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## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: THE AGE OF CONSENT, OR CONCERN? THE RISE OF DEMOCRATIC IMPERIALISM AND 'FALL' OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE <sup>1</sup>

This paper examines political events which have marked the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and demonstrates how 'democratic imperialism', on the march in the world today, extorts cultural support for military interventions through ideological interference with education and the arts. Besides the rewriting of history, one of the most dangerous strategies used to promote it involves conversion of artists' concern into consent, either through misinterpretation of old masters or through massive promotion of our contemporaries willing to be prudent and timely, that is politically correct and supportive of the neo-imperial project.

**Key words:** democratic imperialism, educational reforms, William Shakespeare, Peter Sellars, Bernard Shaw, Harold Pinter, Vaclav Havel, Mario Varga Llosa, Augusto Boal

In his book *Late Victorian Holocausts*, published in 2001, Mike Davis tells the story of famines that killed between 12 and 29 million Indians. These people were, he demonstrates, murdered by British state policy. When an El Niño drought destituted the farmers of the Deccan plateau in 1876 there was a net surplus of rice and wheat in India. But the viceroy, Lord Lytton, insisted that nothing should prevent its export to England. In 1877 and 1878, at the height of the famine, grain merchants exported a record 6.4m hundredweight of wheat. As the peasants began to starve, officials

1 Рад је био објављен у Зборнику радова ЈЕЗИК, КЊИЖЕВНОСТ, ПОЛИТИКА, Универзитет у Нишу, Филозофски факултет, Ниш: Филозофски факултет, 2007, стр.189-211, ISBN 978-86-7379-144-9 УДК 821.163.41-4. Прештампава се уз сагласност уредништва Зборника.

Текст представља верзију предавања одржаног новембра 2006. године у част прославе 35. годишњице оснивања Катедре за англистику у Нишу. Део података коришћен је и априла 2007. године за излагање на конференцији у Лидсу, посвећену прослави 50. годишњице Пинтеровог стваралаштва. Рад изложен на тој коференцији, *Уметници и генерали – Пинтер, Хавел и Зиџмунд Бауман*, бавио се анализом три различита става према бомбардовању Југославије 1999. године, и три различита односа према политици силе. Харолд Пинтер је прочитао овај текст и на основу њега предложио да професор Богоева-Седлар прими почасни докторат у његово име.

were ordered “to discourage relief works in every possible way”. The Anti-Charitable Contributions Act of 1877 prohibited “at the pain of imprisonment private relief donations that potentially interfered with the market fixing of grain prices”. The only relief permitted in most districts was hard labour, from which anyone in an advanced state of starvation was turned away. In the labour camps, the workers were given less food than inmates of Buchenwald. In 1877, monthly mortality in the camps equated to an annual death rate of 94%. As millions died, the imperial government launched “a militarised campaign to collect the tax arrears accumulated during the drought”. The money, which ruined those who might otherwise have survived the famine, was used by Lytton to fund his war in Afghanistan. George Manbiot, *Guardian*, December 27, 2005: ‘*How Britain Denies Its Holocausts*’ (*The Turks haven’t learned the British way of denying past atrocities. It is not illegal to discuss the millions who were killed under our empire. So why do so few people know about them?*)

(The British people) have the Shakespearean capacity to come out of their own soul and to bear for a while the soul of a foreigner. (...) From the frozen north of Canada to hot and sunny India and South Africa they are learning and teaching, always preferring rather to learn than to teach ... They respect those different souls which inhabit their great Empire. They love this mosaic. The founder of this Empire, I think, is Shakespeare. He laid the foundation, he gave the soul, yea the programme for such a big mosaic body. He, king Shakespeare. Shakespeare is the primordial creator and inspirer of the British Empire; the Cromwells, Elizabeths, Georges, Victorias, Pitts, and Gladstones – the secondary masons on the great building. (...). To possess such an Empire, to know how to rule it, how to treat it, how to make it move forward towards progress and civilization – for that is needed a special education. This education Shakespeare could give to the British nation. Father Nicholas Velimirovic, speech delivered in London in 1916, at the celebration of the tercentenary of the Great Poet of Great Britain

You have among you many a purchased slave, / Which, like your asses, and your dogs and mules, / You use in abject and in slavish parts, / Because you bought them; shall I say to you, / Let them be free, marry them to your heirs? / Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds / Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates / Be seasoned with such viands? You will answer / ”The slaves are ours...” Shylock to the Christians in the Court of Justice, William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, 1

On September 10, 2001, a day before the 9/11 attack on America, the *Guardian* ended its special reports on the World Conference Against Racism, in Durban South Africa<sup>2</sup>, with the news that eight prostitutes murdered an Italian delegate to the UN conference - victim they claimed

2 Special report: UN conference against racism, *Guardian Unlimited*  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/unracism/0,,547811,00.html>

they only meant to rob. Much less spectacular and attention grabbing was the *Guardian* report on the political prostitution which only a day earlier, on September 9, killed the conference itself: “European intransigence forced African states to back down on virtually every demand over an apology and reparations for trans-Atlantic slavery.” Under this headline the *Guardian* recorded the shameful fact that at the very beginning of the new millennium, 2001 year after the birth of Christ, sixteen Christian countries of the European Union and America refused to allow slavery to be called a crime against humanity, refused to apologize for it (although they expressed regret), and refused to pay reparations for the exploitation of human and natural resources of their former colonies. Morally and legally Europe and the US defended the claim that they owe nothing to the people they had for centuries used as unpaid labor. On the contrary: the Durban conference legitimized the absurd state of things where Africa today owes its former white masters a debt it will never be able to repay, providing them with new opportunities to disguise their continued shameless profiteering ventures as humanitarian interventions.

The Durban conference, and the events of 9/11 which can be seen as a kind of response to it, or ‘answer’, uncovered unresolved issues that have continued to trouble the twenty first century. Even though the conference was held in Durban to honor Gandhi, whose own fight against racism and discrimination began there, and despite all the media supported effort to create the impression that imperial forms of injustice have been left behind, the conference only made it obvious that nothing of the sort has in fact happened. The events that followed confirm this. It is perhaps because of what took place in Durban in 2001 that in 2006, in preparation for the 2007 bicentenary celebration of the abolition of slavery, the Archbishop of Canterbury reopened the debate on colonialism by emphasizing the role played by the Christian churches in the spread and legitimization of slavery.<sup>3</sup> In the nineteenth century, he reminded his listeners, the official Church of England still possessed slaves on its plantation in Barbados, and reluctantly parted with them 26 years after the abolition laws were passed. The reparation denied to Africa at Durban in 2001 was, at that time, readily given by the Government of Great Britain to the slave-owning bishops of the church of Christ.

