

REIMAGINING SHAKESPEAR’S IN THE ARCHIPELAGO: STUDY OF SHAKESPEAR’S GLOBAL RECEPTION IN INDONESIAN CULTURE

Neysa Meviola Manurung¹, Cicilia Clara Angel Barus², Lulu Ribka Roito Sijabat³, Nurhayati Purba⁴

Universitas Methodist Indonesia

Email : nesyameviola@gmail.com¹, cicilia584@gmail.com², luluribka2635@gmail.com³

Abstract

William Shakespeare’s works have transcended linguistic, cultural, and geographic boundaries to become a global literary canon. This article explores Shakespeare’s reception in Indonesian cultures through the lens of comparative literature. By analyzing adaptations, translations, and performances, it highlights the dynamic ways in which Indonesian authors, directors, and audiences have reinterpreted the Bard’s works. The study illustrates how Shakespeare becomes both a colonial relic and a source of creative resistance and local resonance in Indonesia.

Keywords: Shakespeare’s, Global Reception, Indonesian Culture, Literatures, Cultures

Article History

Received: Juli 2025
Reviewed: Juli 2025
Published: Juli 2025
Plagiarism Checker No 234
Prefix DOI: Prefix DOI:
10.8734/CAUSA.v1i2.365
Copyright: Author
Publish by: SINDORO



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

ISSN 3025-6488



9 773025 648007

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare has long held a prominent position in world literature and is praised as a universal literary figure. His plays have been adapted into innumerable cultural contexts and translated into more than 100 languages. Shakespeare is widely known in Western academia, but his reception in postcolonial societies such as Indonesia is especially complicated, reflecting conflicts between cultural localization and colonial legacy.

This article explores Shakespeare’s global impact, paying particular attention to Indonesia. We examine how Indonesian artists have assimilated, translated, and reinterpreted Shakespearean drama as a vehicle for cultural expression and critique through the lens of comparative literature. Our goal is to demonstrate how Indonesians’ interest in Shakespeare speaks to larger concerns about nationalism, identity, and cultural negotiation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shakespeare’s reception around the world has been extensively researched in a variety of fields, including literary criticism and cultural studies. Dennis Kennedy (1993) presents the idea of “Foreign Shakespeare,” highlighting the ways in which regional cultures modify and reframe the Bard in various theatrical settings. Kennedy’s work serves as a basis for comprehending how cultural, political, and aesthetic factors influence Shakespeare worldwide.

Shakespeare’s global reception has been the subject of much study in a number of disciplines, such as literary criticism and cultural studies. Dennis Kennedy (1993) introduces the concept of “Foreign Shakespeare,” emphasizing how local cultures adapt and reinterpret the Bard in diverse theatrical contexts. Kennedy’s work provides a foundation for understanding how Shakespeare is influenced globally by cultural, political, and aesthetic factors.

Scholars like Clare (2012) and Irawan (2020) have examined the localization of Shakespeare in Indonesia within the Southeast Asian context. Clare talks about how Shakespearean adaptations are frequently transformed into hybrid performances that reflect local aesthetic values due to the influence of Asian theatrical traditions on their form and content. Irawan elaborates on this by concentrating on Indonesian adaptations in particular, emphasizing how regional playwrights like Nano Riantiarno and W.S. Rendra used Shakespeare to make social and political statements.

Studies of translation also shed light on how Shakespeare is transmitted across linguistic divides. A helpful framework for analyzing how Indonesian translators decide to maintain or modify Shakespeare's language and meaning is Venuti's (1995) theory of domestication and foreignization. These techniques are best demonstrated by Rendra's translation of *Hamlet* (1971) and Sumardjo's earlier works, which strike a balance between cultural relevance for Indonesian audiences and faithfulness to the original.

Comparative literature theoretical approaches place a strong emphasis on the dialogic relationship between source and target cultures. According to Damrosch (2003), world literature is a means of reception and circulation, and as such, works such as Shakespeare's are given new meanings as they travel across national boundaries. When this is applied to Indonesia, the intricacies of literary exchange and the part local agency plays in rewriting texts from around the world become clear.

