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Book Reviews

Susan Bennett and Christie Carson, eds., *Shakespeare Beyond English: A Global Experiment* (Cambridge UP, 2013)

Reviewed by ***Hisao Oshima****

Shakespeare Beyond English is a unique collection of reviews about international Shakespearean productions in "The Globe to Globe Festival" held as a part of the Cultural Olympiad of the 2012 London Olympics. As its editors quote from the official London 2012 website and other sources in the introduction, the London Olympics "was launched with the motto to 'inspire a generation' – an objective that would be met not just by the main event but also through the staging of a Cultural Olympiad, 'the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic Movements'" (p. 1). From its early stages, Shakespeare, "Britain's greatest cultural contribution to the world", was firmly linked with this giant undertaking. The "Shakespeare Staging the World" exhibition was held at the British Museum, and the nationwide World Shakespeare was organized as "a celebration of Shakespeare as the world's playwright". The Globe to Globe Festival, staged on the Shakespeare Globe from 21 April to 9 June in 2012, is comprised of "performances of all thirty-seven plays and *Venus and Adonis* delivered in more than forty different languages".

The book is divided into six sections corresponding to the festival's six weeks (six or seven plays staged a week), with two introductions, "Introduction: Shakespeare Beyond English" by the editors and "The Globe to Globe Festival: Introduction" by Tom Bird, the director of the festival, and two "*Afterwords*", Abigail Rokison's "'From thence to England': *Henry V* at Shakespeare's Globe" and Bridget Escolme's "Decentring Shakespeare: A hope for future connections". Just looking at its "Contents", you might be impressed with the amazing variety of foreign Shakespeares: *Measure for Measure* in Russian (Vakhtangov Theatre from Moscow), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in Swahili (Bitter Pill and The Theatre Company from Nairobi, Kenya), *Pericles* in Greek (National Theatre of Athens), *Richard III* in Mandarin (National Theatre of China from Beijing),

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Coriolanus in Japanese (Chiten from Kyoto), *Othello* in Hip Hop (Q Brothers/ Chicago Shakespeare Theatre), *Love's Labour's Lost* in British Sign Language (Deafinitely Theatre, from London), and so on.

The global experiment, just as the myth of the Tower of Babel suggests, seemed to be quite challenging to both the actors and the audience, including the reviewers, because of the language barrier.[1] The organizers of the festival depended on the multilingual composition of the population in London, wishing to encourage a new audience to come to the Globe. For the English-speaking audience, they offered short surtitles of "scene-by-scene synopses" in English (p. 16). Early in the festival, foreign actors sometimes used English words and phrases to establish a communicative relationship with the audience, but the festival organizers asked them not to use this common practice of communication in an international festival in order to preserve the "cultural authenticity and linguistic purity" of each performance. This interference with the actors' communicative methods on stage might sound problematic, but it brought forth a unique linguistic situation in the theatre with one part of the audience understanding the language of the production and the other not understanding it, resulting in unique audience responses. Facing this challenging linguistic situation, the reviewers adopt quite different critical approaches in their reviews, which suggests the fact that the judging system to evaluate international theatrical performances is hardly developed in the Cultural Olympiad, unlike those in the Olympic Games.

In spite of this language barrier, as several reviewers report, the English-speaking audience seemed to enjoy foreign productions, much helped by their visually enjoyable festival performances featuring traditional costumes and performing arts. In fact, as Catherine Silverstone points out in her "Festival Showcasing: *Troilus and Cressida*", the Maori production was "a show case" of an exotic culture (p. 36); but the production also reflects "cultural regeneration", the recovery of traditional cultural practices, once oppressed, in the society of New Zealand, most vividly conveyed by the *te reo (*Maori language) and *kapa hapa* (Maori performing arts) featuring *haka, waiata* (song), *poi* (swinging balls) and *mau rakau* (Maori weaponry) on stage.

