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Teatro Praga's Omission of Shakespeare – An Intercultural Space

Abstract: Teatro Praga's (a Portuguese theatre company) adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* omit what is usually considered crucial to a Shakespearean adaptation by giving primacy to neither text nor plot, nor to a stage design that might highlight the skill and presence of the actors, a decision arguably related to what the company perceives as a type of imprisonment, that of the lines themselves and of the tradition in which these canonical plays have been staged. Such fatigue with a certain way of dealing with Shakespeare is deliberately portrayed and places each production in a space in-between, as it were, which might be described as *intercultural*. "Inter," as the *OED* clarifies, means something "among, amid, in between, in the midst." Each of Teatro Praga's Shakespearean adaptations, seems to exist in this "in-between" space, in the sense that they are named after Shakespeare, but are mediated by a combination of subsequent innovations. Shakespeare then emerges, or exists, in the interval between his own plays and the way they have been discussed, quoted, and misquoted across time, shaping the identities of those trying to perform his works and those observing its re-enactments on stage while being shaped himself. The fact that these adaptations only use Shakespeare's words from time to time leads critics to consider that Teatro Praga is working against Shakespeare (or, to admirers of Henry Purcell, against his compositions). This process, however, reframes Shakespeare's intercultural legacy and, thus, reinforces its appeal.

Keywords: Intercultural, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, Henry Purcell, Shakespeare, Teatro Praga, tradition, *The Tempest*.

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“Omissions are not accidents.”

Marianne Moore

“We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage.”

King Lear (5: 3: 9)

Borrowing from one of King Lear’s last speeches to Cordelia, “We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage” (*King Lear* 5: 3: 9), Harold C. Goddard employs them to describe *The Tempest*. Even though Teatro Praga’s Shakespearean trilogy will end with *King Lear*, it is doubtful the company had this line in mind while devising its stage productions of Shakespeare. Still, the image of two deserted characters singing like birds in a cage beautifully illustrates their adaptations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, productions in which a cage-like structure dominates the space and mediates between the appearance of actors, musicians, as well as audio-visual effects. In *King Lear*, the line portrays an old man’s illusion of making amends, a scenario on an island where he and Cordelia could “pray, and sing and tell old tales and laugh \ at gilded butterflies” (5: 3: 12-13). This island, as Goddard notes in *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, will find its sequel in *The Tempest* where “father and daughter are transmigrated and altered as they might be in a dream” (277). Teatro Praga’s staging of these plays includes both of these elements, as these adaptations may, at times, be perceived as the enchanted, idyllic spaces of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or *The Tempest*, and at others, be seen to portray an old fool’s vision of prison, one in which tales are told by those in gilded cages.

This idea of confinement also points to Teatro Praga’s omission of what is usually considered crucial to a Shakespearean adaptation by giving primacy to neither text nor plot, nor to a stage design that might highlight the skill and presence of the actors, a decision arguably related to what the company perceives as another type of imprisonment, that of the lines themselves and of the tradition in which these canonical plays have been staged. Such fatigue with a certain way of dealing with Shakespeare is deliberately portrayed and places each production in a space in-between, as it were, which might be described as *intercultural*. “Inter,” as the *OED* clarifies, means something “among, amid, in between, in the midst.” It is apparent, then, from the *OED*’s examples that this ‘inter-’ space, or what is here termed the ‘intercultural’ realm of Teatro Praga’s Shakespeare, can be geographical (“interamnum” or among currents), visual (“intercilium” or in between eyelids) or structural/formal (“intervallum” or in the midst of walls). Each of Teatro Praga’s Shakespearean adaptations seems to exist in this “in-between” space, in the sense that they are named after Shakespeare, but are mediated by a combination of subsequent innovations. These varied influences include the Renaissance theatre, Purcell’s works (*The Fairy Queen* and *The Enchanted Island*), the use of personal photographs in the scenes, the projection of iPhone messages on screen, and a reinterpretation of

the early modern court masque by contemporary artists. Shakespeare then emerges, or exists, in the interval between his own plays and the way they have been discussed, quoted, and misquoted across time, shaping the identities of those trying to perform his works and those observing its re-enactments on stage while being shaped himself.

