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Calibans All: Shakespeare at the Intersection of Colonialism

Politically we are Calibans all....
Ahmad 1987: 20

With few exceptions, Shakespearean postcolonial criticism has limited itself to examining the way in which culture has been contested and negotiated on the battlefield of Shakespeare's work and reputation in North America, South Africa, the Caribbean, and India. For obvious linguistic reasons, only a limited number of scholars have ventured into the, arguably, even more complex terrain of Eastern Europe and especially Imperial Russia, where the colonizer-colonized relationships are, if not murky, then like geological formations which, when exposed, reveal seemingly infinite gradations of multi-layered strata.

This paper provides a brief foray into this terrain, one which both confirms the difficulty of assigning a simple or single function to Shakespeare and the need for more supple and comprehensive theories of cross-cultural Shakespearean encounters. For this complex and contradictory relationship to Shakespeare I take a remarkable moment as a synecdoche: the encounter of the African-American actor Ira Aldridge (1807–1867) with the Ukrainian social revolutionary, poet, writer, painter, and former serf Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861). The following scene occurred after one of Aldridge's performances of *King Lear* in St. Petersburg:

Spread out from fatigue and half-lying in a roomy chair was King Lear [Aldridge], and over him, literally on top of him, I found Taras Hryhorovych [Shevchenko]; tears like hail were raining from his eyes; he articulated disconnected, passionate words of distress and grace in a muffled loud whisper, all the while covering the great tragedian's grease-painted face, hands and back with kisses. (Kulish 1910, vol. 6: 457-458; my translation)

Aldridge's presence in Russia and Shevchenko's extraordinary viscerally-emotive response to his performance may be examined from at least three different perspectives: that of the aristocratic Russian, Count Tolstoy, who invited and cultivated the friendship of both the black actor and the Ukrainian painter-writer; Aldridge, the African-American actor playing in English with German actors to Russian audiences; and the Ukrainian Shevchenko, recently-returned to Russia from what was originally to have been a life-sentence of exile. At the nexus of this triad is Shakespeare. A fourth perspective of this intercultural encounter, which I shall consider only in passing, is that of the German influence on "Russian" Shakespeare.

Preceded by many other English writers, Shakespeare arrived late in Russia, giving little indication of the vast ocean of future commentary. Never simple, the Russian relationship to Shakespeare evolved contrapunctally, rather than in any linear fashion. Often tamed, at times silenced, at others loudly appreciated, but frequently simultaneously all three, Shakespeare in Russia reveals the constantly intersecting and problematic notions of colonizer and colonized. When Ira Aldridge arrived in St. Petersburg in 1858, Shakespeare's reputation, limited to a few plays and known to a small group, was in decline after only a brief period of glory in the 1840s. Shakespeare was the preserve of that tiny fraction of the population of the huge empire that was literate and that could afford to attend the theatre. Translators of Shakespeare were almost inevitably "Westernizers," that is, intellectuals who were interested in and willing to entertain or open up a dialogue with Western ideas, including the idea of a theatre. Thus, Alexander Sumarokov, the first translator of the "inspired barbarian" (as he called the Bard) is also notably the "father" of Russian drama, suggesting a necessary link between the creation of a native Russian theatre and interest in Shakespeare. Sumarokov is also the initiator of a two-century long tradition of working from foreign, especially French or German, rather than English sources. Following P. A. de la Place, he "regularized" and transformed *Hamlet* (1748) into moralistic discourses, and made Polonius into the arch-villain of the piece.

Other early Westernizers include the German-born and educated Tsarina Catherine II, who adapted *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Timon of Athens*. By "translating" Shakespeare, as well as carrying on an extensive correspondence with the *encyclopedistes* Voltaire and Diderot, Catherine wished to declare Russia a member of the Western cultural club and herself

an enlightened ruler who partook of larger intellectual discourses and debates, although some of her other actions indicated otherwise: she was responsible for extending total serfdom from Russia to Ukraine in 1783. Shakespeare's only other champion in the eighteenth century, the historian Nikolai Karamzin, was also the first Shakespearean to fall victim to the censor. His *Julius Caesar* (1787) was confiscated and banned by Catherine, a ban which was not lifted until over a century later.

