

Editorial

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It would be both brave and foolish to editorialise about 2020 – the year that spawned a million pandemic-informed think pieces – not least because, as I write these words, there are still a couple of months to go, during which time the international rollercoaster of political, public health, environmental and economic narratives is likely to complete more loop-de-loops.

Yet it would also be remiss of me not to remark on the ways in which 2020 has affected Shakespeare in South Africa. We may mourn lost opportunities; perhaps the most prominent example is the Fugard Theatre's *Hamlet*, which promised to be a seminal production, although the devastation wrought on the performing arts sector by the closure of theatre spaces across the country affected hundreds of actors, directors, crew members and producers who would otherwise have been making Shakespearean magic. As in so many countries around the globe, the South African theatre landscape was marked by the shift from stage to screen. It has felt appropriate to grieve the temporary loss of live, embodied interaction between actor and audience that is at the core of the theatrical experience. It has also felt appropriate to bemoan the phenomenological 'sameness' of screen-watching, lending similar qualities to theatre-via-Zoom as to meetings-via-Zoom and teaching-via-Zoom. Nevertheless, it is equally important to acknowledge the host of innovative responses that Covid-19 has solicited from theatre makers. Undoubtedly, what had already been developing for some years as a hybrid stage-and-screen model will now become increasingly common: theatre for both in-person and digital audiences, combining the irreplaceable intimacy of live performance with the exponentially larger reach of filmed performance.

In an article published in January 2020, reflecting on Shakespeare ZA (<http://shakespeare.org.za/>) – a project of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa that has, since 2017, sought to build a digital meeting-place for theatre makers, academics, teachers, students and members of the public interested in South African responses to Shakespeare – I wrote: "It is vital that ... Shakespeare ZA expands its archive of video material" and that "this includes examples of Shakespeare performed in African languages".¹ I also expressed cautious optimism about "the intersection of digital Shakespeares and South African education", but felt compelled to note the barrier of unequal access to online resources among school learners and university students.²

Within a few months, Covid-19 had resulted in both widely increased use of digital resources in teaching and learning and in the online availability of hours of South African Shakespeare on screen. This ranged from the recuperation of recent theatrical undertakings, such as the experimental *Umsebenzi ka Bra Shakes* (2019) at the Centre for the Less Good Idea and a production concept treatment of *Twelfth Night* (also 2019) directed by Greg Homann, to Shakespearean content on the virtual National Arts Festival programme for 2020: Third World Bunfight's version of Verdi's *Macbeth* and Buhle Ngaba's solo show *Swan Song*. The Market Theatre introduced a weekly series, "Chilling with the Bard", in which some of South Africa's finest actresses delivered monologues for the camera. And then there was #lockdownshakespeare.

I will admit to a vested interest here, as I had the pleasure of working with Ngaba in launching this initiative – a campaign to provide both moral and financial support to actors who were housebound and barred from the stage during lockdown. The result was some fifty monologue performances that are now part of Shakespeare ZA's digital resources, shaking up assumptions about what Shakespeare in South Africa 'looks' or 'sounds' like and providing teachers, learners and fellow theatre makers with vivid interpretive prompts (and perhaps even ideas for new productions in future?). Financial assistance from CN&CO, who have partnered with the Shakespeare Society over the last few years and have enabled various other projects, was supplemented by a generous grant from Business and Arts South

1 Chris Thurman, "Shakespeare.za: Digital Shakespeares and education in South Africa". *Research in Drama Education (RiDE)*, Special issue on "Teaching Shakespeare: Digital Processes" 25.1 (2020): 63.

2 *Ibid.*: 64.

Africa (BASA) to make #lockdownshakespeare possible. The cover of Volume 33 pays tribute to the participants and gestures towards their riveting performances.