The colonial past is not far behind in other productions. In Kenya, the Kenya National Theatre, established in the 1950s, and others like it specialized in English productions of West End comedies and sugary musicals with occasional Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw; the emergence of indigenous language performances was strictly and brutally suppressed, as Emma Cox notes in her "'The girl defies': A Kenyan *Merry Wives of Windsor*". Thus the Swahili

[1] As for the Shakespeare Globe's experimental spirit such as shown in their "original practices" productions, see Pauline Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* (Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999) and Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, eds., *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

re-territorialization of *Merry Wives* on Shakespeare's Globe reflects the Kenyan people's strong pride in the recovery of their indigenous language and culture, though even now girls can hardly defy in its patriarchal tribal societies. According to Cox, several actors solved the problem of the language barrier with extra-textual comic business and metatheatrical practices. The Hostess of the Windsor Hotel (Host of the Garter Inn) in the Kenyan *Merry Wives* handed cans of beer to some of the audience and later asked for the money from them, bringing the audience into an explosion of laughter. The actors intentionally showed how quickly and deftly they changed roles (they doubled or tripled roles because of the small number of actors in the troupe) with a wink at the audience. Such a direct dialogue between the actors and audience is possible and essential at the Globe.

Thus some reviews document dramatic encounters between actors and the Shakespearean performing space. As Lee Chee Keng quotes in his "Performing cultural exchange in *Richard III*", Zhang Dong-Yu, playing the title role, realized that "the Globe was not simply another theatre space the moment he came, literally, face to face with the audience"; he was trained for and has performed on the proscenium stage. Because of the unfortunate delay of the cargo of the beautiful traditional Chinese costumes and sets, the National Theatre of China performed without these exotic outfits, but accomplished the difficult task of appealing to the audience in Chinese. On a thrust stage, surrounded on three sides by a visible audience, he experienced the most fulfilling moments "when he felt engaged in a dialogue with the audience as if they were different parts of Richard's consciousness, sometimes cheering, sometimes objecting to, and sometimes even sneering at his actions" (p. 79). As Cox summed up very concisely about the Kenyan actors who are also used to having the fourth wall in Kenyan theatres, "their work with Shakespeare, created for Shakespeare's Globe, facilitated their departure from another European theatrical inheritance, one rooted in naturalism".

On the other hand, however, some productions did not seem to suit the Globe well. Sonia Masai praises the modern-dress Italian adaptation of *Julius Caesar* which cut all the original historical references, even Caesar himself, and explored the "disjointed inner lives of characters" (p. 92) with its "heavily symbolic language of physical theatre" to capture the mood of "a generation who can no longer endure the status quo and could overturn it but cannot imagine a different future" (p. 95). Countries in the old world also have serious political and economical problems in their societies. Watching *Giulio Cesare* on the Globe, however, Masai had "a visceral sense of dislocation", and even "impression of alienation" at first. Their use of electric valves and darkness, which symbolically visualizes Brutus's disquieting journey into the heart of darkness, originates from their expressionistic "black-box" theatre in Italy. It worked successfully there but not at the Globe where actors play in natural light

during the afternoon or under the constant light coming from the several powerful spotlights during the evening; "Darkness is the one special effect that is impossible to achieve at the Globe Theatre" (p. 98).