His public appeals, regardless of what motives truly lie behind them, have not been taken up by the Queen or the other branches of govern-

3 ‘Archbishop Urges Church to Consider Slavery Reparations: The Church of England should contemplate paying reparations for its historical role in the slave trade, the Archbishop of Canterbury said today’ (<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/132020.html>)

ment.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary. For quite some time now (perhaps from the 1982 Falkland war) Great Britain has openly pursued an idea of greatness that has very little to do with ethics.<sup>5</sup> In 2005 Gordon Brown visited the graves of the soldiers of the Empire in Dar es Salam, Tanzania (for years a base for the African National Congress and its war against apartheid in South Africa and white colonialism elsewhere) and said that Britain must stop apologizing for its colonial past. “I have talked to many people on my visit to Africa and the days of Britain having to apologize for its colonial history are over”, he claimed. “We must move forward. We should celebrate much of our past rather than apologize for it. And we should talk, and rightly so, about British values that are enduring, because they stand for some of the greatest ideas in history: tolerance, liberty, civic duty, that grew in Britain and influenced the rest of the world. Our strong traditions of fair play, of openness, of internationalism, these are great British values.”<sup>6</sup>

Brown, a historian trained at the University of Edinburgh and a son of a minister of the Church of Scotland, was not affected by the fact that in response to the British increasingly more frequent and unabashed pitches for return to patriotism/imperialism, the president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, launched an aggressive assault on the British Empire’s record in Africa in general, and Sir Winston Churchill’s part in it in particular.<sup>7</sup> Now in the role of a Prime Minister Brown will probably remain equally unaffected by the views of the leading British historians (William Dalrymple, Maria Misra)<sup>8</sup> who have, in 2007, criticized him

4 BBCNEWS Tuesday, 27 March 2007: ‘Protester disrupts slavery service (Human rights campaigner Toyin Agbetu said that the Queen had to say sorry for her ancestors. “The monarch and the Government and the church are all in there patting themselves on the back,” he said. NATIONAL NEWS, May 31, 2007 [http://www.finalcall.com/art,am/publish/printer\\_3556.shtml](http://www.finalcall.com/art,am/publish/printer_3556.shtml) “Britain’s queen helps celebrate Jamestown’s murderous past,” by Saeed Shabazz.

“In her remarks she did not acknowledge the injustices to millions of Africans and Native Americans; or acknowledge the role England played in our holocaust. This should be a wake up call to us that the leaders of the White world will not give us justice. We must organize.”

5 Even though all of the murderous interventions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been sold to the public under most ethical and moral pretensions, the people’s ‘reading’ of the events was best expressed by the slogan many protesters carried during the anti Iraq war rally: “No ethics please, we are British!”

6 Daily Mail, 15/01/05: It’s time to celebrate the Empire, says Brown, by Benedict Brogan.

7 Speaking to the Sudanese assembly in Khartoum, Mbeki said that British imperialists such as Churchill traveled to South Africa and the Sudan doing terrible things wherever they went. More recently India’s activists, who are pressuring Britain to apologize for forced conversion of Hindus to Christianity, quoted on the internet excerpts from Churchill’s 1919 documents which reveal orders he had given for the use of poisoned gas against Kurds and Afghans. In the document Churchill criticizes subordinates who are squeamish about applying the discoveries of western science to war and speaks of the right of the more advanced nations to dispossess the ‘lesser breeds’.

8 Sundayheareald, July 22, 2007: “Brown needs to ‘stop glorifying the Empire’, by Senay Baztas.

for continued glorification of the British Empire and for the repetition, in Iraq, of the mistakes made by Britain in India in the past. The stance he has taken is shared and supported by other former European colonial powers and reveals the true nature of the so called 'democratic imperialism' around which Europe is forging its Union, under the umbrella of its Orwellian NATO Partnership for Peace.

It has been insufficiently observed that what Gordon Brown professes sounds very much like the version of British history presented and promoted by the historian Simon Shama, author of the popular series *A History of Britain*, produced in 2000 by the BBC and The History Channel. Services rendered by Shama, as well as by the makers of the 2002 documentary *The British Empire in Colour*, are considerable, and in one sense represent a new step in the art of ideological manipulation. What was hidden in previous accounts of British history (hidden as, for example, in Michael Heneke's eponymous film, the events that took place in Paris on October 17, 1961<sup>9</sup>) stands in these newly produced versions of the past exposed and revealed: the task of the historian is to convince the viewers that the historical horrors they are witnessing are not really horrors but manifestations and demonstrations of 'strong traditions' of fair play, tolerance, liberty, civic duty, openness, internationalism - British values Brown wishes to celebrate. The effort is to normalize the unthinkable and interpret, somehow, the exploitation and extermination of millions of people in India, Ireland, Africa, Australia, as the march of civilization and enlightenment. This intent is evident in the comments and conclusions drawn by the presenters. It remains, however, equally

9 A text by Courtney Traub, written on March 6, 2006, can be found in the internet selection *Best of IDENTIFY 2006*. It is entitled "Grappling with ghosts: In its post-colonial era, France rethinks its identity". In it Traub recalls the incident that took place 17/10, 1961. "I was thrown into the Seine, but I escaped," says Mr. Tahar, an Algerian-born French resident in his 70s, interviewed by Traub. "The police lined us up and asked who could swim. Those who said, they could had their hands bound behind their back and were tossed over. I pretended I couldn't swim," Mr Tahar adds, without a flinch. He is accompanied by another elderly man whose eyes well up with tears. The latter won't give his name but says he, too, was there. It was on that night, with France in the midst of a brutal war to suppress then-French Algeria's independence movement, that 20,000 to 30, 0000 French Muslims and their supporters staged an unarmed protest against a discriminatory curfew in Paris. Police Chief Maurice Papon, once a Nazi collaborator who detained over 1,5000 French Jews during the World War II German occupation, deployed forces to suppress the demonstration. Nearly half a century later, France has only begun to seriously consider what many historians say really happened that night: around 200 protesters shot, beaten to death, or drowned, 200 unaccounted for, and thousands arrested or tortured." <http://inthe fray.com/html/print.php?sid=1564> With such evidence, the question whether "to go forward, as Brown and Sarkozy wish, by defending and reinforcing lies about the past, or whether to comprehend what really happened so that meaningful and all-encompassing 'reparation' can begin, is one of the key questions of our time. See also Johann Hari's text in *The Independent* 10/07/07: *Inside France's Secret War* which deals with what France is doing in Africa now.

evident that in the historical records themselves there is nothing to celebrate but much to deplore and wish to change radically.