I. The Reformulation of Boredom

One could ask why—if the text, usually considered the most important element in an adaptation, is left out—is Shakespeare even necessary? This is a question often posed to Teatro Praga and to those studying their theatre, and one to which a simple answer might be given. The suggestion to perform Shakespeare came from António Mega Ferreira, the Director of the Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB), one of Portugal's main theatrical venues. Teatro Praga decided to accept his proposal, a decision that led to the opening of each of their Shakespearean productions at the CCB. In 2010, they staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and 2013 saw their production of *The Tempest* before both plays were presented at the festival of the Maison de la Culture de Seine-Saint-Denis (MC93) in Bobigny, France. Accepting the challenge, however, did imply that a relation had to be established between Shakespeare and Teatro Praga, one which could suggest rejection, adaptation, remixing, or none of the above, and one which my essay will further explore.

Teatro Praga consists of a collective whose members, at the time of these adaptations, included André E. Teodósio, José Maria Vieira Mendes, Cláudia Jardim, Patrícia da Silva, and Pedro Penim. The collective is known for its non-conventional type of theatre. In these productions of Shakespeare's plays, as was the practice in the company's other productions, a process of rewriting took place. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Purcell's *Fairy Queen* is called on to mediate Shakespeare through the interpretation of the ensemble Músicos do Tejo, whereas in *The Tempest*, DJs Xinobi and Moulinex remix Purcell's *The Enchanted Island*. In their decision to work collaboratively to erase the text, Teatro Praga seems to be reacting to a certain tradition of Shakespearean adaptations, one which another well-known practitioner, Peter Brook, defines as the "Deadly Theatre" in *The Empty Space*:

Of course nowhere does the Deadly Theatre install itself so securely, so comfortably and so slyly as in the works of William Shakespeare. The Deadly Theatre takes easily to Shakespeare. We see his plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way—they look lively and colourful, there is music and everyone is all dressed up, just as they are supposed to be in the best of classical theatres. Yet secretly we find it excruciatingly boring—and in our hearts we either blame Shakespeare, or theatre as such, or even ourselves. To

make matters worse there is always a deadly spectator, who for special reasons enjoys a lack of intensity and even a lack of entertainment, such as the scholar who emerges from routine performances of the classics smiling because nothing has distracted him from confirming his pet theories to himself, whilst reciting his favourite lines under his breath. (10)

Even though one has occasionally been that scholar quoting lines to herself, Brook is right to notice a relation between what he portrays as a “Deadly Theatre” and certain Shakespearean adaptations. His description highlights a type of theatre that is perfectly executed and claimed to be faithful to tradition, but that may indeed be extremely painful to watch. One of Brook’s main complaints has to do with the absence of a relationship between the play being staged and the spectator, who enjoys what could be considered a solitary experience—that of reciting the lines to him or herself (something which could be done, in reality, at home). It is against this tradition of certain boredom—and not Shakespeare himself or his plays—that Teatro Praga is working. According to the *OED*, one of the definitions of “to bore” is “to weary by tedious conversation or simply by the failure to be interesting.” The idea of being tired by boring conversation seems to be a good definition of the Deadly Theatre so often present in a certain way of performing Shakespeare. This is usually characterized, as Brook notices, by its proximity to the author’s words, by what is considered to be a great actor’s virtuous performance or, in the more illuminating productions, by the fact that the stage adaptation updates or reveals something in the text which had not previously been considered in depth.

Teatro Praga wishes to move away from such notions of theatre, which is why it erases not only the Shakespearean text, as mentioned, but also the idea that the actors’ skills should be the highlight of a production. In order to do so, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the actors are confined to a dressing room on stage, and which the spectator only sees through a projection (this room is an allusion to the green room in television shows in which one waits to be called to the live show). The physical presence of the actors is thus denied or mediated through cameras as if to stress that the observation of acting skill is not the production’s main purpose and to, instead, refocus attention on the technologies of performance. Well-known actors are not asked to participate, which further enhances this effect. On the contrary, performers are chosen simply because they belong to what has been termed the “Praga family”.

