

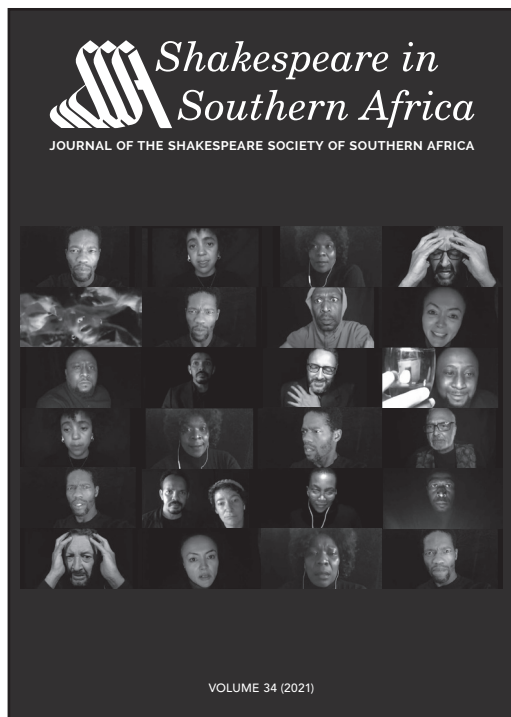
Editorial

CHRIS THURMAN

South Africa's theatre makers continue to operate in an embattled sector. It was hard enough before Covid-19. In 2020, the reopening of theatres was almost unimaginable; during the course of 2021, actors and audiences braved the awkward, on-off, makeshift circumstances of a halting return to live theatre. It is tempting to say that 2022 has brought something of a 'return to normal' – but that would be both to forget the pre-2020 precarity and to ignore the social, economic and technological shifts that have had what now seems a permanent impact on the performing arts: on artists, spaces, funding, audiences.

What this means for Shakespeare in performance in South Africa remains to be seen. It must be noted, however, that there has been very little in the way of 'new' Shakespeare on South African stages over the past two years. This does not mean that there have been no new Shakespeare productions – merely that they have tended to be viewable on screens rather than stages. The cover of volume 34 (2021) of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* gestured toward this with its collage of screenshots from an online *Hamlet*. Other filmic Shakespearean adventures include the Johannesburg Awakening Minds ensemble's *JAM at the Windybrow* series (2021) and its short film *A Midsummer Ice Cream* (2022).

The cover of the present volume gestures towards new stage prospects: it carries an image of a very different production of *Hamlet*, created by Janni Younge and featuring life-size puppets. An extract from this production was previewed at the Maynardville Open-Air Theatre in March 2022 before it was staged in full for a handful of performances at the National Arts Festival in June. A longer run in 2023 is eagerly anticipated – and hopefully Younge's *Hamlet* will be joined by other new, innovative, widely-publicised Shakespeares.



The cover of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 34, showing images from the “live-online-reading” of Neil Coppen’s *Hamlet*



JAM at the Windybrow



The JAM ensemble's *A Midsummer Ice Cream*

The outline I have just offered overlooks at least one significant Covid-era South African Shakespeare: a production of *Macbeth* at the Joburg Theatre that benefited from a brief window between Covid waves (and concomitant lockdowns / closures) in April 2021. This multilingual *Macbeth* was performed by the young cast of the Joburg Theatre's actor training programme, with Jeremiah Mntonga, Michael Mazibuko and Sarah Roberts as director-facilitators. It is very pleasing, then, that volume 35 opens with an article by Roberts reflecting on the collaborative process through which this production developed, attending to "the interplay of spoken word and non-semantic avian and animal calls" – specifically, the ways in which the cast's playfulness in generating birdcalls during the rehearsal process "was instrumental in building performers' confidence in transposition and spontaneous translation" of the Shakespeare text into South African languages.

In a serendipitous coincidence, while Roberts' article was undergoing the review process, a second article was submitted that also focuses on birds in *Macbeth*: Anya Heise-von der Lippe's analysis of avian imagery in Joel Coen's recent film version. The opportunity to place these articles 'in conversation' with one another could not, I felt, be passed up. So it was that we initiated a new format for *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, twinning articles and inviting an interlocutor to facilitate a kind of roundtable-in-print. Here I must convey my sincere thanks to Anston Bosman, who engaged extensively with these two articles and whose questions – as you will agree upon reading the "Roundtable: *Macbeth* and birds, on stage and screen" – elicit clarifying, complicating and gratifying answers from the authors. These are more than just prompts for further discussion; indeed, they may be considered an extension of the usual peer review process (suggesting future possibilities for hybrid 'open' and 'blind' forms of review).

The mutually-informing relationship between Shakespearean theatre and film is also a key aspect of Raphael d'Abdon's article, which follows the Roundtable. Reassessing Carmelo Bene's "misreadings" of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, d'Abdon emphasises Bene's antagonistic response to Western theatre tradition and, in particular, his refining of idiosyncratic conceptual tools – as well as strategies or methods of performance – such as *la scrittura di scena* (scenic writing) and *la macchina attoriale* (the actorial machine). Sadly Bene remains relatively unknown outside Italy despite his celebrated oeuvre, so it is fitting that d'Abdon should place the spotlight squarely upon him. Moreover, for Shakespeare scholars, teachers and creative practitioners wishing to explore decolonial practices, d'Abdon suggests that Bene's work is a stimulating and simpatico point of reference.

In the fourth article in this volume, Peter Titlestad returns us to the cultural, religious, political and material circumstances under which Shakespeare and his contemporaries lived, wrote and performed. Titlestad revisits Shakespeare's literary-dramatic responses to Philip Sidney, reminding us of how Shakespeare "gave Sidney's fruitful arguments unexpected expression" even as Sidney "gave Shakespeare fruitful irritation". Crucially, the article also counters the conventional (mis)representation of the Puritans in scholarly and popular accounts of their connections – for better or for worse – to Shakespeare's work. It turns out that there are no easy answers to the question, "Who were the Puritans?"

Volume 35 also carries two book reviews: Carel Nolte appraises Antjie Krog's Afrikaans translation of Tom Lanoye's *Koningin Lear*, and Linda Ritchie writes about Robin Malan's *A Sillie Shaksbur Quizze*. Nolte ponders the various "contributors" to (and the voices in) Krog's palimpsestic text, recognising their collective challenge to various assumptions about how capitalism 'works', as well as about gender roles and linguistic propriety. Ritchie discusses the *Quizze* as a book that presents itself as edutainment – something for "the lounge" as well as "the classroom" – by embracing its silliness while keeping in mind its potential use to teachers and learners.

I cannot conclude this editorial without issuing my customary acknowledgements and thanks: firstly, to the reviewers and editorial advisers who ensure that *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* maintains rigorous scholarly standards; secondly, to Carol Leff, the secretary of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa, for attending to various practical considerations in pricing, printing and distributing the journal; thirdly, and most especially, to my partner-in-publishing-crime, Liz Gowans, for her expert ministrations as typesetter and designer.

Chris Thurman is Director of the Tsikinya-Chaka Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand. He has edited *South African Essays on 'Universal' Shakespeare* (2014), *Sport versus Art: A South African Contest* (2010) and fourteen volumes of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*. His other books are the monograph *Guy Butler: Reassessing a South African Literary Life* (2010); *Text Bites*, an anthology for high schools (2009); and two collections of arts journalism, *At Large: Reviewing the Arts in South Africa* (2012) and *Still at Large: Dispatches from South Africa's Frontiers of Politics and Art* (2017). He is president of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa and founder of Shakespeare ZA.

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