

*Shakespeare In & Out of Africa*. Edited by Jane Plastow. *African Theatre* 12. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: James Currey, 2013; 208 pp. \$34.95 paper.

The African Theatre series is an excellent resource for scholars and artists seeking information on African performance traditions and theatrical practice, and *Shakespeare In & Out of Africa* is a great addition to the series. The essays address issues central to postcolonialism and adaptation studies: questions of authority and language, cultural hegemony, national identity, and the commodification of global south culture. Most articles focus on performances at the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival, which brought theatre companies from thirty-seven countries to perform Shakespeare's works in translation at the New Globe Theatre in London. In this context, representation, authority, and language were particularly fraught because of Shakespeare's status as a globalized symbol of British (European/Western) identity and London's position as both a post-imperial capital and neo-liberal power center. This volume analyzes the problems of representation for the performers from sub-Saharan African nations.

*Shakespeare In & Out of Africa* takes an admirably broad approach, looking at performances from six different nations, and working through issues important to performance studies, postcolonialism, and adaptation studies. Femi Osofisan's introduction contextualizes the Globe to Globe Festival and summarizes many of the authors' overriding concerns. This is followed by four essays on specific Globe to Globe performances: Penelope Woods writes about The Two Gents' *Vacomana Vaviri Ve Zimbabwe*, a Shona adaptation of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; Colette Gordon describes the Isango Ensemble's adaptation of the poem *Venus and Adonis* into *Uvenas no Adonisi*, incorporating six of South Africa's official languages; Adesola Adeyemi studies *Ìtàn Ògìntìn*, a version of *The Winter's Tale* in classical Yoruba; and Christine Matzke takes on *Cymbeline*, performed in Juba Arabic by the South Sudan Theatre Company. Shifting away from the specific focus on Globe to Globe performances, Michael Walling interviews several theatre practitioners and adapters from various nations, and two essays analyze creole adaptations and attempts to legitimize creole languages in Mauritius and the Cape Verde Islands. The collection wraps up with the play script of Osofisan's *Wèsó, Hamlet!*

Despite the varied subjects, these essays share several common concerns, for instance, the tension between exoticizing national cultures for London audiences on the one hand, and promoting a national identity through adapting and performing Shakespeare on the other. Osofisan describes "the decision by almost all the companies to play up the exotic elements in their productions, a choice that won them uproarious reactions in London, but which was invariably criticized by some of their more discerning countrymen in the audience" (7). Gordon and Adeyemi address variations on this problem encountered by the South African and Nigerian companies. As Adeyemi explains, the Nigerians struggled to find actors to perform in classical Yoruba, and ended up sacrificing quality for linguistic conservatism. The adaptation, which

incorporated Igunnuko masked performance, met with mixed reactions from Nigerians in the audience. While they were happy to see Igunnuko and hear Yoruba spoken on stage, some “thought that its performance was flawed by poor manipulation of the form” (56). The Isango Ensemble’s *Uvenas no Adonisi* developed a fraught relationship to township culture, which for many reviewers became the source of authority for Isango’s ‘authenticity’ as black South African performers. This association necessarily distorted and simplified the township as a cultural space, limiting and exoticizing how London audiences perceived the show (Gordon 40).

On the other hand, adapting Shakespeare can help provide legitimacy for emerging nations or repressed languages. This becomes most apparent in the unifying aspirations of the South Sudan Theatre Company—the first theatrical production from the new nation. The SSTC drew its membership from many of South Sudan’s cultural and ethnic groups, combining numerous performance heritages into a conglomerate *Cymbeline* promoting a message of national unity (Matzke 71). The legitimizing power of Shakespearean theatre is also apparent in the essays on creole performance, which describe efforts to establish Mauritian Kreol and Cape Verdean Crioulo as legitimate and poetic languages. Eunice Ferreira explains the intersections of language, culture, and identity: “Theatre in the islands reflects interplay along a Crioulo spectrum with Europe on one end and Africa on the other. The post-independence theatre movement in Cape Verde and the theatrical tensions manifested on and off stage continually raise questions of what it means to be Crioulo – racially, culturally, nationally, and internationally” (111).

Osofisan’s play, *Wèsóo, Hamlet!*, raises questions about colonialism and self-determination, particularly as the *Hamlet* plot tyrannically overshadows the Nigerian characters who struggle to avoid the seemingly inevitable events of Shakespeare’s tragedy. With characteristic postmodern playfulness, Osofisan brings Hamlet, Ophelia, and Claudius out of the afterlife to try and alter the tragedy replaying in Yorubaland. Shakespeare’s characters interact with their Nigerian avatars—Létò, Túndùn, and Oba Ayíbĩ—but the plot finally unfolds as it did in Denmark. This adaptation parallels the economic exploitation of African communities with the influence of the Shakespearean source text on the events of Osofisan’s plot. The parallel exposes limitations imposed on Africa—culturally, economically, and politically—by the global north and its local representatives.

The tensions explored in this collection—over language, representation, culture, and power—are problems central to postcolonial theory and adaptation studies. In taking on the context of the Globe to Globe Festival, these essays develop complex readings of the limits and possibilities for intercultural theatre to promote cosmopolitan awareness and enact political liberation. Particularly in conjunction with videos of the performances (available at <https://globeplayer.tv/globe-to-globe>), these essays will be of great use to postcolonialists, theatre and performance scholars, and adaptation studies scholars. Though the specific focus in most of the essays may limit the use of this collection as a central text in classrooms, these essays, especially with the production videos, may be of interest in courses like intercultural performance, Shakespearean adaptation, or arts administration. These essays may also be a helpful resource for performative dissertation/thesis work situated in a transnational sub-Saharan African scope.

