ABSTRACT

This analysis puts in perspective the multifarious ideological mechanisms whereby the “subject” is constructed during the reception processes of the master canon of Shakespeare. The attempt here is to cull out the motive behind the worldwide phenomenon of the “Shakespeare industry”. The present scrutiny locates the destabilizing attempts on the Shakespeare canon and the ways in which most of them get co-opted in disguise into the dominant ideologies. The work deals with four Shakespeare adaptations: the British dramatist Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, the Malayalam film director Jayaraj’s film *Kaliyattam*, the post-war British dramatist Edward Bond’s *Lear* and the British Women’s Theatre Group’s *Lear’s Daughters*. The title of the dissertation focuses on an Indian woman’s position as a reader vis-à-vis the texts under discussion. Being in a marginalized position, and decentred from the patriarchal as well as colonial discourses of literary production and reception, she is in a vantage point to uncover the hidden pockets of the consolidation, subversion and the final containment of power. The possibilities of a woman-centred reading are explored here.

The introductory chapter, “Righting the Canon”, makes a foray into the strategies through which literary representation functions to ratify the existing social order. The new writers’ intention of opening the established canon is brought under enquiry. The concepts of reception, subjectivity, discourse, canonization and decanonization are dealt with in detail.

The second chapter tries to disclose the implicit agenda behind the production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The dissertation as a whole is an attempt to fix the chronotopicity of the adaptations of Shakespeare. Applying post-theory, one finds that Stoppard’s play involves a shift in time alone. The setting is the same as that of *Hamlet*. Hence the title “Hamlet Then, Hamlet Now”. The chapter analyses how Stoppard remains blind to the operations of power as well as gender relations and the political as well as subversive potential in the play.

The third chapter concentrates on what happens when *Othello* is uprooted from its native setting and planted in an entirely dissimilar one. In *Kaliyattam* a shift in place occurs. This forms the rationale for the title “Othello There, Othello Here”. This chapter traces the ideology that governs the production of a film based on a Shakespeare play and the meanings that are transmitted through it. Jayaraj, the director of *Kaliyattam*, translates *Othello’s* “transcultural” vision of a singular human essence which caters to suppressing the uniqueness and historical reality of the source culture. Transplanting the play into a culture which is absolutely unaware of the politics behind racial differences is of course a problematic one. Shakespeare resorts to the stereotypes of African, of soldier, and of unfaithful wife in working out his tragedy. Coming to
the Kerala context in the late twentieth century, applying the same thematic pattern does not seem to be an apt one. Thus we may surmise that the proliferation of the ideology is a closed circuit, endlessly repeating the same illusion.

The fourth chapter, entitled “His Lear, Her Lear”, juxtaposes a masculine version and a feminine version of King Lear, ie, Lear and Lear’s Daughters. Bond’s claim is that he has rewritten King Lear to divest King Lear of his tragic stature and to alter Shakespeare’s unfair portrayal of the daughters as cruel women. The chapter establishes how he fails in his mission when Lear turns out to be a Christ-like figure and the three women characters eventually are portrayed as outrageously cruel and repulsively lustful. Lear’s Daughters, on the other hand, is presented as a prequel to King Lear, trying to trace the perversion of the daughters to the innate nature of Lear himself. The play has a collective authorship and thus challenges the aura associated with a single author. Women themselves perform on stage, thus making a different discourse through their performing bodies. Lear’s Daughters invites us to consider narrative alternatives. The chapter observes that the male versions which stick to the conventions easily get canonized whereas the radical reading by women becomes a prey to the perpetual silencing of women in history.

The concluding chapter, “Canonizing the Righting”, establishes how the various mainstream adaptations of Shakespeare eventually get canonized. No real heterodoxy or centrifugal dialogism emerges through the righting of Shakespeare. The ideology of the Shakespearean world remains untrammeled. Concepts of post-theory, like déjà vu and “the uncanny”, are employed here. Though the multitude of Shakespearean adaptations undoubtedly help to disrupt the superior status of the Shakespeare canon, the increasing emphasis given to the appropriations serves simultaneously to produce a still monolithic version of Shakespeare. Thus the Shakespeare revolution is really a covert operation, a restoration in disguise. Each rewritten canon constitutes a canon in miniature. Instead of creating an image of an indeterminate Shakespeare, they propagate the idea that Shakespeare is the determining principle — the fixed and stable point to refer back to.