

SEN – special issue on Shakespeare

<<Pre-print version>>

**'It's William back from the dead':
Commemoration, Representation and Race in Akala's Hip-Hop Shakespeare**

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Akala, Akala, wherefore art thou?
I'm the black Shakespeare and
The secret's out now
Akala, 'Comedy, History, Tragedy'

It's like Shakespeare with a nigga twist
Akala, 'Shakespeare'

Who's allowed to be the custodian of knowledge and who isn't
Akala, 'Hip-Hop and Shakespeare', TEDx Talk.

Recent work oriented towards race in Shakespeare studies has involved calls not just for critical attention to race as an ever-present, constitutive element of Shakespeare but also for modes of scholarship and criticism that actively promote critical race studies, diversity and inclusivity within the field. In her extraordinarily reflective study of race, Shakespeare and contemporary America, Ayanna Thompson describes her work 'as an act of intervention and activism' (2011: 128). Thompson urges the various constituencies of the book's audience, including teachers, theatre practitioners and community activists to facilitate discussions about race both in and through Shakespeare, which she argues might be at its most valuable where it is destabilized or regarded as an ongoing process. Thompson's call is echoed by Ruben Espinosa (2016), who showcases the important work within the field around race and diversity, yet also suggests that such work remains marginalized within the broader currents of the Shakespeare academy. For Espinosa, writing five years after Thompson's influential work, all of us invested in Shakespeare continue to have a material role to play in realizing greater diversity: 'our field's commitment to uncovering and discussing social and racial inequalities – in the world of Shakespeare and in our own – through race and ethnic studies should compel us to engender an atmosphere of inclusivity when it comes to our field, one that encourages future

scholars to challenge the perceived delineation of Shakespeare's meaning' (2016: 62). In this year of the Shakespeare quatercentenary, such ethical commitments to a diversified Shakespeare seem especially salutary. Writing in the Shakespeare Association of America's special commemorative publication, Ian Smith argues that 'speaking about race within the discipline, requires unpacking one's white positioning, which includes making whiteness visible and an object for critical interrogation; checking privilege; and exposing the denials and misinterpretations that, too often, keep race a minority issue and race studies a faddish or questionable enterprise in the era of so-called postracial enlightenment' (2016: 121). As we variously commemorate, celebrate and reflect on Shakespeare as a legacy, as a value and as a potentiality, we also have the opportunity to ensure that it is an open, plural Shakespeare that endures, one full of what Kathryn Schwarz calls 'fugitive propositions' (2016: 18).

I begin with these critics' reflections for several reasons. They offer insight into the current state of critical race studies in the field. They also encourage us to acknowledge and to reflect on our own subject positions and the different types of privilege they might bring as part of – not apart from – any discussion of race and Shakespeare. As such, they provide a useful framework from which one might practice Shakespeare criticism. Yet the kind of Shakespeare that these critics desire is, I would argue, already available within popular cultural productions. The focus of what follows is on British hip-hop artist Akala (the performing name of Kingslee Daley), who has emerged in the United Kingdom as the face of a contemporary, diversified Shakespeare. From his tracks that reference Shakespeare and engage in a battle-rhyme with the Bard to his founding of the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company, Akala has been presented in the media – and to a lesser extent in Shakespeare criticism – as simultaneously a critic of a traditionally valorized Shakespeare, one associated with high culture and white privilege, and an exponent of a more culturally hybrid, pliable Shakespeare that appeals to a young, multicultural demographic.¹ In terms provided by cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall, Akala's work can be interpreted as a space of discovery and play that negotiates constructions of race within culture (1996: 477). Akala exemplifies Hall's understanding of the dominant

representational field and of the importance for 'black culture' to intervene, to de-essentialize the 'black subject' and to advance popular culture expressions of identity that are dialogical (1996: 475-76). With Akala billed as a key figure in major commemorative events, including the BBC's *Shakespeare Live!* from the RSC (to be broadcast on 23 April 2016) and the British Council's *Shakespeare Lives* series, we are perhaps only beginning to apprehend how his status as 'black Shakespeare' functions in relation to the Shakespeare 400 culture industry. Does such self-positioning risk being co-opted in the interests of Shakespeare's apparent universalism? Is there an attendant risk of essentialising the 'black Shakespeare'? By exploring Akala's earlier work, in particular his track 'Shakespeare' and accompanying video, and then turning attention to representations of his role in the Shakespeare quatercentenary, this essay argues that Akala has long been negotiating the difficulties that occur with Shakespeare's cultural capital when race enters the equation. It further argues that in order to enact a responsible and ethical Shakespeare criticism, the critic has to allow for the possibility that Shakespeare's cultural prestige, as Thompson importantly acknowledges, may prove un conducive to a progressive race politics (2011: 6).

