

Editorial

It is only appropriate to begin this issue of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* with an expression of gratitude to Brian Pearce, who edited the journal for almost a decade after ushering it into the new millennium. Readers, contributors, guest editors and editorial consultants can all attest to his great care in producing the journal each year – and to the invaluable service he has performed for Shakespeare scholarship in doing so. With some trepidation, then, I have taken over the editorship of a journal entering its twenty-first year of existence. Fortunately for me, Laurence Wright (in his capacity as Managing Editor) has made the transition a smooth one. I would also like to extend my thanks to those colleagues who act as peer reviewers of articles submitted to the journal – it is a vital task that requires no small amount of time and intellectual energy. Finally, I'd like to mention the work of Bev Cummings-Penlington, who takes dull word-processed documents and turns them into "something rich and strange": the printed page (or, as likely, the pdf file) you have before you.

Earlier this year, I wrote an article for the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper in which I discussed the current situation and future prospects of scholarly journals in South Africa – and of our journal in particular. I hope that readers will indulge me as I quote from that article in order to introduce the present volume:

The title [*Shakespeare in Southern Africa*] in itself may be enough to turn potential 'casual' readers off, either because they were traumatised by studying Shakespeare at school or, more fractiously, because they consider Shakespeare's continued presence on our syllabi and our stages a colonial throwback. Literary academics, on the other hand, may have a slightly more nuanced awareness of the contentious history of Shakespeare studies in this country but would nevertheless be reluctant to engage with what is perceived (as one of my colleagues has described it) as the 'relentlessly apolitical' stance of many Renaissance literature scholars.

How, then, does one persuade potential readers that this is not the case? One approach is to widen the range of contributors and editorial advisors who are involved in producing and assessing the journal's content – and thus, hopefully, to broaden the journal's readership. This may entail soliciting articles, or finding peer reviewers, who are not necessarily part of the comparatively small pool of university-based Shakespeare scholars in South Africa; there is a need for interaction between those in the 'ivory towers' and public intellectuals, artists, journalists or other commentators who are not part of the university environment. Still, if research articles by full-time academics are to be rigorously assessed by their peers, an element of 'elitism' must be maintained.

This does not mean, however, that the content of these articles is removed from the social realities that, ultimately, provide a context for the work of all academics. Guy Butler (founding editor of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*) wrote in 1988 that while 'South Africa has more important things to attend to' than the study of Shakespeare's work, 'that does not mean long-term interests must be neglected. There are occasions when urgent matters may properly benefit from our attending to matters of permanent importance.' Butler's phrasing of the relationship between centuries-old texts and current affairs has been criticised as conservative, but it did at least acknowledge the relationship. Two decades later, the journal continues to explore this dynamic.

Key to such exploration is, of course, material that does not fall into the 'research article' category ... such as book and theatre reviews, interviews with theatre practitioners and shorter literary essays. These pieces serve as a reminder that Shakespeare is a going concern and not simply an arcane object of study.

(Thurman 51)

A glance at the contents page of Volume 21 will reveal that each of the above elements is present.

We begin with the republication, 150 years on, of the second of the 'Merriman lectures' (the first was published in Volume 20; see Laurence Wright's article in that issue, which provides

some context for the lectures). As for the new material, it is most pleasing that – while this is not a ‘themed’ issue – a number of the contributions are in thought-provoking dialogue with one another. Both Daniel Roux’s and Malvern van Wyk Smith’s articles challenge some of the assumptions underlying what has broadly become known as ‘postcolonial Shakespeare studies’. In doing so, they offer a more engaged and engaging approach to the nuances not only of Shakespeare’s plays – primarily *Othello* – but also of our recent social and intellectual history. Eugenie R. Freed’s article takes us from ‘the Africa that Shakespeare Knew’ to ‘the Venice that Shakespeare Knew’, considering Shakespeare’s depiction of that city in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* and exposing the (mis)representation of, along with various (mis)perceptions about, the locale and its inhabitants; Solomon Iyasere’s short piece on Emilia emphasises the dangers of such stereotypes. Michael Williams’s essay presents another English author known for his pronouncements on Venetian society, Lord Byron, and assesses his curious relationship with Shakespeare as (to use Harold Bloom’s term) a “strong precursor”.

Volume 22 (2010) will have a strong focus on Shakespeare in performance, but such an emphasis is anticipated in the present volume: we have Scott L. Newstok’s interview with Welcome Msoni – of *Umabatha* fame – and a number of theatre reviews that, along with the book reviews, resonate in unexpected ways with the longer pieces of work.

Finally, it may be of interest to some readers that I represented *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* at the third annual National Scholarly Editors’ Forum, organised by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), held in Pretoria on 3rd June. One of the key issues discussed at the forum was the tension between the principle of ‘open access’ publishing – the free circulation of knowledge, as it were – and the financial constraints faced by journals and their publishers. On this note, it is worth mentioning that *SiSA* is in the fortunate position of being widely ‘visible’ via various electronic databases without being beholden to a commercial publisher. A recently concluded agreement with EBSCOhost (one of the international databases that lists the journal) means that, through EBSCOhost Connection, our journal content is linked to all major internet search engines (including Google). Basic citation information and an abstract can be viewed by casual ‘surfers’, and of course full articles are available to researchers attached to subscribing organisations, such as university libraries. Previous volumes of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* will also soon be available through JSTOR and SABINET Archive. Please refer to the list at the back of the journal for further information on databases that carry *SiSA*.

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Editor

WORKS CITED

Thurman, Chris. “Dialogue with the Ivory Tower” in the *Mail & Guardian* 25.21 (29 May-4 June 2009): 50-51.