WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AS A NON-HEGEMONIC AUTHOR?
SHAKESPEAREAN FORM AND THE POETICS OF EMULATION[1]

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ABSTRACT: The omnipresence of William Shakespeare's works is striking (although understandable) when it comes to the complex process of the self-definition of non-hegemonic cultures. After all, how to outline one's own portrait when the model adopted implies the centrality of the other in defining the self? This is the inescapable predicament derived from the mimetic dimension of identity in non-hegemonic contexts and its vulnerability concerning the centrality of the other in shaping one's own desire and self-image.

KEYWORDS: Non-hegemonic cultures; Shakespearean cultures; Poetics of emulation; Shakespearean form; William Shakespeare

RESUMO: A onipresença da obra de William Shakespeare é impactante (embora compreensível) no que diz respeito ao complexo processo de auto-definição de culturasnão hegemônicas. Afinal, como esboçar seu próprio retrato quando o modelo adotado implica a centralidade do outro para definir-nos? Este é o dilema incontornável derivado da dimensão mimética da identidade em contextos não hegemônicos e sua vulnerabilidade no que diz respeito à centralidade do outro para moldar nosso próprio desejo e auto-imagem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Culturas não-hegemônicas; Culturas Shakespearianas; Poética da emulação; forma Shakespeariana; William Shakespeare

Non-hegemonic cultures

The omnipresence of William Shakespeare's works is striking (although understandable) when it comes to the complex process of the self-definition of non-hegemonic cultures. After all, how to outline one's own portrait when the model adopted implies the centrality of the other in defining the self? This is the inescapable predicament derived from the mimetic dimension of identity in non-hegemonic contexts and its vulnerability concerning the centrality of the other in shaping one's own desire and self-image. Indeed, *non-hegemonic*, instead of "periphery," "peripheral," is one of the concepts that I am proposing in the theoretical framework I have been developing over the past years.[3]

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[1] This paper was originally presented at the 2019 Forum of Comparative Literature, which took place in Shenzhen, China. I have taken advantage of passages from *Shakespearean Cultures*. *Latin America and the Challenges of Mimesis in Non-Hegemonic Circumstances* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2019); book translated by Flora Thomson-DeVeaux.

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[3] Theoretical framework unfolded in two books, already translated into English, *Machado de Assis*: *Towards a Poetics of Emulation* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015) and *Shakespearean Cultures*. *Latin America and the Challenges of Mimesis in Non-Hegemonic Circumstances* (East Lansing: Michigan State

Let me then albeit briefly introduce the concept of non-hegemonic circumstance. Why not set aside the term "periphery" in favor of the idea of the "non-hegemonic"? That way we can underscore the political, economic, and cultural asymmetries at play while respecting the dynamism of the contemporary world, which befuddles cartographies and snarls latitude lines. Ties between center and periphery are never univocal; within so-called peripheral zones, new relationships between center and periphery are often forged. Not to forget that central regions contain their own peripheral areas. All this to say – *I am not in search of any alleged non-hegemonic essence*; *rather, I look to identify strategies employed in asymmetrical contexts by those at the less-privileged end of exchanges.*[4]

A penetrating observation from Peter Burke will shed further light on the meaning of my reflection. From his perspective:

> (…) the intellectual elegance of analyses in terms of a pair of opposed yet complementary concepts [center and periphery] is extremely seductive. Using these concepts should encourage the pursuit of a fruitful yet relatively neglected line of historical inquiry. Historians are accustomed to study centralization, but they have scarcely begun to explore the process of 'peripheralization.'[5]

Shakespearean cultures present a privileged opportunity for us to understand the phenomenon that is the multiplication of non-hegemonic areas in modernity – that is, in the wake of the Age of Exploration. Here you have a succinct definition: *Shakespearean cultures* are those whose self-perception originates in the gaze of an Other, whose authority derives tautologically from its very Otherness, since it is taken as a metonymy of hegemonic centers. Thus, non-hegemonic cultures are scrutinized by a foreign gaze as if they were objects in an exhibition wherein curator and viewer were one and the same – to wit, the foreign traveler. The viewer has always been a foreigner, with his-her authority deriving from his-her Otherness – and the redundancy imposes itself. That made him-her into a *model to be imitated*, and never questioned – *much less emulated*. In highlighting this tension, I mean to point to the concrete existence of literatures favored by a given historical circumstance that benefits this or that language in the worldwide circulation of works.