Akala's interest in Shakespeare can be dated back to 2006 -2007. The track 'Shakespeare' was a single from his MOBO award-winning album, *It's Not a Rumour* (2006). The Shakespearean theme continued on his next album *Freedom Lasso* (2007) that featured 'Comedy, Tragedy, History'. This track emerged out of an on-air radio challenge to Akala to reference the titles of Shakespearean plays in a rap (July 2008). Akala meets the challenge, splicing titles and punning on familiar quotes from 27 plays – 'Call it urban, call it street | A rose by any other name, smell just as sweet | Spit so hard, but I'm smart as the Bard' – in order to suggest a contiguity between his skill and Shakespeare's craft (Akala 2007a). In keeping with hip-hop's style of 'the speaker's enhanced and often parodic self-esteem as a front and centre rhetorical strategy' (Fischlin 2014: 282), Akala raps 'Akala, Akala, wherefore art thou? I'm the black Shakespeare and | The secret's out now | Chance never did crown me, this is destiny' (Akala 2007a). The force of such declarations is arguably lost as the performer's spoken word is remediated

here as a quoted text. In reading the reference, an initial response might be to turn to terms familiar within Shakespeare studies, and to see Akala as participating in citation or adaptation or appropriation that contribute to the circulation of 'Shakespeare' as culturally current, available and valuable. Yet citing Shakespeare and claiming to be the 'black Shakespeare' needs to be understood in relation to a broader convergence of hip-hop and Shakespeare. Kevin Wetmore (2008) productively reads this convergence through Henry Louis Gates Jr's concept of 'signifyin(g)', a trope associated with an African American literary tradition that entails 'repetition and revision, or revision with a signal difference' (148). As Wetmore explains, 'Hip-hop Shakespeare is thus signifyin(g) Shakespeare – setting up a complex interplay between the original Shakespearean text, elements of hip-hop culture, and the performer's own identities – finding a 'black voice' in the 'white text' of Shakespeare' (148). Akala situates himself within hip-hop's critical interrogation of dominant culture and Shakespeare functions as his focal point for that culture's reliance on binaries. In the simply titled track 'Shakespeare', Akala provides a provocative negotiation of cultural binaries that structure white / black, Shakespeare / hip-hop, or that narrowly constitute Shakespeare as an exclusively white cultural text:

Nigga listen
When I spit on the riddem, I kill em
Raw like the Ball of Brazilians
You don't want war, cor, the kids brilliant
Blood, im the heir to the throne
Not William, Akala, smart as King Arthur
Darker, harder, faster
Rasclaat, I kick the Illa shit
It's like Shakespeare, with a nigga twist
Lyricist, im the best on the road
Nitro flow, oh-so-cold, I'mma blow yo
Keep the hoes, I only want dough homes
Nobody close, I'm alone in my own zone
No no love for the po-po
Loco when I rock mics solo (Akala 2006a).

Akala has said of the track: 'It was a comedic parody that I was the rapping reincarnation of Shakespeare. Not that I am, but there is a genuine relationship

between poetry of all forms and that song made me ask – if Shakespeare was alive today, would he have been a rapper?’ (Emery 2009). Apparent here – and in the track – is not only Akala’s self-reflexive expropriation of Shakespeare but also his concern with locating synergies between hip-hop and Shakespearean verse. Akala riffs off cultural constructions of Shakespeare to enact an intermedial usurpation of the Bard as an author-function that variously signifies, excellence, authenticity and formal sophistication.