In the ideological brotherhood of Europe the newly elected French president Nicolas Sarkozy has, like Gordon Brown, repeatedly promised the French a renewed pride in their colonial past. On Friday, 27 July 2007, Sarkozy delivered a speech in Senegal, in which he made reference to African peasants, said that colonialism was not the cause of all of Africa's problems, and denied that France had ever exploited an African country. He explained himself by saying: "The tragedy of Africa is that the African has never really entered into history ... They have never really launched themselves into the future ... The African peasant, who for thousands of years has lived according to the seasons, whose life ideal was to be in harmony with nature, only knew the eternal renewal of time ... In this imaginary world, where everything starts over and over again, there is room neither for human endeavour, nor for the idea of progress ... The problem of Africa ... is to be found here. Africa's challenge is to enter to a greater extent into history ... It is to realize that the golden age that Africa is forever recalling will not return, because it has never existed."<sup>10</sup>

Similar views were on his mind even earlier. In 2006, the ninety-three year old Aime Cesaire, renowned writer and activist from Martinique (author of a book on the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture, teacher and mentor of Frantz Fanon, dramatist who has penned his own version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) refused to meet Sarkozy, then the leader of the Union for a Popular Movement, because the UMP had voted for the law, passed on February 23, 2005, which requires teachers and textbooks used in French high-schools to "acknowledge and recognize in particular the positive role of the French presence abroad, especially in North Africa." In Martinique, colonized by France in the mid 17th-century, the law amounted to a justification of "the extermination of peoples, the eradication of indigenous cultures and widespread looting" that France was guilty of in many colonized lands. The law to which Cesaire objected was considered by many prominent figures an eulogy to colonialism and French actions during the Algerian War. It was finally repealed by President Jacques Chirac but Sarkozy's election to the presidency indicates that, under his sponsorship, the repealed views will have a continued life. Not, however, without continued protest.

Centre Culturel Francais in Belgrade published its September-December 2005 program with a special section entitled *L'Afrique, c'est chic!* Il-

<sup>10</sup> In the Wikipedia article on Nicolas Sarkozy.

lustrated by a photograph of a naked African fashion model in furs<sup>11</sup> (and followed by a list of other events offered in celebration of Europe's cultural and political heritage) the caption proposed that, today, being an African in France is 'cool'. The authors of this concept must have been very disturbed when in October 2005 the street-riots all over France belied their claim and brought into the spotlight Africans who felt not cool or chic but uneducated, unemployed, neglected, desperate. The riots that broke out the next year revealed more. What the restoration of the imperial ideology implies had become a lived experience for many, and not the likes of Aime Cesaire and the underprivileged Arab immigrants only. The students of the Sorbonne and the College de France took to the streets in March of 2006 because they saw themselves, in their own words, as a Kleenex generation, as disposable and unprotected slaves in the labor market that has freed employers from any humane concerns and restored to them the right to exploit and ruin human lives for unlimited personal profit. It is to be expected that, in Sarkozy's France, after the revision of history books, Balzac and Hugo and Zola will no longer be required reading.

In the momentum which the promotion of the ideology of 'democratic imperialism' is acquiring, attempts have been made to whitewash the Belgian colonial involvement in the Congo as well, in spite the fact that, as recently as 2003, filmmaker Peter Bate directed a shocking documentary *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death*,<sup>12</sup> about this country's

11 The designers were probably unaware of the story of Saarljite, or Sara Baartman, the so called Hottentot Venus, who (like the model in their program brochure) wore fur over her naked body when she was displayed to the French in 1814. One of the reviewers of the documentary made about her prior to the 2002 transport of her remains from the Musee de l'Homme in Paris to South Africa, has this to say about Sara's European experiences: "It is necessary to distinguish between the English and French periods of residence of the Hottentot Venus to better understand her place in the development of scientific racism in nineteenth century Europe. In England she was a living „curiosity“ such as had been displayed since Elizabethan times, a „savage“ from one of the ends of the world, demonstrating the lowest human and perhaps the highest non-human end of the Great Chain of Being. The main public fascination was with the backward thrust of her derriere which validated and presaged the past and future female dress fashion of big rear bustles. In France, by contrast, she was dressed in furs and accompanied by a black servant, in the manner of an expensive courtesan. Her fascination was private rather than public, for an elite versed in a long-established French literary tradition of pornographic curiosity with Khoel/ „Hottentot“ female genitalia. Neil Parsons, (Review of *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman, the Hottentot Venus*,“ H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews, December, 2001). Besides *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (1998) South African filmmaker Zola Maseko has also directed *The Return of Sara Baartman* (2003). Interest in Bartman's case continues to grow. The Guardian published Rachel Holmes' article on Sara Baartman (*Flesh made fantasy*) as recently as March 31, 2007.

12 *Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death*, directed by Peter Bate, Belgium 2003. Shown on BBC Four on Wednesday, 4 April 2007. "The story of King Leopold II and Belgium's brutal colonization of central Africa, turning it into a vast rubber-harvesting labor camp in which millions died."

share in the colonial heritage of Europe. The film makes references to Conrad's eye-witness report of the Congo in the *Heart of Darkness* in order to confirm the veracity of what the viewers of the documentary are shown - unspeakable European 'civilizing' methods used by Leopold II to acquire and exploit a region 80 times the size of Belgium. In the spirit of the restoration of imperialism that is afoot, a discarded statue of the monarch was recently re-erected in Kinshasa. Due to public protests it stayed up only for a day, but the intention of the Ministry of Culture was to use it to encourage the people of Congo to review their attitudes toward their colonial masters and think of the good sides of colonialism.<sup>13</sup>

The synchronized pan-European efforts to rehabilitate the past (meaning imperialism, Europe's single ambition and enduring paradigm) have been criticized and resisted, when perceived. Several years ago the Berkeley based cultural journal *Bad Subjects* ridiculed Stanley Kurtz, research fellow at the Hoover Institute at Stanford, partly for his Conradian name and mostly for his article "*Democratic Imperialism: A Blueprint*". The *Bad Subjects* reviewer saw Kurtz's text, which appeared in the April 2003 issue of *Policy Studies*, as one of the more egregious examples of the emergent wave of unapologetic defenses of colonialism and imperialism. "One might have thought," writes Joe Lockard "after over a century of explicit anti-colonial literature, mass political movements throughout former Euro-American colonies, anti-colonial conflicts involving tens of millions dead, and the resounding triumph of anti-colonialism, that such nonsense would remain confined to a lunatic fringe incapable of the articulateness that Kurtz, Niall Ferguson and Daniel Kruger on the British side of the Atlantic, and other advocates of neo-imperialism can bring to bear. In the immediate aftermath of the Iraq invasion, however, an expanding class of right-wing US intellectuals is in the midst of servicing political needs to rationalize the establishment and maintenance of local rulers who putatively share those much over-estimated beliefs called 'Western values.'<sup>14</sup>

The wave of apologists has, unfortunately, continued to rise, and the class of intellectuals (and 'artists'), servicing political needs and providing rationalizations, has continued to expand. *Cambridge Schol-*

13 BBC News, Friday, 4 February 2005: *DR Congo's Leopold statue removed*. Among other things the report states: "Congo's Culture Minister Christophe Muzunga said he had personally made the decision to reinstate the statue, arguing people should see the positive aspects of the king as well as the negative."