In other words, *Weltliteratur* or *world literature* are not exactly objective descriptions of cultural exchanges; rather, in both cases, ultimately, the set of criteria that defines the works that will compose a supposedly "universal" canon is less concerned with intrinsic literary value than committed to political and economic hegemonies of a given historical period. From this angle, how could a 19th-century author *write* a novel, let us say, in Portuguese or in Spanish without an *exhaustive reading* of the English and French traditions? To say nothing of the Russians or Germans, of course. Or even of the Spanish literature of the 17th century. The author-reader model is a sophisticated invention born of a select family of authors – Machado de Assis and Jorge Luis Borges at their head – as much as it is a structural element of the non-hegemonic condition.

And that's not all. Hegemonies, lest we forget, are mutable.

University Press, 2019). I have also published my research in Spanish (*¿Culturas Shakespearianas? Teoría Mimética y América Latina*. Ciudad de México : Universidad Iberoamericana, 2014) and French (*Poétiques de l'Émulation*: *Littératures des Banlieues du Monde?* (Trans. François Weigel. Paris, Éditions Petra, 2015).

[4] A keen remark by Zhang Longxi concerning Chinese studies helps to clarify the theoretical horizon I am putting forward: "To take the challenge of Western theory and to engage in theoretical debates in the study of Chinese literature and culture, as I see it, is a good way to break the self-imposed ghettoization of Chinese studies, and to open up the field for deeper and theoretically informed inquiries." Zhang Longxi. *Mighty Opposites. From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 16.

[5] Peter Burke, "Centre and Periphery." In: *History and Social Theory*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, p. 82.

In the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the century that followed, the apex of the Spanish overseas empire, English authors saw their Spanish peers as an apparently inexhaustible source of appropriations and, why not? treasure to be looted. Barbara Fuchs mapped out this agonistic dialogue in *Poetics of Piracy*, a compelling essay whose subtitle, *Emulating Spain in English Literature*, alludes to the then-hegemonic status enjoyed by Spanish literature.

In the author's words:

> Early modern English writers turned frequently to Spain for literary models, even at the times of greatest rivalry between the two nations. Spain's position as the dominant European power of the period, as well as the huge explosion in Spanish prose and dramatic writing across a wide variety of genres in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries made it an irresistible literary source.[6]

This hegemony was manifest in the translation of the first part of *Don Quixote*, carried out in 1612 by Thomas Shelton. By the following year, William Shakespeare and John Fletcher would help themselves to one of the stories from the book as they wrote *Cardenio*,[7] the famous lost play in the Shakespearean corpus.[8] Now, while the Elizabethans immediately recognized the genius of their Spanish colleague, it appears that Cervantes never read them – for a lack of translations, if nothing else. The very existence of *Don Quixote* in English just seven years after its publication, as well as its quick absorption into the English dramatic tradition, are evidence of the centrality of Spanish literature back then.