However, it is the use of the “n-word” that marks Akala’s appeal to Shakespeare as political and as racially charged. For Shakespeare scholars, unsurprisingly it is the lyric ‘It’s Shakespeare with a nigga twist’ that has attracted attention. For Ayanna Thompson, who cites the lyric as an epigraph to the introduction to *Passing Strange*, it ‘implies that Shakespeare does not already have a ‘nigga twist’ within it. Whatever the ‘nigga twist’ is imagined to be, it must be added to Shakespeare’ (2011: 6). It registers the paradoxical category of popular culture’s Shakespeare, as well as pop culture’s imaginings of racial identities, as simultaneously distant yet proximate. However, we need to think more carefully about the ‘it’s’ in Akala’s lyric: is the subject here Akala’s track itself, hip-hop, or the overall style? The simile ‘It’s *like* Shakespeare...’ becomes a transformative trope – as in Gates’ sense of signifyin(g) as ‘metamorphosis rather than metaphor’ (Wetmore 2008: 148) – in that Shakespeare and hip-hop are mutually altered and hybridized. The lyric also provides a chapter title to Adam Hansen’s *Shakespeare and Popular Music*, where it is modified to ‘Shakespeare with a Twist’ (2010: 58). As Hansen notes, Akala dropped the earlier version’s ‘nigga’ in subsequent performances of the track, which was also transformed sonically through the sampling of Tomcraft’s ‘Lonliness’. The video for Akala’s track is available on YouTube in ‘Dirty’ and ‘clean’ versions, where ‘nigga’ becomes ‘little’ (Akala 2009). Hansen suggests that Akala abandoned the term out of concern that audiences had become ‘desensitized’ to it, in a way contrary to rap pioneers’ intended appropriations of the term’ (2010: 73). These facts alone reflect the sensitivities around the use of such a charged term – to what extent can it be emptied of its constitutive power to label, denigrate and offend?

Akala's decision to substitute 'little' for 'nigga' may indicate that the connotations of the latter are too entrenched to be re-appropriated. As such, researchers and critics – including the present discussion – need to recognize the potential for risk in citing from the original. However in a track where repetition is not simply at the level of the musical or the sonic, I would argue that the lyric is also performative, in Judith Butler's sense of the term. 'As acts', Butler explains, injurious words 'become phenomenal; they become a kind of linguistic display that does not overcome their degrading meanings, but that reproduces them as public text and that, in being reproduced, displays them as reproducible and resignifiable terms' (1997: 100). That is to say, Akala's lyrics uses 'nigga' knowingly, and also discursively:

Its William back from the dead
But I rap bout gats and I'm black instead
It's Shakespeare, reincarnated
Except I spit flows and strip hoes naked
No fakin'-test my blood bruv
Its William, back as a tug cuz
So real the shit I kick now
Plus I don't write, I recite my shit now
Straight from the top, expert timin'
On top of that now, the whole things rhymin'
No more tights, now jeans saggin'
If I say so myself, I'm much more handsome
Don't ever compare me to rappers
I'm so quick-witted that I split em like fractions
My shit, I tell em like this
It's like Shakespeare with a nigga twist.

As Shakespeare is 'reincarnated' by the lyrics, Akala positions himself as both like *and* unlike ('black instead'), with race offered as only one marker of differentiation as Akala stages an intermedial exchange with the Bard: 'I don't write, I recite my shit now'. As with Shakespeare films from the 1990s, where 'media themes rise to the level of subject matter' (Donaldson 2008: 23), so in Akala's Shakespeare media and meditzation become an intrinsic story in and of themselves. In the video, Akala performs direct to camera and against a set of computer-generated wallpapers that locate him in an urban setting. Other backgrounds evoke the respective mediums of the rival bards, as the video cuts between ink dripping down calligraphy patterns – suggesting the author's pen

and signature – and a wall of stereos, beat boxes and cables. As the backgrounds change in the video, the ink patterns seem to flow into the electric cables, suggesting cultural syncretism.

The interplay between the traditional Shakespeare and Akala as ‘Shakespeare reincarnated’ is further conveyed sartorially with cuts from Akala in modern dress (a dark coat and hoodie) to Shakespearean style doublet and ruff. An image of Shakespeare’s face fades out, revealing a skeleton head. Later, we see a skull spin on Akala’s hand in a visual reference to the iconic image of Hamlet holding Yorick’s skull. The self-proclaimed Bardic successor has Shakespeare quite literally in the palm of his hand. The video moves between Shakespeare as (dead) author and media phenomenon. Registered here too is the process of remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000) that Akala’s lyrics engage in, as they allude to, adapt and hybridize an existing technology of expression.² Digital wallpapers featuring old TV monitors, and the subsequent cut to Akala performing within these frames, suggest how all cultural production, including the artists’s own brand of hip-hop or grime, is mediatized.