14 Joe Lockard, *Iraq's New English Studies*, *Bad Subjects*, Sunday May 11, 2003.

Lockard writes: "The currency of the phrase 'imperialism,' which had once been the province of either history texts or marginal elements of the Left, recently has been revived and revitalized by right-wing Anglo-American intellectuals with close access to political power."



ars Publishing lists January 1, 2004 as the publication date of another book on *Democratic Imperialism*. The volume with this title (edited by Filip Spagnoli who in 2002 earned his PhD in political philosophy from the University of Brussels in Belgium) promises to enlighten the readers on how to universalize democracy and human rights by explaining which actions and which instruments are to be considered permissible in the execution of the noble democratic imperial project. In 2005, a year after Spagnoli, one more author, Avery Plow, presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association a paper entitled *Democratic Imperialism: The Emerging Paradigm of U.S. Foreign Policy*. Besides describing the main features of democratic imperialism, and demonstrating how it can be defended within the context of international law, the paper in particular shows how democratic imperialism coheres well with the idea of 'conditional sovereignty' (suspension of the rights of sovereignty and justification of interventions) which is gaining prominence<sup>15</sup>.

Some comfort may be derived from the fact that in 2007 Christopher Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe and Alexander Gourevitch edited *Politics Without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations*<sup>16</sup>, as well as from the fact that in July of 2005, in spite of all the neo-colonial and neo-imperialist propaganda, Melvyn Bragg had to announce that over one million listeners of his BBC Radio 4 program voted Marx the greatest philosopher of all time. But, it has to be kept in mind that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has just begun and that in the course of its first five years two countries have been invaded and are in the process of being destroyed, and many more stand threatened with the same fate. With such a record it is obvious that the situation calls not for our consent, but for our deepest concern. The resistance to the great neo-imperial project must be much greater than it currently is. A powerful 'manifesto' for this struggle was delivered by the Indian writer Arundhati Roy in her CESR sponsored lecture on Imperial Democracy, given in Harlem, on May 13, 2003, at the Riverside Church where in the past Nelson Mandela had spoken, and where Martin Luther King Jr. first protested the Vietnam War<sup>17</sup>. Roy's 'historical sense', which made it imperative for her to invest her individual talent into this critical tradition, came from her strenuous examination of the British imperial presence in India. For many others,

15 [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p39782\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p39782_index.html)

16 Bickerton, J./ Cunliffe, P./ Gourevitch, A. (eds.) (2007): *Politics Without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations*. London: University College London Press.

17 Roy's speech, whose full title is *Instant-Mix Imperial Democracy, Buy One, Get One Free*, was broadcast on live radio in five major U.S. cities, and is available on many internet sites: Znet, Third World Traveler, or OutlookIndia.com Magazine, the issue of May 26, 2003.

artists and 'laymen' alike, similar awakening of the historical sense was triggered by Shakespeare, by the critical examinations of history found in his plays. Rightly cherished for so many reasons, Shakespeare has endured, worldwide, because he continues to be such an enduring sources of critical insight into the true nature of Western values and the history they still generate.

***Are we to be the dunces of the Western world, brain-dead, dumbed down, easy to control?***

In 2001, in another infamous beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, British government's adviser on education, proposed changes to the syllabuses in UK schools which meant that "English students would learn about media studies and writing on the internet, but would not have to study Shakespeare"<sup>18</sup> The draft proposals horrified many UK teachers who could not imagine that Shakespeare may be taken off the English syllabus to be replaced by internet studies. Even when these proposals to re-shape English studies were withdrawn (like Sarkozy's law-enforced revisions of French history) the fact that such reforms had even been considered was widely seen as cause for concern. Are Britons to become the dunces of the western world? was the question asked by the Daily Telegraph in its comment on the QCA intention to have Chaucer, Shakespeare and Joyce dropped from the required reading lists.

All those whose protest was recorded in the BBC report and elsewhere, in their defense of the importance of literature in modern education, said the obvious: a college professor from Reading observed that the government is very aware of what employers want, but that education without literature would mean that key cultural elements of Britain would be lost. For professor Park Honan, there are, in Shakespeare, insights and benefits of 5000 other writers, which is why Honan considers him to be the best antidote to the dumbing-down going on almost everywhere in society today. Poet Craig Raine insisted that those people who want to make English 'user-friendly' and replace it with the study of beer mats, bus tickets, and neighbors (at the expense of literature) must admit that Shakespeare is manifestly richer than soap operas. Deploring the QCA's proposal J. G. Ballard recognized in their strategy "the sort of Charles Saatchi approach to education, a sort of popularizing of everything. It will create a vacant, trend-hunting society. Maybe that is what

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<sup>18</sup> BBC NEWS, Tuesday, 8 February 2001 (Non-Shakespeare English move denied).

the government want? A nation of brain-dead, dumbed down people who are easy to control. Studying Shakespeare teaches you to examine language word by word.... If you study it when you are young it stays with you and enriches your life forever. Without any doubt he is the greatest writer in the English language.”<sup>19</sup>

In pondering over the QCA move many have asked the same crucial question: what does the government want? Trying to find an answer novelist, critic, and journalist Philip Hensher observes: “Even if you aren’t given to conspiracy theories, it is hard to suppress the thought that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the government’s advisory board on state education, is pursuing a long term class war of devilish ingenuity. Let’s not educate them; let’s keep them ignorant; let’s discourage them from ever reading a book; and we, the leisured rich, will face a future of lolling in our red velvet dressing-gowns, fed Turkish Delight by a whole generation of illiterate, epsilon-minus semi-morons.” What astonishes Hensher even more is the fact that the wonderful comprehensive education he received as a child was supplied by a council lead by the same man, David Blunkett, who now, he says, “presides over an unutterably degraded system.”<sup>20</sup>