Another powerful example shows that cultural hegemonies are Heraclitian: nothing stands in the way of the non-hegemonic condition rising to a position of centrality. Take Joachim du Bellay, for example, a notable member of the *Pléiade*. In 1549, he published a sort of group manifesto entitled *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Française*. It undertook the difficult task of affirming the merits of French in comparison to the classical languages. A canny strategist, Du Bellay turned to Roman history in order to prove that French could express ideas just as well as Latin or Greek. His coup de grace was to point out that the Romans perfected their tongue by "imitating the best Greek authors, transforming themselves into them, *devouring them*, and, after having thoroughly *digested them*, converting them into blood and nourishment [...]."[9]

Thus, in the 16th century, the French language occupied an asymmetrical (and inferior) position in relation to Greek and Latin, which were seen as the natural vehicles for literary and philosophical expression. By the 18th and 19th centuries, however, French had become the lingua franca of the Republic of Letters. Nowadays, French has been replaced by another language, for English has become the common language of the globalized world. And who is to say that in the course of the 21th century a new language will not perform this same role?

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[6] Barbara Fuchs, *Poetics of Piracy*. *Emulating Spain in English Literature*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, p. 1.

[7] Stephen Greenblatt and playwright Charles Mee developed an ambitious attempt to reconstruct the text and perform it in multiple countries. See: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~cardenio/. Accessed 10 June 2016. In the final chapter of *Poetics of Piracy*, Barbara Fuchs lays out an unsparing critique of the initiative, arguing that it fails to recognize the relevance of the Spanish tradition in the making of modern English literature.

[8] Roger Chartier recently dedicated a study to the work: *Cardenio between Cervantes and Shakespeare: The Story of a Lost Play.* Trans. Janet Lloyd. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013. In it, the author recalls: "[...] the strong Spanish presence on the stages of London." Ibid, p. 22. Shortly thereafter: "It was within the context of this strong presence of Castilian literature that 1612 saw the publication of Thomas Shelton's translation of *Don Quixote*." Ibid, p. 28.

[9] Joachim du Bellay, *"The Regrets," with "The Antiquities of Rome," Three Latin Elegies, and "The Defense and Enrichment of the French Language*. Ed. and trans. Richard Helgerson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p. 336 (italics mine).

This circumstance confirms that my framework deals not in essences but in strategies. The hegemonic and non-hegemonic conditions are not fixed points but rather dynamic axes – historically determined, and hence changeable.

And that's not all. Imagine, if you will, the following historical constellation: multiple centers existing at the same time.

In a study of Italian art that ranges across multiple centuries, Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg would make a decisive contribution on this score. The relationship between center and periphery, they wrote, is hardly a peaceful one. "*Its essence is not diffusion but conflict*; and the conflict is apparent even in cases where the periphery seems to follow slavishly the lead of the center."[10] The authors opted to work with the notion of polycentrism so as to better grasp the complexity of the Italian situation, dealing as they were with some centers of national influence and others at a regional level.

The concept of the non-hegemonic condition exacerbates precisely the aspect of conflict between the adoption of a model and then its necessary adaptation to a new environment, while it entails the polycentric structure suggested by Castelnuovo and Ginzburg.[11]

The concept of the poetics of emulation, meanwhile, favors a specifically critical objective. Therefore, before moving on to the omnipresence of William Shakespeare in the context of non-hegemonic cultures, I should say that the procedures inherent to the poetics of emulation entail a deliberately anachronistic return to the classical technique of *aemulatio*. The two should not be confused; *aemulatio* belonged to a specific rhetorical system, the foundations of which were gradually undermined by the advent of Romanticism. In classical poetics, one undertook the *imitatio* of a model seen as the *auctoritas* in a given genre in order to then carry out the *aemulatio* of that same model. Ideals of originality and influence carried less weight in this context. *Traditio* was not to be questioned; rather, one would work to broaden it through acts of emulation, aimed at enriching but not exactly overcoming the model, which remain as an *auctoritas* on its own.

Deliberate anachronism lends a new cast to key aspects of classical poetics, as it implies a formal freedom without parallels in preceptistic art;[12] to an extent this is truly a "free form," which would be adopted and transformed by a deceased author, such as the one imagined by Machado de Assis in his *Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*.[13] The repercussions of this freedom in the realm of cultural politics make it such that, under certain circumstances, an objectively secondary position may become an unexpected spur to invention.