Early nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals, taken with neo-classicism and sentimentality, did not find Shakespeare especially congenial. Although new translations began to appear (such as those by Ivan Veliaminov, Nikolai Gnedich, Stepan Viskovatov, Mikhail Vronchenko, and Nikolai Ketcher), the practice of working from adaptations and translations prevailed, as may be seen by the title page of the most notorious of such examples, Alexander Rotchev's *Macbeth. A Tragedy of Shakespeare from the Works of Schiller* (1830). A Frenchified and Germanicized Shakespeare subsequently was revered not as Jacobean tragedian, but as romantic melodramatist. From his beginnings in Imperial Russia, then, Shakespeare was doubly foreign: geographically and historically distant, his works were also mediated by foreign filters and contemporary translation practices and literary fashions.

The zenith of Shakespeare's popularity in tragedy (knowledge of which was limited to only a handful of plays) came with a period of general Anglomania, the growth of the Romantic movement, and the development of a native Russian theatre in the 1830s and 1840s. Pushkin, the descendent of an Ethiopian general, is of central importance here. The first Russian writer to become "enthralled" by Shakespeare (to whom he referred as the "father" of Russia), Pushkin accepted Shakespeare as the inspiration and guiding hand for many of his works, at the same time as he fully believed in the "natural" and "untutored" quality of Shakespeare's genius. Also responsible for an outburst of tremendous enthusiasm for Shakespeare was Nikolai Polevoi's "translation" of *Hamlet* as embodied by two great actors, the wild, emotional Pavel Mochalov (1800–1848) and the slightly-less-so Vasilii Karatygin (1802–1853). And, finally, Russian journals, which while at first derivative (reprinting articles about Shakespeare from French, German and English periodicals such as *The Spectator* and *The Edinburgh Review*), increasingly became an original and very influential medium for the dissemination of knowledge about Shakespeare.

By the 1850s, however, Shakespeare's eclipse was hastened by the death of Mochalov and Karatygin and, in literary developments, by the turn to realism. Precisely at that moment, Aldridge arrived in Russia. Himself little known in Russia, in preparing for his visit Aldridge advertised the fact that he had played in Covent Garden and the Lyceum in London, had toured the British Isles and most of Europe (including France, Hungary,

Serbia, Bohemia, and many German states), and that he was to present with but one exception (*The Padlock*), a repertoire entirely Shakespearean. The first black actor to play white Shakespearean roles, he debuted in St. Petersburg on 10 November 1858 with *Othello*. The novelty of a black actor and one with almost an entirely Shakespearean repertoire quickly aroused the interest of Petersburgers. Hitherto, no single actor in Russia had made Shakespeare his preserve and, in fact, few Shakespeare plays had actually been staged. The influential progressive thick journal *Sovremennik* [*The Contemporary*] excitedly commented:

A black tragedian! That's certainly original! Although we don't understand a word of English, certainly we can't miss seeing a *black tragedian!* Added to which, the English Othello will have a German Desdemona – that indeed is strange and fascinating. (cited in Marshall and Stock 1993: 224)

Many of those who attended did so out of the curiosity expressed by *Sovremennik*: for the exoticism of the black actor playing in an unknown language with a white actress responding in Schlegel's elegant translation of Shakespeare. In the absence of English actors, Aldridge was forced to play with a German troupe, thus initiating a tradition of bilingual productions (Tommaso Salvini and Sarah Bernhardt later followed this precedent). Limited to only six performances, Aldridge was permitted to play at the Circus Theatre, a venue which surely contributed to many spectators' idea that they were about to watch a freak, a sideshow, a comedy. Indeed, many of the reviewers subsequently admitted that they had come to gape and to mock the spectacle. Arriving at the Circus simply to observe the oddity of heroic characters played by a black actor, most Russians seem to have been swept away by the force of Aldridge's acting. After the shock of the first linguistic dissonances, the majority, like Théophile Gauthier (then touring Russia), found themselves unperturbed by the disjunction, since they understood neither German nor English. Only the very few who understood both languages, like the Russian correspondent from the *New York Herald*, found the performance comical. No one seems to have been concerned that Shakespeare was, again, being presented to the Russians by mostly German intermediaries. The German troupe (unnamed in the extant documents) and the German influence (dating back at least to Catherine II) seems to have been naturalized or at least regarded of little cultural threat. Instead, the focus was on Aldridge, whose presence divided the Russian intelligentsia.

