatre.

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INTRODUCTION

The turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed the proliferation of international festivals, performances, courses, research centres, and faculty positions committed to the investigation (and celebration) of Shakespeare's plays (Joubin, 2019, pp. 1-6; Schoch, 2021, pp. 81-89). As a result, Shakespeare has achieved a near-global status and his name has come to evoke the global stage (see also Huang, 2005, p. 273). In the current trend of global Shakespeare adaptation and scholarship, attention has increasingly turned to cultural and performance analyses. These inquiries delve into the manifold ways in which subsequent generations and diverse cultures have reconceived and reshaped Shakespearean works beyond their original contexts (Lanier, 2006, p. 228). The present article sets out to revisit the performative and cultural turns in Shakespeare studies and to explore the new insights and possibilities for future research that they have created.

In addressing the question of why and how Shakespeare's works continue to enjoy global popularity in the present day, it is productive to remind ourselves of how the adaptation history of Shakespeare's works began. The search for the first generation of playwrights to adapt Shakespeare's works after his death takes us back to a period known as the English "Restoration". The term refers to the time from 1660 to 1688 when the English monarchy was reestablished following a period of republican government known as the Commonwealth (1649-1660). The Restoration carries special significance in theatre history because it marked the relaunch of theatrical activity after a lengthy period of suspension. Upon the beginning of the English Civil War in 1642, the English theatres had in fact been shut down: apart from a few unauthorised performances during the Interregnum, the theatres remained closed until Charles II's return from his European exile in 1660, by which time there had been no official and commercial theatrical activity in London for almost twenty years (for an account of Shakespeare's revival in the Restoration, see Eubanks Winkler et al., 2023, pp. 1-14). When the theatres finally reopened, Restoration dramatists including William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew were faced with a scarcity of new, original plays, due to the prolonged suspension of theatrical entertainment. As a result, the Restoration repertoire was initially composed of the pre-1642 classics of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. But the Restoration playhouses did not stage Shakespeare's plays the way that Shakespeare's own company had done decades earlier. Women (and not boy actors) played women's roles, and plotlines, especially those of the histories and tragedies, were rewritten to account for the sensitive political climate in the aftermath of regicide and civil war (*King Lear*, for example, now survived). Furthermore, ambiguities in Shakespeare's writing were removed or clarified, and there was a greater emphasis on aural and visual spectacle thanks to the more sophisticated acoustic and technical possibilities afforded by the new indoor theatres, which were equipped with a proscenium arch and moveable scenery (see Fretz, 2022, pp. 32-40 and Holland, 1979, pp. 19-54; for detailed case studies of Restoration revisions of Shakespeare, see Dobson, 1992, pp. 17-99). As a particular moment in English theatre history, the Restoration matters to us today because it reminds us that the creative reinterpretation of Shakespeare's plays has been a hallmark of their performance history since the very beginning. Rather than treating Shakespeare as an untouchable figure, it encourages us to view him as a versatile medium that can be utilised to convey adapters' (and audiences') ever-changing perspectives, ideas, sensibilities, and cultures. By tailoring Shakespeare's plays to their own political and cultural moment, the Restoration adapters lay some of the groundwork for the localisation of Shakespeare into diverse cultural contexts.

During the period from approximately 1950 to about 1980, the localisation of Shakespeare in non-Anglophone contexts was propelled by two main forces. Firstly, the open stage movement served to demystify the dramatic event by emphasising its non-illusionist nature; secondly, the movement to contemporise the meanings of plays highlighted the collective responsibility of theatrical practitioners and audiences to engage with social and political issues beyond mere entertainment or high-art values (Kennedy, 2004, pp. 6-8). As Alexa Joubin, writes, “[b]y giving expression to marginalised, oppressed, and disenfranchised cultural voices, performances of Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays become a vehicle of empowerment, an agent to foster the multicultural good” (Joubin, 2019, p. 3). These forces, alongside efforts to translate Shakespeare’s works into different languages, liberated Shakespeare from the constraints of realism and promoted his integration into non-Anglophone cultures and theatrical practices. In addition, as Joubin has highlighted, “directors [also] began employing hybrid performance styles as early as the 1950s, with Peter Brook being a notable example” (Joubin, 2019, p. 2). The 2012 World Shakespeare Festival, staged during the London Olympics, marked a turning point also in British appreciation for international Shakespeare performances. Held at the Globe Theatre, the festival presented 37 of Shakespeare’s plays in 37 different languages, showcasing the global reach and enduring relevance of Shakespeare’s work. This unique event fostered a renewed appreciation for the diverse interpretations and cultural perspectives that enrich the experience of Shakespearean theatre. However, scholarly inquiry into Shakespeare’s “local habitation” and the manner in which his works are adapted and appropriated within specific cultural settings has remained too limited (Huang, 2005, p. 256). According to Richard Schoch, “[p]erformances of Shakespeare outside the Anglophone world are not blandly global – in the way that businesses like Starbucks and McDonald’s are the same everywhere – but insistently local and often intercultural” (Schoch, 2021, p. 82). Thus, research gaps continue to exist regarding Shakespeare’s role in the shaping of post- and transnational cultural spaces as well as with regard to Shakespeare adaptation across different media.