The *poetics of emulation* was honed through these *Shakespearean cultures*, with their hyper-sensitivity to the gaze of the Other, a theoretically absolute model – which was Europe

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[10] Enrico Castelnuovo & Carlo Ginzburg, "Center and Periphery." *History of Italian Art*, vol. 1. Preface by Peter Burke, trans. Ellen Bianchini and Clare Dorey. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, p. 30 (italics mine).

[11] Here is a fascinating possibility concerning the plurality triggered by the poetics of emulation: "The ayuujk culture tends to recognize mimesis as an important element and considers being to be the result of imitating others and living like others. Simply put, unlike other peoples in Mexico and Latin America, their ideal of mimesis is not monist, but pluralist. [...] a plurimimetic society is radically different from, and perhaps essentially opposed to, one whose mimetic model is monist." Emiliano Zolla Márquez, "Do Corpo Ayuujk ao Corpo Indígena. Mímesis, Alteridade e Sacrifício na Sierra Mixe". In: Mendoza-Álvarez, Carlos; Jobim, José Luís; Méndez-Gallardo, Mariana (eds.). *Mímesis e Invisibilização Social. A Interdividualidade Coletiva Latino-americana*. São Paulo, É Realizações, 2016, p. 192-93.

[12] To recall a precise formulation of my project: "The poetics of emulation as proposed by the critic, although it bears a relationship to literary and cultural practices that predate the 18th century in the West, is indeed a sort of deliberate anachronism, as it does not reproduce the meaning it once held." José Luís Jobim, "A Emulação Produtiva: Machado de Assis e a Cultura Latino-Americana, segundo João Cezar de Castro Rocha". In: *Mímesis e Invisibilização Social*, op. cit., p. 90.

[13] "This is, in fact, a diffuse work, in which I, Brás Cubas, while perhaps adopting the free form of a Sterne or a Xavier de Maistre, cannot say whether I have added a few grumbles of pessimism." Machado de Assis. "To the Reader." *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas. Obra Completa*. Vol. I, op. cit., p. 513.

through the first decades of the 20th century, then shifting to the United States, especially after the end of World War II. In the theoretical framework I have been developing the concept of *Shakespearean cultures* merges with the idea of a *poetics of emulation*. In both cases, I seek to expand on the *challenges of mimesis*, made even keener by the emergence of the world-system in the modern era. [14] *Shakespearean cultures*, in general, grew out of non-hegemonic environments; thus, the *poetics of emulation* tends to be honed amidst such circumstances. What I seek is to understand the worldview of those cultures and the procedures of this poetics.

Shakespearean form and the poetics of emulation

Let us then take a brief stroll through the history of Shakespeare's translations, seen from the angle of the non-hegemonic circumstances.[15]

First step: Germany, 18th century. Back then, German culture suffered a severe complex of inferiority vis-a-vis French achievements, and it was the major task of the generation of Schiller and Goethe to overcome this complex. One example should suffice: Fredrick II, King of Prussia, wrote his essays and eventual poems in French… At this crucial moment, the first complete translation of Shakespeare's plays into German came out between 1775 and 1782, later improved by the famous collaboration of August Wilhelm Schlegel and Johann Ludwig Tieck.[16]

In Goethe's 1795 *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship*, this hallmark of the *Bildungsroman*, a pride of place is given to the interpretation of the text and the staging of the play *Hamlet*, an initiative that proves to be decisive in the quest for the unfolding of German culture. After all, at the time, "what counted as 'culture' was imported from France, including the French language, the language used by polite people, as well as French literature. The aristocratic idea of German inferiority, however, is corroborated by the narrative plot."[17]

Shakespeare, in this context, offered an alternative model to French classicism, that is, the author of *King Lear* authorized a theater diametrically opposed to Racine's and Corneille's plays. In the particular case of *Hamlet*, Goethe provided a powerful interpretation of the saga of the Prince of Denmark, stressing his allegedly hesitation as the key trait of the character. In this context, the famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be," undergoes a surprising twist offering an unexpected metaphor to the poignant question of the 18th-century German culture.