Equally strong words are used by Sir Frank Kermode (Britain’s foremost literary critic and one of the most distinguished Shakespeareans of his age, now in his ninth decade) who thinks that Universities are being driven by madmen, and education, in general, run by lunatics. He remembers that in the 1950s the study of English had powerful ethical implications, powerful social implications, which are now gone. That is what, in his view, makes the fading of the importance of literature (once regarded not just as important, but the most valuable intellectual and moral activity a civilized man or a woman could pursue) a matter of profound concern. He remembers towering figures such as FR Leavis, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Northrop Frye, under whose scholarship the loss of ethical and social relevance of literature could never happen. But such figures are gone, replaced, Kermode says, by some very good scholarship and “an immense amount of rubbish.”<sup>21</sup>

Kermode’s and Hensher’s observations can be taken a step farther, and the planned ‘fall’ of Shakespeare from the secondary school curriculums connected with the rise of democratic imperialism. As T. S. Eliot accurately perceived, Shakespeare (like Marx, we may add) had a

19 Shakespeare, February 2001, [http://nomuzak.co.uk/evidence\\_1..html](http://nomuzak.co.uk/evidence_1..html)

20 Hensher, Philip, *The Spectator*, *What do they know of English*, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3724/is\\_200102/ai\\_n8948159/print](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3724/is_200102/ai_n8948159/print)

21 The Ideas interview: Frank Kermode, *The Guardian*, Tuesday August 29, 2005.

remarkable historical sense which is why he had problems turning European political practices, disguised today behind the word democracy, into celebrations. The tradition that Brown applauds, Shakespeare criticizes: the slave-owning Greek ‘democrats’, the equally slave-owning aspirants to democracy in Rome, the Elizabethans whose queen (as the disruptor of this year’s celebration of the abolition of slavery reminded the British) was eager to send ships to Africa to look for the profitable human cargo, the early-modern Christian Venetians (good because they were financially ‘sufficient’) whose claims to moral authority Shylock undermines by reminding them of their ‘many purchased slaves’. He would have probably viewed with the same disgust the slave owning Thomas Jefferson, and Bush and Blaire who brought ‘freedom and democracy’ to Afghanistan and Iraq in the traditional European way – over the dead bodies of more than million innocent civilians. In King John Shakespeare does not mention the Magna Carta because it must have been clear to him that it had less to do with real democracy and more with traditional European hypocrisy.<sup>22</sup>

Shakespeare was appalled by the crimes committed in history, by the never ending story of what Europe’s privileged elites allowed themselves to do to the people they were in the position to exploit and despise. Indeed, this (and not imperialism) is the kind of education Shakespeare could give to the British nation - critical understanding and moral and emotional intelligence with which to move forward, not by consenting to what Blaire or Gordon Brown wish to do, but by dissenting and breaking free from the arrogance, ignorance, injustice and deceit which the mighty so commonly practiced throughout history. A nation truly brought up on Shakespeare would not have had to wait for the Archbishop of Canterbury to remind them, in 2007, of the inhumanity of slavery and the shameful role the church had played in its spread and legitimization. But, if imperialism is to be ‘normalized’ and practiced again (with the word ‘democratic’ attached, to make it more palatable) critics whose works might lead people to recognize the true nature of the processes they are engulfed by, have to be eliminated. Shakespeare

<sup>22</sup> In Michael Ondaatje’s novel *The English Patient* (1992), in a scene cut from the very popular Hollywood movie, the Seek sapper Kip has this to say to ‘the English patient’ when he hears that a nuclear bomb has been dropped on Hiroshima: “My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. But we, oh, we were easily impressed by speeches and medals and your ceremonies.” When he is told that the man is perhaps not English he responds: “American, French, I don’t care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you’re an Englishman. You had King Leopold of Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You all learned it from the English.” Ondaatje, M. (1993): Toronto: Vintage Books. Pp. 284-286.

included, since those affected (or infected) with his approach to history tend to develop heretical, politically incorrect interpretations of historical events, and breed trouble.

One such 'subversive,' American theatre director Peter Sellars, who studied both Shakespeare and his own time carefully, cast a black actor in the role of Shylock in the performance of *The Merchant of Venice* he staged after the 1992 Los Angeles riots. He did so because he wished to highlight what he understood to be the historical bond between these two groups of discriminated and despised victims. Speaking before an Australian audience in 1999, and thinking about our future in the new millennium, the Bardolatrous Sellars said: "The question is how can we now put back at the centre of our artistic practice what has formed the power of artistic practice through history but has been missing hugely in the last generation, which is very simply social justice. You have without social justice no Sophocles, no Shakespeare, no Maurier - these are the people who put the issue of social justice at the centre not at that margin. Shakespeare called his theatre the globe, not the corner. Shakespeare was about thinking globally, about finding your place in the world creatively".<sup>23</sup> It is on the last word that the emphasis must fall. The imperial tradition does not have much to say about finding your way in the world creatively. Bush and Blair claim that they invade sovereign countries because justice is at the centre of their concern; yet, in the pursuit of justice in Iraq, for example, they managed to destroy more innocent civilians than the 'killer' they came to 'liberate' the Iraqi people from. The 'kings' in Europe continue to grow old without becoming wise, in spite the fact that Shakespeare's *Lear* must have been on their reading lists at some point in their student life.

This may be so because Shakespeare, like the *Bible*, can be read and interpreted in many different ways, with different but equally serious outcomes and consequences. When in his preface to *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*,<sup>24</sup> Bernard Shaw defends Shakespeare from certain claims made about him by his friend Richard Harris (for instance that Shakespeare was a sycophant and an enemy of democracy) he reminds the public that "whoever will read *Lear* and *Measure for Measure* will find stamped on his mind such an appalled sense of the danger of dressing man in a little brief authority, such a merciless stripping of the purple from the 'poor, bare, forked animal' that calls itself a king and fancies

<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia article on Peter Sellars.

Transcript of ABC Speech *Cultural Activism in the New Century*, August 19, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Shaw, B. (1910): *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*. The EServer Drama Collection on the net, 15-18.

itself a god, that one wonders what was the real nature of the mysterious restraint that kept 'Eliza and our James' from teaching Shakespear to be civil to crowned heads." Think of all that, Shaw insists, and think how Shakespeare was never forgiven for belittling Caesar, and then "believe, if you can, that Shakespear was one of them that 'crook the pregnant hinges of the knee where thrift may follow fawning.' Think of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Osric, the fop who annoyed Hotspur, and a dozen passages concerning such people! If such evidence can prove anything ... Shakespear loathed courtiers." Shakespeare saw the world, Shaw was happy to say, "if not exactly as Ibsen did (for it was not quite the same world), at least with much of Ibsen's power of penetrating its illusions and idolatries, and with all Swift's horror of its cruelty and uncleanness". In the final movement of his preface Shaw's analysis of Shakespeare turns into a definition of the task which is of paramount importance for the artist to perform: "It was not possible for a man of his powers" says Shaw, "to observe the political and moral conduct of his contemporaries without perceiving that they were incapable of dealing with the problems raised by their own civilization, and that their attempts to carry out the codes of law and to practise the religions offered to them by great prophets and law-givers were and still are so foolish that we now call for The Superman, virtually a new species, to rescue the world from mismanagement."

