



President's report: 2017-18

Since my previous report (in August 2017), the Society has continued to support and promote the work of theatre makers, teachers, learners, academics and students engaging with Shakespeare.

The website Shakespeare ZA (<http://shakespeare.org.za>) has commissioned and published reviews, interviews and feature articles. In addition to their written contributions, Marguerite de Waal and Kirsten Dey have done a wonderful job as editors of the site, ensuring that it is regularly updated with news and information about new productions, publications and other Shakespeare-related events. The “Resources” section has expanded and is a useful point of reference for teachers and learners looking for material to kick-start or supplement classroom discussions.

A highlight of the final months of 2017 was “Moving Shakespeare”, a colloquium at the Market Theatre Foundation in Newtown in October co-organised by SSOSA, the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa (CISA) at the University of the Witwatersrand, the Wits School of Arts and the School of Literature, Language and Media. At this two-day gathering of theatre makers, dancers, choreographers and scholars – which included talks, screenings, workshops and performances – participants explored and reflected on the ways in which Shakespeare ‘moves’. SSOSA vice-president Sandra Young delivered the keynote lecture, on Vishal Bardwaj’s film *Haider*, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* set in Kashmir. This starting-point – thinking about Shakespeare’s movement across the Indian Ocean and, more broadly, the Global South – was a response to the visit to South Africa of Indian Kathakali dancer, actor and playwright Arjun Raina. “Moving Shakespeare” culminated in a performance of Raina’s *The Magic Hour*, an ongoing project centred around his work with Kathakali and Shakespeare (it has previously been adapted and performed in India, Germany, Japan, France, Russia and Australia). Raina was joined by Odissi dance specialist Lillian Warrum for an exciting evening of music, dance and theatre in which Indian classical dance forms met Shakespeare’s *Othello*. *The Magic Hour* offered a second point of departure for “Moving Shakespeare” – that is, the consideration of Shakespeare’s work as expressed in and through movement and dance. There were also

opportunities to address movement *within* Shakespeare's plays, in terms of the dynamics between performers and characters – experiments in 'moving parts' and extemporaneous ensemble work. Mark Hawkins, Sunnyboy Motaung, Oscar Buthelezi and their colleagues from Moving Into Dance Mophatong (MIDM) performed and discussed aspects of their collaboration with Raina as part of his residency at the Nirox Foundation. Sarah Roberts and Nicola Pilkington workshopped a scene from *Much Ado About Nothing* with students from the Wits School of Arts and the Market Theatre Laboratory. Pilkington also discussed the touring production of *Coriolanus* she co-directed in 2016 with cast members Sanelisiwe Yekani and William Harding. Colette Gordon of the University of the Witwatersrand framed the colloquium with a talk on "Shakespeare in Movement", and Lliane Loots of the University of KwaZulu-Natal gave a paper on "Dancing Shakespeares" (including the work of Dada Masilo, Gregory Maqoma and Helge Letonja).

Volume 30 of the journal *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* was published in print and online in January. This was a special volume on the theme of "Decolonising Shakespeare: Contestations and re-imaginings for a post-liberation South Africa". It was guest edited by Lliane Loots (UKZN), Sandra Young (UCT) and Miranda Young-Jahangeer (UKZN). The volume emerged from the *Decolonising Shakespeare* conference held at UKZN Howard Campus in October 2016, and included ten articles/essays and three reviews. (Following the slightly delayed appearance of Volume 30, a decision was taken to defer publication of Volume 31 to the end of 2018 – this volume will soon be ready to go to press.)

In February the Society contributed R20,000 towards the production costs of *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by Tara Notcutt, at Maynardville Open-Air Theatre in Cape Town (the show was independently financed).

Over the first few months of the year, following a request from the Polish Ambassador to South Africa HE Mr Andrzej Kanthak, the Society explored the possibility of sending a production to the prestigious Gdansk Shakespeare Festival in 2019. SSOSA President Chris Thurman subsequently travelled to Poland to meet with Festival Director Jerzy Limon and his colleagues, and planning for South Africa's participation in the 2019 event is underway.

Schools liaison has been a key area of activity this year. Numerous IEB schools requested support for Grade 12 learners writing essays on the topic of Shakespeare's place in South African school curricula. The Society was also represented at the English Academy's teachers' conference at Maritzburg College in May, and made a presentation to the delegates about the teaching of Shakespeare in a South African context.

The Society's partnership with the Shakespeare Schools Festival (SA) continues to be a productive and mutually beneficial one. In 2016 SSOSA undertook to support the activities of SSF-SA by contributing R50,000 per year over a three year period (2017-2019), allocating unspent interest that had accumulated in the Shakespeare Education Trust Fund (interest that the Society is constitutionally mandated to spend). It has proved rather difficult to access this

fund in recent years, but thanks to the work of colleagues at the Grahamstown Foundation the problems have now been rectified.

The Society has also sought to raise funds to cover its administrative costs and to build financial reserves so that it can contribute towards future theatrical, educational and other projects. We were delighted when the dynamic company CN&CO undertook to support us in this fundraising adventure, committing itself in addition to a baseline monthly income for the Society of R10,000.

The main task of the Society at national level for the remainder of this year is to prepare for the next triennial congress, to be held in Cape Town in May 2019. This will be a major event, consisting of an academic conference (including a keynote address by Ayanna Thompson, president of the Shakespeare Association of America); a theatre makers' platform (masterclasses, workshops, discussion fora); and a gathering of school teachers (sharing classroom experiences, discovering new pedagogical approaches, interacting with representatives of the Department of Basic Education), which will be linked to a Shakespeare Schools Festival event taking place at the same time.

Finally, the Society's branches in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Grahamstown and Durban continue to meet regularly and to pursue their respective programmes of events (branch reports are available separately).

Chris Thurman

October 2018