In the 19th-century romantic movement the Eastern European cultures found themselves in the same predicament, namely, the project of writing the national epic poem demanded a previous achievement: the translation of William Shakespeare's complete works; only then could national languages attempt higher flights. In Martin Esslin's eloquent description: "In many Eastern European countries, for example, the national literature, and therefore national consciousness itself, had crystallized around translations of Shakespeare. […] Once language had its fully adequate version of Shakespeare it became able to support the foundation of a nation, its institutions, its political autonomy."[18]

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[14] Immanuel Wallerstein: *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2004. The world-system is defined by increasingly planetary and ever more asymmetrical transnational relations.

[15] This issue indeed will be the topic of a forthcoming book: *Personal Shakespeare – The non-hegemonic center*.

[16] On this issue, see the important and recent book, John A. McCarthy (ed.), *Shakespeare as a German Author*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

[17] Thomas Kullmann, "The *Hamlet* Project in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship*. *Multicultural Shakespeare*: *Translation*, *Appropriation and Performance*, vol. 15 (30), 2017, p. 149.

[18] Martin Esslin. "Introduction." In: Jan Kott. *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*. New York and London, Norton, 1966, p. xii.

In Brazil, in the 19th century, Machado de Assis resorted to William Shakespeare precisely to define national consciousness. In his famous critical essay, "News of the Present Brazilian Literature. Instinct of Nationality," Machado, in opposition to the romantic notion of local color, defined a key aspect of national identity. In his words, a "certain intimate sentiment" [*certo sentimento íntimo*], which would allow an author to deal with any theme and any historical period not only his own. His litmus test was Shakespeare's work: "And I shall ask if *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar* or *Romeo and Juliet* have anything to do with English history or the British territory, and if, nonetheless, Shakespeare is not both a universal genius but also an essentially English poet as well."[19]

Let us move to the 20th century.

In the decolonization movements after 1945, Shakespeare's works provided an authentic lighthouse, with an emphasis, almost an obsession, with a particular play, *The Tempest*. From George Lamming's book of essays *Pleasures of Exile* and his novel *Water with Berries* to Aimé Césaire's play *Une Tempête*, Shakespeare's conceptual characters – Prospero, Ariel and Caliban – provided models for self-reflection.

In Africa, in the decolonization movement of the former Portuguese colonies in the 1970s and 1980s *The Tempest* was once again a key reference, and Shakespeare played a fundamental role in the revolutionary imagination. In 1975, Manoel Ferreira edited *No Reino de Caliban*. *Antologia panorâmica da poesia africana de expressão portuguesa* [In the Kingdom of Caliban. A Panoramic Anthology of African Poetry of Portuguese Expression]. In 1985 Pires Laranjeira entitled a collection of essays, *Literatura Calibanesca* [Calibanesque Literature]. It is as if Caliban's parting shot still hung in the air today, defining an entire process:

> You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
> For learning me your language![20]

The potential paradox, however, should be signaled: how is that possible that the work that rests at the very center of the hegemonic canon, often compared to the Bible in its importance as shaper of the Western worldview,[21] that is, William Shakespeare's complete works, has become the main aesthetic and intellectual tool for non-hegemonic cultures?

Let me risk a hypothesis.

Shakespeare is fundamental not only by virtue of the topics he dealt with, but especially given his compositional technique – namely, his constant appropriation of other voices into his own inventions. He was almost never concerned with developing "original" ideas for his plays. On the contrary, he was always able to take advantage of existing material, combining a variety of sources into a structure that was itself unique. The *Shakespearean form*, engendered by this unabashed and systematic pillage of voices, grants inventors from non-hegemonic cultures a precious freedom, translated into the irreverent assimilation of both the canonical repertoire and the contemporary achievements of peers.