The present article contains three case studies drawn from different geographical and methodological arenas with the aim of facilitating the charting of new and exciting directions in the study and practice of Shakespeare in performance. While these case studies, focusing on adaptation and performance in Greece, Malaysia, and the United States, offer just a limited glimpse into the vast array of Shakespearean performance and adaptation traditions around the world, they have been selected because they elucidate particular research directions and methodologies that can help plug some of the aforementioned gaps in existing scholarship. Specifically, these case studies delve into non-Anglophone Shakespeare adaptations, including cross-media political adaptation in Greece and cultural adaptation in Malaysia, before exploring a practice-based research model (involving rehearsal studies) deployed at the Folger Theatre in the USA that sought to understand how Restoration Shakespeare could be adapted for audiences today.

Political Adaptation (Greece)

The adaptability of Shakespeare’s works is particularly conspicuous when placed within the non-Anglophone context. When Shakespeare’s plays are translated, they become newly contemporary not only in terms of *mise-en-scène* but also in a linguistic sense, because they acquire a new script. Striking examples of this phenomenon can be observed in Greece, a nation renowned for its affinity for the theatrical arts. The popularity of Shakespeare in Greece can be

attributed to the deep-rooted and intimate connections between Shakespeare and Greek theatres. In the 1860s and 1870s, the dawn of modern Greek professional theatre witnessed an abundance of Shakespearean productions by the first modern acting troupes performing mainly in Constantinople and Athens (Sideris, 1964, p. 31). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Greek audiences were already so familiar with Shakespeare that they were able to watch parodies that emerged after foreign (non-Greek) examples (Sideris, 1964, p. 38). The Greek National Theatre (also known as the Royal Theatre) has always included Shakespeare in its repertoire, and often opened its theatre season with a Shakespearean play (Krontiris, 2007, p. 92). Theatre stars, who ran their own companies, often played Shakespearean roles to promote their talent (Damianakou, 1994, p. 11). New companies based on collective work (ensemble), like Karolos Koun's Art Theatre (established in 1942) or Spyros Evangelatos's Amphi-Theatre (1975-2011), which introduced a wide range of new plays from the global dramatic output, also included Shakespeare in their repertoire.

The very first troupes performed, apart from Constantinople and Athens, in several Greek cities, like Ermoupolis (the capital of the island of Syros) or Patras (Yanni, 2005, pp. 236-275). In the 1930s, the National Theatre established Thespi's Chariot (Arma Thespidos), a branch of the National Theatre Company especially designed to travel in the Greek provinces. From the 1980s Municipal Peripheral Theatres were established in several Greek cities. In the twenty-first century, the National Theatre created the Summer Academies, which took place in various parts of Greece (the third one in Mytilene being on the Renaissance).

Shakespeare's recurring presence on the Greek stage also reflects the adaptability of his plays to Greek historical and political contexts. At various points in history, Greek directors utilised Shakespeare's works to convey their social and political agendas, thus establishing a deeper connection between Shakespearean narratives and Greek audiences. In March 1941, during World War II, *Henry V* was performed at the National Theatre in honour of the country's British allies. The production underscored the play's heroic elements at a moment when the Greeks, with the help of the British, were preparing to face the imminent German threat (Krontiris, 2007, pp.41-66). A year later, a production of *Othello* by Marika Kotopouli's company even made an anti-racist statement, adding Jewish overtones to the presentation of the Moor (Krontiris, 2007, p. 75). During the 1967-1974 dictatorship, Karolos Koun's choice of *Measure for Measure* (which he staged in 1968-1969) was certainly not random, since the major issue of the play is power abuse; nor was his production of *Troilus and Cressida* (1972-1973) irrelevant, as the play depicts a decadent Greek antiquity that seemed to echo, in Koun's production, the recurring motif of ancient Greek valour in the dictators' nationalistic rhetoric (Georgopoulou, 2018, pp. 44-45).