For liberal Russians, Aldridge presented much more than a curiosity or a touring Shakespeareophilic missionary. His colour and background, his Othello-like claim to be descended from Senegalese princes – as well as his “unfitness” for the stages of his native America, made him a natural symbol

for the fate of his people (as K. Zvantsev explained on the eve of Aldridge's arrival), as well as a convenient tool by which liberal democrats could attack the Tsar and his repressive regime:

In our contemporary history there is an event which creates a whole sphere of life and thought, i.e. the liberation of the Negro in the United States; this becomes something *internal*, not only for the enslaved people, but for all of us. That is why, for us, at this particular time, the role of Othello performed by this artist of genius, with all its subtleties of tribal and climatic character, has a universal mighty significance ... From Othello is torn the deep cry, 'Oh, misery, misery, misery!' and in that misery of the African artist is heard the far-off groans of his own people, oppressed by unbelievable slavery and more than that – the groans of the whole of suffering mankind. (cited in Marshall and Stock 1993: 221–222)

For Zvantsev and progressive Russian intellectuals, Aldridge presented an image of the strength of the human spirit and liberation from slavery, a liberation which was finally to come with the 13th Amendment to the American Constitution in 1865. Aldridge-Othello also spoke to their own, related issue, serfdom – just as, a few years later, French liberals would similarly read their injustices into Aldridge's performances. In Paris, Alexandre Dumas *père* would kiss the actor's cheeks and proclaim, "Je suis aussi un Nègre" (Marshall and Stock 1993: 320). For liberals East and West, the black actor was perceived as a kind of blank upon which a variety of different, although related, ideals and hopes were written. Adhering to many ideas of this group was the aristocratic Russian, Count Tolstoy, Vice-President of the Academy of Arts in Petersburg, at whose home progressive painters, singers, poets, artists, and literati gathered.

Just prior to Aldridge's arrival, the draft legislation for the abolition of serfdom was circulated. (It was promulgated in 1861.) Both his repertoire of characters "more sinned against than sinning" and his revisionary view of Lear, Othello, Shylock, and Aaron the Moor spoke directly to larger issues of freedom and justice. Reinterpreting these characters as victims and yet heroic figures, Aldridge was himself scripting a new kind of liberal Shakespeare (and anticipating the kind of Shakespeare for which, in 1999, Hugh Quarshie has called), most notably in his complete rewriting of Aaron the Moor and Shylock. Shakespeare's malevolent Moor was transformed into a noble victim brought to violence only out of desperation, while Shylock became (as one contemporary observed) not "particularly a Jew, but a human being in general, oppressed by the age-old hatred shown towards people like him, and expressing this feeling with wonderful power and truth" (cited in Marshall and Stock 1958: 234). Completely cutting act five of *The Merchant of Venice*, Aldridge added a final, mimed scene in which Shylock shuddered with horror at the Venetians' blithe sentence of his conversion to Christianity. In *Othello*, Aldridge attempted "vividly to

convey to audiences the messages that racism is the green-eyed monster that destroys not just its victim but also its perpetrator and innocent bystanders” (Hill 1984: 41). His interpretation of the marginalized, the Jew, the Moor, the slave, the old man, encouraged the response of the intelligentsia in Russia and elsewhere of reading Shakespeare as a champion of the oppressed and downtrodden, rather than as the carrier of an imperial Western culture. Zvantsev was moved to think

of the many generations of black people suffering under the whip of American slave-traders, . . . All this has been represented by Shakespeare so truthfully, so powerfully, that, without the slightest exaggeration – one risks hating all his white heroes, or at least, the Venetians that surround Othello, not excluding, even Desdemona herself. It is a pity that even she is not black. (cited in Marshall and Stock 1993: 232)

