

Appropriation of Shakespeare's Plays in the Postcolonial World: The Case of Malawian Education

Innocent Akilimale Ngulube

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine why the postcolonial world perennially appropriates William Shakespeare's plays instead of decolonizing them as purveyors of British colonialism and possibly of British neocolonialism now. In this regard, the paper uses Malawi as a case study which is a landlocked country located in South Eastern Africa bordered by Tanzania to the North, Zambia to the North West, and Mozambique to the South East and West. In particular, the paper argues that the Malawian education system appropriates Shakespeare's plays because of their timeless and universal applicability. This appropriation is illustrated by the commanding presence of Shakespeare's plays in English syllabus at both secondary school and university levels. Thus, in order to account for this continued appropriation of Shakespeare's plays in Malawian English syllabus, more specifically the study of Literature in English, the paper employs neoclassical literary criticism with a leaning on Samuel Johnson's treatise on Shakespeare's universality and postcolonial justifications for such universality. The paper starts by foregrounding the colonial use of Shakespeare's plays and its attendant critique. The paper then explores neoclassical and postcolonial justifications for the universal appropriation of Shakespeare's plays before putting the Malawian English syllabus into context. Finally, the paper teases out socio-political ramifications of appropriating Shakespeare's plays in Malawian education since the attainment of independence in 1964.

Keywords: appropriation, William Shakespeare, decolonization, postcolonial world, universality