Of all the authors in Western literature, Shakespeare benefited the most from others' writings – it is as if the motive of the structural oscillation between *the own and the foreign* –

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[19] Machado de Assis, "Notícia da atual literatura brasileira. Instinto de nacionalidade." In: *Obra Completa*. Vol. III. Rio de Janeiro, Nova Aguilar, 1986, p. 804.

[20] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. 1.2. Ed. David Lindley. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 120.

[21] This is Harold Bloom's perception: "After Jesus, Hamlet is the most cited figure in Western consciousness, no one prays to him, but no one evades him from long either." *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999, p. xxi.

to remind Leo Spitzer's acclaimed essay "*Das Eigene und das Fremde*"[22] – had already been fully developed by Shakespeare himself. According to scholars, of the 36 plays published in the *First Folio*, from 1623, no fewer than 32 are the product of a combination of multiple sources – hence *inventions*, not plots *created* from whole cloth. That leaves just four plays where Shakespeare came up with the conceit entirely on his own – *Love's Labour's Lost*; *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; *The Tempest*. Even in those few cases, he incorporated a range of suggestions for specific scenes and lines.

Invention, from the Latin *inventio*, is a key concept in the theoretical framework of *Shakespearean cultures* and the *poetics of emulation*.

In his inventory of forms of creation, George Steiner resurrected the distance between two verbs that we commonly use as synonyms: *creare* and *invenire*. To *create*, from the Latin *creare*, is an arrogant verb that implies producing something new at the very instant of creation; this is the Romantic *creatio ex nihilo*, a paean to the self-centered artist immune to external influences. Indeed, "Latin *creatio* is grounded in biology and politics: in the engendering of children and the appointment of magistrates."[23] To *invent*, meanwhile, from the Latin *invenire*, is a suggestive verb, of a modesty with far-reaching consequences, as it means to *come across that which already exists*, and often by chance. For one to *invent*, there must be previously existing elements that can be recombined into new arrangements and relationships yet to be explored. Hence, "the Latin *invenire* would appear to presuppose that which is to be 'found', to be 'come upon'."[24]

Shakespearean cultures belong to the domain of *invention*!

Invention is one of the most important procedures in the poetics of emulation. Its corollary is that reading must come before writing, and in the case of non-hegemonic cultures, the centrality of translation in the development of tradition. In this spirit, the poet-critic Haroldo de Campos proposed the theory of "transcreation," by which the act of translating is, as he puts it, an act of creation.[25] Or the gesture of an inventor, as I suggest, since the translator always works off a preexisting text.

If originality is seen as *creatio*, the author must see himself as a true demiurge of himself. Here we are dealing with the writer-as-originator,[26] or the engineer, in the famous comparison traced by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind*. If originality is thought of as *inventio*, however, the author stands out as an avid reader of tradition, incorporating it and recycling it. This is the realm of the writer-as-arranger, who shares not a few methods with the *bricoleur*.

In the work of Jorge Luis Borges, this is a structural procedure.[27] Let us see how he recalled his first forays into the art of the essay:

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[22] *Leo Spitzer, "Das Eigene und das Fremde*. Über Philologie und Nationalismus," *Die Wandlung* 1 (1945/46), p. 576-594. In this essay, Spitzer provides a fascinating account of his experiences as a teacher and researcher in different academic contexts.

[23] George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 19.

[24] Ibid, p. 89.

[25] Susan Bassnett saw it clearly: "Haroldo and Augusto de Campos use translation as a way of affirming their right as Brazilians to reread and repossess canonical European literature." Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature. A Critical Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, p. 157.

[26] The expression *writer-as-originator* comes from Robert MacFarlane, who set it against the idea of *writer-as-arranger*. His book is of key importance for the ideas set out here. MacFarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. For the distinction between types of writers, see p. 16.