This reformulation of “boring conversation” or “Dead Theatre” is highlighted in both *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*. The actors’ words are not poetic and seldom originate from Shakespeare’s text. Bawdy language is at times used, but not, as in Shakespeare, to portray the adventures of minor characters or to identify and place them socially in relation to noble characters. On the contrary, in Teatro Praga’s *The Tempest* we see a young

Miranda being playful with a very old Ferdinand, an intentional subversion of the expectations of an audience familiar with Shakespeare. In Praga's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, characters' words could be described as the type of banal conversation that contemporary lovers have on reality television shows, which, though mundane, is language to which people can relate. Such conversations may, naturally, and up to a point are, boring to spectators in the theatre, intentionally disrupting and dislocating the poetry in Shakespearean lines. The fact that such conversations appear in between Purcell's music and other references reminds us of someone sitting at home watching television and constantly changing channels. This further serves a critical purpose, as highlighted by Francesca Rayner in her article "Whose hand do we kiss? Performing Democracy in a Portuguese *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." There she notes how the company "targeted the contemporary 'banalization' of the language of love prompted by television reality and talk shows and the awkward role of performance in sustaining this banalization" (541). Rewriting the text seems, as Rayner rightly claims, to simplify it. Rayner's article focuses on the relation between Praga's adaptation and what she considers to be its lack of a discourse on power or democracy:

...this *Dream's* uncritical celebration of the power of festivity and spectacle meant that the performance was unable to make its performers and its spectators appear in a way that would challenge their conventional spaces of participation and representation within current regimes of Shakespearean performance in Portugal. (536)

This interpretation is accurate, but perhaps the point remains that, in this particular performance, Teatro Praga does not wish to challenge power or the venue in which the play is being presented. On the contrary, as highlighted in the program notes, and referring to the relation the Renaissance theatre had with its audience, it wants to celebrate, and while making a "tribute to power" (Teatro Praga), it also intends to entertain, and to delight.

This notion of pleasure is, however, subversive, in the sense that rewriting the text not only simplifies it, as Rayner maintains, but uses it to portray a reality that is usually left out in what is considered theatre of quality. Allusions to reality television or to popular culture—such as Madonna's words in the song *La Isla Bonita* which are included in the staging of *The Tempest*—arguably better portray, or ironize, Shakespeare's description of Prospero's island than they might if the production were not so festive or celebratory toward popular culture. These practitioners at Teatro Praga seem to align themselves with those who reject the idea that Shakespeare belongs to the domain of high culture, and that there is a limit to what one can do with these texts. Critics like Diana Henderson have noted how Shakespeare's "story convincingly

demonstrates the instability of the line dividing high and low, elite and popular, revealing the multiple (and sometimes colliding) meanings of those terms” and how “He and his cohort challenged a two-tier vision of high and low, and could on occasion move in either direction” (6-7). Not only do Shakespeare’s plays mix references and defy an idea of what theatre and society should be about, but we should also remember another tradition of adaptations which attempts to reject a formal idea of what a performance should be. Robert Shaughnessy notes, in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Pop Culture*, how “Throughout history, Shakespeare’s enduring high-cultural status has coexisted with a multiplicity of other Shakespeares, recycled in stage performance and cinematic adaptation, political discourse, literary and theatrical burlesque, parody, musical quotation, visual iconography, popular romance, tourist itineraries, national myth, and everyday speech” (1). This mingling of domains supports the idea of Shakespeare as an intercultural agent, to which these adaptations are truthful, even if they might seem to betray his plays in the literary sense.

