



**SHAKESPEARE
SOCIETY OF
SOUTHERN
AFRICA**

BRANCH REPORTS 2016-17

Grahamstown

(Branch chair: Lynette Paterson)

In August 2016, five Grahamstown schools met over two nights in the Rhodes Theatre to revel in the theatrical challenge and joy of playing Shakespeare before an audience. This was the second local incarnation of the national Shakespeare Schools Festival, and once again its overall success was thanks in no small measure to the contributions of SSoSA volunteers. Helen Lockyear, Lynette Paterson, Warren Snowball, Mary-Louise Peires and Helen Holleman all provided support to the participating schools, and we spotted SSoSA supporters in the audience both nights. We watched adolescent Benedicks, Beatrices and Rosalinds frolicking their way through the comic texts; we saw learners whose first languages are Afrikaans and isiXhosa emoting in high Elizabethan English; and we marvelled at primary school children delivering Romeo's and Juliet's speeches with the same swagger and verve as they played their marimbas. SSoSA can be justly proud of its involvement in an education project that gives so many youngsters their first profound encounter with Shakespeare and with the stage.

Our usual Shakespeare Birthday Lecture took place earlier in the year on April 26th, with Dr Frank England delivering a challenging and intriguing lecture entitled *Fashioning the Self in Augustine, Iris Murdoch and Shakespeare*. The lecture probed some key ethical scenarios in Shakespeare's plays, and the audience appreciated Frank's extensive and sensitive readings from the plays. Thanks to Trudi Adendorff and Martina de Lange for spot-on catering.

The Reading Group is like the SSoSA Grahamstown branch's steady engine. Its unceasing engagement with the plays reminds me of the theory about sleeping cats, whose devotion to their delicious task is what keeps the world turning. If we stopped reading the plays, we would simply fall off the planet. Having

devoted ourselves to the English History plays in 2015, in 2016 we enjoyed a more frivolous year with the comedies – and a fabulous comic ensemble we proved to make. We wrapped up the year with the late works, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*.

James Joyce's aspirant young bard Stephen Dedalus reflects as follows on the death of Shakespeare:

He returns after a life of absence to that spot of earth where he was born, where he has always been, man and boy, a silent witness and there, his journey of life ended, he plants his mulberrytree in the earth. Then dies ... Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves.

SSoSA members in Grahamstown are a group of friends who meet in the context of Shakespeare and walk through ourselves. Amidst his company of characters, what a numberless crowd we make!

My sincere thanks to the 2016 committee of Helen Holleman, Malvern van Wyk Smith, Trudi Adendorff, Warren Snowball and Andrew Renard.

Johannesburg

(Branch chair: Eleanor-Mary Cadell)

The Johannesburg Branch has followed its policy of presenting a varied programme, and I am happy to report that this has been received with appreciation.

- In June 2016, Shelagh Scholes, art historian, gave an illustrated talk on Tudor portraiture. This was designed to give members another insight into Shakespeare's world.
- In September 2016, a DVD was shown: *Shakespeare Live!* which had been produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the BBC to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday on stage in Stratford. This was very popular with the members who were delighted with the presentations. These ranged from acting to dancing, to song and comic pieces performed by famous Shakespearean actors.
- October 2016: DVD of the classic film *Falstaff – Chimes at Midnight* starring Orson Welles.
- November 2016: DVD of John Barton's *Exploring a Character (Playing Shakespeare, No 4)*, with Patrick Stewart and David Suchet.

- February 2017: DVD of *A Muse of Fire – Shakespeare in Practice*. Contemporary actors, with brief appearances by John Barton and Henry Goodman, attempted the complexities of interpretation when playing some of Shakespeare's great characters.
- March 2017: Dorothy Ann Gould presented "The Right to Speak" about the powers and range of the voice. She was assisted by two JAM (Johannesburg Awakening Minds) actors, who interacted with members and answered questions.
- On 22 April 2017, Shakespeare's birthday was celebrated at St Columba's, with a programme devised by Fiona Ramsay and Louise Saint-Claire. The polished performance saw the next generation onto our stage – Louise's daughter, Sarah Richards! Music and song were provided by Eleanor-Mary Cadell and Maggie Mendelsohn, who has been one of our stalwarts. Thanks go to Candice Else of Maple Drive Caterers and to the volunteers who helped set up the tables – Beryl Unterhalter, Maureen Spiro, Lizzie Staughton and Hilary Semple. The celebration was judged to be a great success and well supported.
- May 2017: DVD of John Barton in conversation with Ian McKellen, Judi Dench, Patrick Stewart and Jane Lapotaire.