During the Greek financial crisis (2009-2018), notable adaptations of Shakespeare's works addressed the sociopolitical situation in the country. For her street performance *Hamlet Committed Suicide* (2011), director Stella Mari chose the most politically charged excerpts from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to present the various aspects of the Greek crisis, regarding the latter as both national and personal. Mari's performance was also seen as a political act of activism (Georgopoulou, 2018, pp. 45-46). Obvious references to the Greeks' financial hardships during the crisis were also visible in two different productions of *Timon of Athens*, directed by Alexandros Cohen (2014) and Stathis Livathinos (2018). The former was inspired by the bankruptcy of two famous Greek fashion designers, and the set (which included a passage in the form of a runway) and costumes (that reminded of haute couture) alluded to this context; the latter included more specific hints, such as Timon's last costume, a coat made of a sleeping-

bag, which reminded of the homeless people of Athens, whose number was multiplied during the crisis (Georgopoulou, 2020, pp. 226-234).

However, the adaptability of Shakespeare's plays is not only seen on the Greek stage; rooted in their universal human themes, references to them are also traced in non-theatrical texts and contexts. For instance, any young couple facing problems due to a difference between them regarding social class, nationality, or religion is in Greece commonly referred to as a Romeo-and-Juliet couple (Georgopoulou, 2017, p. 47); Hamlet's dilemma of "To be, or not to be" is constantly paraphrased in various contexts; and politicians who face political dilemmas are often portrayed as Hamlet's counterparts (Georgopoulou, 2018, pp. 48-50). During the financial crisis, a parallel was even drawn between Greece's creditors and Shylock, and between Antonio and every Greek citizen, from whom the creditors supposedly required a pound of flesh (Georgopoulou, 2018, p. 51).

Shakespeare's centrality in Greek theatrical adaptation, and his integration into Greek popular culture through various media such as radio, television, and the press (printed or online), underscore the possibilities of cross-media adaptation studies and make the case for exploring adaptation across different media and linguistic platforms. Through the active recontextualisation of Shakespeare's plays to fit new political settings and to engage audiences with distinctive social and economic experiences, Greek adaptation practices also provide renewed impetus for exploring Shakespeare's politicised presence in popular culture on a global scale.

Cultural Hybridity/Interculturalism (Malaysia)

Like the political and politicised adaptations of Shakespeare in Greece, the contextualisation of Shakespeare in Malaysia showcases the adaptability of Shakespearean texts across disparate cultural, historical, and political contexts. Due to the greater geographical and cultural distance between the Shakespearean source culture and the Malaysian target culture, though, expressions of cultural hybridity here become foregrounded even more compellingly.

Shakespeare has always enjoyed a strong presence in modern Malaysian theatre practice. For example, there has never been a shortage of Shakespeare productions at Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPAC) since its establishment in 2005. To commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 2016, KLPAC staged one Shakespeare's play every month throughout the year. One of the most impressive Shakespeare-inspired performances during this 2016 celebratory stint was Omar Ali's *Dato Seri*, an adaptation of *Macbeth* which was staged with remarkable success and later re-staged in mid-May 2018 to celebrate KLPAC's thirtieth anniversary. Staged after the 2018 national election in Malaysia, this adaptation addressed the consequences befalling leaders who are hungry for power. The production also preserved the richness and musicality of classical Malay through a translation rich with archaic Malay words as well as proverbs, folklore, and songs. For example, reviewers highlighted that the classical Malay word for nation, *pertiwi*, sounded more patriotic when used vehemently in the adaptation (Kirat, 2018). Amid the transparent richness of the Malay cultural nuances in the staging, remarkably, Shakespeare's distinctive iambic pentameter remained mostly uncompromised. As one of the lead actors, Redza Minhat, commented in an interview with Azlinah Al Aydeross,

We've adapted [*Macbeth*] into a fictional Malaysian setting; it's a Malaysia that's never been colonised. We tried our best to stay true to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. So, I think Tan

Sri, he adapted it as a homage to Shakespeare. The language is actually *stylised in the rhythm of Shakespeare*. What you can expect is not a contemporary play on *Macbeth* but *Macbeth* adapted into a more relevant, Malaysian context. (Al Aydeross, 2018, emphasis added)