In the case of Teatro Praga, the allusions to popular culture are linked to the idea that Shakespeare and certain passages in his plays have been transformed into clichés. This stereotype is most visible in the imagery that links certain aspects of the plays with a romantic notion of love. In their adaptations, Teatro Praga ridicules this imagery, reflecting on an idea of what the modern experience of love is or can be, how it is described, what it is made of. In his book *Against Everything*, Michael Greif discusses how:

The problem is experience; specifically the concept of experience that gives us the feeling we are really living, but makes us unsatisfied with whatever life we obtain. ... Experience is directly attainable. It is definite and cumulative, where happiness is ambiguous and pleasure evanescent. ... We see our lives as a collection of experiences: the day I met those people at that party”, ... the feeling I had as a tourist in Paris. These snow globes and beach rocks can be held on to, compared, and appraised for quality. You put them on the shelf, and take them down; or lie awake at night, just wondering at them. They come with stories and you put forward your experiences as rivals to the experiences others can tell. We become lifelong collectors, and count on fixed mementos to provide substance of whatever other aims we may declare, when asked, are our real goals or reasons to live (loc. 1327).

Seeking experiences is not exactly something new or particular to today, but the idea that happiness comes with the gathering of experiences, with a collection of fixed mementos to be later remembered, seems to appropriately portray the modern times Teatro Praga is describing, which is why both *Midsummer* and *The Tempest* appear as a collection of different moments. Some of these moments or artefacts, such as the staging of Purcell’s songs, belong to what

could be described as high culture, while others allude to and replicate the everyday popular experience of television, of text messages, and ordinary people falling in and out of love. Reality television, as Greif describes in another chapter, symbolizes how we “need myths, not only of our ideal, and our average, but of our fallen extreme” (loc. 2260), which is precisely what is illustrated in the bawdy segments of Praga's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But, more importantly, placing different objects together aims to destabilize the distinction between high and low culture, and point to our own experience as viewers, switching from channel to channel, exchanging messages while watching television, mixing different types of content. This would suggest that this intercultural Shakespeare would further operate on a temporal axis, in the sense that it mediates between past and present.

This notion of experience is also relevant in the sense that we seem to think that it shields us from boredom. The Program Notes explain Praga's objectives in adapting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an attempt:

to provide enjoyment and relaxation. [...] It's like inviting someone for dinner and avoiding “certain topics” so that nobody gets bored and the conversation can flow. It's like driving on the freeway to Algarve, Baroque music playing on the radio, your friend sitting beside you and kissing your neck... and here we go into the future, where a party awaits us, a fashion cocktail and an astronomical bill which will be paid when the Winter arrives (Teatro Praga).

One does not, in fact, tend to invite someone to dinner to have boring, or tedious, conversations, which therefore means that if Teatro Praga is tempting the audience to view the show, it somehow promises they will not be bored, nor will they discuss topics which could promote dissent. The idea of an astronomical bill being paid later is also interesting, as it points to our daily lives and the things in which we choose to invest our time and attention. (Will we later pay the bill if we are carefree, if we do not save enough money for retirement, if we do not exercise, eat too much sugar, if we smoke?).

The game that is being played with the audience is one that tests their knowledge of both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, reproducing actions and redefining certain aspects in each one. As Lawrence Lessig explains in his book *Remix*:

Remix is an essential act of ... creativity. It is the expression of a freedom to take “the songs of the day or the old songs” and create with them. In Sousa's time, the creativity was performance. The selection and arrangement expressed the creative ability of the singers. In our time, the creativity reaches far beyond performance alone. (56)

Lessig is referring to John Philip Sousa, a conductor and critic of the United States copyright system. The distinction being made is important. On the one

hand, one may focus on performance, on the idea of how creativity consisted of how to stage (in the case of theatre) something previously written and, on the other, of the notion that creativity has always included other things beyond adaptation, such as what Lessig terms remix: “the words of others are used to make a point the others did not directly make. Old cases are remixed so that the remix is meant to do something ‘new’” (52). Remix media, as Lessig explains, “may quote sounds over images, or video over text, or text over sounds. The quotes thus get mixed together. The mix produces the new creative work—the ‘remix’” (93). This is illustrated in both adaptations when Shakespeare is made to collaborate with plastic artists such as Catarina Campino, Javier Nuñez Gasco, Vasco Araújo, and João Pedro Vale.