Similarly, Panaev, writing in *Sovremennik*, praised the nobility and strength of Aldridge’s interpretation, the first “real” Othello Russians had ever seen (Morozov 1939: 56). By presenting a series of noble and persecuted characters, Aldridge invited a thematic, socio-political reading of his performance. This anticipated audience response (so successful with sympathetic spectators like Zvantsev 1858) was further extended by his only comic role, that of the slave Mungo in Isaac Bickerstaffe’s *The Padlock*, a role which Aldridge deliberately took up right after playing Othello. Aldridge’s repertoire thus created its own unstated but very vocal narrative of the consequences of colonization. The broad comedy of the slave was balanced by his ingenuity and native intelligence; when he was unjustly punished, spectators reportedly cringed.

Although he played King Lear in white-face, Aldridge kept his black arms and hands free of make-up, as if to insist – Marshall and Stock suggest – that he was a black man playing a white. This tactic may have also deliberately contributed to the perception that the injustices committed against the old king were analogues of those committed against blacks. Aldridge’s awareness of the way that race could be effectively exploited through Shakespearean characters may also be seen in the way that he encouraged an Othello-like myth about himself as an “extravagant and wheeling stranger/Of here and every where,” descended from Senegalese African princes. Eliding his New York roots, Aldridge referred to himself as the African Roscius. The combination of his own exploitation of race and the liberal Russian championing of Aldridge and Shakespeare as symbols of opposition to tyranny thus worked together to conflate Bard, actor, race, and role.

If in progressive circles Russians admired Aldridge’s performances and used them to further their own, Slavophiles and supporters of serfdom saw only “Savage, wild flesh in earrings” or, simply, “stupidity” (Alekseev 1965:

542). Similarly, while Shakespeare's naturalization was perceived by Russian Westernizers as a way of revealing Russia's growth into cultural maturity, the Slavophile opposition regarded the domestication of the bard as an intrusion and an admission of backwardness and provincialism. Even worse, Shakespeare by a black American actor was an act of cultural colonization and, more, of degradation. In Moscow, Russian actors at the Maly (Alexandrinsky) Theatre refused to perform with Aldridge. In direct response to this affront offered by a black performing Shakespeare, Vasili Samoilov hurriedly prepared *Othello* and *Lear*, deliberately performing them at the Maly at the same time that Aldridge was acting elsewhere. But, notwithstanding the Russian's attempt to appeal to native honour, the auditorium was not as full as at Aldridge's performances. Nor did Samoilov's performances, according to the reviewers, reach the same heights of power as Aldridge, whom actors now began to study and emulate.¹

While extremists derided the "wildness" of Aldridge's performances, in fact, the great majority were astonished by his restraint, particularly by comparison with the melodramatic posturings and declamatory style of Russian actors. Théophile Gauthier, who anticipated a "vigorous, somewhat uncontrolled, a little wild and fierce" *Othello*, found, instead, a "decorous," "majestically classical" and "gentlemanly" *Othello*, whom he compared to Macready (Gauthier 1895: 254–256). Count Tolstoy's daughter, Ekaterina, similarly disappointed by the lack of a lurid *Othello*, was, at first, "*unpleasantly*" put off by the "simplicity" of Aldridge's acting (Marshall and Stock 1993: 224). Some critics drew surprised attention to his unaffected gait, which resembled that of a "normal" person rather than a tragedian. Indeed, Aldridge has been credited, along with Mikhail Shchepkin, with helping to encourage the growth of a Russian realistic school of acting well before the advent of Konstantin Stanislavsky.