It was not possible for the British Nobel Laureate Harold Pinter to observe the political and moral conduct of his contemporaries, either, without perceiving how incapable of dealing with the problems raised by their own civilization they are. His life and work demonstrate what a true, and not merely formal, Shakespearean education can empower a man to do.<sup>25</sup> When better off boys got drunk in pubs and cafes, Pinter and his friends spent evenings walking, wrapped in discussions, intoxicated with literature, with the language of Shakespeare and Marlow and other great masters of English. As an actor in Anew McMaster's company, he played in Shakespeare's plays every night for a number of years. When he ultimately came to write, he was a fully fledged Shakespearean, not as an imitator or follower but as curious, perceptive and concerned student of life, and champion of imagination, compassion and justice. Shakespeare's historical sense helped him sharpen his own. It made him question the acts of those who claim to have 'moral authority' but only use their fist, and read, in the events of the twentieth and the twenty-first

<sup>25</sup> Harold Pinter's book *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948-2005*, begins with "A Note on Shakespeare" written in 1950.

century, a very different story from the one that Blair and Brown wish to make official.

Pinter used his Nobel Prize Lecture in 2005 to voice his concern and to repeat, this time for the audience the Nobel honor made available to him, views he had expressed for decades, perhaps since 1973, when on 9/11 in Chile, close to 20,000 people were killed in a CIA coup. In the Lecture Pinter documented his criticism carefully and asked, over the evidence he had presented, the question Shakespeare asked in every play he had written: “What has happened to our moral sensibility? Did we ever have any? What do these words mean? Do they refer to a term very rarely employed these days - conscience?” He closed his address with this definition of his stance: “I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the *real* truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory. If such a determination is not embodied in our political vision we have no hope of restoring what is so nearly lost to us - the dignity of man.”<sup>26</sup>

In his updated biography of Pinter Michael Billington writes that Pinter’s Nobel Prize Lecture was totally ignored by the BBC. “You would have thought” he says “that a living British dramatist’s views on his art and global politics might have been of passing interest to a public service broadcaster. There was, however, no reference to the speech on any of BBC TV’s new bulletins. Instead, as Pinter points out, *Newsnight* carried an item on how much President Bush loves dogs and how much dogs love him (lapdogs, presumably).”<sup>27</sup> A note sent to Pinter by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes explained and countered this neglect: Fuentes thanked Pinter for endorsing ‘the truth of the lie of art with a searing clarity that damns for ever the lies we are served as truth in politics.’<sup>28</sup>

One text, in which Pinter “damns the lies we are served as truth in politics”, must have been especially annoying to the Anglo-American governments who had, in the last decades of the twentieth century, openly cast themselves in the role of the Superman Shaw had called for “to rescue the world from mismanagement.” When this ‘casting’ was ecstatically supported by the mainstream media, Pinter addressed the matter in a broadcast aired on Channel 4 on May 31, 1990. *Oh, Superman*<sup>29</sup> was his answer to *The Economist*, a magazine with worldwide circulation, which had in February 1990, published a leader entitled “Yes, You are

26 <http://nobelprize.org/literature/laureates/2005/index.html>

27 Billington, M. (2007): *Harold Pinter*. London: Faber and Faber, 424.

28 *Ibid.*, 425.

29 “Oh, Superman”, *Various Voices*, 190-200.

the Superpower”. *The Economist’s* enthusiastic endorsement of the USA readiness to use military interventions to ‘help’ other countries make the world a safer, richer place” ended with the following paragraph which triggered Pinter’s response: “A modern Superpower must be a place that lesser fry admire, even envy. The past twelve months have seen the triumph of Western ideals, of democracy and market capitalism. One of the main reasons for that triumph was that in the post-war decades, America lived up to its ideals while Marxist beliefs turned to venal reality. America at home has to stay a land of opportunity and openness to better ensure that the rest of the world keeps going that way. Over to you, Superman.” Pinter’s first reaction was to ask what the 40 million Americans who live on or under the poverty line would have to say about this praise. His comment, however, had a much more serious target, *The Economist’s* claim that it was America’s duty to ensure that the rest of the world keeps going its way.

Pinter had just visited Czechoslovakia and the warning in his broadcast was primarily addressed to Eastern European countries, recently freed from oppression and eager to do what *The Economist* advised - embrace the American way. To clarify what that way actually meant, Pinter pointed out to some commonly overlooked facts: that the powers generously assisting ‘liberations’ in Eastern Europe were the same powers enslaving and exploiting South America, afflicting it, for decades, with coups, US supported dictators, death-squads, occupations, embargos. When certain intellectuals, worldwide, rushed to acquire fame for exclaiming “Let Poland be Poland”, others, like Pinter today, insisted – “let Salvador be Salvador,” as well.<sup>30</sup> Such breadth of vision and depth of historical insight were not welcomed, and in some cases those who promoted them were punished by death, like Martin Luther King who crossed the forbidden line when he figured out the connection between the treatment of black Americans in the USA and the American invasion and destruction of Vietnam<sup>31</sup>. In *Oh Superman* Pinter’s comparative

30 *The Nation*, February 27, 1982 issue, “Communism and the Left” by various contributors (report on the evening of February 6 at Town Hall in New York, organized in support for Solidarity in Poland). <http://www.thenation.com/docprint.mhtml?i=19820227&s=sontag>

31 The text of the speech, given on April 4, 1967, exactly one year before Martin Luther King was assassinated, is linked to the Wikipedia article on King. The audio recording of the speech was put on the net by an enthusiast who had this to say: “I looked around the web and couldn’t find audio of what is in my opinion King’s best, most powerful, most beautiful, and most pertinent speech, “Why I Oppose the War In Vietnam.” So here it is, in MP3 and complete, enjoy. It is a discussion of America’s motives for involvement in Vietnam and a little bit about our hushed history, amazing how little has changed, the speech could have been made yesterday. In 1964, the year Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize, Time Magazine called him man of the year, but they called this speech “a demagogic slander that sounded like a script of Radio Hanoi.” <http://wrybread.com/music/vietnam/index.shtml>



study embraced Czechoslovakia and Nicaragua, without going in depth into hells paved with American best intentions in other parts of South America or the rest of the world. However, in his book *Various Voices: Prose, Poetry, Politics 1948-2005*, which covers more than five decades of activism, we can read with what concern and commitment he continued to follow, and protest, the fate of El Salvador, Cuba, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