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Lockdowns of varying severity in 2020 left many people hankering for years gone by – for the time BC (Before Covid). I didn't have to look too far into the past to discern what seemed to be a halcyon time, at least as far as Shakespeare in South(ern) Africa was concerned. In May 2019, SSOSA held its triennial congress in Cape Town, centred around a conference on the theme of “Shakespeare and Social Justice: Scholarship and Performance in an Unequal World”. The event was energising, challenging, intellectually provocative, socially affirming: a wonderful gathering of scholars committed to the topic at hand and to its permutations in the classroom, the theatre and beyond. As the theme of the conference should remind us, however, we ought not to be nostalgic for a pre-Covid world that was full of injustice – in various ways aggravated by the pandemic, although there have been chinks of light, promises not of a utopian future but (perhaps) of slow structural change that might indeed lead to a more just world. In the meantime, for activist-academics, there is much work to be done.

The articles in this volume have been developed from papers prepared for the “Shakespeare and Social Justice” conference with a South African focus. (Other papers presented at the conference are being expanded into essays for a collection to be co-edited by Sandra Young and myself.) There are some pleasing echoes and connections between the eight articles. Marguerite de Waal's account of productions of *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* staged before, during and after student protests on South African university campuses in 2015–16 may be paired with Néka da Costa's reflections on her role as director of the latter production, which travelled to schools around the country in 2018. Fiona Ramsay's article, too, links performance and education in its assessment of the use of accents and Original Pronunciation in working with drama students. David Schalkwyk connects student protests to Shakespeare in a different fashion: by comparing *The Fall*, the collaborative Baxter Theatre production engaging with the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student movements, to John Kani's *Kunene and the King*. Kani's play is scaffolded by *King Lear* as it addresses race and racism in South Africa.

Complementing the focus in these articles on staging or appropriating Shakespeare in a decolonising South African context, Sarah Roberts revisits an earlier post-apartheid moment: the 1998 Take Away Shakespeare Company *King Lear*. Incorporating personal memories and reflections on practice, Roberts contributes to the ongoing and necessary task of documenting South African theatre history, and Shakespearean performance in particular. Her treatment of the Take Away *Lear* contrasts it with Jonathan Munby's production of the play in London two years ago. Geoffrey Haresnape's article is also in dialogue with earlier attempts to link *King Lear* to injustice in South Africa – from Martin Orkin to Nicholas Visser – as he presents a reading of the play in light of current debates about land restitution and the policy of expropriation without compensation.

Lisa Barksdale-Shaw likewise uses this previous scholarship on *King Lear* and land (Visser citing Orkin citing Sol Plaatje) as her starting-point in an article that interprets Caesar's will in *Julius Caesar* as an attempt to empower the people of Rome through the conveyance of land; this public bequest, and the document recording it, can be related to the constitutional argument for land reform in South Africa. Laurence Wright takes us further back into South African history, and the history of invoking Shakespeare in response to injustice, by considering Lady Anne Barnard's review of a performance of *1 Henry IV* at the African Theatre in 1801 and her critique of colonial governor Sir George Yonge. Wright's focus on Barnard's complexities and contradictions allows him to offer a Janus-headed interpretation of this moment: looking two centuries into the past, to Shakespeare's time, and two centuries into the future, to our own. He asks: “Can post-revolutionary notions of social justice be imposed on pre-revolutionary works of art?”

This question is indirectly answered in Scott Newstok's new book *How to Think Like Shakespeare*, reviewed in these pages by Tony Voss. In Voss, *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* has its book reviewer par excellence; happily, the present volume includes a second review by him, combining Stewart Elden's *Shakespearean Territories* and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton's *Shakespeare's Englishes*.

Volume 33 concludes with a tribute to André Lemmer, who died in August this year at the age of seventy-five. Paul Walters and Charles van Renen's obituary describes Lemmer as "a person of immense – seemingly boundless – energy and creativity". As teacher, editor and theatre maker, he made a tremendous contribution to the study and performance of Shakespeare in South Africa.

Thanks are due, once again, to all the editorial consultants who acted as peer reviewers of articles in this volume, and to Liz Gowans for her expert typesetting and design.

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