These artists are called upon to freely interpret Shakespeare without the need to be faithful to plot or text. The obliteration of Shakespeare as a referent takes place, and each artist’s impressions about the play are transformed into a visual idea. One that, it should be noticed, understands Shakespeare through the lenses of the tradition he originated. Thus, popular culture objects that might seem unrelated to Shakespeare—as wings alluding to a Victoria’s secret model—are included in one of these brief performances. For example, in *The Tempest*, these visual artists were invited to reinterpret the notion of a court masque or, more specifically, an anti-masque, one which precedes the transformation of a negative image into virtue, or the presentation of a thing of blackness. These are some of the most beautiful moments of the shows, grandiose occasions from a visual viewpoint, destined to enchant the audience and ironize its gaze. Previous discussions of Shakespeare and Purcell help to give initial guidelines for each collaborator in the show, but what is asked of these artists—from the light designer to the musicians, from the plastic artists to the actors—is their own interpretation of moments of the play. The purpose of these adaptations is not to be faithful to content, but to ponder on how to make sense of Shakespeare’s legacy in our contemporary world. In their use of playfulness and irony, and while trying to be agreeable to the audience, perhaps they are also critiquing what theatre is or should be.

II. Remagining the Tempest

If what is usually considered the most important aspect of Shakespeare’s plays—its text and the narrative—is absent, what, then, remains? Critics have observed how, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare presents an island in which the virtues and flaws of characters are highlighted. This is the reason the island, in effect, differs from character to character, depending on their past, personality, and intentions. The island depends on the personality of each person, which is why some have bad dreams and others good ones; some see images of usurpation and others a pastoral paradise. As Goddard puts it, “To innocent senses the isle itself is pure

loveliness; to corrupted ones it is no better than a swamp” (284). Or, as Northrop Frye argues, “In this island the quality of one’s dreaming is an index of character” (291). Likewise, in Teatro Praga’s island we see ourselves. The show opens with the audience’s entrance in the auditorium, the lights are on, the actors are present and the spectators see themselves reflected in a big screen on stage. These mechanisms call attention to the audience’s role in the play and to the nature of the act of watching. As the narrator announces at the beginning of the show “we are all in the same boat.” The tone is not, however, serious. After all, this is a Shakespearean romance.

If the island doubles our image, it is only natural that a discussion about the nature of theatre itself is to be found in Teatro Praga’s *The Tempest*, a company well-known for debating the topic in their staging of plays. In Shakespeare’s text, one finds multiple references to the art of theatre and to the way Prospero associates magic to his “art” (1: 2: 291). In Teatro Praga’s play, Prospero controls the narrative of his characters, their past and present, and we rely on his descriptions to better understand the stories that take place off stage.

Prospero is the main character of this stage production, as if Teatro Praga is claiming that, in Shakespeare’s text, this is a figure who finds himself surrounded by underdeveloped characters such as Ferdinand or Antonio. Miranda is perceived as a teenager in love with the idea of romance (and of being in love), which explains her fascination for Ferdinand, the first man she sees. In Bárbara Falcão Fernandes’ stage design, the actors are on the outside of the cage, on a stage which is divided between the video projection, the action which takes place on stage, and the actions occurring on the left of the stage. In these moments, the audience observes through the video how what takes place off stage is placed at the centre of the scene. Sycorax is brought back from the dead and in her Teatro Praga gives Prospero a worthy rival, played by the actress Cláudia Jardim. As dictatorial as Prospero, Sycorax attempts to steal his role and to stage manage the re-entry of her son, Caliban, “This island should be yours, are you listening to me?” This omnipotent figure is the only character who comes across in all spaces of the stage: appearing in the video projection and backstage, crossing the space whenever she pleases, and being a central figure of the masques.