Aldridge's *Lear* comprised one of his greatest Russian successes. Some critics preferred his *Lear* to his *Othello* because in the former he acted, while in the latter he was said to be "simply himself." Remaining in role as a feeble old man even after the play was over and after he acknowledged the audience's ovations, Aldridge particularly affected the Ukrainian bard Taras Shevchenko. The latter had been invited to the home of the Count and Countess Tolstoy to meet Aldridge and hear his "recitations from Shakespeare"; thereafter he attended a number of Aldridge's performances.

¹ Herbet Marshall and Mildred Stock have most exhaustively printed the responses to Aldridge in their biography of the actor. The Ukrainian translation of this book, however, also includes a separate chapter on Shevchenko and Aldridge authored by Oleksa Novyts'kyi "with the participation of Herbert Marshall." This chapter includes material not found in the original English biography of the black actor. Also useful is Errol Hill's *Shakespeare in Sable* and, for Russian readers, A. A. Alekseev's *Shekspir i russkaia kul'tura*.

Born a serf with a natural artistic talent, Shevchenko acquired his freedom from a reluctant master by the intervention of a small artistic circle, who raised the exorbitant sum by auctioning off a painting donated by the portraitist Karl Briullov. Shevchenko's new status of free man, not extended to his siblings, permitted him to study at the Imperial Arts Academy, which was otherwise barred to serfs. There, he obtained a good humanist education and learned French. Submitting "The Death of Lucrece" as his fulfillment of the Academy's historical theme, within nine years Shevchenko himself became a lecturer there, a young bohemian-about-town, attending the theatre, discussing ideas, painting, etching, and writing poetry and plays. He was lionized as the brightest young poet of his day, especially for his *Kobzar* [*The Bard*], which, among others, dealt with romantic themes of orphanhood, injustice, tyranny, and betrayal. From this period in the 1840s, the height of Anglomania and Romanticism, Shevchenko acquired his love of Shakespeare and melodrama – perhaps the only genre possible for a colonized people. He saw a number of productions of heroic, melodramatic Shakespeare on the lively stages of St. Petersburg and, in 1843, took the most *Sturm und Drang* scene of the plays and illustrated it with an etching: "King Lear and the Fool in the Midst of the Raging Elements."

Shevchenko's clandestine circulation of sharp political satires aimed against tyranny and the tsarist family past and present, as well as the suspicion that he belonged to a secret organization, the Brotherhood of Cyril and Methodius, earned him arrest without trial, a lifetime sentence as a private soldier, exile and – most severely and at the personal insistence of Tsar Nicholas I – a complete prohibition from painting and writing. Sent to the far reaches of the Russian empire, Shevchenko was later given some reading privileges, and most frequently requested two books in particular from his friends, the Bible and Shakespeare in Nikolai Ketcher's translation;² both represented spiritual sustenance, longing for truth, freedom and justice. For Shevchenko, Shakespeare was the apex of literary talent; thus, he conferred the epithet "Shakespearean" on works that he particularly admired. In response to the public reading of Marko Vovchok's short stories, he shouted out "Shakespeare! Shakespeare!" (Bilets'kyi 1964: 42).

Shevchenko's love of Shakespeare was, doubtless, tinged with some guilt. As a serf, he could hardly have had access to the Bard's works; only his freedom, provided by both Russian and Ukrainian friends, permitted his acquaintance with Shakespeare. As a Ukrainian, Shevchenko would not have been able to read the English writer in his own language, since, at the same time as Shakespeare was being translated, adapted and censored

² See Shevchenko's various requests in F. M. Bilets'kyi, "T. H. Shevchenko pro Vil'iama Shekspira," *Inozemna filolohiia* 1964, n° 1, pp. 39–40.

in Russian, in the “provinces,” most specifically in Ukraine, he was strictly prohibited in the Ukrainian language until the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, then, in his poetry, Shevchenko depicts himself as a hybrid, a “classically marginal or displaced figure – he is neither peasant nor nobleman, he can neither return to his past nor forget it nor deny it” (Grabowicz 1982: 145). Like the hybrid Aldridge, Shevchenko openly drew attention to his roots, totally identifying his personal fate with that of his nation: Ukraine as *slavus-esclavus*.