[27] Zhang Longxi's sharp critique of Michel Foucault's reading of Jorge Luis Borges is exemplary of a hegemonic misreading of a non-hegemonic author: "The Myth of the Other." In: Zhang Longxi, op. cit., p. 19-54.

> There was a longish essay on the nonexistence of the ego, cribbed from Bradley or the Buddha or Macedonio Fernández. When I wrote these pieces, I was trying to play the sedulous ape to two Spanish baroque seventeenth-century writers, Quevedo and Saavedra Fajardo, who stood in their own stiff, arid, Spanish way for the same kind of writing as Sir Thomas Browne in 'Urne-Buriall.'[28]

Touché! The circuit of *inventio* stretches over the centuries and doubles back on itself. Borges turned to the *imitatio* of Spanish authors, who, for their part, inaugurated their movement by applying *the same kind of writing as Sir Thomas Browne*. And that's not all: the author of *El Hacedor* admits to cribbing from Macedonio Fernández or Buddha or Bradley – and the incoherent list only attests to the *ars combinatoria* underlying the inventiveness of the author-as-arranger.

Back to Shakespeare: his work was composed by a diverse, heteroclite collection of sources: from this angle, Shakespearean theater looks like a miniature preview of non-hegemonic cultures in their dealings with the challenges of mimesis. The playwright's literary appetite was healthy and omnivorous, given to both classics and contemporary works. Shakespeare feasted on the comedies of Plautus and Terence, the tragedies of Seneca, the writings of historians, medieval chronicles, historical incidents, and legends. At the same time, he also studied his peers' production, unblushingly adopting some of their best dramatic insights.

Here we have the perfect model for authors from contexts marked by asymmetrical power, economic, and cultural relationships, for, instead of the search for "originality" and "precedence" what is at stake is to render the appropriated sources ever more complex. The best non-hegemonic authors and thinkers sensed this elective affinity with the compositional method favored by the author of *Othello*.

Time to clear up a basic concept: *appropriation*. In the Arden edition of *The Tempest*, the editors lay out an important distinction between "adaptation" and "appropriation." While the first concept suggests that the new work "retain a clear identification with [the original text]", the second entails a different approach: "borrow characters (usually) or themes or specific language from a well-known play for philosophical or social purposes which may have no relation to the drama itself apart from the widespread recognition of the borrowed symbol".[29] This is the case with the Latin American appropriations of *The Tempest*. From Rubén Darío's "El triunfo de Calibán" (1898) to José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900), not to overlook Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Caliban* (1971), no other text played such an important role in the self-definition of Latin American identity**.** That is to say, Latin American cultural history is a radical case of a Shakespearean culture insofar as it defined itself via the gaze offered by Shakespeare's conceptual characters.

So as to properly define the concept of *Shakespearean cultures*, let me evoke V.S. Naipaul's novel *The Mimic Men*, the title of which already suggests a reading inspired in René Girard's work on mimetic theory.[30] While reflecting on his experiences, the narrator, Ralph Singh – native to a Caribbean island and exiled in London – identifies a key affinity with a "young English student." This is very important, as it clarifies that this dilemma is not exclusive

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[28] Jorge Luis Borges, "Autobiographical Essay." *The Aleph and Other Stories,* pp. 135-88. Trans. and ed. Normas Thomas Di Giovanni. New York: Bantam, 1971, p. 160.

[29] Virginia M. Vaughan & Alden T. Vaughan, "Appendix 2. Appropriations". In: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Orgs. Virginia M. Vaughan & Alden T. Vaughan. London, The Arden Shakespeare, 1999, p. 315.