*Shakespeare In & Out of Africa* does an excellent job focusing on a culturally significant festival and drawing out from it a variety of tensions that continue to shape African national identities, theatre, and the dynamics of power and culture on a global scale.

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Directed by Coleman Domingo  
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Playwright Robert O' Hara has dealt with themes of secrecy, family, race and gender since his startlingly acclaimed early work, *Insurrection: Holding History* (1997). His newest play, *Barbecue*, continues an exploration of these themes, adding a great dollop of irony to the fate of these characters in a funny and often audacious domestic comedy. In this play, O'Hara confronts two pervasive themes in contemporary American culture: exploitation and authenticity. Being the clever and provocative playwright that he is, O'Hara delivers, for the most part, a piercing look into how our contemporary media culture is dominated by the "reality show," where episodes of human frailties are exploited for the sake of fame and fortune. O'Hara uses the substance abuse intervention as a mirror that reflects our society's all-consuming penchant for the tabloid presentation. While a comedic tone dominates, *Barbecue's* underlying seriousness is revealed through its characters' attitudes toward their own dysfunctional issues in relation to gender, race and class. O'Hara mixes these familiar themes with theatrical verve, resulting in a play that leans toward an entertainment piece without the stringent commentary associated with O'Hara's earlier work.

In an interview included in the program notes, O'Hara explains that the idea for the play came from his watching a television show called "Interventions". He says that he observed mostly non-middle class whites as subjects but rarely people of color of any class, leaving him to wonder whose story gets told and by whom? His satirical take on contemporary American mores utilizing the issue of the intervention, which was popularized in late 80s as a way to deal with a loved one's addiction problems, poses an ethical question: Can we redeem ourselves without being honest? Using this premise, the play explores addiction, class and money. The barbecue acts as metaphor for the quintessential American family gathering where fun and relaxation is the primary draw. However, in O'Hara's hands the happy family gathering collapses into a melee. Individual family member's secrets are ruthlessly uncovered by the siblings as they await the arrival of their sister, Barbara, the real object of the intervention. The actors perform with gleeful abandon as they rip into each other's foibles while the audience witnesses the fissures within the dysfunctional family as a model for the wider American society that more often than not supports greed and surface probity.

*Barbecue* is set mainly in a park landscape with picnic tables, benches, and a slide. Human nature is played out in the unremitting space of Mother Nature. Into this sylvan setting comes a white family--siblings who might commonly be called white trash--talking, talking, talking about the pending intervention of their notorious sister, Barbara, also known as “Zippity Boom”. When the lights come up on the second scene, the white actors have been replaced by black actors in the same costumes assuming the same roles. It is a wonderful theatrical sleight of hand, eliciting (at least from my audience) sustained laughter and applause. The first act is the teeter-totter that swings between the white and black characters, giving the audience more back story and revealing the distinct character defects from each family. By the end of the act we realize that the black family is being filmed as the counterparts of the real white family. O’Hara has accomplished an element of surprise that shock the sensibilities of his audience through a wonderful theatricality that does not return in the latter half of the play.

Act II brings the two Barbaras together on the park landscape. The long scene promises more revealed secrets and does not disappoint. Black Barbara, a well known entertainer, has bought the white Barbara’s memoirs of recovery from addiction to produce a film (called “Barbecue”) for her own self-aggrandizement. As it turns out, Barbara’s memoirs are faked. Celebrity Barbara’s abuse problems as well as her lesbianism have been covered up by publicists. Ironies of ironies abound as the two collude to conceal the truth for selfish reasons (more money for the white Barbara and an Oscar grab for the black Barbara), thereby circumventing the actual intent of the intervention, which is to free them of their secrets. Ironically, the women have empowered themselves to tell their own story in the manner they deem fit.

If the second half of the play seems less satisfying than the clever and provocative first act, it is because the reality show based referent seems to have pervaded every aspect of American life to the extent of predictability. I applaud O’Hara for writing a play that seeks to question who gets “intervened”? Having the women agree to deceive the public certainly illustrates agency, but eludes the actual intent, which is honesty emerging from a deeper examination of the self. Black Barbara’s “Zippity Boom” merges with her celebrity personality in a kind of makeover that is familiar in our celebrity driven culture. White Barbara will give her family “hush” money to maintain the fictional account of their lives. Granted, the conversation between the Barbaras is confessional, but only between the two of them. Their secrets will remain a covenant in exchange for money. Tellingly, the open space of Act I abruptly transforms into the confined space of an Oscar telecast by the end of Act II with both families brought on stage in the glare of bright lights to thank each other for telling their stories so “truthfully”. It is amusing and discomfiting at the same time.

Even though O’Hara’s evolution as a playwright retains its power in the interrogation of secrets and lies *Barbecue* could be considered a way station for the gifted playwright while on his way to weightier subjects. *Insurrection: Holding History* was twenty years ago and playwrights should be allowed to try their hand at many genres of drama. As it is, the play entertains and while doing so manages to hold the mirror up to our tabloid culture, asking the audience to consider what kind of society do we want: exploitation or authenticity?

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