

Editorial

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Readers may be surprised to find in this volume an article by Guy Butler, who died in 2001 and whose work on Shakespeare was last published in 1994. Here I claim a certain editorial licence. I discovered Butler's "*Macbeth*: 'The great doom's image'" and other previously unpublished pieces a few years ago while researching material for *South African Essays on 'Universal' Shakespeare*.¹ For various reasons it could not be included in that book, but a reviewer's comment on the manuscript (notes for a lecture first delivered in 1976) encouraged me to consider it for this journal. One of the aims of *South African Essays on 'Universal' Shakespeare* is to reflect the changing nature of Shakespeare studies across various 'generation gaps'. The book presents Butler as a representative of earlier generations of South African Shakespeare teachers, theatre-makers and scholars, placing his work in dialogue with that of current Shakespeareans and attempting to discern marks of continuity as well as of disruption.

In various ways, Butler's Shakespeare scholarship seems dated. Critics such as Martin Orkin and Natasha Distiller have, in fact, suggested that Butler's version of Shakespeare was a conservative and reactionary one even for its time. In other ways, however, his essays, lectures and articles remain astute and pertinent. The reviewer mentioned above described Butler's insights into *Macbeth* as "a refreshing dose of learned scholarship", adding:

Having fed on a diet of New Historicism, which disregarded 'Christian' readings of Shakespeare, I found it refreshing to perceive another way of looking at the plays, especially one incorporating the art of the time. What is clear is that Butler writes ... with the assurance of wide reading and scholarship and the authority of a sharp intellect.²

The tension between 'then' and 'now' – along with the fact that good literary criticism does not become moribund, even though it becomes perceived as outmoded, or is in fact outmoded – is part of the impetus behind *South African Essays on 'Universal' Shakespeare*. But it should also be of particular interest to readers of this journal, not least because Butler was the founding editor of *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* and because Orkin and Distiller's critiques, along with those of David Johnson and others, are based on early volumes of the journal (which was established in 1987).³

The dialogue between Butler and current Shakespeareans thus continues in the pages of Volume 26. But there are various other dynamics that place the contents of this volume 'in conversation'. The illustrations on which Butler's argument about *Macbeth* depends are complemented by a very different set of images: the photographic essay accompanying Sarah Roberts' account of an innovative production of *Julius Caesar* (also depicted on our cover). Vital to the success of this ensemble production were the crowd scenes, which are in turn discussed in Tony Voss's essay on "The Myth of the Multitude". Along with *Julius Caesar*, Voss addresses *2 Henry VI*, *Sir Thomas More* and *Coriolanus* – but also *Hamlet*, "one in a

1. See Chris Thurman (ed), *South African Essays on 'Universal' Shakespeare* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).

2. Anonymous reader's report on draft manuscript for *South African Essays on 'Universal' Shakespeare*, December 2012 (Courtesy Ashgate Publishing).

3. See Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Natasha Distiller, *Shakespeare, South Africa, and Post-Colonial Culture* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 2005); and David Johnson, *Shakespeare in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

sequence of plays in which the playwright's sympathy for the common people is at issue". Some other core strands of *Hamlet* criticism are teased out in this volume. Brett E. Murphy pursues the literary, dramatic and religious controversy surrounding the status of Hamlet's father's ghost, following but also taking issue with Stephen Greenblatt. Colette Gordon writes about a clowning appropriation of the play that emphasises its meta-theatricality; her substantial review moves between the Company Theatre of Mumbai's *Hamlet – The Clown Prince* and Shakespeare's play text(s), offering some thought-provoking comments on the production's provenance as well as the context of its performance in South Africa. Meta-theatrical reflections (both within Shakespeare's plays and by those who bring them to life on stage) are also central to the books reviewed by Victor Houliston and Josiah Nyanda.

Like Gordon, Laurence Wright addresses the enrichment and displacement that comes from very differing sites of production and reception, in a review essay that contemplates how "the advent of live filmed Shakespeare extends and challenges our sense of what global Shakespeare might mean". One of the live filmed performances Wright refers to is the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Richard II*, directed by Gregory Doran – a production that Derrick Higginbotham, in his analysis of the play based on intersecting notions of the "wasteful man", the "effeminate man" and the "queer man", finds wanting. Identifying the "templates" used to construct King Richard gives us pause. What is it that makes us think we "recognise" Shakespeare's characters? This is the question posed by Sandra Young in her article on two further aspects of *Hamlet*: the problematic but almost-standard Freudian reading(s) of the play and the vexed question of universality. Todd A. Borlik expands the scope of the 'universal' by offering historical insight into the "stellification of Shakespeare" – a process that is "both symbolic of and predicated upon the international acceptance of him as a cosmopolitan rather than a quintessentially English author", but also one that is ineluctably tied to European colonial expansion. This celestial perspective on Shakespeare takes us close to Butler's focus on the cosmic dimensions of 'universality' – literally, Shakespeare's conception of the universe based on his Judeo-Christian theological assumptions.

I trust that readers will enjoy (and perhaps contribute to) these and other 'conversations' taking place in the present volume.

Finally, two notes of thanks. The first is to Bev Cummings-Penlington, who continues to ensure a high-quality 'look and feel' to *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* – including, with volume 26, the implementation of our change in referencing and citation format to the Chicago Style. Secondly, I would like to pay brief and inadequate (but nonetheless sincere) tribute to Laurence Wright, who has stepped down as Managing Editor of the journal after many years of steering it through the changing currents of the local and global academic publishing industries. Although Laurence has retired, he remains one of the leading lights in South African Shakespeare scholarship and I look forward to reading more from him in these pages. Monica Hendricks, the new Director of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA), has taken over as Managing Editor.

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