Illustration number 27 in Michael Billington's biography of Harold Pinter shows a photograph of Pinter and Vaclav Havel, taken in Prague in 1988, a year before the Velvet Revolution. Placed on the same page is Pinter with another writer/activist, the Nicaraguan poet-priest Ernesto Cardenal, photographed at the launch of the Arts for Nicaragua Fund at the Royal Court in 1987. Havel became famous when, with the support of the Catholic Church and all the Western European States and America, he led the revolution that freed Czechoslovakia from Russian influence, and socialism. Cardenal became 'famous' when, against the wishes of the Catholic Church, he participated in the Nicaraguan people's effort to free themselves from the influence of America, and establish socialism. His image, kneeling before Pope Paul II who is scolding him, made news worldwide. The Polish Pope (who had no objection to members of his Church who had collaborated with the Nazis, many of whom he, indeed, elevated to sainthood) took the time and trouble, during his visit to South America, to meet with Cardenal<sup>33</sup> and chastise him for his Marxist Liberation Theology and other activism on behalf of the Nicaraguan people. Cardenal could have been killed (like the Salvadorian meddlesome priest, Archbishop Oscar Romero, murdered, like Becket, 'in the Cathedral', but not canonized). He was not, and since he was not, other disciplinary measures had to be taken.

Today, looking at the two photographs on the same page in Pinter's biography makes one realize many things about the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most of all how well perceived, on Pinter's part, was the danger of partial sight and limited concern. Vaclav Havel, on the photograph with Pinter in the eighties, was Czechoslovakia's chief dissident and symbol of Czech discontent. In the nineties, the same man gave the American govern-

32 Pinter's 2001 University of Florence Speech (his response to the NATO bombing of Serbia) appears on pp. 238-240 in *Various Voices*. He had delivered a similar speech in Greece the year before, in 2000. While the attack on Yugoslavia was in full blast, on May 4, 1999 BBC 2 aired Pinter's *Counterblast*, his powerfully presented case against the NATO bombing of Serbia.

33 See, for example, the page on Ernesto Cardenal on the New York State Writers Institute site <http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/olv3n1.html>, or his article in the October 29, 2006 issue of *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* entitled "The Vatican goes to bed with the CIA". <http://www.walterlippmann.com/docs990.html>

ment 'soul's joy and content absolute' by becoming the major manufacturer of consent for US military interventions and 'liberations', and all other aspect of US foreign policy. The attack on Yugoslavia in 1999, the subsequent attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq ('freedoms' brought to the respective people with fire bombs, phosphorus bombs, cluster bombs, depleted uranium bombs, and who knows what else) all received Havel's enthusiastic support. As a President of his country he was eager always to be the first to offer the NATO generals his country's men and resources. Under leaders like him, newly liberated Eastern European states, speedily made members of the European Union, easily consented to providing secret prisons for the unrepentant and uncompliant 'enemies' of America. What the people think of these developments can occasionally be seen, as in the film *Czech Dream* (a documentary released in 2004, targeting the American Dream and the American Way which the Czech's are expected to imitate and follow), or in the street protests against the installation of US military bases on Czech soil. The people demand a referendum, while the man who brought them democracy, Vaclav Havel, insists that such a serious question is not for the people, but for the 'experts', to decide.

In 2002, before his presidency was over, Havel talked openly of inviting Madeleine Albright (who is Czech by origin) to replace him as the head of the Czech Republic. He seemed not to be concerned that the proposal was to be made to a woman who had publicly declared, in 1996, that 500,000 Iraqi children who died from the US imposed embargo (later in the 21<sup>st</sup> century more would die in the war) represented, for America, the use of justified means for the achievement of a desired goal. Other numerous trips to the US took place whenever outside support was required for new developments in America's war on terrorism, or when new medals were to be pinned on his deserving chest. In 1991 he won the National Endowment for Democracy Award, in 1997 the Fulbright Association Prize, in 2003 the Presidential Medal of Freedom, to mention just a few. It is interesting that in 2000, nine years after Havel, The National Endowment for Democracy awarded its prize to Natasa Kandic, putting her where she belongs, together with the likes of Richard Holbooke, Wesley Clark and other military and diplomatic 'heroes' who had done so much to 'bring democracy' to Serbia in 1999. Some comfort can be found in the fact that in the same year, 1999, John Keane, the editor of Havel's *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State In Central-Eastern Europe*, summed up Havel's life and political activism in a biography entitled *Vaclav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts*.<sup>34</sup>

34 Keane, J. (1999): *Vaclav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts*. New York: Basic Books.

In the case of Vaclav Havel and Harold Pinter, what appeared to be a shared idea of freedom in the 80s, eventually turned into an unbridgeable divide. But divergent conceptions of freedom and democracy appeared not in their case only. Europe is divided over Peter Handke, and South America, more famously, over the split between Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Like Havel (and for the same political services rendered in a different geographic region) Llosa received the American Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994. In 2006, in the presence of Dick Cheney, the Irving Kristol Prize was awarded to him by the American Enterprise Institute, the same organization where, on February 23, 2003 President Bush elaborated publicly his vision of “Democratic Imperialism.”<sup>35</sup> The connections run deep: Kristol the father gives prizes, William, the son, heads the Project for the New American Century. Llosa became their man in 1987, when the Peruvian government attempted to nationalize the banking system and he, in response, decided to fight for the rights and freedoms of banks, corporations, and all other players committed to the free market enterprise.

As in the case of the Kristols, the stance has become ‘traditional’ for the Llosa family as well. In a recent address, and in numerous articles, Mario Vargas Llosa’s son Alvaro, (Washington D.C. based free-market enthusiast, nominated by the World Economic Forum, in Davos, the Young Global Leader of 2007), called people involved in socialist revolutions and other non-American experiments in South America – idiots.<sup>36</sup> Like Sarkozy, the Llosas and the Kristols believe that anyone who chooses not to “enter into history” by supporting the western imperial idea of progress is a defective human being whose democratic right to choose and decide should be denied. Tables, of course, can be turned. Those who have read Dostoyevsky’s novel know that choosing to be an Idiot may not be such a bad thing, and those who know Shakespeare, know that many of his characters come to life only when, in their ‘madness’, they drop out of ‘history’ and, in some alternative mental and moral space, recover the sanity which the ‘sane’ and ‘successful’ have lost. When Macbeth “launches himself into the future” (becomes, in Nietzsche’s phrase, ‘timely’, and ‘to beguile the time’ begins to look like the time) his life turns into a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. It must have been quite a blow to the Llosas when on September 11,

35 See the transcript of President Bush’s Speech to American Enterprise Institute on <http://www.alfredliienthal.com/bushataet.htm>. Also relevant is the article by Omar G. Encarnacion, “The Follies of Democratic Imperialism”, published in the World Policy Journal in the Spring of 2005.