It is, however, in the repetition of tempests, in the idea that we are observing what remains after a play has ended, in the remixing of the idea of confinement, of Shakespeare’s epilogue and the way it is related to Patrick Wolf’s song *The Magic Position*, that this *Tempest* particularly excels. Teatro Praga stages again and again the notion of repetition present in Shakespeare’s epilogues:

Now my charms are all o’erthrown
 And what strength I have’s mine own
 Which is most faint. Now, ‘tis true

I must be here confined by you,
 Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
 Since I have my dukedom got
 And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
 In this bare island by your spell;
 But release me from my bands
 With the help of your good hands.
 Gentle breath of yours my sails
 Must fill, or else my project fails,
 Which was to please. Now I want
 Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
 And my ending is despair,
 Unless I be relieved by prayer,
 Which pierces so that it assaults
 Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
 As you from crimes would pardoned be,
 Let your indulgence set me free.
 (Epilogue: 3-20)

This passage is drawn from *The Tempest*'s epilogue after Prospero decides to leave his books and, according to some descriptions, to abandon his magic (or the need for it). In these closing lines, he asks the audience to free him, and the choice seems to be between letting him return to Naples or confining him on the island, which would mean that the play would begin again, so that the audience might better appreciate its re-enactment. As Marjorie Garber clarifies, "Prospero addresses himself directly to the audience, putting himself in our hands and asking of us—as various characters in the play had sought from him—freedom from bondage and confinement" (loc. 21856). At the beginning of Teatro Praga's *The Tempest*, Miranda asks the audience what they think about the show which had just finished (and which the audience, who has entered the room minutes ago, did not see, an allusion to Shakespeare's own play and its history).

After this small introduction, Prospero, standing above the cage, begins to speak and describes the show which has just ended. The line "I must be here confined by you" (4) finds its illustration in Praga's *The Tempest* in an image that the company posted on Facebook a few weeks before the show. In it, one sees a group of tourists inside a cage in the middle of the savannah, being observed by a group of lions (a case in which prey and predator seem to have exchanged roles). As mentioned, Shakespeare's notion of confinement on the island is illustrated in the set design, and we find a giant cage in the middle of the stage, where Prospero's storm makers accompany him. Notice how, in this idea of a cage which the viewers observe, we also perceive a commentary on the nature of theatre itself, that space where others are given the opportunity to be voyeuristic.

The repetition of storms, the circularity of both Shakespeare's play and the adaptation, is also highlighted. At the ending of their play, as written in the script, Teatro Praga's Prospero (played by André E. Teodósio) rewrites the previously mentioned line as follows:

And I am stuck to this. To this position. The Magic position. Tempestas. ...

You placed me here. In the Magic Position. And sooner or later this had to happen. I am not up to the challenge. ... And I deserve a rest. ... Each time I come here I try to find a new and more appropriate solution to this, now, here: me, standing, speaking in front of people I don't know and in whom I cannot trust.

Teodósio's words describe the previously quoted monologue, in which Prospero claims to have played his part: to forgive those who had deceived him and tried to please the audience. Remember how in the epilogue of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, "Requesting the 'good hands' (applause) and 'gentle breath' (praise) of the audience in the theatre, [Prospero] puts himself in the position in which he had previously put those who conspired against his life, asking for mercy and forgiveness," as Garber maintains in *Shakespeare After All* (loc. 21856). The spirit of Shakespeare's epilogue thus finds its expression in sentences such as "I am stuck to this. To this magic position. Tempestas." Patrick Wolf's song, *The Magic Position*, had already been alluded to in a previous moment of the show. In the song, the major key is the amorous zenith of a relationship, which describes the role of lovers, illustrated in the phrase "It's you who put me \ in the magic position, darling \ To live, to learn, to love in the major key." To which will later follow "But c'mon get back up \ It's the time to live \ So give your love to me \ I'm gonna keep it carefully (...) Let me put you in the major key." Both Prosperos, Shakespeare's and Praga's, seem similar to a lover to who, after the sexual act, asks his partner if he/she is satiated or if they should return to the beginning of the night, thus drawing a further parallel between sexual and theatrical experience. No matter what the nature of the burden is, though, these figures seem to long for a lover (which in the case of the theatre would be the audience) and for rest. It almost seems as if magic, sex, or even theatre were obligations which, when unaccomplished, are condemned to repetition.

