



President's report: 2016-17

It has been a productive year for the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa since the triennial congress held in Grahamstown in July last year.

Another successful conference was organised by outgoing president, Warren Snowball, under the broad theme "Shakespeare: Religion, Psychology, Anthropology". Delegates came from across South Africa as well as from Germany, Britain and France. The keynote speaker was Peter W. Marx, Chair of Theatre and Media Studies at the University of Cologne and Director of the university's Theatre Studies Collection. His talk, weaving together scholarship about the German literary and theatrical history of the Ghost in *Hamlet* and insights into more recent 'global' renditions of the play, was a public event – part of the National Arts Festival's Think!Fest programme – and the venue was filled to capacity.

A number of the papers delivered at the conference were subsequently published in volume 29 of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*. (Volume 30 will be appearing towards the end of 2017. It is a special volume, guest edited by Lliane Loots, Sandra Young and Miranda Young, dedicated to articles emerging from the important "Decolonising Shakespeare" colloquium held at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban last year.)

At the 2016 congress a new executive committee was elected. This was an opportunity to extend sincere and hearty thanks to Warren for his wonderful service to the Society. The new executive has undertaken some exciting initiatives that may be noted here.

The first is a partnership with the Shakespeare Schools Festival (SA). The Society has allocated an amount of R150 000 (from unspent interest accrued by the Shakespeare Educational Trust Fund) over three years to supporting SSF activities, and has contributed an additional R50 000 towards the launch of the SSF in the Free State. SSOSA is now offering a free "Youth Membership" to high school learners and teachers with the following benefits:

- Opportunities to meet and observe professional actors and directors at work
- Links to Literature and Drama departments at various South African universities
- Discounts on tickets to productions of Shakespeare's plays.

A second project of the Society is the launch of Shakespeare ZA (<http://shakespeare.org.za>), a website designed to act as a virtual meeting-place for teachers, learners, theatre makers, scholars and others interested in Shakespeare. It is a platform for sharing event information, educational resources, publications, translations and more; SSOSA has a dedicated space on the site, as does *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*. Shakespeare ZA is designed as a replacement of the Society's newsletter, and we would like the SSOSA page to host reports on the activities of the various branches (the page is also designed to act as a repository of information about past conferences, etc). Shakespeare ZA includes a blog page, which has already hosted a handful of guest bloggers, and with the help of Kirsten Dey and Marguerite de Waal (postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria) Shakespeare ZA is also on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The SOSSA executive has also drawn up guidelines for the allocation of funding to applicants whose projects meet the criteria of the Educational Trust. An amount of R15 000 was set aside to co-fund a proposed production of *Julius Caesar* based on Sol Plaatje's Setswana translation *Julius Kesara*, but this has been deferred.

Finally, the Society has committed an amount of R5 000 to contribute towards the costs of a Shakespeare colloquium to be held at the Market Theatre Foundation in October 2017. This is a collaboration between the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa, the Wits School of Arts and the Wits University English Department. The colloquium and related events were spurred by the prospective visit to South Africa of kathakali dancers Arjun Raina and Lillian Warrum.

Chris Thurman

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