[30] Girard employs the expression with the same irony implied by the novel's title: "En s'engouffrant dans la direction déjà choisie par les premiers, les *mimic men* se félicitent de leur esprit de décision et de liberté". René Girard, *Quand ces Choses Commenceront*. Entretiens avec Michel Treguer. Paris, Arléa, 1994, p. 211 (emphasis his). I have quoted him in French so as to highlight the use of English in the original.

to the exotic condition of being an intellectual from the periphery of capitalism but rather an anthropological circumstance affecting all: "He was like me: he needed the guidance of other men's eyes."[31] Farther onward, the narrator defines the mimetic nature of desire: "We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others."[32]

Those affected by this existential condition are relegated to a sort of "half a life," always hanging on the opinions of the rest – like Shakespeare's characters, as keenly characterized by Girard in *A Theatre of Envy*. The playwright came to develop a precise semantic field to define the centrality of the other in shaping desire:

> Shakespeare can be as explicit as some of us are about mimetic desire, and has his own vocabulary for it, close enough to ours for immediate recognition. He says 'suggested desire,' 'suggestion,' 'jealous desire,' 'emulous desire,' and so forth. But the essential word is 'envy,' alone or in such combinations as 'envious desire' or 'envious emulation.'[33]

The topic structures Shakespeare's theater.

In *Julius Caesar*, when Cassius seeks to involve Brutus in a conspiracy to assassinate the Dictator of the Roman Republic, after having praised Brutus highly, he poses a decisive question:

> […] Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?

Brutus' answer is an essay unto itself:

> No, Cassius, for the eye sees not itself
> But by reflection, by some other things.[34]

The formula is perfect: the eye cannot see itself in the absence of a reflection provided by a surface beyond the subject. Naturally, Cassius offers himself up as a mirror for his friend; and, convinced of his worth by the gaze of the other, Brutus joins the conspiracy against Julius Caesar.

Half a Life is another novel by Naipaul, in which an identical dilemma faces Chandran, a character who happens to meet W. Somerset Maugham. Through a series of revealing cultural misunderstandings, the English writer takes the Brahmin for a wise holy man, since he speaks infrequently and monosyllabically; and, impressed by the encounter, mentions him in one of his novels. That's all it takes for Chandran to become "famous for having been written about by a foreigner," in J. M. Coetzee's apt summary of the plot. The new literary celebrity starts to receive visits from tourists, and he is left with no choice but to play out the story narrated by the author of *Ashenden: Or the British Agent*. Despite the awkwardness of the situation, this

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[31] V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men*. New York, Vintage International, 2001, p. 23.

[32] Ibidem, p. 25.

[33] René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy. William Shakespeare*. New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 4.

[34] William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*. Org. Marvin Spevack. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 81. This is the second scene of the first act. Girard's comment on this key passage: "Cassius resorts to the same language of specularity as Ulysses did with Achilles, wishing likewise to stir up the spirit of mimetic rivalry in a man whose ambition has become insecure." René Girard, *A Theatre of Envy*, op. cit., p. 188.

involuntary alchemy leads to a sort of backwards conversion: "Soon he c[ame] to believe his own lies."[35]

The Brahmin's road to fame was not without certain obstacles: "It became hard for me to step out of that role."[36] That's right, you've got it: a role created by the eyes of the other, which the Brahmin was forced to accept: "I recognized that breaking out had become impossible, and I settled down to live the strange life that fate had bestowed on me."[37] Here, fate has a name: the gaze of the other. And since the foreigner – European in the 19th century, or North-American in the next – is considered an indisputable model, he is lent authority to define whatever lies before him. An unexpected Adam, he is tasked with naming, bringing words and things together at last.

Shakespearean cultures experience this dilemma on a collective level, a circumstance that makes this problem even more complex. In any case, if my hypothesis is sound, Shakespeare's method of composition would have provided a thinking structure as well as a literary form, whose scope and sharpness until today help to shape and frame the non-hegemonic historical experience.

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[35] J. M. Coetzee. "V. S. Naipaul: *Half a Life*". *Inner Workings*. *Literary Essays – 2000-2005*. New York, Penguin Books, 2007, p. 275.
[36] V. S. Naipaul, *Half a Life*, A Novel. New York, Vintage International, 2002, p. 5.
[37] Ibid., p. 6.

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