36 See, for example, Alvaro Vargas Llosa’s article “Return of the Idiot” published on Tuesday, July 17, 2007, by the Nanada.com network.

2006, the 14<sup>th</sup> summit of non-aligned nations was held in Havana, and 116 states, representing two-thirds of the world's population, attended.

In 2001, about the infatuation with democratic imperialism (or globalization) of Havel and Llosas and their likes, the Brazilian theatrical genius and 'idiot' Augusto Boal had this to say, in the closing chapter of his Shakespearean autobiography entitled *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics*:

"In the great theatre of world politics, the great lie is proclaimed by the great fat ravenous one: inevitable globalization. Those who govern say: it is already inevitable, best adapt ourselves to it. International finance carries out an inhuman Pythagorean operation. Pythagoras allowed us to think without the burden of objects. He created an abstraction: the number. The global economists are carrying out a Pythagorean revolution the other way around: they reify the number which thus becomes autonomous. For them, the number exists, the human being no necessarily. It is our duty to shout in the ears of our governors that all economic decisions are, first and foremost, ethical decisions! For an understanding of ethical behavior, numbers are not enough – words are necessary too: humanism, justice, democracy – there are words! ...Global economists divide humanity into three groups. The first controls the market – a God adored above all things and beings! The second is humanity inserted into the deified markets, producing or consuming. The third, discardable humanity. This last exists not only in Bangladesh, Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia – where tractors shovel corpses into common graves – it even exists within rich countries. In the United States – and these are their own economic data, not mine – 20 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line: the wretched. Of course, most of the wretched are Latino or black. Profit is the post-Berlin God. On the fall of the Wall, nicknamed the Wall of Shame, other walls were erected, with no shame. Around the rich mansions: out with poor and starving, out, out! – and at the frontiers of rich countries: out with the foreigners, out, out! Profit, not human beings, is what determines the relationship between countries, encumbered with walls of shame. Profit, not love, determines human relations. They say it is inevitable. A Lie! There are people who do not feel repugnance for human solidarity, in contrast to the great fat famished one. ...Inevitable? Not true! Even if it were, nothing would justify us giving in to it".<sup>37</sup>

The Belgrade National Theatre did not invite Augusto Boal, or someone like him, to convey to the national audience, in dramatic terms, his perception of life and his views on the current political situation in the world. The same theatre that in 2006 canceled a play by Peter Handke, invited in 2007 the Czech film maker Jiri Menzel to be its guest direc-

<sup>37</sup> Boal, A. (2000): *Hamlet and the Baker's Son: My Life in Theatre and Politics*. London: Routledge.

tor and stage a play. Menzel, who has probably consented to the Czech liberation presided over by Vaclav Havel, and whose task is now to complete the Revolution and 'liberate' the arts from the concerns Peter Sellars identified as central, in an interview published in the JAT magazine in the spring of 2007, derided the theatre of ideas, poured scorn on committed art and very proudly announced that he was going to direct *The Merry Wives of Windsor* because it was *the only* play by Shakespeare that had no historical context, and no historical references. If Shakespeare has not been dropped from the curriculums yet, there are many other ways he can be made to 'fall'. One is when Falstaff, hiding in the dirty linen of the merry wives of Windsor, is perceived as a Shakespeare play most likely to attract the attention (and reinforce the habits) of audiences daily fed on the latest sex scandals of celebrities, clerics and politicians and other unwholesome confectionary produced out of cheep emotions. Consent, or concern is a question that needs to be debated in this country urgently (and not only because of what Nikolaj Velimirovic had to say about Shakespeare and imperialism). Dunces brought up on revised history books, with no experience of Shakespeare and no access to other opportunities to develop adequate historical insight, are indeed easier to control. By coercion or seduction, they are to be produced. The Project for the New American Century depends on it. The survival of the planet, however, depends on something else – on our historical sense, on the great poetical/political histories of mankind that help us achieve it. Vyasa, the poet-creator of *Mahabharata*, says he composed his great epic because the Earth demands it. In writing his plays, Shakespeare must have felt the same.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The reference is to Peter Brook's and Jean Claude Carriere's dramatization of the *Mahabharata*, on which they worked for over a decade. In 1989 a film version of this 1985 performance was made.

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Љиљана Богоева Седлар

## 21. ВЕК: ДОБА ОДОБРАВАЊА, ИЛИ ИНТЕРЕСА? УСПОН ДЕМОКРАТСКОГ ИМПЕРИЈАЛИЗМА И „ПАД“ ВИЛИЈАМА ШЕКСПИРА

Резиме

Рад даје културолошки преглед и критичку анализу првих година двадесет првог века из перспективе неколико догађаја који су почетак тог века обележили. Поред Конференције о расизму и расној дискриминацији која се почетком септембра 2001. завршила у Дурбану, у Јужној Африци, и догађаја везаних за сам 9/11 у Америци, рад посебан значај придаје забрињавајућим појавама у култури и образовању. Реч је о изгласавању, а потом повлачењу закона који налаже да уџбеници из историје у Француској морају о француској колонијалној поршлости говорити у позитивном светлу; о предлагању, и повлачењу предлога, да се у енглеским школама из наставе избаци Шекспир и свеколика класична књижевност, да би деца имала времена да анализирају савремене новинске текстове и телевизијски програм, и да уче језик компјутера; о додели Нобелове награде драмском писцу и активисти Харолду Пинтеру; о наградама које америчка влада додељује политичким истомишљницима и апологетама, уметницима као што су Вацлав Хавел и Марио Варгас Љоса; о политички и војно отвореним и бруталним притисцима да се произведе сагласност за ратове којима се успоставља такозвани демократски империјализам, о конституисању уметности која на разне начине подржава и опслужује идеолошке потребе поменутог неоимперијалног пројекта, али и о уметности која остаје свест, савест, и енергија који омогућавају да се социјална правда, човекољубље и права демократија никад не забораве и не затру.