The lyrics contrast Shakespeare to the world of grime and hip-hop, especially its fast pace, street speak (for example, ‘gats’ or a gun, after the Gatling gun first used in the 1860s; and ‘hoes’, as in slang for a prostitute) and hyper-masculine code. Yet Akala’s track is not reducible to the “n-word”, or indeed to a single referent ‘Shakespeare’. It should not be essentialized on either of these discursive plains. Rather, the track and his work more generally can be understood in terms of Stuart Hall’s valuation of culture as a key site of meaning making, but also resistance. Hall argues that black artists and producers must develop cultural strategies in order to ‘shift the dispositions of power’ (1997: 471), although he recognizes that access to and interventions in the field of representation are hard won and may find resistance: ‘what replaces invisibility is a kind of carefully regulated, segregated invisibility’ (471). Hip-hop and rap have, in a North American context especially, long been understood as crucial spaces through which black artists ‘create new meanings of “blackness” and develop critiques that offer alternatives to the status quo’ (Spence 2011: 3).

Akala is tuned in to such cultural contexts but has equally proved keen to exploit hip-hop's richly citational dimension to cut across race lines – along with the aforementioned sampling of Tomcraft, he also references Eminem.

Yet Akala is also keen to perform a distancing from his North American peers – 'Don't ever compare me to rappers' – as well as from hip-hop's more commercial dimensions: 'The streets gave birth to hip hop', he claims, 'and the streets are where it lives. But the corporate world stole rap. Now Akala's stealing it back' (Akala 2006c). In his track 'Roll Wid Us' (Akala 2006b), Akala's hip-hop directly confronts corporate culture – and in the video, he performs before executives in a boardroom (Akala 2007b). Elsewhere, he has commented too on the origins of hip-hop in forms of African culture (Akala 2011). These various self-descriptions and rhetorical claims are themselves indicative of an authenticity discourse within hip-hop, which as Tricia Rose argues, seeks to redefine 'the constitution of narrative originality, composition and collective memory' and thus 'challenge[s] institutional apparatuses that define property, technological innovation, and authorship' (1994: 85). Akala ironizes the signifying practices of his hip-hop peers as empty and inauthentic, but the frustrations with hip-hop in fact express more general frustrations with dominant culture and mass media (as further suggested in the video's bank of TV monitors). This is exemplary of a trend within hip-hop, as David Hesmondhalgh notes, to direct anger and rage 'implicitly at an imaginary peer group enemy' and, in so doing, 'draw attention to the widespread existence of social suffering and counter the sentimental and optimistic implicit claims of other kinds of popular culture' (2007: 83). Thus in verse two of the track, Shakespeare functions synecdochically for structural inequities in contemporary Britain:

I'm similar to William, but a little different
I do it for kids that's illiterate, not Elizabeth
Stuck on the road, faces screwed up
Feel like the world spat em out, and they
Chewed up
It's a matrix, I try and explain it

Akala styles himself and his craft as closer to the street and more socially aware than Shakespeare, whose plays have been all too easily construed as oriented toward the Queen rather than her subjects. The juxtaposition of Akala's Shakespeare to an imagined one of the past is a self-authenticating strategy through which emerges a frustration with one-dimensional or politically conservative accounts of Shakespeare. An allusion to the film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) is available, where the suggestion of a connection between the young playwright and royal power is literalised in the scene when Judi Dench's Elizabeth appears among the Globe audience. Of course, the 'Elizabeth' of the lyrics carries a double resonance in a British context: Akala expropriates Shakespeare in order to distance the Bard from his more official or 'high' culture associations in Britain, or to at least present an alternative to such institutionalized iterations. The singular and putatively essentialised 'Shakespeare' of the track's title belies the plurality of Shakespeares that emerge: the black Shakespeare, the hip-hop Shakespeare, the royal Shakespeare and the socially conscious Shakespeare. Akala destabilizes the binaries of Shakespeare / hip-hop, white / black, high / popular culture. As Hall argues, it is when cultural productions enact a dialogical approach – 'the logic of coupling rather than the logic of binary opposition' (1997: 475) – that more progressive race politics come into view.

As Hall also recognizes, however, progress on one category of identity politics such as race may not be coextensive with other dimensions or may even cut short other positionalities, as in (re)iterations of hyper-masculinity in black culture. While Akala's track may use 'Shakespeare' to spotlight the dominant culture's constructions of race and class, and while the track decodes hip-hop culture, when it comes to gender and sexuality, it seems to express normative ideologies. Whereas women are 'Elizabeth' and 'hoes', a figuring that implies a virgin / whore dichotomy, it is between men that the real business of the lyrics takes place, as Akala engages in a distinctly masculinist battle-rhyme with Shakespeare as the haunting father figure that must be simultaneously acknowledged, and trumped. Akala's track and the video especially express a desire to exorcise a Shakespeare of exclusivity and privilege, placing in its stead a

version that can be a vital catalyst for individual self-empowerment and collective critical awareness. Yet more traditional gendered constructions of the poet / artist / Bard continue to ghost this cultural production and Akala's strategies of self-representation.

