



Shakespeare and the Coconuts: On Post-apartheid South African Culture

Natasha Distiller

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“The term ‘coconut’ is one of several edible designations, including ‘bounty’ (from the American Bounty chocolate bar), ‘topdeck’ (a South African chocolate bar) ‘apple,’ ‘banana,’ and, of course, ‘oreo’ (from the American Oreo cookie), used to designate someone who, due to his or her behaviour, identifications, or because they have been raised by whites, is ‘black’ on the ‘outside’ and ‘white’ on the ‘inside.’ In South Africa, the appellation ‘coconut’ is currently in extensive circulation, and is closely tied to class mobility as indicated through speaking a specific kind of ‘white’ English. When used by those who are claiming access to an authentic blackness of whatever shade, the term has derogatory implications of inauthenticity, artificiality and, sometimes, shameful or shameless aspiration.”

(From the Introduction)

In this book Natasha Distiller explores historic and contemporary uses of Shakespeare in South African society which illustrate the complexities of colonial and post-colonial realities as they relate to iconic Englishness. Beginning with Solomon Plaatje, the author looks at the development of an elite group educated in English and able to use Shakespeare to formulate South African works and South African identities. Refusing simple or easy answers, Distiller then explores the South African Shakespearian tradition postapartheid. Touching on the work of, amongst others, Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Antony Sher, Stephen Francis, Rico Schacherl and Kopano Matlwa, and including the popular media as well as school textbooks, *Shakespeare and the Coconuts* engages with aspects of South Africa’s complicated, painful, fascinating political and cultural worlds, and their intersections.

Written in an accessible style to explain current cultural theory, *Shakespeare and the Coconuts* will be of interest to students, academics and the general interested reader.

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