In conclusion, there is a lively discussion about Shakespeare's global influence in the literature, with particular research highlighting how politicized and localized his reception was in Indonesia. By combining these insights and using them in a thorough case study of Indonesian adaptations, this article adds to that conversation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative methodology based on cultural studies and comparative literature techniques. Scholarly articles, performance reviews, historical documents, and textual analysis of Indonesian translations and adaptations of Shakespeare's works were used to gather data for this study. Theater scripts and performance archives from organizations like Teater Koma, as well as translated works by Trisno Sumardjo and W.S. Rendra, are examples of primary sources.

Additionally, the study employs interpretive analysis to investigate how Shakespeare's plays' thematic, linguistic, and cultural changes mirror larger sociopolitical dynamics in Indonesia. The differences between these adaptations and their English originals, as well as between other international reimaginings of Shakespeare, are examined using a comparative framework. Shakespeare's localization and politicization in the Indonesian context can be understood more deeply thanks to this method.

Comparative Literature and Shakespeare By focusing on discussions between literatures rather than their isolation, comparative literature promotes the study of texts from many cultural backgrounds. Shakespeare's works are perfect for this analysis because of their versatility and widespread global appeal. Comparative literary studies aid in examining how regional customs and political histories influence Shakespearean reception in non-Western settings such as Indonesia.

Shakespeare's works' widespread distribution offers a rich environment for comparative analysis. Scholars frequently investigate the intersections of textual authenticity, cultural specificity, and political expression in their translations and adaptations of the Bard. Nationalist movements, artistic innovation, and colonial educational systems are all strongly linked to Shakespeare's arrival and reinterpretation in Indonesia.

Literary Importation and the Legacy of Colonialism During the time of Dutch colonization, Shakespeare was brought to Indonesia. Shakespeare was used by Dutch educational institutions

to advance European values of reason and civility. Early Indonesian encounters with the Bard were influenced by this setting, which positioned him within a framework of European literary superiority. Shakespeare thus came as a symbol of colonial cultural imposition rather than as a neutral figure.

Dutch literature and Western classics, such as Shakespeare, were given priority in the curriculum during colonial rule as means of "civilizing" the native populace. A second layer of cultural mediation was created when Indonesian intellectuals were exposed to Shakespeare but frequently received his works in translation or through Dutch interpretations. Shakespeare's themes of justice, power, and treachery nevertheless struck a deep chord and predicted subsequent nationalist appropriations.

This reception changed in Indonesia after independence. Shakespeare was reframed as a source for national reflection and cross-cultural experimentation rather than as a colonial instrument as local academics and artists reclaimed literary space. This change is especially noticeable in the plays of translators and dramatists who added local issues and indigenous symbols to Shakespeare.

Shakespeare in Translation: Interpretation and Change Shakespeare's translation into Indonesian is a culturally negotiated act in and of itself. The difficulty is in expressing poetic rhythm, humor, and historical context in addition to linguistic equivalency. Early translations were academic and literal, with an eye toward teaching. Local idioms and sensibilities were incorporated into later translations, like those by Rendra and Trisno Sumardjo, which adopted more poetic and performative approaches.

Through his work in the 1960s, Trisno Sumardjo introduced Shakespeare to a wider audience in Indonesia. While modifying expressions to conform to the rhythms of the Indonesian language, his translations preserved structural integrity. But a radical departure was introduced by W.S. Rendra. His 1971 staging of *Hamlet* combined Shakespearean tragedy with wayang orang aesthetics while incorporating Javanese theatrical traditions. A culturally hybrid performance that directly addressed current political concerns under the Suharto regime was the end result.

These translations were acts of reinterpretation rather than merely language exercises. To represent Indonesian landscapes and concerns, names, settings, and dialogue were changed in some versions. Shakespeare's performative potential as a worldwide playwright who can be "localized" without sacrificing thematic universality is highlighted by this adaptability.

Shakespeare on the Stage in Indonesia Shakespeare has been reinterpreted in some of the most colorful ways by Indonesian theater. Shakespearean themes were employed by directors such as Rendra and Nano Riantiarno to examine Indonesian politics, society, and culture. *Macbeth* was recast as a cautionary tale against military might and political ambition, while *The Tempest* was recast as a metaphor for colonial dominance.

Shakespeare was frequently used as a platform for social criticism by Nano Riantiarno, the founder of Teater Koma. Using figures from Javanese mythology, Riantiarno recast the colonial narrative in his adaptation of *The Tempest*, *Semar Gugat*. While Caliban assumed the persona of Semar, a sage and divine clown figure in Javanese mythology, Prospero was compared to Dutch colonists. A criticism of colonialism and its lasting effects was made possible by this recasting.

Additionally, Shakespeare has been powerfully localized through traditional performance forms like lenong, ketoprak, and wayang (shadow puppetry). These adaptations establish a dialogic relationship between Shakespeare and Nusantara cultural identities by fusing Javanese cosmology, Sundanese humor, and Balinese aesthetics. They do more than just transplant the original story. For instance, *Wayang Hamlet* combines folk performance and classical literature to present a Shakespearean tragedy through puppetry.

National Identity and Shakespeare Shakespeare has served as a paradoxical symbol of Western canon and a means of redefining national identity in Indonesia. His plays have been incorporated into literature curricula, theater productions, and classrooms to promote critical thinking, language proficiency, and intercultural communication. Shakespearean drama has provided subtle criticisms of authority and power, especially during periods of political repression.

President Suharto's New Order (1966-1998) imposed strict censorship and control over the creation of art. Nonetheless, artists were able to express disapproval through Shakespearean allegory. Through subtle allusions to the authoritarian nature of the government, *Macbeth* was used to examine themes of paranoia and power hunger. Shakespeare thus turned into a platform for moral debate and political opposition.

Shakespearean plays performed in regional tongues, like Javanese or Sundanese, also encourage cultural diversity and subvert linguistic centralism. It serves as a reminder that Shakespeare is not exclusively Western and can be appropriated and reimagined by any culture. For Indonesia's multilingual and multiethnic society, the localization of his works acts as a kind of cultural validation.

Shakespeare Around the World and the Postcolonial Turn A larger postcolonial discourse in which former colonies reinterpret the canon to assert autonomy is reflected in Indonesia's engagement with Shakespeare. "Global Shakespeare," according to academics like Ania Loomba and Dennis Kennedy, is about ideological struggle as much as geographic dissemination. The process of turning Shakespeare into a living, localized art that speaks to current Indonesian realities is best illustrated by Indonesia's adaptations.

Shakespeare's canonical status is often acknowledged in postcolonial adaptations, but his content is also subverted or localized. This dual vision is manifested in Indonesia through politically charged performances, syncretic staging, and the fusion of traditional and modern forms. A growing corpus of "postcolonial Shakespeare" studies that affirm local agency and contest Eurocentric interpretations is a result of these practices.

CONCLUSION

Shakespeare is now more than just a colonial legacy in Indonesia thanks to translation, adaptation, and performance. He is a dialogic partner, a character whose writings are constantly reframed to speak to regional issues, artistic customs, and political realities. We can follow these changes through comparative literature, which demonstrates how texts from around the world can be re-rooted in local contexts.

Indonesia's Shakespeare is changing along with it. His reception throughout the archipelago's time and geographical regions demonstrates how literature has the ability to cut across boundaries and histories and speak to new generations. Shakespeare endures in the hands of Indonesian artists—not as a holdover from imperialism, but as a vibrant and complex voice in the fabric of Indonesian culture.

REFERENCES

- Loomba, Ania. *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Kennedy, Dennis. *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Rendra, W.S. *Hamlet: Sebuah Adaptasi*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1971.
- Sumardjo, Trisno. *Terjemahan Hamlet dan Macbeth*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1960s.
- Irawan, Bambang. "Shakespeare di Indonesia: Antara Kolonialisme dan Kreativitas." *Jurnal Sastra Bandingan*, 2020.
- Riantiarno, Nano. *Semar Gugat: Adaptasi The Tempest*. Teater Koma, 2000.

Sulastin Sutrisno. Drama dan Masyarakat: Studi Kasus Teater Modern Indonesia. Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1988.

Clare, Janet. "Localising the Bard: Shakespeare in the Asian Context." Asian Theatre Journal, vol. 29, no. 2, 2012.

Venuti, Lawrence. The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation. Routledge, 1995.

Damrosch, David. What Is World Literature? Princeton University Press, 2003.