Teodósio's speech also points to the word 'tempestas,' which makes explicit the obsession with time in Shakespeare's play, first noted by Northrop Frye when he observes how "Few plays are so haunted by the passing of time as *The Tempest*: it has derived even its name from a word (*tempestas*) which means time as well as tempest" (191). Frye explains how "Timing was important to a magician," something those in the theatre know well, which in this case would mean that the repetition of storms in the play also points to the importance of time that, for Frye is ambiguous, because "When everyone is trying to make the

most of his time, it seems strange that a melancholy elegy over the dissolving of all things in time should be the emotional crux of the play” (191). Thus, intercultural assumes here yet another sense, that of *tempestas*, which in Teatro Praga’s play refers to the interval between storms (and to their repetition in the play).

III. “I Must [Not] Be Here Confined by You,” Teatro Praga and Tradition

The importance given to *The Tempest’s* circular nature and to the idea that to be in the theatre is to be confined to a tempest which perpetuates itself, leads to an underlying theory about how theatre is usually described and how the company wishes to position itself, which José Maria Vieira Mendes discusses in his book *Uma Coisa não é Outra Coisa*, where he considers two historical positions on theatre and literature: the first chapter is dedicated to those who think theatre is literature, and the second to those who consider that it is not. Both positions are criticized and Vieira Mendes makes an important argument against the necessity to define or to separate these areas, made by those who, according to him, tend to divide the world in dualistic terms and wish to know “what a thing is.” One of the problems of such positions is that they lead to the idea that those choosing to adapt Shakespeare know what they should do beforehand, which is to find and to explore its theatricality, and the criteria with which they will be judged (a principle that is, as quoted, based on the proximity between text and performance, and the actor’s skill when saying certain words). Thus, he questions “what percentage of Elizabethan theatre should be included in a contemporary adaptation of *Hamlet*?”

To put things differently, I do not wish to banish theatre from dramatic literature or dramatic literature from theatre. Similarly, I do not have to abolish the actor from the theatre, the light design, the stage curtain or the black box. I only wish do be able to do a production without actors, text, stage curtain or black box without it being understood as an affirmation against theatre. As if it were a “different” type of show, “reactive,” “anti-theatrical,” “teenager”, and so on. (226)

Vieira Mendes is replying to the critics who think that refusing to adhere to a preconceived idea of what it is to stage the text is to go against the text or theatre itself. In a way, the assertion being made is very simple: theatre can be many things, and encompass different ways of staging, which is why one production may have actors, while the following dispenses with them. This idea of confinement may, then, also be applied to a description, to the dualistic terms in which theatre has been described, to the pre-fixed roles in which we exist in it. This is why we perceive such idea of confinement in Teatro Praga’s stagings.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, lovers spend their time in a box in banal conversation, purposefully transforming gilded butterflies and other poetic images into commonplaces, thus erasing the Shakespearean text. This box reminds us of popular shows, reality television and those who fall in love. In *The Tempest*, the island is a cage which forces everyone to observe and be observed, the action obliterates the text and the five act structure, so as to place and to repeat the epilogue amidst multiple tempests. In Teatro Praga's staging of both plays, the cultural capital that derives from the Bard is considered as relevant as the plays themselves. Shakespeare appears as an intercultural, "popular" figure, inseparable from the tradition that emerges from him. *Intercultural*, then, claims the space in between Shakespeare's works, their heritage, and the shows themselves as they are presented to the audience. But the notion of the intercultural, of something in between, also points to the way the cage on stage is able to transform or to question the identity of text and music, of the space in which the play is staged and how it places spectators in the theatre. The fact that these adaptations only use Shakespeare's words from time to time leads some critics to complain that Teatro Praga is working against Shakespeare (or, to admirers of Purcell, against his compositions). This process, however, reframes Shakespeare's intercultural legacy and, thus, reinforces its appeal.

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