Malaysia's National Cultural Policy, which aims to preserve indigenous cultural heritage and at the same time promote harmony among the different ethnic communities in the multi-racial country, plays a major role in linguistic and cultural localisations of the kind seen in *Dato Seri*. According to Nurul Farhana Low Abdullah, the national policy advocates redefining local culture as an attempt to promote "national unity among the various ethnic communities" (Abdullah & Shafii, 2017, p. 185). Accordingly, a Shakespearean adaptation that aspires to authentically embody a Malaysian identity should be executed in the Malay language. Furthermore, it should emphasise the integration of cultural elements specific to the indigenous people of the region where the production takes place. Hence, the prescriptions of Malaysia's National Cultural Policy help transform Shakespearean plays into potent intercultural instruments.

A noteworthy instance that underscores the role of hybrid Shakespeare as an intercultural instrument is Norzizi Zulkifli's 2009 reinterpretation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, titled *Mak Yong Titis Sakti (Mak Yong's Magical Drop)*. This adaptation not only employs the Malay language but also deserves special attention for its integration of traditional art forms into the play. Norzizi intelligently incorporated elements of *Mak Yong*, a traditional Malay dance-drama introduced as court theatre in the state of Kelantan during the reigns of the four female Patani rulers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Chua, 2009). This classical genre features unique acting, vocal and instrumental music, gestures, as well as elaborate costumes, and was originally performed mainly as entertainment or for ritual purposes related to traditional healing practices. Despite being designated by UNESCO in 2005 as a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity", *Mak Yong* was banned from being performed in Kelantan by the ruling Islamic Party. The prohibition, instated in 1991 and finally lifted in 2019, was rooted in the notion that *Mak Yong* performances contradict the teachings of Islam with its pre-Islamic animist rituals, transgendered performance, and the prominent role of female performers. Despite the imposed ban, Norzizi's adaptation was revolutionary in intent, as it aimed to help prevent the demise of a traditional art form by integrating it into her adaptation of a Shakespeare play. In her production, the desire to preserve cultural heritage was thus a main motivation for the cultural hybridisation of a Shakespeare play.

Through Malaysian directors are producing a growing number of Shakespeare adaptations, only a select few have resonated with audiences worldwide. At the time of writing, the online repository Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A), which is dedicated to sharing approaches to performing Shakespeare in East and Southeast Asia, includes only one Malaysian production, namely Norzizi's *Mak Yong Titis Sakti*. Intriguingly, at the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA), where traditional Malay theatre takes centre stage, Shakespeare's plays serve as a surprisingly crucial element in safeguarding these very practices (Abdullah & Shafii, 2017, p. 186). Notably, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* have often been chosen as popular options for the final projects at ASWARA. However, none of these ASWARA productions have been archived in A|S|I|A. The perceived amateurish quality of ASWARA's projects, and the potential superficiality of cultural instruments in their productions, may have fallen short of A|S|I|A's strict repository guidelines.

In twenty-first century Malaysia, Shakespeare also continues to enjoy popularity among students of higher learning institutions. Here, the traditional classroom approach often clashes with adaptation practices. To illustrate this point, a group of undergraduate students majoring in English literature at the Department of English, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) were assigned to watch David Glass's reworking of *The Tempest*, back in 2019. Glass's debut in Malaysia with *The Tempest*, was first staged in March at PenangPac (Penang Performing Arts Centre) and then re-staged at KLPAC. The production, a collaboration between Glass, a UK-based theatre maker, and KL Shakespeare's Players, was set on a beach littered with plastic bags. In between the raging storm, interplayed by Glass's skilful and artistic approach which was aptly described by the players as "film on stage" (Chan, 2019), environmental pollution and the global climate emergency were highlighted and critiqued. Following their viewing, the students debated the environmentalist approach taken in the adapter's interpretation of Shakespeare's play. They questioned how this adaptation aligned with the emphasis placed in their studies on the playwright's genius for creating strong characters. As an example, they cited David Garrick's eighteenth-century adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, for which Garrick introduced significant changes, including "intensive stage preparation" and "alterations to the text" aimed at creating a grand spectacle (Termizi, 2010 p. 155). Indeed, the fate of Garrick's production is somewhat analogous to the students' response to Glass's adaptation. Despite selling out the playhouse, reviews for Garrick's *Antony and Cleopatra* were largely discouraging, as the eighteenth-century audience was not receptive to an "experimental" Shakespeare text that had been heavily edited, making it more suitable for reading than performance (Termizi, 2010, p. 156). This raises the question of whether innovative considerations can truly co-exist with an agenda that seeks to preserve the essence of Shakespeare's work in contemporary adaptation. Like some of the eighteenth-century responses to Garrick's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Malaysian students' reactions to Glass's *Tempest* reflect a broader discussion about balancing innovation with artistic integrity in modern interpretations of Shakespeare's plays.