Another example in which its reviewer expresses a sort of dissatisfaction is Chiten's Japanese *Coriolanus,* surprisingly "the first Japanese Shakespeare production to be staged at the Globe" (p. 225). In her "Bread and circuses: Chiten, Japan and *Coriolanus*", Deana Rankin places it in "a powerful tradition of Japanese Shakespeare" from the "epic films of Akira Kurosawa to the ground-breaking productions of Tadashi Suzuki and Yukio Ninagawa".[2] Motoi Miura, the director of Chiten, acknowledging "the huge influence of Suzuki on his work", departed from the legacy of Ninagawa's much acclaimed Samurai Coriolanus at the Barbican in 2007. Instead, their "Bread and Circuses" *Coriolanus,* using *Kyogen* masks and blue *shibori* peasant clothes, "aims for comic subversion" to show "how the canny lower classes outwit the bombastic upper-class hero and get away with it" (p. 223): a Brechtian musical comedy of class struggle in a Shakespearean tragedy? After all, Chiten is famous for their productions of Chekhov. Tom Bird first saw their work in Moscow: not Shakespeare but Chekhov, *The Seagull*. Their *Uncle Vanya* I enjoyed in Fukuoka, Japan was a beautifully designed expressionistic production with a grand piano at the centre of the stage; the audience enjoyed Chekhov's long philosophical lines the actors voiced with some modern relevance. The greatest problem of their *Coriolanus* for the Globe audience, however, was their focus on Coriolanus's political language ("Coriolanus never stops talking") and their choice of a full, text-based version of performance. Good or bad, this is another traditional style of Japanese Shakespeare, which is often adopted by major commercial theatrical companies such as Bungaku-za, Haiyu-za, and Mumei-juku but now challenged by new companies of younger generations in Japan.[3] In spite of his unique visual stage designs, Ninagawa usually uses a full version of authentic translation in his productions. On the other hand, Suzuki sometimes has been criticized for curtailing or changing the original text to achieve his dramatic design. Rankin concluded her review, wondering "what if Chiten had instead, following their own theatrical practice, broken up, explored and reconstructed the text in their own powerful way to give their audience a truer account of Shakespeare's tragedy?"

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[2] See Hisao Oshima, "*The Tempest* and Japanese theatrical traditions: Noh, Kabuki, and Bunraku" in Tobias Doering and Virginia Mason Vaughan, eds., *Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature, Vol. 29: Critical and Cultural Transformations: Shakespeare's The Tempest – 1611 to the Present* (Narr Verlag, 2013), pp. 149-172.

[3] For example, see my performance review, "*The Tempest* by Yamanote Jijosha" in *Shakespeare Studies: The 400th Anniversary Special Issue*, Vol. 53 (Shakespeare Society of Japan, 2015), 75-78.

In conclusion, this book gives us a lot of precious glimpses of manifold issues surrounding global Shakespeare now. Therefore, the reader might wish that it had a chapter which contains an inclusive assessment of this unique experiment of global Shakespeare; "*Afterwords*" do not serve this turn enough. Anyway, what is important to emphasize here is that not all the productions represent their country or its whole reception of Shakespeare, though some attempted to do so through staging Shakespeare with the Olympic spirit, "show-casing" their national cultures or commenting on their historical and political situations, like a Juba Arabic *Cymbeline* by the South Sudan Theatre Company from "the world's newest nation" formed in July 2011 after a long civil war, as Kim Solga notes in her review (p. 101): a sort of Shakespearean version of *Cool Runnings* (1993), a film about the first Jamaican Bobsled Team in the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary. In spite of some limitations as a collection of reviews, however, the book with many illustrations and colour plates is a good guide on the current global reception of Shakespeare, leading us through the kaleidoscopic world tour of various local Shakespeares on the globe.

Shakespeare Forever: A Review of *From Shakespeare to Sh(Web)speare* (Łódź: Łódź UP, 2015)

Reviewed by ***Tomasz Fisiak***[*]

The year 2016 marks an important anniversary – it has been 400 years since the death of the father of English literature, William Shakespeare. It comes as no surprise that scholars all around the globe are paying tribute to the Bard of Avon and his inspiring *oeuvre*. The forms of commemoration vary – from conferences to new adaptations of films, from recreations of plays to artistic projects engaging the visual arts. Obviously, numerous publications devoted to Shakespeare and the reception of his works in the 21st century have appeared, as well; they cover topics as diverse as race, ethnicity, gender, emotions, directorial approaches and the social reception of Shakespearean dramas.[1] Some noteworthy books on Shakespeare have also been published in Poland, an example of which is a concise collection of essays by Monika Sosnowska, PhD, an assistant professor at the Department of the British and Commonwealth Studies (Faculty of International and Political Studies, University of Łódź).