Shevchenko met Aldridge shortly after his release from nearly ten years of exile, an exile fortuitously shortened by the death of the Tsar and the constant lobbying of his friends, among them Count Tolstoy’s family. Shevchenko’s poetic works, however, continued to be banned in the empire, appearing in Ukraine only in 1905. For Shevchenko, Aldridge was the embodiment of a Shakespeare whom he had treasured and committed to memory in exile. His comment in a letter to the actor Mikhail Shchepkin, that Aldridge “performs wonders” on the stage and shows us a “living Shakespeare,” makes a great deal of sense (cited in Borshchagovskii 1939: 11). In Aldridge, he recognized, as did other progressive intellectuals, not only the whole history of Aldridge’s people (what the Russians saw), but also himself and his own people’s history. Shakespeare was the pellucid mirror in which receding colonialisms were discovered. Like blacks, Ukrainian actors were confined by tsarist edict to a “song-and-dance” theatre of lower class characters and caricatures, which served to confirm national stereotypes. Like the blacks in America, they also were prohibited from playing in or possessing their “own” Shakespeare. Shevchenko understood that even as Shakespeare spoke the language of the masters, he also gave voice to Aldridge, just as Russian Shakespeare had sustained Shevchenko in exile and provided the medium of this new friendship. With the help of fifteen-year-old Ekaterina Tolstoy, who acted as translator, Aldridge and Shevchenko exchanged songs and histories, both deeply moved by the other’s narrative, each seeing himself in the other.

In spite of the language barrier, through gestures, song and Shakespeare, Aldridge and Shevchenko became good friends, Shevchenko eventually drawing Aldridge’s portrait, and Aldridge requesting a copy of Shevchenko’s likeness from a mutual friend, the sculptor and artist Mykhailo Mykeshyn. Listening to an English he did not understand, remembering a Russian Shakespeare he had lovingly conned, Shevchenko watched Aldridge-Lear playing with actors speaking yet another language. As the Ukrainian’s colleague M. Savychev relates, Shevchenko was unable to repress his feelings during many of Aldridge’s performances. In one case, he expelled so many loud sighs and expressions of grief that Savychev’s mother was obliged to flee from her box in embarrassment and return home

before the end of the play (Savychev 1958: 395 in *Spohady*). Shevchenko's enraptured response to Aldridge's masterly control of his craft was also a keen response to the performance of injustice, as Mykeshyn's caricature of Shevchenko indicates. Standing, his forehead lowered and his fists clenched as if to control anger as much as enthusiasm, the pudgy Ukrainian poet hardly seems like a revolutionary. Mykeshyn's scribble alongside the cartoon comments, "Mutely enthralled by Ira Aldridge" (Novyts'kyi following, 1966: 200).

As a metonymy of exile and solitude, of interconnected levels of colonizer and colonized (and thus a thoroughly Romantic situation), the encounter between Aldridge and Shevchenko suggests the complexity of Shakespeare's cultural "work" in Russia: simultaneously solace, connection, pleasure, opposition to tyranny, and a mark of colonialism. Yet, notwithstanding the double colonialism (a Shakespeare acquired by Russian masters from Germany and France), Shevchenko's Shakespeare provided the *lingua franca* of their meeting in the highest social circles. If not free from imperialist taint, Shakespeare nonetheless could appear to present a counter to tribalism and intolerance.