Ultimately, theatrical practices in Greece and Malaysia suggest that authenticity should not be sought in textual or semantic rigidity, but rather in the vibrant dialogue between past and present. Instead of clinging to a singular, authentic Shakespeare, adaptations can make his plays accessible and relevant to new generations of theatregoers. In that respect, Glass's reimagining of *The Tempest* challenged and enriched traditional classroom perspectives, underscoring the educational role of performances. This pedagogic dynamic is something that the Theatre for Life Workshop (TFLW), a community engagement programme initiated in 2016 under the auspices of the Department of English at UPM, has sought to utilise. Far from being a workshop for acting skills, TFLW, led by its founder Arbaayah Ali Termizi, employs the creative process of theatre to address moral and ethical issues, thereby moving beyond mere entertainment (Rafik-Galea, 2020, p. vii). The inaugural session of the workshop, targeted at adolescents aged 13-16 from socioeconomically privileged backgrounds, addressed the prevalent issue of academic stress within this demographic. Leveraging interactive activities, the workshop fostered self-reflection and encouraged participants to transcend their comfort zones while embracing the inherent challenges of adolescent development. The programme proved to be a success when TFLW began to garner interest from other schools in the Klang Valley. In the latest 2023 TFLW programme, 50 teenagers from Tunku Khursiah College, initially expressed a preference for working with traditional Shakespearean plays perceived as "authentic";

through the programme's training methods, however, they were guided to explore the concept of adaptation and ultimately embarked on the creation of adapted theatrical pieces.

Our account of Shakespearean adaptations in Malaysia has suggested that, despite the abundance of Shakespearean productions within the Malaysian cultural context, Malaysian-directed works remain underrepresented in globally accessible databases such as A|S|I|A. This fact points to an uneven distribution of scholarly attention across the different performance spaces in Asia. It also demonstrates the urgent need to reassess the scope and meaning of "Asian Shakespeare" and to reevaluate and expand digital archives, making them more inclusive and diverse. Furthermore, our discussion of the localised integration of Shakespeare adaptations into educational practices has suggested that the (re)directing of interdisciplinary scholarly efforts towards applied theatre can yield further and deeper insights into how Shakespeare's works are understood, adapted, and transmitted across and within Asian regions, as well as different demographics.

Practice-Based Performance Research (USA)

The emerging field of rehearsal studies has demonstrated further significant potential for enriching intercultural Shakespeare studies by putting Shakespeare criticism into dialogue with performance studies, adaptation studies, and creative practices. As Gay McAuley has argued, "observing the work process constituted by rehearsal is central to scholarly, critical and analytical engagement with the performance phenomenon" (McAuley, 2008, p. 276). A model of rehearsal study and practice-based performance research was tried as part of the international research project "Performing Restoration Shakespeare", funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council (2017-2020). This project sought to investigate how Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare's works succeeded in performance in their own time and how they could succeed in performance today, focusing particularly on how the Restoration theatre transformed plays like *Macbeth* into multimedia spectacles that integrated acting, music, dance, and changeable scenery (Fretz 2022; Reimers & Schoch, 2019). One of the research and performance events organised as part of this project consisted of a professional production of William Davenant's *Macbeth* (c.1664, published 1674) at the Folger Theatre, Washington D.C. (2018), which was directed by Robert Richmond.

