



President's Report (November 2021)

Covid-19 constraints continued to hamper Shakespeare performers, teachers and enthusiasts in 2021 – but they also resulted in some welcome innovation. A much-awaited Fugard Theatre production of *Hamlet*, having been called off in Cape Town last year, was reconfigured as a “live-online-reading” in May. A multilingual *Macbeth* produced at the Joburg Theatre in April was not able to tour schools as hoped in the second half of the year, but may yet have a (digital and in-person) life in 2022. Kickstart Theatre’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, due to be staged at the Botanical Gardens in Durban in June, was cancelled; elsewhere in KwaZulu-Natal, school productions like Westville Boys’ and Westville Girls’ *Perchance to Dream* were performed successfully and recorded for publication on YouTube. The Shakespeare Society’s online platform, Shakespeare ZA (shakespeare.org.za), provided “coverage” of these performance twists and turns. The Society also continued to support the Shakespeare Schools Festival (SA), which achieved an admirable combination of in-person and online events in 2021.

The activity of SSOSA branches was also restricted by the pandemic. Happily, one previously regular feature on the calendar was reinstated: the annual Shakespeare Birthday Lecture, hosted by the Makhanda branch of the society, was held as a hybrid in-person and Zoom event. I was fortunate to be invited to give the lecture in 2021.

The #lockdownshakespeare initiative, one of the Society’s most successful projects in 2020 – driven by SSOSA Executive Committee member Buhle Ngaba – continues to enjoy a creative “afterlife” and has resulted in connections with scholars and theatre makers in various countries. Shakespeare ZA and the work of SSOSA featured prominently in an online seminar held on 31st March under the auspices of the Tsikinya-Chaka Centre (Wits University) and the Creative Media Academy (University of the West of Scotland). With the title “Lockdown Shakespeare: Transnational Explorations”, the event included discussion of the #lockdownshakespeare videos and comparisons to similar self-recording or site-specific performance practices in Scotland, Ghana and Malawi. #lockdownshakespeare was also reviewed by Henry Bell for *Shakespeare Bulletin*.

Shakespeare ZA has continued to grow its resources for teachers and learners (special thanks to Executive Committee member Bernice Borain for sharing content she has created). The project of digitising translations of Shakespeare’s plays into South African languages

continued slowly in 2021; there are now 10 digitised translations available on Shakespeare ZA, with a further twelve condensed scripts commissioned by the Shakespeare Schools Festival and edited by SSOSA available to Schools Festival participants in isiXhosa, isiZulu and Afrikaans. SSOSA has also been a partner in the electronic publication of Deryck Uys' Afrikaans translations – a project which has been taken over by the Tsikinya-Chaka Centre (TCC), along with the expansion of the digitisation project into a planned Sol Plaatje Archive for Shakespeare in African Languages.

The partnership between SOSSA and the TCC has proved a constructive and mutually beneficial one, enabled primarily by the fact that I am president of one organisation and director of the other. A number of members of the SSOSA Executive Committee are also TCC affiliate members. It does, however, seem advisable that future collaboration is undertaken on a formally agreed basis – and, as I will be continuing as full-time as director of the TCC, it is preferable that I step down as president of the Society at the next SSOSA congress.

The next triennial congress would ordinarily be due in 2022, but given the ongoing uncertainty around international travel, in-person gatherings and other circumstances mitigating against conference planning, it has been decided to defer the congress to 2023. There is also an opportunity to co-host this event along with the Tsikinya-Chaka Centre and, possibly, the Shakespeare Beyond Borders Alliance.

A selection of papers presented at the 2019 congress and conference were developed into research articles and published in *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* volume 33 (2020). A further ten delegates have since been expanded their papers into essays for a volume edited by 2019 conference convenors Sandra Young and Chris Thurman, and submitted to Arden/Bloomsbury for review; it is hoped that this collection will be published as part of the Global Shakespeares Inverted series (of which SSOSA Executive Committee member David Schalkwyk is series co-editor).

Chris Thurman