Aldridge and Shevchenko's "natural" affinity for each other, expressed in their instant friendship, was also so regarded by the aristocrats of the Tolstoy household, although at least one account unknowingly portrays it as a natural alliance of subalterns. Ekaterina Tolstoy (later Mrs. Yunge), the intermediary by virtue of her knowledge of languages in the meetings between Aldridge and Shevchenko, later recalled that Aldridge

was a sincere, good, careless, trusting, and loving child. His character was very similar to that of Shevchenko, with whom he became very close. It would happen that Aldridge would come in with his quick, energetic step and at once ask, "And the artist?" That is what he called Shevchenko, for every attempt of his to pronounce that name ended with his shaking with laughter over his hopeless attempts ... (cited in Marshall and Stock 1958: 242)

Post-colonialists and feminists will immediately recognize in Tolstoy-Yunge's easy conflation of the characteristics of the black actor with that of Shevchenko the portrait of the subaltern or the "other," possessing the characteristics of an amiable, emotional and loving child, one man not at all distinct from the other.³ Nearly fifty years later, in 1913, the painter Leonid Pasternak, father of the rather more-famous Boris, recreated this

³ Similarly, Zvantsev characterized Aldridge as possessing both a "leonine and at the same time childlike nature" (cited in Marshall and Stock 1958: 232). Panaev, who highly praised Aldridge's Othello, drew attention to his childlike innocence which nonetheless somehow revealed a tiger underneath. Panaev also begins his review in *Sovremennik* by first emphasizing that Aldridge is more like a Moor than a black; his lips aren't quite so thick (Morozov 1939: 56).

scene in a drawing reproduced here. Pasternak extends the similarities “observed” by Tolstoy-Yunge into the physical realm. Aldridge’s African characteristics are echoed in the thick features and apparently dark skin of the Ukrainian who, looking intently at the declaiming actor, studies him for a sketch. From the imperial perspective, both are engaged in “exotic” and unusual activities: the black as actor, the former serf as painter. By comparison, Shevchenko’s own drawing of Aldridge (his portrait has not survived) shows the black’s warmth and nobility in a conventional pose, while his self-portrait of about this time, reveals a sensitive artist looking frankly but tentatively out of the darkness at the viewer.

Yet, lest the critic too quickly position herself against Pasternak, the complexity of the originary intercultural and multilingual moment of Aldridge-Shevchenko’s meeting and, more, its subsequent significance, prevents any such easy division into powerful and powerless, master and subaltern. If some Russian actors at first refused to perform with Aldridge, others were irrevocably changed by him. When Aldridge departed from St. Petersburg, he was presented with a massive bracelet inscribed “To Ira Aldridge, the great interpreter of the immortal Shakespeare, from the Russian Artists, St. Petersburg, 1858.” If Aldridge was a victim of colonialism, he was also a “colonizer” or, as he was called by a number of Russians, a Shakespearean “propagandist.” Travelling not only to large centres, he also toured provincial towns throughout the empire, popularizing Shakespeare’s name and plays. While his effect on the Germans is unknown, in addition to Russian actors and literati, he also made a lasting impression and effect on Ukrainian actors, playwrights and translators. Accompanying Shevchenko in some of his meetings with Aldridge, Pantelimon Kulish would go on to become the first major translator of Shakespeare into Ukrainian. The then young Ukrainian actor Ivan Karpenko-Karyi (stage name of Ivan Tobilevych) and later playwright (authoring nearly 40 plays) was so moved by the experience of seeing Aldridge perform that he was still recreating the black’s intonations and gestures thirty years later, passing them on to a younger generation of actors.

After the death of Shevchenko in 1861, Aldridge toured Ukraine, including Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa, bringing Shakespeare, sometimes illegally, to the stage. When *Macbeth*, *Richard III* and *King Lear* were banned throughout Russia by tsarist decree, Aldridge continued to perform the plays by the simple expedient of not printing posters announcing his performance. By the time the authorities discovered what he staged, he had already moved on to another city. With renewed waves of repression beginning in 1862, Aldridge was no longer welcome in Russia. His perambulations finally ended with his death in 1867 in d, Poland, another country for which he symbolized opposition to tyranny.

With all of its layers of meaning, Aldridge's meeting with Shevchenko begs the classical post-colonial question, "Who can speak for the colonized?" (Shakespeare seems to have, at least in part, done so.) But perhaps even more important is Lear's question paraphrased, "handy-dandy", "Who is the colonizer? Who is the colonized?"

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