One key difference between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Davenant's *Macbeth* is that the latter puts a much stronger emphasis on visual and aural spectacle, especially by staging singing and dancing witches. Davenant's *Macbeth* also gives "a more prominent role to the Macduffs by developing them into 'good' counterweights to the 'evil' Macbeths" (Fretz, 2022, p. 39), and it concretises much of Shakespeare's "suggestive and metaphorical language" (Fretz, 2022, pp. 44-45). For example, "the last syllable of recorded time" is changed to "the last *minute* of recorded time", and "out, out, brief candle" is changed to "out, out, *short* candle" (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 2009, 5.5.17-28; Davenant, *Macbeth*, 5.5, sig. I3r). Traditionally, criticism has viewed these changes as deformations of Shakespeare's precursor text (see Eubanks Winkler et al., 2023, pp. 7-8). But this critical consensus does not chime with the play's reception when it was staged. In fact, there are suggestions that these Restoration productions of Shakespeare were phenomenal successes in their time. For example, the English Member of Parliament and diarist Samuel Pepys hailed Davenant's *Macbeth* as a "strange perfection" (Pepys, 1971, p. 7). It was this "strange perfection" which "Performing Restoration Shakespeare" endeavoured to explore.

In order to understand how Restoration Shakespeare was put together for performance, a practice-as-research methodology was employed. Broadly speaking, the terms “practice as research” or “practice-based performance research” describe an approach which “pursues hybrid enquiries combining creative doing with reflexive being, thus fashioning freshly critical interactions between current epistemologies and ontologies” (Kershaw et al., 2005, p. 64). The process entails researchers being “embedded in the creative process and accompanying artists on their journey from first read-through to opening night and then into the run” while the creative process is “documented by scholars in daily field notes” (Reimers & Schoch, 2019, p. 471). Taking its cue from this methodology, the research project “Performing Restoration Shakespeare” created a “community of scholars and performing artists that, together, undertook archival study, ran studio-based workshops and created public performances, all designed to explore Restoration Shakespeare as a performance genre and to test the appeal of this distinctive theatrical form for audiences today” (Reimers & Schoch, 2019, p. 470). In this collaborative model, artists were wholly responsible for creating the performance, but their process was informed by on-going conversations with the scholarly team. Artistic decisions remained the preserve of the stage director, musical director, designers, actors, and musicians. Meanwhile, the scholars were embedded in the rehearsal process as participants, consultants, and observers, able to use their academic expertise to inform staging choices and to act as a valuable resource for actors and directors whilst at the same time maintaining an independent critical distance from the production.

Collaborations between scholars and artists, such as those that took place as part of the research project “Performing Restoration Shakespeare”, can establish groundbreaking frameworks for examining drama and performance. The integration of performance events and practice-based research offers valuable insights that can reevaluate prevailing paradigms not only within Shakespeare criticism but also at its intersections with performance studies, adaptation studies, and creative practices. Through a dialectical process that brings together historicist and presentist viewpoints, and textual and performance-based perspectives, practice-based research establishes artistically and academically beneficial exchanges that can lead to new insights. One such insight gained in the course of the project “Performing Restoration Shakespeare” related to the use of music in Davenant’s *Macbeth*. In the run-up to the production at the Folger Theatre, the artistic director Robert Richmond was uncomfortable with the music prescribed in the Restoration adaptation of *Macbeth*; for him, *Macbeth* was a tragedy, but the music, singing, and dancing were comical. Richmond also struggled with Davenant’s comic Hecate: Davenant’s Hecate is played by a bass singer, while the other witches are played by women. Richmond pondered changing the role and casting a woman. The rehearsals thus raised the question of how the comic and the tragic, the ludicrous and the serious, may be reconciled. By adopting the methodology of rehearsal analysis and practice-as-research, it became possible to gain a fresh and fuller understanding of genre hybridity within the Restoration performance spectacle, something which would not have been possible by merely reading the play, because the hybridity derives from the acting and the musicality (for discussions of the revival of Davenant’s *Macbeth* at the Folger Theatre in 2018, and for its implications for modern theatre practice, see Fretz, 2022, pp. 27-56, and Payne, 2017, pp. 21-40; for a similar experiment with *The Tempest* at Shakespeare’s Globe, see Fretz, 2019, pp. 3-28). The performance-based research approach also revealed intriguing gender dynamics in Davenant’s play. Recent revisionist scholarship has interpreted Davenant’s Lady Macduff as a break with dramatic precedent and as a “rare and [...] subversive tragic heroine” (Greenfield, 2013, p. 40). It is

worth noting that, in contrast to the expanded role of Lady Macduff in Davenant, Shakespeare's original portrayal relegates the character to a single, pivotal scene culminating in her brutal murder – a narrative choice that primarily serves to ignite Macduff's pursuit of vengeance, thereby driving the plot forward. By comparison, Davenant's Lady Macduff is a more fully developed character (see Fretz, 2022, pp. 39, 48-9). Drawing on the Folger's 2018 production, Sara Reimers has argued that the feminist potential of Davenant's Lady Macduff manifested itself even more compellingly through "practical exploration" when the play was performed (Reimers, 2023, p. 143). In addition to revealing comic-tragic hybridity and musical effect in Davenant's adaptation, the application of a practice-as-research model thus suggested that the dramatic potential of supporting characters like the Macduffs may be insufficiently explored in Shakespeare's original play.

