Shakespeare Beyond English

Tackling vital issues of politics, identity and experience in performance, this book asks what Shakespeare’s plays mean when extended beyond the English language. From April to June 2012 the Globe to Globe Festival offered the unprecedented opportunity to see all of Shakespeare’s plays performed in many different world languages. Thirty-eight productions from around the globe were presented in six weeks as part of the World Shakespeare Festival, which formed a cornerstone of the Cultural Olympiad. This book provides the only complete critical record of that event, drawing together an internationally renowned group of scholars of Shakespeare and world theatre with a selection of the UK’s most celebrated Shakespearean actors. Featuring a foreword by Artistic Director Dominic Dromgoole and an interview with the Festival Director, Tom Bird, this volume highlights the energy and dedication that were necessary to mount this extraordinary cultural experiment.

SUSAN BENNETT is University Professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary, Canada. Her interest in contemporary performances of Shakespeare’s plays dates back to her 1996 monograph, Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past. Her latest book, Theatre and Museums, was published in 2013. A current research project is concerned with the circulation of performance in global markets where Shakespeare, not surprisingly, is a premium brand. She hopes to see some of the Globe to Globe Festival performances again at different international venues and with other audiences.

SHAKESPEARE BEYOND ENGLISH
A GLOBAL EXPERIMENT

Edited by
SUSAN BENNETT

and
CHRISTIE CARSON
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16 Timon of Athens, Bremer Shakespeare Company. Photograph by Simon Annand, reproduced by permission of Shakespeare's Globe.
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FOREWORD

Dominic Dromgoole

It was only four days in to the Globe to Globe Festival. We had already seen the sublime Isango come and go with their sung and danced Venus and Adonis, that afternoon we had premiered the Vahktangov's cerebral and monochromatic Measure for Measure, and tonight was the second and last performance of the Māori Troilus and Cressida. They had erupted onto the stage the day before with their visceral tribal version, their bodies almost naked, their buttocks painted with swirling green Pacific patterning, eyes popping and feet stamping, as if they were trying to pound their way through the earth back to New Zealand. The acting was exhilarating and supple, turbo-charged and witty. The show finished, and the curtain call exploded into a haka, that articulate yell which thrills the blood. No sooner had they finished than the audience erupted in turn. But not with conventional applause. About sixty Māori, who had discreetly placed themselves around the back of the yard, shrieked back at the stage, doffed their coats onto the floor and hunkered down, pounding out a combative rhythm straight at the stage. The audience was thrilled and terrified, caught in the no man's land between two groups of mammoth Māori rehearsing an old tribal war rite. When it finished there was more mad applause. I was up in the Upper Gallery in one corner, and watched the thrilled and babbling audience filter out of the vomitoria. They left one group in the middle. It was the Deafinitely Theatre troupe, later in the Festival to play Love's Labour's Lost, all of them hearing-impaired, vigorously signing their responses and ideas to each other. ‘Hello,’ I thought, ‘we may be on to something here.’

That night was, of course, a long way down the road from the moment when the idea for the Festival first popped up. A big, simple, stupid idea, which like all stupid ideas took very little translating or explaining: to do all the plays of Shakespeare, each in a different language, each by a premier company from a different country, all in the same space in just six weeks. Our great good luck is that through the vision of Sam Wanamaker, who made the Globe happen, and through the brilliant early
leadership of Mark Rylance, who enshrined boldness and experiment at its heart, the theatre has become an iconic space within a very short time. Companies from all around the world wanted to come and play with us, and wanted to play raw, human and dirty as the simplicity of the Globe demands. No concepts, no mediation, no filter, just the plays, those remarkable and eternal human documents, told straight from the lit eyes of the actors to the lit eyes of the audience.

Our greater good luck is our audience, a remarkable congregation of collaboration and goodwill, who lift every experience here to a greater height than we could ever imagine. Our own audience turned out in strength, about 200 of them seeing each and every show, with many others seeing 5, 10, and more. And they welcomed the huge influx of new audiences who really made the Festival all that it could be. Whether it was five generations of a Bengali community sitting together in a bay, the deaf audience all waving their hands in the air in celebration, the Palestinians waving their flag, a group of Albanian children holding an impromptu birthday party in the yard, or the South Sudanese invading the stage and refusing to leave – whoever they were, it was essentially their Festival. And to them goes our greatest gratitude for making it work.

I hope these essays give some idea of the range, the variety and the wit of the work. The bar was set high early and was constantly raised. Since the Festival happened, we at the Globe have spoken surprisingly little of it. It is almost as if it defies language. Hopefully, this book will start the process of trying to make some sense of it.
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Editors’ Note: All references to the plays use the New Cambridge Shakespeare Editions for character names and line numbers. All of the names of performers and scholars visiting from Asia use the Eastern ordering, which places the surname first (Yong Li Lan rather than Li Lan Yong). For performers and scholars living, working and publishing in the West, the surname follows (Adele Lee rather than Lee Adele). Translations are by the chapter authors unless otherwise stated. A website exists to accompany this volume which will contain any developments that occur after the book has gone to press. To keep up with the ongoing impact of the Festival and this collaborative research project, please see: www.rhul.ac.uk/english/showcase/staffprojectsinitiatives/showcaseitems/shakespearebeyondenglishglobalexperiment.aspx