To turn attention to the track's gender implications is to foreground the ideological contradictions that all cultural production – and individuals too – instance and negotiate. It seems important to recognize the gender politics of Akala's recourse to Shakespeare, especially considering how the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company (which he founded) is involved in a range of educational contexts, especially outreach programmes that explore the possibilities of using the lyricism of hip-hop to teach Shakespeare. Its work is also utilized as a teaching resource.³ For Akala, teaching Shakespeare through hip-hop has a disruptive, deconstructive element as it addresses cultural hierarchies and prejudices. 'By calling things 'high culture', he explains in an interview about the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company, 'we're viewing something as having more value because of the way it's presented. Shakespeare isn't any more of a high culture than hip-hop' (Emery 2009). Positing an asymmetrical relation between hip-hop and Shakespeare has deeper ramifications, he claims that a consequence of his workshops with teenagers is to realize a more accessible Bard, extending Shakespeare to audiences that might otherwise feel alienated by the language of an early modern playwright, but also to extend Shakespeare's cultural cachet to them: 'It's about showing them what's attainable. And if Shakespeare is presented as the most unattainable, highbrow entity, but then it's made relevant to them, what else might be?' (Emery 2009). For Akala, then, Shakespeare marks a key space where socio-economic inequalities can be examined; and Shakespeare's cultural authority can be mobilized in the interests of a progressive race and class politics, as through access it comes to signal youth agency.

However, as Thompson has noted with regard to contemporary race relations, we need to interrogate the assumption that Shakespeare necessarily offers a 'theoretical and practical tool for negotiating contemporary race relations' (2011: 6), especially because of the cultural force of the 'Bard' as a site of

tradition and authority. 'If the question remains whether race studies and racial activism benefit from attention to or inclusion of Shakespeare, then we must advocate for an unstable Shakespeare to get to the answer' (2011: 17). Akala's sense and use of Shakespeare negotiates these terms: through his work, the Bard's cultural whiteness gets destabilized but, as noted above, its iteration of male cultural privilege is also remobilized. In this regard, Shakespeare is not entirely or simply conducive as a medium or metaphor for revising structural inequalities. In part, my argument here is that despite Akala's critical work, and despite his incisive reflection's on the interconnections between perception, access and knowledge, he cannot himself escape the 'matrix' that is ideological structures, what Hall calls the 'machineries' and 'regimes of representation' (1997: 456), any more than he can control the field of reception. To continue the emphasis on gender politics, we might consider the Hip Hop Shakespeare Company's website as illustrative here – among the images on the banner is a photo of Akala standing beside Ian McKellan, with group of young people in the background. Hamlet-like, Akala holds a skull. The image has several effects: it presents Akala as the life-giving entity that mediates Shakespeare to a young, racially heterogeneous demographic. Through McKellan, it keys him into a venerable tradition of white male Shakespearean actors. Another effect is to suggest that McKellan's celebrity accumulates value through the association with the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company.

As a further illustration of dominant representational regimes, there is the media portrayal of Akala's involvement in Shakespeare quatercentenary celebrations. Consider *The Economist* film 'The World in 2016', which includes a segment on Shakespeare 400" 'On the 23 April 2016, the world will celebrate a writer who has touched rich and poor alike. His works have been enjoyed in more than 100 countries but nowhere more than his home land, England' (*The Economist*, 2015). The video begins backstage at the Barbican, with Alex Hassell in rehearsal for the RSC's *Henry V*, and moves to a vox pop from David Tennant. The voiceover establishes how the 2016 celebrations will be marked by an emphasis on attracting a new audience for Shakespeare. The first conduit is technology,