The performance-based model of research that was deployed in this research project has the potential also to enrich the field of global/local Shakespeare studies. Recent scholarship on global/local Shakespeares has stressed the importance of redirecting attention towards regional and local cultural nuances, thereby rejecting the imperialist and outdated notion of a "universal" Shakespeare who matters to people of all colours and creeds whilst at the same time also moving away from the tendency to categorise non-Anglophone Shakespeares under reductive umbrella terms such as "Asian Shakespeare". Indeed, the cultural politics of broad-brush terms like "Asian Shakespeare" are in danger of supporting a framework of ideology that sets whiteness against non-whiteness. Seeking to redress some of these issues, Alexa Alice Joubin has advocated for the examination of Sinophone frameworks of Shakespeare adaptation as a way of helping us to "move beyond the limiting scope of national profiling [and] to consider intraregional networks of Shakespearean performances" (Joubin, 2021, p. 102). Joubin has also held up the works of Ninagawa and Kurosawa as productions that reveal "intraregional cultural flows within East Asia" (Joubin, 2021, p. 25). The embedding of scholars in creative practice can open new avenues for exploring forms of intra-cultural and cross-cultural dialogue and exchange. McAuley contends that "the rehearsal analyst, like the ethnographer, must move constantly between noting what is being said and done, and trying to make sense of these sayings and doings, in terms of both the immediate and the broader sociocultural context": "[they] must first 'grasp' and then 'render' what has been grasped" (McAuley, 2008, p. 286). By embedding researchers directly within creative processes and meticulously documenting the verbal and non-verbal interactions of artists as well as the surrounding context, rehearsal studies can shed light on the complex and multifaceted cultural-creative forces shaping artistic creation. These forces include, but are not limited to, cultural values and practices, historical contexts, individual artist experiences, power dynamics, and even cultural conflicts. This comprehensive approach can deepen our awareness of the significance of diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds, not just in general, but also in the specific case of "local Shakespeares", leading to a more nuanced understanding of how they embody present cultural subjectivities rather than past notions and conventions. By documenting the unique local influences and negotiations involved when adapting a Shakespeare play in different parts of the world, practice-based performance research can become a powerful tool to approach global/local Shakespeare adaptations as dynamic cultural-creative processes, opening them up to modes of scholarly investigation that, until now, have often remained centred on Anglophone productions.

CONCLUSION

By examining political adaptations of Shakespeare in Greece, cultural hybridity in Malaysian productions, and a practice-based research model (involving rehearsal studies) deployed at the Folger Theatre in the USA, the present article has argued for the importance of deviating from the traditional obsession with textual or performative authenticity and instead to explore the mechanisms by which Shakespeare's works blend into different historical, political, and cultural contexts. The article has pointed to the diverse ways Shakespeare's plays are adapted and integrated into popular culture beyond the Western world. Firstly, its discussion of Greek adaptations has highlighted the usefulness of cross-media cultural analysis, exploring how theatre, radio, television, and press have recontextualised Shakespeare's plays for new audiences and political settings. The kind of multimedia approach advocated in this article can usefully expand our understanding of Shakespeare's politicised presence globally. Secondly, the article's survey of Malaysian adaptations has pointed to an imbalance in existing work on Asian Shakespeare adaptations, with an overemphasis on East Asian and English-language productions. This calls for a broader definition of "Asian Shakespeare", a shift towards applied theatre studies across the Asian continent, and more inclusive digital archives. Thirdly, the article has suggested practice-based performance research as a model for enriching global/local Shakespeare studies and exploring how regional cultural nuances and negotiations manifest themselves in theatre practice, including in rehearsal. By documenting how local and subjective cultural influences, such as diverse values, practices, and experiences, shape creative processes within theatre practice and adaptation, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of these endeavours as dynamic, evolving networks of cultural-creative collaboration. In essence, these findings urge us to move beyond traditional geographical and methodological foci in Shakespeare adaptation and to embrace its diverse, ever-evolving presence in different cultures and media.

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