From Shakespeare to Sh(Web)speare consists of three major sections, each of them representing a different analytical approach to Shakespeare's body of work. The first part explores Polish (re)interpretations of Shakespearean motifs. The next one deals with sensory approaches to the Bard's best known plays, i.e. *Othello* and *Hamlet*. The final segment of Sosnowska's collection forays into the mostly uncharted territory of popcultural Shakespeare. The miniature form of the book (five essays) may encourage even casual readers who are not accustomed to lengthy scholarly analyses. Additionally, what renders the collection visible among other publications on Shakespeare is its attractive cover design (skillfully blended rainbow-coloured skull and rose).

The volume opens with a very personal introduction, in which Sosnowska explains the reasons for arranging her work in three parts. As she claims, "[e]ach section aims at exhibiting the impact of Shakespeare's legacy on different levels of culture: national/local, highbrow/scholar, and popular/global" (10). Even though this goal may seem difficult to attain, the author nevertheless successfully completes her mission, as proved immediately by the first chapter

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[1] A particularly notable work is 2016 *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe: Conflict, Commemoration, Celebration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), a collection edited by Erica Sheen and Isabel Karremann, which comprises essays by such renowned Shakespearean academics as Nicole Fayard (University of Leicester) or Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney (University of Łódź).

of *From Shakespeare to Sh(Web)speare*, the opening essay in particular. "Romantic Shakespearations in Polish Culture: From Inspiration to Incorporation" minutely discusses the influence of the Bard's *oeuvre* on the development of Romanticism in Poland, taking into account the historical context (partitions, November Uprising, liberation movement etc.). Sosnowska demonstrates how frequently authors such as Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki or Cyprian Kamil Norwid more or less consciously referred to Shakespearean characters, themes and motifs, thus building "a national Polish Shakespeare" (39). This term perfectly summarises the other text in the Polish section, however the context dramatically differs, for Sosnowska delves into the use of Shakespeare in Polish cabarets. The essay appears less academic and more informative, and the author reveals her emotional attachment to the POTEM cabaret whose sketches she scrutinises. What merits attention is the fact that the author translated all the discussed sketches herself, hence rendering it possible for readers from abroad to enjoy the creativity of the POTEM group.

As mentioned before, the second section of the volume examines *Othello* and *Hamlet* (in case of the latter both the play and its cinematic adaptation) with a view to sensory studies. In the first article, "Sensory Studies and the Mona Lisa of Literature, or *Hamlet* and the Senses," Sosnowska ponders whether the eponymous play is "the tragedy of the senses – cultural dialectics between the eye and the ear" (73). A thorough theoretical background which accompanies her analysis is of utmost value. As a result, despite the complexity of its subject matter, the text is very well-structured, coherent and approachable. Hence it is unfortunate to notice that the next article in this chapter, "Sight as an Exclusively Male Sensory Domain: Speculations, Suspicions and Visions about Femininity in Olivier Parker's *Othello* (1995) and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996)," gives an impression of less unity.

Even though the third part consists of merely one essay, I find it particularly interesting, as it revolves around the character of Ophelia, exploring her status of a pop icon. The author juxtaposes *Hamlet*'s female protagonist with e-culture, concentrating on YouTube/Flickr visual re(contextualisations)/(re)workings of her death scene, thus situating Ophelia or, rather, NecrOphelia, in a myriad of fascinating contexts and approaches (corporeality, death as exhibition, thanatophilia, mass culture, morbid eroticism). However, I object to Sosnowska's description of Ophelia as a "bombshell," which I find slightly too far-fetched.

"Brevity is the soul of wit" (1082) – this quote from *Hamlet*'s Polonius aptly sums up the significance of *From Shakespeare to Sh(Web)speare*. Despite its inconspicuous size, the volume offers both interesting and varied approaches to the works of the immortal English poet and playwright. It may therefore be considered a truly helpful source of information for Polish scholars, as well as Shakespearians abroad. Unfortunately, I need to mention that the volume would

benefit from a bit more careful editing and proofreading – a few obvious typographical errors affect the overall very good impression. Nonetheless, I can wholeheartedly recommend Monika Sosnowska's contribution to the field of Shakespearean studies.

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