with the film profiling the RSC and Samsung 'RE:Shakespeare' app (which features Tennant himself and Akala). The second conduit is Akala – as the film's narrator explains 'it's not just a technological transformation that's taking place'. The film includes a clip of Akala performing in studio and a vox pop, where he talks about the necessity of updating and demystifying Shakespeare. The film then cuts back to Tennant, who talks about how Shakespeare's plays express the human condition. The narrator closes with the line 'perhaps some things really are timeless'. This film is by no means exemplary of national and global Shakespeare commemoration. However, it does reveal how easily the traditional Bard reforms, in ways that Thompson identifies as especially problematic to contemporary racial activism. In part, the film trades on Tennant's celebrity but for my purposes here, I am interested in how the film's trajectory, from Hassel to Tennant to Akala, and then back to Tennant, implies a symbolic passing of the baton of male cultural privilege from one figure to another. Although Akala is positioned as the innovator that brings Shakespeare to a new or next generation, the invisible bardic baton gets returned to Tennant as the paragon of the classic Shakespearean actor. The film is less about a conscious appropriation of Akala than a recourse to traditional assumptions and evaluations of proper Shakespeare. The technologically new, the culturally popular, or the non-normatively raced are represented as secondary, or after the 'thing itself'. The BBC's press release for its programme of events for 23 April 2016, which will feature live performances from the RSC, is similarly revealing: 'Dame Judi Dench, Ian McKellen, Joseph Fiennes, English National Opera, (ENO), Birmingham Royal Ballet, Ian Bostridge, and Akala (Hip Hop Shakespeare) confirmed for BBC Two's Shakespeare Live! From the RSC' (BBC 2016). Star-turns, the cult of celebrity, the established and revered Shakespeare actors, all come first, with Akala recognized as a brand that is less than and yet reenergizing to these more traditional icons. However, to see race as a factor of the announcement is perhaps a function of the difficulty one invariably encounters in a culture where the dominant machineries of representation continue to be ghosted by raced ways of seeing.

'How to enunciate race while depriving it of its lethal cling?' asks Toni Morrison (1998: 5), a question that is, she elaborates, 'of concept, of language, of trajectory, of habitation, of occupation' and one that cannot be easily resolved. I borrow Morrison's insight here in order to reflect on privilege based on gender, race and class but also to recognize that what one notices – about race, about Shakespeare, about aesthetics and about politics – may be a function of such intersecting sites of privilege. Akala's own work reverberates with Morrison's question, as he seeks to push the boundaries of what Shakespeare is, for whom and to whom he speaks. For Akala, Shakespeare is an effective tool for disclosing normative modes of representation, but he also locates value in Shakespeare at the level of language, moving from a political use of Shakespeare to identification with his works on an aesthetic level. He disrupts Shakespeare's cultural whiteness yet, as I have suggested, Akala himself is interpreted as a racial text that is simultaneously accommodated as visual evidence of Shakespeare's vitality and at the same time implicitly controlled and framed in relation to more traditional expressions of the transcendent Bard. What kind of Shakespeare is thus being celebrated, commemorated and *remembered*? If Akala's work and reception demonstrate how Shakespeare's cultural prestige can be mobilized in the interests of a race and class activism, they also encounter and register the traditional values, assumptions and prejudices that are embedded in the Shakespeare phenomenon. As Shakespeare scholars like Thompson, Espinosa and others emphasize, it falls to the teachers and practitioners in the field to continually check, destabilize and diversify what Shakespeare means, and what values get expressed through that conduit as a false universal. Or, perhaps we need to be less Shakespeare-centric, and recognize that the issue is less about Shakespeare's success or failure as a metalanguage for race than about the challenges, complexities and vicissitudes of contemporary race relations, which Shakespeare may or may not bring into focus. In Akala's brand of cultural syncretism, which locates contiguities and differences between hip-hop and Shakespeare, we might find a productively creative and indeed critical way to variously celebrate and use Shakespeare as one among a range of meaning-making technologies, each with their own distinctive yet equally valued histories.

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Notes

¹ Consider the passing reference to Akala in McLuskie and Rumbold (2014: 2): 'The celebrated "Shakespeare" no longer referred to only to the collection of the texts written by an early modern playwrights: the Shakespeare of the hip-hop performer Akala was getting as much attention as a new scholarly biography'.

² The visuals may recall the Shakespeare episode of MTV's *Celebrity Deathmatch*, where the Bard goes head-to-head with rapper Busta Rhymes for the title of best poet. The episode was broadcast on 11 March 1999. See Burt (2002) and Lanier (2002).

³ See the online lesson plan that uses Akala's work:

<https://www.tes.com/lessons/zf-dwjGwc0K4ug/ted-talks-hip-hop-shakespeare>