Most grateful thanks go to Douglas Smith for preparing the financial statement for the year ended 31/12/2016.

Cape Town

(Branch chair: Geoffrey Haresnape)

We held a total of six meetings during the year under review: four in June, August, October and November 2016, and two in January and May 2017. Four meetings took the form of a screened session with a Shakespearean focus, followed by discussion and tea. *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* were the plays highlighted, in part with material taken from the *Shakespeare Uncovered* DVDs. There were also two talks given, one by Geoff Haresnape and the other by Professor Tony Parr. Geoff spoke about Carole Langille's *Ophelia Poems* and Tony's subject was modern analyses of *King Lear*.

The Cape Town Branch was well represented at the Ninth Triennial Congress of the Society (held from 4 to 7 July 2016 at Rhodes University in Grahamstown). Geoff Haresnape was invited to read a paper, and Winston and Linda Travis attended the AGM.

Roy Sargeant was active as our branch's nominee on a committee exploring the way forward for the Maynardville Open-Air Theatre Trust. We look forward to a report on this matter in due course.

Early in 2017 much publicity was accorded to a suggestion emanating from a high level in the South African educational hierarchy that Shakespeare's work be dropped from secondary school syllabi. This has occasioned much debate. Clearly the members of the Cape Town branch of SSoSA derive much inspiration from Shakespeare's insight into human characters and societal issues; anyone wanting a master class in colonial oppression and political chicanery needs only to follow *Antony and Cleopatra*, as we did in April 2016.

Thanks to the 2016/2017 committee for their support.

Durban

(Branch chair: Patricia Devenish)

When we met at our AGM in June 2016, little did we realise that before the next AGM, we would be losing our chairman Hugh Thompson. Hugh's unexpected death on July 28th left us all deeply saddened. Hugh was an immensely active person, full of wit and humour and his sudden death was a shock to us all. Hugh was an excellent chairman, teacher, artist, adjudicator, a man of many talents and we have missed him dearly. Hugh was a most enthusiastic participant of our play reading and always took a leading role. In future, any play reading will be in memory of Hugh.

At the AGM in 2016 Hugh was voted in as Chairman, Patricia Devenish as Vice-Chair and Sally Stretch as Treasurer. Other committee members were Nancy Church and Daniel Keyter. Robert King was co-opted onto the committee at a meeting held in September 2016, when we planned the programme for 2017.

In August, we cancelled our planned meeting and instead commemorated Hugh's life and work. In September, we viewed Part 1 of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In October, we enjoyed an interactive workshop with Richard Finch on *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Kiss me Kate*. Desi Halse was the pianist. In November, Charlotte Mbali led a discussion on James Shapiro's book *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606*. December saw members enjoying a bring and share lunch and we viewed Part 2 of the *Merry Wives*.

The 2017 programme started in February with guest speaker, Debbie Lutge (Professor of Drama at Durban University of Technology), giving a presentation on the performance of *Much Ado about Nothing* by her students at a Shakespeare Festival in Germany. In March, we had our annual play reading. This year it was *All's Well That Ends Well*, which was much enjoyed. Tamar Meskin (Lecturer in Drama at UKZN, Howard College) was due to speak on "Shakespeare must Fall?" at our April meeting, but this had to be deferred to September. Instead, we viewed the first part of *Henry VIII*. In May we celebrated Shakespeare's birthday with a bring and share lunch and we viewed the second part of 2nd part of *Henry VIII*. June saw our AGM take place, followed by a discussion on witchcraft based on a chapter of *The Year of Lear*. In July, we viewed a DVD entitled

Shakespeare Live, which was a commemoration of Shakespeare's life performed at Stratford. In August, we enjoyed a programme of music and readings as the well-known pianist, composer and teacher Count Filip Kormuth thrilled us on the piano with some music by Tchaikovsky, Debussy and Liszt. This was followed by various readings by members. After each reading, Filip played a composition of his own that interpreted the text read.

My thanks go to fellow committee members Nancy, Sally, Danny and Robert. We are grateful to the manager of Garden Grove, for allowing us to use this lovely venue free of charge.