

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare Beyond English

Susan Bennett and Christie Carson

On 6 July 2005 the International Olympic Committee announced that London would be the host city for the 2012 Olympics Games.¹ Some two years later (4 June 2007) the ‘London 2012’ brand 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’.² And at the heart of this giant undertaking (more than 2,500 cultural projects bore the London 2012 imprimatur)³ was Shakespeare. As the British Museum–British Petroleum ‘Shakespeare Staging the World’ exhibition (mounted as a centrepiece of this Cultural Olympiad) proclaimed, he is ‘Britain’s greatest cultural contribution to the world’.⁴ Similarly the nationwide World Shakespeare Festival was announced as ‘a celebration of Shakespeare as the world’s playwright’.⁵ Representing the most widely distributed and banner component of the Cultural Olympiad celebrations, this Festival was ‘[p]roduced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, in an unprecedented collaboration with leading UK and international arts organisations, and with Globe to Globe, a major international programme produced by Shakespeare’s Globe’; according to the World Shakespeare Festival’s website, ‘it’s the biggest celebration of Shakespeare ever staged’.⁶

Shakespeare Beyond English is about the Globe to Globe Festival, staged 21 April–9 June 2012 at Shakespeare’s Globe, comprising performances of all thirty-seven plays and *Venus and Adonis* delivered in more than forty different languages (when including the pre-Festival ‘Sonnet Sunday’) and bringing a diversity of international content to audiences as well as to the umbrella organizations of the World Shakespeare Festival, the Cultural Olympiad and London 2012. Contributors to *Shakespeare Beyond English* review and reflect on these productions to examine questions of cultural authority and global markets, along with ideas about language, nationhood, power, pleasure and more. Why, this book asks, should Shakespeare be at centre

stage in London's remarkable year, and why, when the world was coming to London for such a large-scale sporting event, should Shakespeare be such a dominant and compelling part of London 2012's brand identity? What was at stake in these global performances at Shakespeare's Globe, and who were their audiences? The essays address, too, a variety of challenges that these Festival performances, individually and collectively, present to ongoing scholarly debates about the contemporary relevance of Shakespeare's plays.

The genesis for this project was, however, simpler and certainly less ambitious. It was partly wonder – could the Globe really be planning to bring in thirty-eight different theatre companies, none of which would be English-speaking, to perform in a six-week period? – and partly cynicism – would this be yet another assertion of Shakespeare's universality by way of the exotic 'other' on an English stage? Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper had worked together on *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*,⁷ so when the editors of this volume were curious to discover more about this mammoth event, it was to Karim-Cooper, Head of Research and Courses at the Globe, that we naturally turned. Giving us a snapshot of the Globe's plans, she asked if we would be interested in spearheading a scholarly response to the Festival, but without specifying what shape that might take. And so we thought, rather predictably, that there was scope for a collection of scholarly essays that might bring new evidence and different points of view to debates about 'foreign Shakespeare' that have interested the field at least since Dennis Kennedy's landmark book of the same name.⁸ But Karim-Cooper urged us to consider all of the performances in the Festival rather than a select few and to engage with the full breadth of the 'world' that would be showing London audiences their Shakespeare.

In a few short months *Shakespeare Beyond English* evolved as a remarkable collaborative enterprise among an international group of scholars and theatre professionals – some Shakespearean specialists, others theatre and performance practitioners and/or researchers; some experts in or native to particular language communities, others without any knowledge of the language of the production they saw – whose ideas, arguments and criticisms have developed from the night of the performance and a subsequent blog review on the Globe's website through to the diverse and thoughtful essays collected here. As readers will notice, the initial plan remains the backbone of this volume: longer essays that explore in-depth a key issue in thinking about Shakespeare 'beyond' his homeland and natural tongue. Shorter essays allow for a full record, as well as a much wider variety of perspectives about the Festival: some look to specific national traditions 'with' Shakespeare, others assess interpretive or performance practices, and yet others dwell on an audience's engagement with a show. In some instances, we commissioned more than one contributor, so as to pry out particular complexities (political, aesthetic and cultural among them) in a production or group of productions. As a whole this book must serve as a

scholarly archive of the Globe to Globe Festival, but it is our hope that it is a great deal more. The more than forty contributors collectively challenge the business of Shakespeare, whether that business takes place in the classroom, in the scholarly journal or monograph, on the stage, or in the audience. If there is a common thread among the very different analyses gathered here, it is that the Festival was unlike anything any of us had seen before, and that fact inevitably challenged familiar and sometimes fiercely held assumptions time and again – whatever those assumptions were and however they had been formed.

A press release sent out by the Globe on 7 June 2012 heralding the end of their Festival summed up in rightfully glowing terms the six weeks of theatre that had just passed: ‘Since the celebratory opening weekend on 21 and 22 April, Shakespeare’s Globe has welcomed artists from all over the world to perform in the hugely ambitious multilingual Globe to Globe Festival as part of the London 2012 Festival. For the first time ever, 37 international companies performed all 37 of Shakespeare’s plays in 37 different languages’.⁹ Their statement recorded the more than 85,000 tickets sold and revelled in the knowledge that 80 per cent of bookings were made by first-time visitors to the theatre. As Ruth Mackenzie, Director of the London 2012 Festival, commented, ‘The Globe has exceeded expectations by gaining . . . new audiences, many of whom were from the communities represented on stage’; its success, she suggested, was a model for the Cultural Olympiad at large.¹⁰ If our contributors were experienced – indeed, generally, expert – audiences for Shakespearean performance, what they saw and with whom they saw it strayed far from usual theatre-going conditions. As readers will discover, the experience of watching a Shakespeare play with audiences drawn predominantly from non-English-language communities in London changed the conditions of reception in ways that few of us well rehearsed in Shakespeare spectatorship could ever have imagined. What, then, is ‘Shakespeare beyond English’?

Certainly, the idea of an international Shakespeare festival is not new (nor, of course, is the idea of a ‘Complete Works’ festival – the RSC had one in 2006); what was new, different and special about this Festival was the stated aim to speak to local communities through the gateway of the Globe stage. In this way, the Globe to Globe Festival had at its heart ideas dearly held by its founder, Sam Wanamaker, about giving back to the local population at the same time as reaching out to an international audience. Furthermore, the idea of the theatre welcoming a different community each night, and specifically a different London community, recalls the ‘physical, soulful and spiritual experience’ that the Globe’s first artistic director, Mark Rylance, had sought for his audiences.¹¹ But the process that brought thousands of first-time Globe attendees to the theatre was, without doubt, a novel one. The foreword to this book by the current artistic director, Dominic Dromgoole, and the question-and-answer introduction to the Festival by its director, Tom Bird,

suggest how keen companies were to participate; as Dromgoole puts it, ‘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.’¹² In the same vein, Bird describes in the Festival programme the eighteen-month journey that he and Dromgoole undertook ‘to meet theatre people in every corner of the world’, marvelling that ‘[e]verywhere, Shakespeare, or perhaps the name of the Globe Theatre, seems to have a currency that affords one a special welcome, a mutual recognition – or, in the case of the Republic of Armenia, complete immunity from border controls’.¹³

Selection of the companies to perform at the Globe to Globe Festival started with productions that Dromgoole or Bird knew or had heard about and subsequently saw: this accounted for nine plays.¹⁴ Their stroke of genius, it seems to us, was to move ahead with commissions for the other twenty-nine groups driven by the potential to connect with the many diasporic populations that make up contemporary London. Not all the new productions were by companies that met this criterion, but very many did. The capital city could easily generate ‘natural’ audiences for performances in languages such as Arabic, Bangla, Hindi, Polish, Spanish, Turkish and Urdu, but the question must have always been, ‘Will they come?’ As the attendance statistic perhaps implies, they certainly did. Almost all of the performances benefited from the pleasure of audiences predominantly populated by speakers of the language on the stage – often, of course, these spectators were long-time residents of London and their families. And, inevitably, some of these spectators had never been to the country where the theatre was from, but had spoken the language at home, growing up in this large metropolitan city. From this shared experience of language came so many expressions of delight, pride and, occasionally, national fervour.

Many of the essays in this book address the complexities of these language relationships and the dangers that an enthusiastic and celebratory mode masks continuing inequities both locally and abroad, but, for now, it is worth remarking how successfully the Globe to Globe Festival met current goals articulated by the Arts Council. In their ten-year vision, ‘Achieving great art for everyone’, the Council argues for ‘excellence, founded on diversity and innovation, and a new collaborative spirit to develop the arts over the long term, so they truly belong to everyone’.¹⁵ In a year when the Council took an almost 30 per cent cut in its government revenue, it could justifiably seem that any kind of art for everyone has been made an impossible goal, but the Festival successfully modelled one way at least that new audiences can be brought into premium arts venues. Of course, the cultural weight of Shakespeare and his plays has much to do with this appeal for performers and spectators alike. Kyu Choi from the Yohangza Theatre Company of South Korea (a fan favourite for their charming version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

populated with the sprites of Korean folklore) commented, ‘As an artist, if you’re really into Shakespeare’s work, performing in Shakespeare’s home at the Globe, that’s a great honour for us.’¹⁶ It was the joy of being in ‘Shakespeare’s home’ as well as ‘at home’ in one’s language that produced the festive, high-spirited atmosphere that characterized Festival performances, irrespective of the weather or the subject matter. For English-speaking audience members, this almost always proved infectious.

In the context of language, Bird suggests in his introduction that three different notions were in fact at work when developing the programme for the Festival. The first was this commitment to London’s languages, but the second he calls a ‘Shakespeare language’,¹⁷ by which he sees the plays engaged with local debates about identity and often, also, the nature of art – something that also produces the Globe’s now iconic presence on London’s South Bank. The third is what Bird calls ‘big languages’, languages spoken by a great many people in the world. If the English that presides as a global *lingua franca* is set aside, what other languages hold sway politically, socially and culturally in our world? Are those the same languages as or different ones from the languages of London’s diasporic communities or from the Shakespeare language that he suggests unites people and art? The organizers seemingly recognized the limits of their language selections, something they suggested through the Sonnet Sunday event that took place on 22 April, the day before the official Festival opening. This was a six-hour marathon staging of Shakespeare’s 154 sonnets, performed in a variety of languages not included in the Festival proper – among them Latin, Finnish, Czech and Cornish.¹⁸ Above all else, then, the Globe to Globe Festival brought to the fore questions of language and its effects, on stage and off.

But can language be separate from nation? That it can was a presumption of the Festival organizers, and they tried very hard to avoid flag-waving, national anthems and political protests. All of these things took place on different occasions during the Festival, moments that only enforced the sense of how hard it is to acknowledge that a language can be spoken by many people outside a nation without that acknowledgement standing as a nationalist statement. The elision of language and nation produced some of the Festival’s more controversial or at least thought-provoking occasions. As Bird notes in the programme:

The festival has found itself at the mercy of international politics (*Cymbeline* from the world’s newest country, South Sudan, *The Comedy of Errors* from Afghanistan, *Richard II* from Palestine); ash clouds, the Eurozone crisis (the National Theatre of Greece join us with *Pericles*); delicate sensitivities (the Polish *Macbeth* is one of the most badly behaved performances you will ever see); censoring dictatorships (the Belarus Free Theatre’s *King Lear* will be harder-earned than most) and many other hurdles besides.¹⁹

He does not mention in this list the arguments that were played out around the invitation to the Habima Theatre of Israel to contribute *The Merchant of Venice* to the Festival. In advance of its performance dates (28 and 29 May), a letter was published in the *Guardian* (29 March) that opened ‘We notice with dismay and regret that Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London has invited Israel’s National Theatre, Habima, to perform.’²⁰ The thirty-seven signatories – among them arts luminaries such as Caryl Churchill, Mike Leigh, Jonathan Miller, Mark Rylance, Emma Thompson and Harriet Walter – expressed support for the inclusion of a performance in Hebrew but asked ‘the Globe to withdraw the invitation so that the festival is not complicit with human rights violations and the illegal colonisation of occupied land’.²¹ Among other responses, one from Howard Brenton (3 April) suggested to the protestors ‘Denounce, don’t censor; argue, don’t ban.’²² Interestingly, he ponders whether the invitation to the National Theatre of China (*Richard III*) might be considered support ‘for the occupation of Tibet’,²³ throwing a political spotlight onto yet another of the Festival’s productions. Wherever one stands on the political appropriateness or otherwise of the Habima, and perhaps other, invitations, what the Festival inspired was critical debate – before, during and after what took place on the stage.

The location of the Globe to Globe Festival within the larger Cultural Olympiad, branded for London 2012, and in relationship to the Summer Olympic Games, also raises questions about national (rather than linguistic) competition. But this Festival might well have served to challenge the logic of the Olympics: after all, the most cursory look at the parade of athletes in the Games’ opening ceremonies demonstrates that this is not an even playing field among countries. Moreover, national identity for some athletes is not one of birth but of other circumstances, including a choice that serves both competitor and country in maximizing the chances of reaching the podium. But at the Globe to Globe Festival all the visiting companies had the same on-site considerations, ‘a break-neck three-day schedule of rehearsal, technical rehearsal, and two performances on consecutive days, an equally warm send off, then home’,²⁴ and tickets for the Festival were definitely easier to obtain than for the Olympics’ more popular events. Like the Summer Olympic Games, the performances themselves and the audiences they reached inspired an almost visceral experience of identity formation. It is not coincidental that so many of our contributors (and both editors) have experience of expatriate life and hybridized culture. If we have come to an historical moment when more nations are significantly multicultural than monocultural, this asks us, too, to better measure the plurality of cultural expression in Shakespeare’s London as much as in our own time. Thus, many of the contributions explore what it is about language that makes people feel included socially and culturally. Many of the plays discuss in detail migration – indeed, banishment – from home, cutting across propositions of

national identity with issues about conflict at familial and more local governmental levels – topics that seemed to have a special resonance with Festival audiences.

The opacity and obscurity of Shakespeare's language is the common battle cry of reluctant high school and university students, and many Festival companies sought a linguistic equivalent by deploying old or poetic forms of their mother tongues. The Globe's useful provision of brief plot synopses ahead of scenes through surtitles – a remarkably Brechtian strategy – was, it seemed, often as much appreciated by the native speakers in the audience as by the English-only spectators. Some of the most impressive productions used more than one register of language, slipping back and forth between these with seeming effortlessness. In the early days of the Festival, many of the companies opted for selected words in English to ensure moments of interaction with the entire audience. Often this provided a linguistic punchline that the actors could be sure everybody would understand. But, part-way through the Festival, the organizers asked companies to stop using English words – an injunction that imposed an extremely artificial restriction on the way that many of the actors normally express themselves. