

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## **Bengal as Shakespeare's India and the Stolen Indian Boy: The Historical Dark Matter of *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

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The medieval idea of India's fabulous wealth perpetuated by Marco Polo, John Mandeville, Vasco de Gama, and Anthony Eden among others, and reflected in Columbus's search for a passage to India that ended in his Caribbean landfall in 1492,<sup>1</sup> now appears to be experiencing a second coming. Led mainly but not exclusively by Indian American expatriate Shakespeare scholars, a rich vein of critical attention has been accruing to the idea of India in Shakespeare in the Western academy. While noting several allusions to India scattered across the Shakespearean oeuvre,<sup>2</sup> discussions of the

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An earlier, shorter version of this essay was presented as the keynote address in the 'Shakespeare: 400 Years After' International Shakespeare Conference at the Independent University of Dhaka, Bangladesh in November, 2016.

<sup>1</sup> For some samples of this traditional European mythologization of India's wealth see Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition.*, ed. by Sir Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), II, pp. 338, 360-64, 376, 375-76, 389-90, and 393-94; *The Book of John Mandeville: With Related Texts*, ed. by Iain Macleod Higgins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2011), pp. 101-2, 106, 108-9; *Em Nome De Deus: The Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco Da Gama to India, 1497-1499*, ed. by Glenn Joseph Ames (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 136, 157. Closer to Shakespeare's own time, see Richard Eden's frank explanation of Columbus's confusion of the Caribbean as the West Indies in Edward Arber ed., *The First Three English Books on America: ?1511-1555 A.D. Being Chiefly Translations, Compilations, &c., by Richard Eden...* (Westminster: A. Constable and Company, 1895), p. 339; for his continuation of the medieval writing of India's fabulous wealth see p.14. De Gama's trip occurred after Columbus's Caribbean voyage, but was the first European sea voyage to India and so a continuation of the same myth-making discourse, as also were Eden's descriptions in the mid-sixteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> These include, 'Indian-like' in *All's Well That Ends Well* 1.3. 204; 'As mines of India', in *1 Henry IV* 3.1.165; 'Not deck'd with diamonds and Indian stones', in *3 Henry VI* 3.1.63; 'made Britain India', and 'strange Indian with the great tool', in *Henry VIII* 1.1.21 and 5.3.34 respectively; 'an Indian beauty', and

topic have come to focus on one particular play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, expectedly, because of the largest number of such allusions that it contains,<sup>3</sup> and in it, on the material of the 'lovely boy stolen from an Indian King' that the fairy Puck explains is the source of a contention between the fairy King and Queen, Oberon and Titania (2.1.22), and that Titania herself details in 2.1:

Set your heart at rest:  
The fairy land buys not the child of me.  
His mother was a votaress of my order:  
And, in the spiced Indian air, by night,  
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,  
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,  
Marking the embarked traders on the flood,  
When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive  
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;  
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait  
Following,—her womb then rich with my young squire,—  
Would imitate, and sail upon the land,  
To fetch me trifles, and return again,  
As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.  
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;  
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,  
And for her sake I will not part with him.

(2.1.121-37)

The generalized exotic imagination that earlier critical commentary saw in these lines is now being replaced insistently by particular identifications of India in them, along a spectrum of methodological axes ranging from historicist, to psychoanalytical to

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'not one hit? / From Lisbon, Barbary, and India', in *The Merchant of Venice* 3.2.98-9 and 268 respectively; '[base] Indian' in *Othello* 5.2. 347; 'dead Indian' in *The Tempest* 2.2.33; 'Her bed is India' and 'I had gone barefoot to India', in *Troilus and Cressida* 1.1.100 and 1.2.74 respectively; 'metal of India', in *Twelfth Night* 2.5.14; and 'Indian king', 'steppe of India', 'spiced Indian air', 'Indian boy' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2.1.22, 69, 124, and 3.2.375 respectively. Notably, the majority of these allusions are in the context of a fabulous India. All citations from Shakespeare in this essay are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans and J.J. M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) and will henceforth be identified in the essay itself.

<sup>3</sup> Four times compared to single occurrences or less in the rest of his plays, and twice the number of the word's appearance in *The Merchant of Venice*. Derived from a simple word search in *Folger Digital Texts* online at <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/>.

postcolonial.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding a few demurrals,<sup>5</sup> partly because of the risky though containable slipperiness of the term ‘Indian’ which in early modern English usage could apply to any non-European, the arguments for an Indian recognition have remained predominant, and justifiably so. As Gitanjali Shahani has succinctly put it,

Written and performed in a historical moment when ‘India’ was a shifting signifier, the play interweaves residual and emergent understandings of the term... config[uring] India in more geographically precise terms... shaped in large part by actual European and English mercantile expeditions to the Indian subcontinent and the Spice Islands.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, what has been a common feature in all but two of such discussions (Desai’s and Buchanan’s)<sup>7</sup> is their un-localized, pan-Indian, identifications of the lines, necessitated

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<sup>4</sup> Margo Hendricks, “‘Obscured by Dreams’: Race, Empire, and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.1 (1996), 37–60; Shankar Raman, *Framing ‘India’: The Colonial Imaginary in Early Modern Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 2001), esp. p. 22; Jyotsna Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: ‘Discoveries’ of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996); Gitanjali Shahani, ‘The Spiced Indian Air in Early Modern England’, *Shakespeare Studies* 42 (2014), 122–40; R.W. Desai, ‘England, The Indian Boy, and the Spice Trade in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, in *India’s Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation, and Performance*, ed. by Poonam Trivedi and Dennis Bartholomeusz (Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2005), pp. 127–41; Ania Loomba, ‘The Great Indian Vanishing Trick: Colonialism, Property, and the Family in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’ in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Dymphna Callaghan (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2016), pp. 181-205 (esp. p. 183).

<sup>5</sup> For the demurrals see Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 85. For an earlier hesitation about Shakespeare’s derivation of the particular lines from Fitch see Ram Chandra Prasad, *Early English Travellers in India: A Study in the Travel Literature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Periods with Particular Reference to India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1980), p. 38. For an American identification of the lines see Henry Buchanan, ‘India and the Golden Age in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, in *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 65, A Midsummer Night’s Dream* 65 (2012), 58-68.

<sup>6</sup> Shahani, 130-31.

<sup>7</sup> Despite the voluminous documented English spice trade with East and South Asia and which will be referred to below, Buchanan argues for an English spice trade with coastal Virginia (pp. 58-59); Desai locates the Indian description in the lines as applying to the Malabar coast in *south western* India (pp. 129-32) whereas the lines from Fitch that Desai cites in support of his claim (‘Ralph Fitch’, in *Early Travels in India 1583-1619*, ed. by William Foster [Oxford: Humphrey Milford, 1921], pp. 1-47, henceforth referenced as Foster) are about the *northwestern* Indian region of Diu. In his inward journey Fitch did not linger in the region around and below Goa after being incarcerated there by the Portuguese, although on his outward journey he *did*, at Cochin for eight months waiting for a ship to carry him to Goa (Foster, pp. 44-46). This region did have a lot of Portuguese and other European maritime trading activity that Fitch describes as witnessing (Foster, pp. 14, 44), which would match the allusion to ships laden with goods in Titania’s lines about the Indian boy, and there is as well some evidence of Portuguese

perhaps by their inability or reluctance to establish a specific history of the playwright's knowledge of India. What this essay will instead show is that Shakespeare's Indian picture was based on an early English experience of the Bengal delta in eastern India, so that Bengal was the unmarked faceplate of Shakespeare's India. This history belongs to what may be termed 'historical dark matter', corresponding to its namesake phenomenon in physical astronomy comprising of matter and events that theoretical (mathematical) analysis predicts and physical observation studies,<sup>8</sup> the theoretical substance and critical methodology of which this essay will also try to demonstrate over the course of its argument. The first part of this essay will trace the back-history, the 'historical dark matter', of Shakespeare's knowledge of India; in the second, it will describe the critical poetics of how Bengal silently coloured Shakespeare's imaginations of India; and in the third it will sketch how the complex cultural politics of

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abductions of Indians in this region (see Odayamadath Kunjappa Nambiar, *Portuguese Pirates and Indian Seamen* [Bangalore: M. Bhaktavatsalam, 1955], p. 211). Recently, Thea Buckley has even found a local tradition in Kerala, immediately to the South of Cochin, about a Shakespeare play involving an English sailor and an Indian princess kidnapped and sold into a brothel, but the play in question is *Pericles* (Anam Rizvi, 'How Did a Forgotten Play by Shakespeare Resurface in Malayalam in Kerala?', web essay at <https://scroll.in/magazine/844884/how-did-a-forgotten-play-by-shakespeare-resurface-in-malayalam-in-kerala>, accessed 28 August 2017), and it is a nineteenth century tradition. Whether this is the same individual that figures in another memorial legend of kidnapping of an Indian princess, Mira or Mirabai, a possible relative of the family of the Mughal emperor Aurangzebe, who is sold into slavery by the Portuguese off the Malabar coastline, and who via Manila ends up in Mexico and eventually dies there as a saintly figure (see Kathleen Myers, 'Testimony for Canonization or Proof of Blasphemy: The New Spanish Inquisition and the Hagiographic Biography of Caterina de San Juan', in *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, ed. by Mary E. Giles [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999], pp. 270–96, esp. pp. 273–74; Octavio Paz, *In Light of India*, trans. by Eliot Weinberger [New York: Harcourt, 1998], pp. 83–4) is unclear because this legend originates in the sixteenth century. Neither of these materials match, however, the gender of Shakespeare's allusion to a 'boy', and the volume of Portuguese kidnapping activity is much greater for Bengal in the sixteenth century than it is for the Malabar coastline, as will be shown below. The most recent discussion of the topic is that of Anna Kurian, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Stolen Generation', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 29.1 (2016), 6–13, who discusses the Indian boy allusion in terms of colonialism, race and gendered parenting.

<sup>8</sup> 'Dark Matter | CERN', (the European Organization for Nuclear Research)

<http://home.cern/about/physics/dark-matter>, accessed October 6, 2016:

'Galaxies in our universe seem to be achieving an impossible feat. They are rotating with such speed that the gravity generated by their observable matter could not possibly hold them together; they should have torn themselves apart long ago. The same is true of galaxies in clusters, which leads scientists to believe that something we cannot see is at work. They think something we have yet to detect directly is giving these galaxies extra mass, generating the extra gravity they need to stay intact. This strange and unknown matter was called "dark matter" since it is not visible'. Also see Ken Freeman and Geoff McNamara, *In Search of Dark Matter* (Chichester: Springer Science & Business Media, 2006), pp. ix-x.

Shakespeare's constructions of Bengal as India and the stolen Indian boy—play out centrally in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

## II

The specific history of Shakespeare's knowledge of India invoked above is the well-known but otherwise ignored account of the trip of Ralph Fitch, a London leather seller, to India in 1583 that only Rubin Desai has invoked as was seen earlier. Commissioned by several wealthy London merchants, including Edward Osborne and Richard Staper among others, the enterprise was a secret commercial spying mission to gather information on commodities suitable and profitable for an impending English trading initiative in the then Portuguese dominated theatre of activity that was India. Fitch's journey, the published account of which has elsewhere been studied for the multiple instances of recursive Indian talkback or Indiaspeak that are parhessically registered in it,<sup>9</sup> took eight years to complete and took him across the heart of Akbar's India from Surat on the west coast via Agra and Fatehpur Sikri to Chittagong in the east (see fig. 1). Upon his return and de-briefing by his sponsors and which led to his central consultancy in the formation of the East India Company half a decade later, his experiences were recorded by that indefatigable Elizabethan advocate of overseas English expansion, Richard Hakluyt, and published in short form in his *Principal Navigations and Voyages of the English People* in 1598, and more fully by William Foster, among others, in 1921.<sup>10</sup> After about a decade of involvement in the founding of the East India Company Fitch disappears completely from the documentary record and is mentioned only in his death in St. Katherine Cree in Jacobean London's crowded east side in 1611.<sup>11</sup>

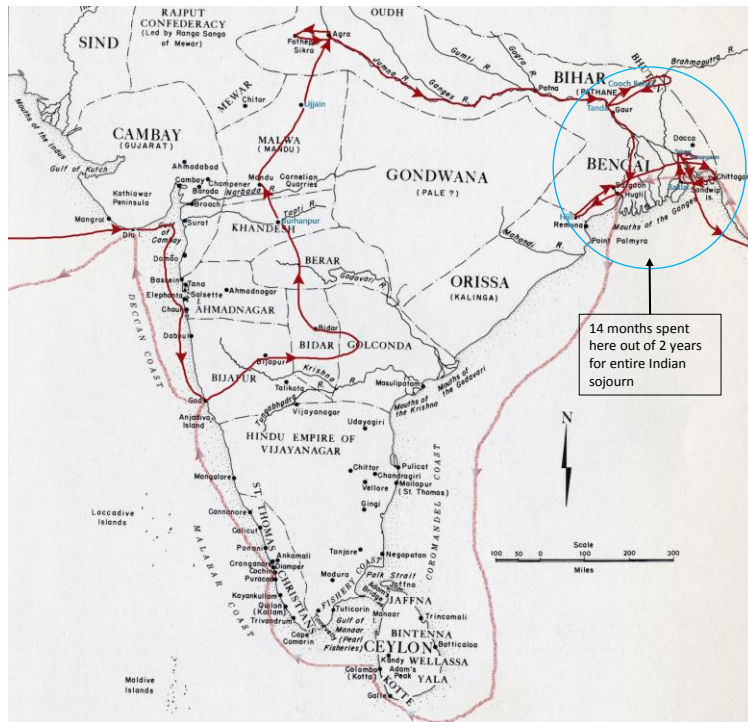
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<sup>9</sup> Imtiaz Habib, "“They Say” : Indian Talkback as Indiaspeak in Ralph Fitch Account of India in 1583 Or The Protocolonial English Observer Observed", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 47.2 (2016), 305-25 (esp. pp. 321-2). *Parhessia* is a Foucauldian term deriving from the classical Greek term 'parrhesiazesthai' meaning 'to say everything - from "pan" (everything) and "rhema" (that which is said)'; see the web essay, 'The Meaning and Evolution of the Word Parhessia' at <http://foucault.info/documents/parrhessia/> accessed 23 February 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Traffiques of the English Nation*, ed. Edmund Goldsmid, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: E & G Goldsmid, 1889), X, Part 3, pp. 21-54; reprinted in Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus Or, Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (Cambridge UP, 2014), X, pp. 165-204; An earlier publication of Fitch's account in modern times was John Horton Ryley's, *Ralph Fitch England's Pioneer to India* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), and a later one in 1930 was J. Courtenay Locke's, *The First Englishmen in India: Letters and Narratives of Sundry Elizabethans Written by Themselves* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 53-72.

<sup>11</sup> Foster, pp. 6-7.

Fig. 1



INDIA  
IN THE LATE  
SIXTEENTH CENTURY  
(According to European Sources)

Map from Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2 : 357.

Reconstruction of the route of Fitch's Journey across India superimposed.

All locations approximate

This much is well known. What has not been noticed is the fact that of all the Indian regions that Fitch visited, his longest stay was in Bengal, which his co-traveller to India, John Newberry, had specifically directed him to explore. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, 1585, ‘in the companie of a one hundred and four score boats laden with salt, *hing*, opium, lead, carpets, and diverse other commodities’ he sets out from Agra to float, as he resonantly puts it, ‘down the river Jemena and down the river Ganges to Bengal’.<sup>12</sup> He drifts past Allahabad, Benaras, takes a detour into Cooch Bihar, taking five months to reach his destination. He is in Bengal from January of 1586 when he arrives till November of that year when he leaves for Burma, Pegu (Thailand), Malacca, Java and Sumatra. This eleven-month sojourn is supplemented on his return from the Far East in November 1588, by another three month stay in Bengal until February 1589 when he starts his return journey via Colombo, Cochin, and Surat back to England, which he reaches in 1591. *He is thus in Bengal for fourteen months, which means he spends more than half of his total Indian stay of two years in Bengal alone.* His now well-known comments on the peoples and customs of the Indian regions through which he passed are not particularly extensive for Bengal, and about his three-month residence in Bengal on his return from the Far East, he has nothing to say beyond the quick comment that he waited there that long for a ship to carry him westwards. Yet, the very *fact* of his

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 18 and 24.



extended stay in Bengal, and what he *doesn't* say about it, are significant, as will be seen shortly.

In what he does say some features are worth noting. The number of cities and towns he mentions visiting – Serrepore, Satgaon, Hughli, Bacula (in Barisal), Sonargaon, and Chatigam (modern Chittagong), literally crisscrossing Bengal (see fig. 2) – comprises the largest number of towns and cities of all the Indian locales he observes. Furthermore, the maximum number of Indian interjections or Indiaspeak buried in the repeated refrain ‘they say’ occur in this part of his account, in Bengal. Bengal is special in his account also in the sense that it is marked by water: it is the only Indian region he approaches by water, it is the only one marked by the mighty named rivers he sees and crosses. In the itinerary of his trip that he details, Bengal stands as one of the limits or geographic parameters of India. As its Eastern gateway – one that he crosses through *twice* – it functions in his experience albeit silently as the face of India, foretelling the settlement of the East India Company in Bengal nearly a century later in the settling of the site of Calcutta by Job Charnock in 1690 and the establishment of the city by 1698.<sup>13</sup> As a zone that he can leave and re-enter and marked by a watery expanse, Fitch’s Bengal is a fluid, liminal zone, one that is both impalpable and real, nameless and identifiable, a malleable entity. More crucially perhaps, the language of Fitch’s memory of Bengal is characterized by wealth. In the four pages on Bengal out of a total of the twenty pages devoted to India, the word ‘rich’ and its early modern English metonyms, such as ‘costly,’ ‘prosperous,’ ‘abundant,’ ‘plenteous,’ ‘sumptuous,’ ‘great,’ ‘populous,’ ‘faire,’ ‘fruitful,’ and ‘fine,’<sup>14</sup> attend Fitch’s narrative 46 times for Bengal alone out of 142 times for all of India, which is 34% for Bengal alone, with the word ‘great’ in particular occurring 38 times or 63% of the times for Bengal alone out of a total of 60 for all of India. More specifically, the word ‘silk’ appears 4 times in Fitch’s Bengal passages alone, which is the same number of times that commodity is cited for the rest of India combined. Equally notably, ‘rice’ is cited eight times for Bengal compared to five times for the rest of India. While not as readily apparent in the dryness of his mercantilist language, Bengal in Fitch’s India is undercoated by the diction of his prose as a dreamscape of topographic malleability and copious prosperity that suffuses

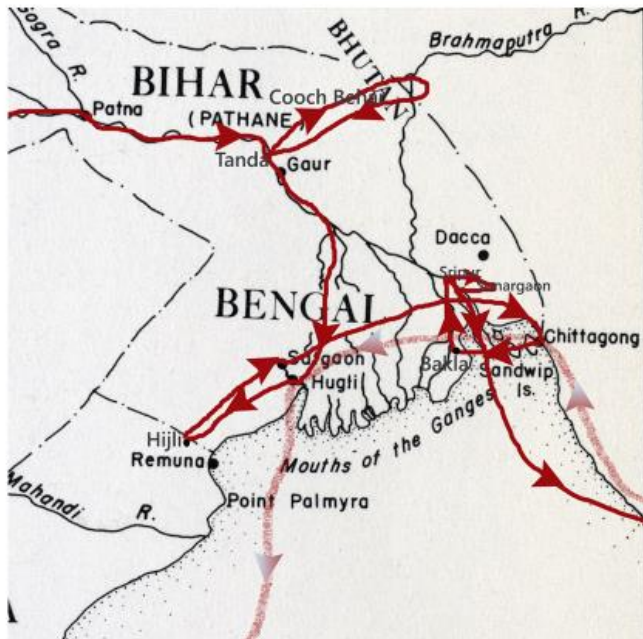
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<sup>13</sup> Krishna Dutta, *Calcutta: A Cultural and Literary History* (Signal Books, 2003), p. 10; Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> For the early modern English usages of these words, see Ian Lancashire’s University of Toronto electronic database *Lexicon of Early Modern English*, electronic database at <http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/>

his picture of India and becomes its proxy visage.<sup>15</sup> Subsequent proto-colonial accounts of India, such as those of William Finch, Nicholas Worthington, Thomas Coryat, Edward Terry, and Thomas Roe,<sup>16</sup> will merely amplify and consolidate this template of India's incredible prosperity, that is, without specific reference to Bengal.

**Fig. 2**



Faded lines showing Fitch's exit route

Locations of extinct cities and towns derived from the estimates of Tirthankar Roy, *The East India Company: The World's Most Powerful Corporation* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2012), p. 35; Biplab Dasgupta, pp. 12 and 267; and C. E. Haque, *Hazards in a Fickle Environment: Bangladesh* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), p. 142.

Yet, what Fitch doesn't say is still more significant. This includes principally what he did in Bengal in his three-month wait there for a ship to carry him westwards for his return to England, and who the merchants were with whom he travelled to Bengal, which only later scholarship identified as Portuguese.<sup>17</sup> His terse comment about his return to and extended stay in Bengal includes only the date of his return and the duration of his wait but not where he stayed.<sup>18</sup> He may have stayed in Chittagong which would presumably have been on the path of his return from the Far East, or more probably Hugli or Porto Pequeno, the other ocean serving port available to him in Bengal that was a more stable Portuguese enclave. Common to both ports, and what allows some insight into his silence, was the fact that they were both under the control

<sup>15</sup> Prasad well described this image: 'The picture that emerges from Fitch's narrative is that of a prosperous India. The traveller does not seem to be so much interested in the political condition of the country as in its wealth' (p. 45).

<sup>16</sup> For these accounts see Foster, pp. 122-87, and Thomas Roe, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India*, ed. by William Foster, 3 vols. (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> This includes Fitch's editor, Foster, an identification with which everyone else has subsequently concurred; Foster, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Foster, p. 48.



of the Portuguese. His entire Indian trip was meant to be done in secret precisely because he was venturing into the territory of the Portuguese, who understandably viewed English aspirations of commerce in areas dominated by them with extreme suspicion and outright hostility. In fact, Fitch was arrested as a Protestant English spy by the Portuguese authorities at Hormuz and was subsequently transported to and incarcerated in Goa upon his first arrival in India, as he himself records.<sup>19</sup> His escape from that condition and his trek across India was thus necessarily done incognito, albeit with the help of Portuguese Jesuit missionaries and private merchants who would help him and protect him from the Portuguese authorities and alien locals as a fellow European Christian in India. Almost certainly thus, his stay in Bengal the first and the second time would have been in civilian Portuguese localities, and about the details of which he – and Hakluyt in his recording of Fitch’s journey in London – would have been silent, not only because of diplomatic sensitivity (there were Portuguese and Spanish spies in London) but also the commercial value of the information he would bring back, the latter becoming in subsequent decades the imperative for the East India Company’s standing policy of secrecy in its official activities.<sup>20</sup>

One activity that Fitch very likely would have seen in his time with the Portuguese in Bengal, was the casual abduction of locals for conversion to Christianity and transportation to European and other destinations as servants and slaves. Bengal and Orissa were notorious in the sixteenth century for Portuguese kidnappings of Indians, as the accounts of Portuguese Jesuit missionaries employed for such conversions record, as regional Indian chronicles, legends and ballads memorialize,<sup>21</sup> and as subsequent British

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp. 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> For the East India Company’s secretiveness *Report on the Old Records of the India Office*, ed. by G.C.M. Birdwood, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1890), pp. 3-4; *Annals of the Honorable East-India Company*, 3 vols., ed. by John Bruce, (London: Cox, Son, and Baylis, 1810), ‘Oath of A Freeman... 1609’, I, pp. 157-8; *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series: East Indies: China & Japan 1513-1616*, ed. by W. Noel Sainsbury (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862), p. 427, Item 1019; I. Bruce Watson, ‘Fortifications and the “Idea” of Force in Early English East India Company Relations with India’, *Past & Present*, 88 (1980), 70–87.

<sup>21</sup> In Indian chronicle accounts such as the *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi: A History of the Mughal Wars in Assam, Cooch Bihar, Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in the Reigns of Jahangir, and Shahjahan* by Mirza Nathan, trans. by M.I. Borah, 2 vols. (Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Government of Assam, 1936). II, pp. 629 and 635; *The Padshah Namah* by Abd Al-Hamid Lahawri, 2 vols., ed. by Mawlawis Kabir Ai-Din Ahmad and Abd Al-Rahim (Calcutta: The Asiatic society of Bengal), I, pp. 435-41; M.A. Jalil, *Bangey Magh- Firingi o Bargir Atyachar* (The Tyranny of the Mughls, Firingis and Bargi’s in Bengal), (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1988), pp. 1-22.; Lahawri and Jalil qtd. in Kamrun Nessa Khondker, ‘Mughal River Forts in Bengal 1575-1688: An Archaeological Appraisal’ (M. Phil. Thesis, Cardiff University, 2012), p. 138; available at <https://orca.cf.ac.uk/46748/1/2013khondkerknmpil.pdf>, accessed 8 March 2018; also see Abhay Kumar Singh, *Modern World System and Indian Proto-*

colonial records indicate.<sup>22</sup> As Satadru Sen importantly points out, the numerical scope and circumstantial details of such incidents, that is to say their precise recordation and identification, are ‘always beyond determination because these were relocations, [violent displacements], without precise beginnings, middles, or ends’.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, colonial kidnappings remain largely unmarked phenomena – historical dark matter – within the burgeoning epistemology of current anticolonial and post-colonial scholarship, even as they are a universal, fixed mark in the history of early modern European proto-colonial and colonial expansionism. This, however, was a chilling feature of *all* European commercial expeditions to Africa, America, India and the Far East, initially for the purpose of training the abductees as interpreters and also for casual captivity for menial labour, as well as for purpose of intimidating local populations.<sup>24</sup>

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*Industrialization: Bengal 1650-1800* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2006), p. 77; in local histories such as the *kula panjis*, *kula biborinis* and *puthis*, Jamini Mohan Ghose, *Magh Raiders in Bengal* (Calcutta: Bookland Private Ltd., 1960), IX, pp. 26-34, and for Hughli as a slave market used by Portuguese pirates, see p. 105; Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 42; Ansu Datta, *From Bengal to the Cape: Bengali Slaves in South Africa from 17th to 19th Century* (n.pl.: Xlibris Corporation, 2013), pp. 90-91 and 121; in ballads, as in compilations such as *The Ballads of Bengal*, 4 vols., ed. by Dineschandra Sen (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988). III. Also see J. J. A. Campos, *The History of the Portuguese in Bengal* (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1979), pp. 130-3, and Fanny Emily Penny, *Fort St. George, Madras: A Short History of Our First Possession in India* (London: S. Sonnenschein & Company, 1900), p. 100. For related instances of Portuguese abductions of Bengalis and other peoples in and around the Bay of Bengal as well as the Indian ocean generally, see, Shaugata Bhaduri, ‘Indo Canadian Diaspora - The Iberian Connection’, in *India in Canada: Canada in India*, ed. Taniya Gupta and Antonia Navarro-Tejero (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 19–32, esp. p. 26; Daniel Connolly, “‘I Never Beheld a More Piteous Object’”: Abductions and the Production of Colonial Knowledge in Maritime Asia’, *Journal for Maritime Research* 16.2 (2014), 124–38, esp. 128, 129; Biplab Dasgupta, *European Trade and Colonial Conquest* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), pp. 193 (the kidnapped individual mentioned here went on to become a famous poet of medieval Bengal, Aloal) and 267.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Hertslet, *Hertslet’s Commercial Treaties: A Collection of Treaties and Conventions, Between Great Britain and Foreign Powers... as They Relate to Commerce and Navigation, Slavery, Extradition, Nationality...*, 16 vols. (London: Butterworths, 1885), XV, pp. 285-6 (the treaty between the English and the Portuguese mutually agreeing to abstain from kidnapping, signed in 1880 but obviously referring to a long-standing competitive practice common to both); James Talboys Wheeler, *Early Records of British India: A History of the English Settlements in India, as Told in the Government Records, the Works of Old Travellers and Other Contemporary Documents, from the Earliest Period Down to the Rise of British Power in India* (London: Trübner, 1878), pp. 89-90; Dirom Gray Crawford, *A Brief History of the Hughli District* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1903), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Satadru Sen, *Savagery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean: Power, Pleasure and the Andaman Islanders* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Connolly, pp. 124-29. Connolly’s essay represents a serious recent examination of this elusive topic of European abductions in Asia and elsewhere. Also see Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Akron: Ohio University Press, 2015), n.p.

This is the phenomenon of kidnapping as colonial terrorism, which in current terrorism studies constitutes first wave terrorism for territorial and colonial conquest in contrast to the fourth wave terrorism for religious and political ideology currently unfolding.<sup>25</sup> The British rival the Portuguese in this violent behaviour worldwide as well as in India, as ship log books of sixteenth century English commercial expeditions and early seventeenth century East India Company records document.<sup>26</sup> The sporadic but persistent character of these mentions show that casual abductions of Indians and Asians people were for the East India Company – and for all European trading expeditions in the early modern period – a normative instantaneous practice in irregular need of recordation if at all, and bereft of the moral and ethical considerations that were to be the bane of the laws that were to prohibit such activities only two centuries later. Thus, the Portuguese kidnappings of Indians in Bengal that Fitch presumably saw in the late 1580s would be part of his confidential report to his London backers and become

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<sup>25</sup> David C. Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Terrorism' in *An International History of Terrorism: Western and Non-Western Experiences*, ed. by Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Bernhard Blumenau (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 282–311.

<sup>26</sup> Connolly, pp. 128, 130-31 and 133; *Samuel Purchas, Hakluytus Posthumus*, 22 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1905), III, p. 325 ('we tooke with us twelve of the Indians of several places'); *Letters Received by the East India Company From Its Servants in the East*, ed. William Foster, 16 vols. (London: Sampson, Low, Marston and Co., 1897), II, p. 36 (refers to the taking of a young girl), 93, 113; Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), p. 249; Sir Clements Robert Markham, *The Voyages of Sir James Lancaster, Kt., to the East Indies: With Abstracts of Journals of Voyages to the East Indies During the Seventeenth Century, Preserved in the India Office* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1877), p. 386; Clements Robert Markham, *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1878), p. 387 ('we saw a boate at sea [off the coast of Gujrat, near Suarat] and out of her gotte a a pilot' [emphasis added]). The comment of Miles Ogborn who cites the last two sources, is useful: 'When at sea, advice, information, and maps were sought from captains of European and Asian ships met along the way, and 'local' pilots — Indians, Africans, Arabs, Javanese, and Japanese — were either paid, pledged or kidnapped, depending on the circumstances...', *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 49. Fanny Penny tries vigorously to separate the English from such activities (pp. 101-3), but the other sources cited here provide evidence to the contrary, including this one from the company itself, which in 1828 alludes to enslaving Indians as a long standing practice of the East India Company ('while the company had only a factory at Tellicherry long before the acquisition of the territory, the transfer of slaves was recognized and sanctioned by an order of the Governor of Bombay'), *East India: Slavery: Copy of the Despatch of the Governor General of India in Council to the Court of Directors*, (no pl., no publisher, 1841), p 131: digitized edition at: <https://books.google.com/books?id=dPtAAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA131&dq=kidnapping+in+the+east+india+company++company+records&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjq1PCItsvZAhWKmeAKHUDvBPQQ6AEITzAH#v=onepage&q=kidnapping%20in%20the%20east%20india%20company%20company%20records&f=false> (accessed 1 March 2018).

part of the intelligence they would use to prepare their own Indian enterprise.<sup>27</sup> Yet, while such experiences were not suitable for the published account of Fitch's voyage, they would be perfect for deployment by him in the sensational sailors' yarns of Elizabethan and Jacobean London tavern culture.

Several convergent factors compellingly place Shakespeare and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a productive proximity with Ralph Fitch's Indian experience. When Fitch returns to London in 1591, Shakespeare is by universal scholarly consensus just arrived in London and looking for material for sensational playscripts with which to make his mark in the public theatre. An unpaid Elizabethan tax notice locates one of Shakespeare's earliest London residences in Bishopsgate Ward near St Helen's, Bishopsgate.<sup>28</sup> Just inside the northern wall of the city, Bishopsgate was the main stopping point for travellers entering the city from northern destinations such as Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwickshire. Situated about a mile south of the first London playhouse the Theatre in Shoreditch where Shakespeare would go to work, Bishopsgate contained players, and active inn-yard theatres such as The Bull and Cross Keys,<sup>29</sup> and some of the very merchants who had financed Fitch's trip to India, such as Richard Staper.<sup>30</sup> That location is also where the Leathersellers Hall is located, immediately adjoining St Helen's Church and occupying the southern part of the estate of an old Benedictine nunnery that the company acquired in 1543; the northern part of that estate contained cheap tenements.<sup>31</sup> These premises would provide suitable lodgings for newcomers to town such as William Shakespeare. Recently discovered documents in

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<sup>27</sup> Dasgupta provides an instance of the East India Company's intelligence gathering that Fitch's report would have helped to build (280).

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (Oxford (UK): Oxford UP, 1975), 161-64. The 1596 date of the tax notice plausibly allows for Shakespeare's residence here for some years prior to that date in order for him to be noticed by the city's tax authorities.

<sup>29</sup> For the players resident here see E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford (UK): Clarendon Press, 1923), 2: 299, 302, 320, 339, 344. For the inn yards see Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642* (Cambridge (UK): Cambridge UP, 1992), 119. Even John Aubrey's dubious hearsay report half a century after the fact locating Shakespeare in the early 1590s even farther north in the tenements immediately adjoining the first playhouse in Shoreditch, in the company of theatre colleagues such as Christopher Marlowe [John Aubrey, *Brief Lives: Chiefly of Contemporaries ...*, ed. Andrew Clark, 2 vols. (Oxford (UK): Clarendon Press, 1898), 1: 97], underlines the logic of Shakespeare finding places to live in districts and neighborhoods around the playhouse where he would go to work and in the part of the city where he first arrives, of which the Bishopsgate residence just inside the city's north gate would be a natural choice. Why and how Shakespeare could have first entered the city from Newgate on the west side as Schoenbaum asserted without explanation (96) is hard to understand.

<sup>30</sup> Stanley W. Wells, *Shakespeare: For All Time* (Oxford [UK]: Oxford UP, 2003), 77-79.

<sup>31</sup> William Henry Black, *History and Antiquities of the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers* (London: Edward J. Francis, 1871), 72-73.

the archives of the Leathersellers company point to a familial Shakespeare connection with the Leatherselling profession,<sup>32</sup> which explains the occupation of Shakespeare's father as a glover and leather whitener as well as Shakespeare's lodging in Bishopsgate, in the company of people his family knew who could help an inexperienced provincial like him settle in the brawling metropolis that London already had become.

Alehouses and pubs were ubiquitous in Elizabethan London and they were *the* principal social venue for people, as social comments and historical notices of the time, and modern social historians have long made clear.<sup>33</sup> This was particularly true for the Bishopsgate area, with its prime artery, Bishopsgate Street, 'connect[ing] one prime locale of taverns with another'.<sup>34</sup> The socially cross-sectional clients of taverns and alehouses generally, and in that area in particular – 'between Bishopsgate and Shoreditch ... where the writers clustered, close to the first theatres'<sup>35</sup> – included players, poets, and returning mariners enthralling locals with their sensational experiences. These were necessarily informal exchanges that in their delivery became

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<sup>32</sup> 'Our Neighbor: William Shakespeare and the Leathersellers', *The Leathersellers Review*, 30 (2007), 14-16, also available at

<http://www.leathersellers.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/leathersellers%202007-08.pdf>.

Also see, Jerome Farrell, 'Ralph Fitch Our Most Adventurous Leatherseller.pdf', *Leathersellers Review* 30 (2007), 16–18.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Porter, *Shakespeare's London* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing Limited, 2012), p. 89 and Arthur F. Kinney, *Rogues, Vagabonds, & Sturdy Beggars: A New Gallery of Tudor and Early Stuart Rogue Literature Exposing the Lives, Times, and Cozening Tricks of the Elizabethan Underworld* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), p. 16 (both include the comment of the Swiss visitor, Thomas Platter, in 1591 that 'I have never seen more taverns and alehouses in my whole life than in London', with Kinney also including the comment of Thomas Dekker that in the suburbs there are more alehouses than there are 'in all of Spain and France', [p. 246]); Dominic Shellard and Siobhan Keenan, *Shakespeare's Cultural Capital: His Economic Impact from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (London: Springer/Macmillan, 2016), p. 105 (quotes 1577 Elizabethan government survey figures on taverns and alehouses to the effect that there were 19000 alehouses, taverns and inns across England for a population of 4 million, i.e. one pub for every 250 residents, which means people went to such establishments very commonly, otherwise such establishments could not have proliferated as much as these statistics indicate); Russell A. Fraser, *Shakespeare* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988), p. 87 (provides modern numerical estimates of the spread of taverns in Elizabethan London - 900 taverns in Middlesex county alone- the area of greater London in Shakespeare's time); Johannes Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England* (Bristol: Jessica Kingsley, 1994), pp. 88-89 (modern study of the social life of Elizabethan taverns); Steven Earnshaw, *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 45 (offers a modern analysis of the theatrical and political space of Elizabethan taverns using the Boar's Head tavern in Eastcheap as an example).

<sup>34</sup> Park Honan, *Christopher Marlowe: Poet and Spy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 187.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Nicholl, *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2005), pp. 2 and also 50.

unlocalized, timeless and apocryphal, and which if ever published rarely acknowledged, as one such pamphlet did, that ‘the contents were penned as he [the traveler] delivered it from his own mouth’.<sup>36</sup> Margo Hendricks has reminded us of the historicity of tavern tales: ‘For many Londoners knowledge of India (and Africa and the Americas) would have come orally, from seamen who served on the merchant and fighting ships traversing the Atlantic and Indian oceans... [and] for whom India may have been the stuff of a sailor’s tavern tale’. The disseminatory effect of such tales was indirectly corroborated by Hakluyt himself, when he boasted that in his ‘publike lectures... [he] was the first, that produced and shewed both the olde imperfectly composed, and the new lately reformed Mappes, Globes, Spheares, ... for demonstration in the common schooles, to the singular pleasure, and generall contentment of my auditory’.<sup>37</sup>

These factors collectively make a tavern conversation between Shakespeare and Fitch in any one of the many taverns in the Bishopsgate area sometime between 1591 and 1595 a certain but unrecorded and unverifiable occurrence. What is known about their circumstances – Shakespeare, the aspiring young playwright with his familial leathersellers connections recently arrived in London and looking for sensational material for the stage, and Fitch, the leatherseller just returned from India with valuable exotic information from an as yet unknown but rich country – points to the likelihood of what did happen between them – a conversation about India – while not necessarily being known by others or noted in its moment. This is an assertion of strong probability, that while not rising to the level of established fact anticipates its factuality and forecasts it in future investigations. It is a quintessential dark historical event that is humanly predictable but not documentarily visible, whose phenomenal character makes perfectly possible such a casual assignation between the two. It is also worth remembering that what Fitch was carrying was highly classified information, of which Shakespeare would have been perfectly aware and been obliged to use only in the most indirect and subtle ways. As such, it is feasible to posit a causative albeit shadowy connection between the return of Fitch to London in 1591 and the presentation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with its dreamy Indian material at the Theatre in Shoreditch in 1595.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mark Shaaber, *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England 1476-1622* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1929), 234-35.

<sup>37</sup> For the quotation from Hendricks as well as from Hakluyt see Hendricks, pp. 45 and 45n16, who cites Hakluyt in ‘empirical’ support of her point that public knowledge of India and other newly experienced lands was spread by returning sailors and by Hakluyt who interviewed them (‘lately reformed’).

<sup>38</sup> Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells (eds.) *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 468.



### III

The interface between Fitch's account and Shakespeare's narrative of the Indian boy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the dialectical politics of the poetic imagination which in seventeenth century England doesn't just generate poems and plays but also, as Todd Wayne Butler has put it, 'builds and unmakes governments', and which according to Cornelius Castoriadis creates reality *ex-nihilo*, here drawing not on the transcendence that Immanuel Kant hypothesized drives the imagination but rather on the social reality and desire that Baruch Spinoza postulated as impelling the imagination.<sup>39</sup> This is the desire for the unavailable, the desire and dream of wealth in the collective unconscious of a national literature, and because it is an imaginable desire of possession it is spontaneous and effortless, a possession that happens not through the violent mechanics of taking but in the sensuous dream of a receiving of that which is volitionally given – an unidentifiable human servitude and material wealth that is Bengal as India. This imaginable desire for possession exemplifies what nearly a century before Shakespeare, Pico della Mirandola had implied is the 'distortion and concealment' that is one of the double effects of the imagination.<sup>40</sup> In Shakespeare's own time the observation of the seventeenth century English social philosopher Thomas Browne that 'Knowledge is

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<sup>39</sup> The quotation is from Todd Wayne Butler, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), p. 3. For Castoriadis and Kant see, Vrasidas Karalis, *Cornelius Castoriadis and Radical Democracy* (Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 94-99; and 'Introduction' in Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand (eds.), *The Politics of Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 3-4, 19-20. For the differences between Kant and Spinoza on the imagination see Bottici and Challand, 'Introduction', p. 9, and Thomas Hippler, 'Spinoza and in the Origins of Critical Theory', in Bottici and Challand, pp. 62-64 (esp. p. 64). For connections between the literary imagination and national politics see Andrea T. Baumeister and John Horton (eds.), *Literature and the Political Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 19 and 44; Alessandra Ferrara, 'Politics at Its Best: Reasons that Move the Imagination', in Bottici and Challand, pp. 38-54 (esp. p. 53); Paul Gilbert, 'The Idea of A National Literature' in Baumeister and Horton, pp. 198–217 (esp. p. 198); and Moira Fradinger, *Binding Violence: Literary Visions of Political Origins* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> See John Sallis, in *Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 63-4, who has explained Mirandola's statement '[imagination is a] faculty of assimilating all other things to itself' (Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, *On the Imagination*, ed. and trans. by Harry Caplan [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930], p. 33, as 'the power to distort and conceal all things...', deriving, beyond Caplan's 'assimilation', from Mirandola's original Latin word *effingat* from the verb *effingo* meaning among other things to form, fashion, shape, wipe clean or wipe out (Lewis & Short Latin Dictionary, Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0059%3Aentry%3Deffingo> accessed 3 March 2018) and which is a part of imagination's 'double effect'. See also Mirandola's comments on the imagination as a 'vain and wandering thing' and as the fuel of ambition (*On the Imagination*, pp. 29 and 45-7 respectively).

made of oblivion, and to purchase a clear and warrantable body of Truth we must forget and part with much we know', adds particular point to Supriya Choudhury's recent reminder that 'memory and forgetting are closely interdependent in colonial culture'.<sup>41</sup>

The imaginative charge of Fitch's dry descriptions of India appears in Shakespeare, in free floating non-specific imagistic allusions, holographic simulacra. If Shakespeare's India is a dream, if Shakespeare's India is 'a set of assumptions' as Margo Hendricks proposed, if it is the frame of a 'colonial imaginary' as Shanker Raman has argued, or an '[en]framing trope' as Jyotsna Singh has contended,<sup>42</sup> the body of that dream and the substance of that frame is Fitch's experience of Bengal. Fitch's articulated and silent experiences of Bengal namelessly, indivisibly, haunt the idea of India that Shakespeare scatters in cryptic allusions, fragmentary images across his plays but centrally incorporates in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare's India is the discrete dreamy *translation* of the datum of Fitch's hybridly dreamy Bengal as India to which he floats 'down the river Jemena and the river Ganges,' and it exists – appropriately – in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As dream is topographically unidentifiable, so Bengal in the dream of India is unidentifiable, faceless, with the word 'Bengal' not even appearing anywhere in the play, or in the rest of the Shakespearean oeuvre. Yet, as the substance of dreams come from material experiences, so the substance of Bengal in Shakespeare's dream of India comes from the material experiences of Fitch in Bengal, the site of his longest stay in India. Just as the history of Bengal's naming slips and slides between Aryan and Dravidian pre-histories, Sanskritic and Prakritic etymologies, between medieval and early modern narratives of Hindu dynastic possessions and Muslim incursions, between Mughal territorial landscapes and Portuguese British colonial seizures,<sup>43</sup> so India and Bengal float in and out of each other in Shakespeare as the face and the shadow of the amorphous haunting of India. Just as Fitch's time in Bengal mutates between the real September of the Gangetic delta into the early summer of his

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Browne, *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. by Simon Wilkin, 6 vols. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), 'To the Reader', I, p. 1; Supriya Choudhury, 'Remembering Shakespeare in India: Colonial and Postcolonial Memory', in *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory*, ed. by Clara Calvo and Coppélia Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 101–20 (esp. p. 104).

<sup>42</sup> Hendricks, p. 45; Raman, p. 22; Singh, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> For the general basis of this thematic trajectory see Nitish Sengupta, *Land of Two Rivers: A History of Bengal from the Mahabharata to Mujib* (London: Penguin, 2011), n.p., Chapters 1-39; Eaton, pp. 3-268; Swarupa Gupta, *Notions of Nationhood in Bengal: Perspectives on Samaj, c. 1867-1905* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 259-78; Uzma Z. Rizvi, 'Creating Prehistory and Protohistory: Constructing Otherness and Politics of Contemporary Indigenous Populations in India', in *The Death of Prehistory*, ed. by Peter R. Schmidt and Stephen A. Mrozowski (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 141–60 (esp. pp. 141-8).

England, so Shakespeare's dream world of fairies and mortals hovers between the 'spiced air' of tropical high summer Bengali nights and the cooler English early spring seasons of 'oxslips', 'nodding violets', and 'wild thyme[s]' (2.1.250), while simultaneously conflating in the latter a mythical Athens with the reality of the poet's rural Warwickshire boyhood.

Yet, performing also the task of converting dystopia into utopia, the dream and fairy world of the play services as well the collective protocolonial longing of escaping the actuality of an overcrowded, polluted, over employed, and politically turbulent, late Tudor London haunted by the problem of an ageing and childless Queen, into a dreamscape of effortlessly possessed, fluidly fertile, plenty that is Bengal as India. The politics of sixteenth century English literary fairy work may be read in a variety of ways,<sup>44</sup> but contrary to frequent modern readings of the stolen Indian boy as a changeling, and despite the play's own use of the term (for example by Oberon in 2.1.123), the figure cannot be said to conform to the changeling tradition in early modern Anglo-European popular literature simply because there is no substitution involved.<sup>45</sup> If generally in English post-medieval Catholic and Protestant cultural exegesis fairies and dreams articulate secret soulful desires,<sup>46</sup> Shakespeare's fairies betray buried national yearnings of territorial acquisitions and treasures possessed. The stolen Indian boy as well as the 'trifles' his mother used to happily fetch Titania transmute the violence of protocolonial predation into the softer emotional contours of a willing subaltern bondage between Anglo-European and Bengali Indian in which that bondage is a natural ontology that needs no more explanation than a casual allusion to an unspecific devotional sisterhood, 'a votaress of my order'. Even if for some that volitional gendered liaison may spell an Indian proto-feminist resistance to the play's

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<sup>44</sup> For a good survey of modern views of Elizabethan fairies, see Jesse Lander, 'Thinking with Fairies: A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Problem of Belief', *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 65, A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2012), 42–57.

<sup>45</sup> For this distinction see the features of changelings in Minor White Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), pp. 159–62; Katharine Mary Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 136–46; Theresa Bane, *Encyclopedia of Fairies in World Folklore and Mythology* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013), pp. 80–1; Regina Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith: Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), pp. 49 and 52.

<sup>46</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (New York: Dover, 1930), an Elizabethan pamphlet of 1584; see the invocation to the supernatural powers of Sybilla, the 'blessed virgin of fairies': 'to give me good counsel at all times, and to come by treasures hidden in the earth, and all other things that is to do mee pleasure', p. 235, also see pp. 225 and 250. Modern affirmations of this trait of fairies in the Elizabethan cultural discourse include Melitta Töller, *The Fairy Mythology in William Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* (Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2008), pp. 3–4 and 5; Lander, p. 52; Buccola, pp. 45–48, 60, and 246 n.9.

Western/English patriarchal textual design, that critical dividend is a Derridean supplement or substitution<sup>47</sup> of the transfiguration that Titania's speech about the stolen Indian boy and his complicit mother performs. The speech transforms the terrorist colonial tactic of kidnapping to intimidate a target population through fear into the romance of a happy and always-already existing surrender and submission.

This is a double naturalization in that it picks up and increases the implicit sanitization of the violence of his origins in Puck's matter-of-fact account of the Indian boy earlier: 'lovely boy stolen from an Indian King'. In that account the force of his seizure is syntactically visible but encased in a *fiat* of nature by the positioning of the word 'stolen' immediately after the phrase 'lovely boy' to make the stealing of the boy as ordinary and inevitable as the grabbing of an attractive fruit. The boy that is *naturally* 'stolen' in Puck's account becomes a hundred lines later in Titania's speech even more benignly situated, domesticated in an ancestral connection to the proxy motherhood of Titania, in which the brutality of his apprehending is elided altogether and replaced by the obligatory benevolence of a remembered maternity. This cleansing of the boy's history eclipses the lines' all-women parentage 'without the intervention of men', as gay and lesbian critical exegesis puts it.<sup>48</sup> The destiny of the Indian boy as a page in Oberon's plans for him differs only in degree from Titania's familial future for him as her pet who will perform tricks for her presumably as lucrative as the ones his mother did in fetching for Titania the treasures from the land, the 'trifles' she brought her. The commonality of a natural captivity as the boy's future in both Oberon's and Titania's projections is perfectly explained in Satadru Sen's analysis of the European colonial psyche that cannot conceive of an independent self-directed subjecthood for the non-European outside of a submission to itself, signally exemplified by Columbus's instantaneous comment about the friendliness of the Caribs who swim out to greet his ship as a sign of their suitability for servanthood to his countrymen.<sup>49</sup>

Concomitantly, the variance of Titania and Oberon from their traditional identities in early modern popular writing supplements the ways in which modern scholarship has

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<sup>47</sup> For a careful consideration of such arguments — and a modification of them — see Loomba, pp. 181-8, 191, and 199. For a compact elucidation of Jacques Derrida's difficult notion of the 'supplement', see Jack Reynolds, 'Decision', in *Understanding Derrida*, ed. by Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 46-51 (esp. p. 47).

<sup>48</sup> Claude J. Summers (ed.) *Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2014), entry for 'William Shakespeare', pp. 611-12.

<sup>49</sup> Satadru Sen, *Savagery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean: Power, Pleasure and the Andaman Islanders* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 92-3; Columbus's comment is quoted in Tom Smith, John S. Bowman, and Maurice Isserman, *Discovery of the Americas, 1492-1800* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), p. 28.

described Shakespeare's transformative use of fairyland.<sup>50</sup> In Titania's case that is a matter of her firmly English rather than her vaguely Amazonian associations in the popular early modern imagination, not just in the play's allusion to her as the 'fair vestal throned by the West' (2.1.164) but also in its echoing of one of the commonest names of Elizabeth in her court's culture of complimentary poetic praise, Diana.<sup>51</sup> The variance of Oberon from his typical non-Western character in works extending from Huon of Bordeaux to those of Edmund Spenser and Robert Greene, that Hendricks detailed,<sup>52</sup> is despite the play's solitary allusion to him as having come 'from the farthest steppes of India' (2.1.71) greater still, in the manner in which his drive to possess the Indian boy invokes not just Elizabeth's father's anxiety for a male heir just a few decades back but also Ferdinand of Arragon's implicitly competitive political marriage to the older and more intellectually capable Isabella of Castile with her more attractive kingdom a century earlier.<sup>53</sup> These factors, posit an Iberian Oberon and an English Titania and bring into view the design of a political allegory in the play. If, since the end of the fourteenth century in England, 'biblical hermeneutics and allegorical interpretation of classical authors affected vernacular composition' as modern medieval scholars assert, then a culture of political allegory in the play's own moment is only to be expected.<sup>54</sup> That culture is corroborated by what has been described as the obsessive courtly fervour of 'lockpicking' the meaning of public writings and performances, led by Elizabeth

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<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Swann, 'The Politics of Fairylore in Early Modern English Literature', *Renaissance Quarterly* 53.2 (2000), 449–73 (esp. 449-54).

<sup>51</sup> Marion A. Taylor, *Bottom Thou Art Translated: Political Allegory in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and Related Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1973), pp. 131-3; Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 168; Susan Doran, *Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp. 117-124; Gail Kern Pastor and Skiles Howard (eds.), *William Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream* (New York: Bedford / St. Martin's, 1999), 'Contextual Readings', pp. 138-9.

<sup>52</sup> Hendricks, pp. 47-48.

<sup>53</sup> William Hickling Prescott, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic*, ed. by John Foster Kirk (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1872), pp. 205-6; M. Lunenfeld, 'Isabella I of Castile and the Company of Women in Power', *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 4.2 (1977), 57–79 (esp. 57-67).

<sup>54</sup> For the quotation see, Ann W. Astell, *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. ix. For the pervasiveness of allegorical tastes in the play's own moment, see, Louis Adrian Montrose, 'The Imperial Votaress', in *A Shakespeare Reader: Sources and Criticism*, ed. by Richard Danson Brown and David Johnson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 60–71 (esp. pp. 63-4 and 158-62), and Louis Adrian Montrose, 'The Shadows of Playing', in *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Critical Essays*, ed. by Dorothea Kehler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), pp. 217-40 (esp. pp. 224-6); Maurice Hunt, 'A Speculative Political Allegory in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*', *Comparative Drama* 34.4 (2000), 423–53 (esp. 424-5).

herself partly due to her distaste about any insinuations in them about her accession.<sup>55</sup> As confirmatory is Edmund Spenser's admission that the rhetorical purpose of the political allegory in *The Faerie Queene* was to invite the reader to 'discover... [the] general intention and meaning' of his work.<sup>56</sup> This historical context lends credence to the modern critical assertion that Shakespeare's plays 'not only were topical but were meant to be so interpreted', that is, allegorically.<sup>57</sup>

The necessary semantic fluidity of political allegory precludes a specific identification of Oberon and Titania, requiring instead only a heuristic gesture towards the idea of an impending national clash between Elizabeth's England and a unified Iberian regime, led by the figure of Phillip II who as Elizabeth's brother-in-law is still in public consciousness when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is written.<sup>58</sup> The clash is over the treasure of India that is Bengal, and that is figuratively represented by the Indian boy, its metaphoric fruit as it were. The rhetorical unity of political and poetic allegory makes an English national interest an artistic idea in the public sphere, that both homogenizes the latter and brings it into a supportive relationship with the structures of power "to create continuity and unity" and... compensate for instability' in that relationship.<sup>59</sup> This discursive phenomenon converts Titania's resistance of Oberon's demand for the Indian boy from being a local textual confrontation to being the heart of the play's trilevel action as noted frequently in critical commentary.<sup>60</sup> For the popular stage's raucous and highly excitable audience of more than 2000 people on an average at each performance<sup>61</sup> the play becomes thus an inspiring public script of imperial English aspiration that meets the prime condition laid down by the courtier critic Phillip Sidney for art that is to move, namely to be delightful first if it is to be instructive, and which

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<sup>55</sup> Taylor, pp. 14-17 (p. 17).

<sup>56</sup> Edmund Spenser, 'Letter to Walter Raleigh', *The Complete Works of Edmund Spenser*, 8 vols., ed. by Alexander Balloch Grossart, (London: Spenser Society, 1882) III, pp. 315-20 (emphasis added).

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, p. 29.

<sup>58</sup> Desai also sees an allegorical representation in Oberon and Titania representing a Spanish Phillip and an English Elizabeth respectively, although he sees the source of contention between them as issuing from Phillip's re-marriage negotiations after Mary Tudor's death (138-9).

<sup>59</sup> David Lawton, *Voice in Later Medieval English Literature: Public Interiorities* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 70; quoted in Astell, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Desai, 138; Ismail Wali, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Shakespeare's Syzygy of Meaning* (Pittsburgh: Rose Dog Books, n.d.), p. 48.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Gurr, 'The Social Evolution of Shakespeare's Globe', *Theatre Symposium: A Journal of the Southeastern Theatre Conference* 4 (Theatrical Spaces and Dramatic Places: The Reemergence of the Theatre Building in the Renaissance) (1996), 15-26 (esp. 19-20), and *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 21; Susan Cerasano, 'Must the Devil Appear?: Audience, Actors, Stage Business' in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Arthur F. Kinney (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), pp. 193-211 (esp. pp. 195-6).



echoes Horace's instructions in *Ars Poetica* that 'poems should be tender and affecting, and bear away the soul of the auditor'.<sup>62</sup> That *moving*, and that 'bear[ing] away [of] the soul of the auditor', is the play's entertaining of the audience, its pleasure at experiencing the naturalism of English dominion over others in the comforting romance of a youthful summer dream, in which an equally natural patriarchal dominance underwrites the capers of young lovers in the forest and oversees their benevolent restitution to Athenian society. Hermia's and Helena's reactive relationship to their desired male partners are not a reversal of Oberon's 'beg[ging]' of Titania for the Indian boy (2.1.123), since all three relationships, like those of Theseus and Hippolyta and Pyramus and Thisbe, are mired in contentions of possession and theft in variable degrees.

To begin with, Lysander's flight into the Athenian forest with Hermia is prefaced by Oberon's plan to steal the already stolen Indian boy from Titania, which Puck carries out with his love-inducing potion that locks her affections on an ass-headed Bottom. Moreover, Lysander's flight is itself both a stealing away and a theft in the patriarchal legal understanding of the play's audience, as her father complains to the Duke: 'This man [Lysander] hath bewitch'd the bosom of my child... And stolen the impression of her fantasy' (1.1.123-8). The imbroglio of the two young couples in the forest likewise proceeds along the axis of a thievery of affections as Hermia, in trying to understand Lysander's abandonment of her for Helena because of Puck's mistaken application of the potion on *his* eyes, incredulously exclaims: '...would he have stolen away / From sleeping Hermia' and 'You thief of love! what, have you come by night / And stolen my love's heart from him?' (3.1.53-4; 3.2.297-98). So, if the application and misapplication of Puck's magic potion starts the cascading abductions of affections among the lovers, the correction of those mis-pairings is an intrinsic part of the release of Titania's donkey-centred emotions in exchange for her surrender to Oberon of the kidnapped Indian boy. Book-ending all thieveries is the hijacking of the dolorous effects of Ovid's tragedy by the 'mungrell' comedy<sup>63</sup> of the mechanicals' hilarious performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe', and in that, one last performative echo of the imminent blissful English plunder of Bengal as India underlying the play.

Entirely unsurprising therefore, is the high incidence of the word 'stolen' in the play, its eight occurrences constituting the highest usage of that word for any play in the canon.

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<sup>62</sup> Philip Sidney, *An Apology For Poetry (Or The Defence Of Poesy)*, ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd and R.W. Maslen, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 87 line 15; Horace (Q. Horatius Flaccus), *Ars Poetica* (The Art of Poetry: To the Pisos)' electronic edition available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0065%3Acard%3D99>.

<sup>63</sup> The term 'mungrell' is Sidney's; see *Apology*, p. 112.

The preponderance of ‘stolen’ over the word ‘steal’, which appears 6 times, reflects the fantasy completion of a desired action incomplete as yet in real life, a buried textual *leitmotif* that is the protocolonial English collective political imaginary’s drive to possess the treasure and the people of India now experienced first-hand in Fitch’s journey. That *leitmotif* predictively articulates, to appropriate Gitanjali Shahani’s comment about the play’s allusion to spices, ‘later narratives of colonial plunder’.<sup>64</sup> If in the play’s completion of its comedic obligation of ‘every Jack ... [having] its Jill / And nought... [going] to ill’ (3.2.490-1), the traditional presence of an obstructive villainy performing the blocking action of a comic plot in ahistorical formalist exegesis is uniquely missing, that elision is the masking of the plot’s prime mover, the taking of the Indian boy that symptomizes the historical aggression of competitive Anglo-European predatory incursions into India. To the play’s audience its own imagined history can only have a happy outcome, it can only be a comedy. Such happy political allegories are the common staple of complimentary queenly entertainments showing the dominion of England over barbaric others, such as the famous one of the Salvage Man subdued naturally by English grace that was staged before Elizabeth by Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester at his estate in Kenilworth in 1575, and George Chapman’s poem about Guiana’s grateful supplication to English power dedicated to Walter Raleigh in 1596. The happy allegory of the stolen Indian boy in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* also recalls the lavish spectacle with fairies and ‘the fair vestal throned by the west’ that was put on for Elizabeth by the Earl of Hertford at *his* estate in Elvetham in Hampshire in 1591.<sup>65</sup>

As the simply ‘stolen’ Indian boy prefigures the young Indians who will start appearing within the next two decades in triumphant public London baptisms celebrating English ideological dominion over the peoples it will subjugate,<sup>66</sup> so do the 43 occurrences of silk and spice in this play and busily over the rest of the canon personify the dominant volume of the extraction of those commodities over all others dispatched by the English from India in the next three centuries. Preceded by the baptism and marriage record of an Indian named Samuel Munsur (Monsour) in St Nicholas, Deptford in 1613, in the dockyard of ships returning from India, and heralded by the elaborately staged street-

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<sup>64</sup> Shahani, 129.

<sup>65</sup> For Kenilworth see Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), pp. 165-71; for the poem about Guiana’s submission to England see George Chapman, *The Works of George Chapman: Poems and Minor Translations*, ed. by Charles Algernon Swinburne (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), p. 50; for Elvetham see Taylor, pp. 82-9.

<sup>66</sup> For more on this general Tudor-Stuart practice of symbolically displaying in this manner its achieved or aspired-for power over others, see E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), I, p. 46; Habib, *Black Lives*, pp. 72-3 and 258.

side christening of a seventeen-year old Indian boy as Peter Pope in the powerful business district of St. Dionis Backchurch in north-central London in 1616, and continuing at regular intervals throughout the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, a stream of young Indians are brought into the metropolis and ceremoniously domesticated into their menial English Christian lives. Some selective instances include the baptisms of ‘Phillip’ on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1613 in St Katherine by the Tower; ‘Thomas Mamato’ in St. Nicholas, Deptford on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1617; ‘James’ in St. Botolph, Aldgate on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1618; and ‘George Horsan, on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1626, who like Peter Pope was baptized by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. Still more exemplary was the baptism of a sixteen-year old female ‘Indian’ named ‘Loreto’ in the church of St. Olave, Hart Street in 1638, and a nine-year old girl tellingly named ‘Catherine Bengal’ in Westminster in 1650.<sup>67</sup> Despite the intermittent Indian regional identifications of these records, these individuals are likely to have been Bengali, given the province’s history of casual abductions noted earlier and the increasing concentration of English activity there in the seventeenth century.<sup>68</sup> Echoing the official description of Peter Pope by his missionary procurer, Patrick Copeland, these were the ‘first fruites of India’, the human successors of the ‘Indian boy stolen from his parents’ in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Still more significant, of course, were the other ‘fruits’ of India, the silk and commodities extraction, that for the former would in the next three centuries by British Indian colonial estimates amount to more than 673,000 lbs. per annum of purchased stock from all over Bengal including Malda, Cassimbazar and Dhaka (cities currently in West Bengal and Bangladesh),<sup>69</sup> and which between 1663 and 1720 would account for

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<sup>67</sup> See Habib, *Black Lives*, p. 338, Item 286; 240-41, 339 Item 296; 340 Items 300, 302; 343 Item 319; 345 Item 328; Item 349; and Item 359 respectively, and for Catherine Bengal see Intiaz Habib, ‘East Indians in Shakespeare’s London’, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 36.1 (2006), 1-13, (see p. 8 n. 41).

<sup>68</sup> See in this connection Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 241.

<sup>69</sup> For the components of this summary statement, see C.R. Wilson, *The Early Annals of the English in Bengal* (London: W. Thacker and Co., 1895), pp. 45-6; Nitya Gopal Mukerji, *A Monograph on the Silk Fabrics of Bengal* (Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Press, 1903), p. 70, ‘Table T’ p. 81; Jagjeet Lally, ‘The Pattern of Trade in Seventeenth-Century Mughal India: Towards an Economic Explanation’, *LSE Working Papers* 09, no. 120 (2009): 32, electronic essay available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/economicHistory/pdf/WP120>; Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720* (Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 119 and 165, for Bengal as being the principal supplier of raw silk and textiles by the end of the eighteenth century, and pp. 57 and 245 for Jean Baptiste Tavernier’s claim of six to seven hundred thousand bales of silk exported from Bengal in the later seventeenth century; the electronic essay ‘Bengal Maritime Trade’, at <http://what-when->

88% of all silk sold in Europe.<sup>70</sup> As M. Ahmedullah has found, between the seventeenth and eighteenth, centuries silk and other textiles would make up ‘71%’ of the value of all goods exported from Bengal to England by the East India Company. By the eighteenth century Bengal’s share of total exports of textiles from Asia by the British would be higher than all other locations combined.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, the Bengal enticements that ‘spice[s]’ Titania’s Indian ‘air’, would include in addition to saltpeter, cloves, turmeric, pepper, opium and rice, the English procurement of which, starting modestly and possibly whetted as Desai implies by the unearthing of such items in the hold of the seized Portuguese galleon *Madre Dios* in 1592,<sup>72</sup> would grow to purchased stocks of 230,000 pounds by 1680 and more than 400,000 by 1720.<sup>73</sup> As A.K. Bagchi has put it, by 1795 the British will have taken away ‘more than 7 per cent of the gross material product of Bengal’,<sup>74</sup> a profitability that may explain the valuation of Bengal at this time, by both the Mughals when they hand over Bengal to the British as well by the British themselves, as a ‘paradise’.<sup>75</sup> The well-known economic data cited in this paragraph describes the material history forecasted by the innocuously metaphoric ‘baubles’ from the land that the Indian boy’s mother fetches Titania in emulation of the ships ‘big-bellied’ with ‘merchandise’ loading at the shore, the native collaboration feminized and anonymized in typical colonial fashion into the compliant figure of ‘a votaress’ of Titania’s order. That compliance would change into potential subversiveness in Bassanio’s earlier cited allusion to the ‘dangerous[ness]’ of the ‘Indian beauty’ veiled beneath her ‘scarf’ in *The Merchant of Venice* (3.2.100-1), the play written next, echoing perhaps the emerging resistance to English plunder by local Bengali communities. As the veil masks the dangerous enticements of India’s wealth for Europe

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<http://how.com/western-colonialism/bengal-maritime-trade-of-western-colonialism/> accessed August 26, 2016 for the total volume of European exports from Bengal reaching up to 3 million rupees by 1720.

<sup>70</sup> Dasgupta, p. 282.

<sup>71</sup> M. Ahmedullah, ‘From Muslin To Museum: The Rise and Fall of Bengal’s Textile Empire – Part 2’, *Alochonaa (Dialogue)*, February 25, 2014, electronic essay available at <https://alochonaa.com/2014/02/25/from-muslin-to-museum-the-rise-and-fall-of-bengals-textile-empire-2/>.

<sup>72</sup> Desai, 132.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson, *Annals*, p. 58; ‘Bengal Maritime Trade’, electronic essay at <http://what-when-how.com/western-colonialism/bengal-maritime-trade-of-western-colonialism/>; K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company: 1660-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 503 and 547-8.

<sup>74</sup> Amiya Kumar Bagchi, ‘RAS | On Colonialism and the Indian Economy’, *Review of Agrarian Studies* 5.2 (2015), 96-109 (esp. p. 97).

<sup>75</sup> *A Collection of Treaties and Engagements with the Native Princes and States of Asia: Concluded on Behalf of the East India Company by the British Governments in India, Viz. by the Government of Bengal Etc. : Also Copies of Sunnuds Or Grants of Certain Privileges and Imunities to the East India Company by the Mogul and Other Native Princes of Hindustan* (London: United East-India Company, 1812), pp. 12, 14, and 19.

as Richard Wilson has resonantly put it,<sup>76</sup> so the play's allegory of the fairies and their Indian boy softens the violence at the heart of the English colonial dream of possessing India.

Substantial constructions of India or buried textual memories of Fitch's Bengal experience, such as the Indian boy passage, do not appear subsequently in Shakespeare's plays, beyond the cryptic allusion in *Macbeth* to the ship that Fitch had embarked on from England, The Tiger (1.3.8). That allusion may also refer to Fitch's brief tenure as British Consul in Aleppo in 1596.<sup>77</sup> The other allusions to India noted earlier are entirely of the geographically unspecific variety. Why India as a particular place would disappear from the Shakespearean poetic imagination in the later part of his career, given the growing English involvement in the subcontinent in those years and beyond, must remain for the moment a mystery. The mystery merely profiles the significance of the Indian passages in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

#### IV

The inherent unverifiability of the Fitch-Shakespeare connection identifies it as the dark matter of history. Analogous to a concept of contemporary physical astronomy that describes cosmic matter that is theoretically predicted but cannot be physically observed,<sup>78</sup> historical dark matter comprises the miscellanea of the quotidian that does not and cannot inhabit the sunlit islands of recorded document. Dark matter as historical evidence emerges from a temporal and locational triangulation of event and historical subject to convert probability into a plausible presumption of fact that is predictive of material verification as yet unacquired. Methodologically, the evidentiary claim of historical dark matter is absolved of the orthodox historiographic sin of speaking from absence, if it is understood that what is not said (or recorded) is often what need not be said, including but distinct from what cannot be said because it must not be said for attendant contingent pressures and obligations. In its own moment the obvious and the compulsively secretive need no articulation let alone recordation, but they do in the retrospective inquiry, to fill in the interstitial space between recorded fact and its un-narrated aporetic hinterland. The documentary archive cannot record the totality of

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<sup>76</sup> Richard Wilson, 'Veiling an Indian Beauty: Shakespeare and the Hijab', *Actes Des Congrès de La Société Française Shakespeare* 26 (2008), 177–202 (esp. p. 177), <<http://shakespeare.revues.org/1482>>.

<sup>77</sup> Foster, *Early Travels*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>78</sup> V. Trimble, 'Existence and Nature of Dark Matter in the Universe', *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics* 25 (1987), 425–72 (esp. pp. 454-5); Iain Nicolson, *Dark Side of the Universe: Dark Matter, Dark Energy, and the Fate of the Cosmos* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 96-7.

actional minutiae because such phenomena do not meet the minimum requirements of record keeping, the contextual utility that is the originary impetus of official archive and visible fact. Such material constitute the dark matter of historical analysis, valuable in the function it performs in making fully legible the phenomenal logic of the human narrative. In its interrogative instincts historical dark matter study shares and complements the revisionist energies of both new historicist and postcolonial critical praxis, and is particularly relevant for the early modern period with its precarious, fragmentary and opaque documentary record. Shankar Raman has insisted that ‘Like all cultural documents literary texts bear the impress of the material world from which they originate’.<sup>79</sup> If so, historical dark matter methodology provides a deliberate systemicity to the unspoken practice of early modern cultural and literary analyses based on evidence that, while reliable is inevitably circumstantial and indirect, and that Marjorie McIntosh, and Michele Marrapodi have reminded us ‘has [always been] thus in literary studies’.<sup>80</sup>

Political allegory can be a difficult undertaking in itself, but additionally so in the case of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for the challenge of its dark historical matter, which if made obvious can be politically offensive and artistically distasteful in its time and in ours, and in the latter consideration perhaps even unacceptable for conventional historiography. Puck’s apologetic epilogue, ‘If we mortals offend / Think this but a dream and all will mend’, did not satisfy Samuel Pepys in the 1662,<sup>81</sup> and awareness of the play’s protocolonial substructures may not restore our expectations of the light comedy we traditionally expect from the play. But such is the internecine underbelly of all art, its obscure umbilical link to the material history of its times, particularly in the archivally fragmentary and obscure early modern moment. Still, blending the politics of its dark historical matter with our pleasure in its literary artistry can enrich rather than detract from our enjoyment of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. That is a particular

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<sup>79</sup> Raman, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Marjorie McIntosh, ‘Social Capital in English Communities’ in *Patterns of Social Capital: Stability and Change in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Robert I. Rotberg and Gene A. Brucker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 131; Michele Marrapodi, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories: Anglo-Italian Transactions* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 124. For a clear example of the continuing critical orthodoxy of drawing plausible inference from indirect evidence see Honan, pp. 187-8: ‘Shakespeare and Marlowe saw each other dozens of times ... though the fact that no camera, no pen, ... records their exchanges is daunting. Even so, I want to offer a kind of circular report ... [of] the most fascinating of all relationships in Marlowe’s working life’.

<sup>81</sup> *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* ed. by G. Gregory Smith (London: Macmillan, 1905), p. 151, entry for September 29, 1662: ‘to the King’s Theatre, where we saw “Midsummer’s Night’s Dream”, which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life’.; quoted and discussed by Lander, p. 42.



enjoyment for the client constituencies of the world Shakespeare industry, such as India in general and Bengal in particular, where to trace the dark historical shadow of Bengal underlying the play is to stake the claim of those regions and their peoples in the cultural capital of the postmodern world that is Shakespeare.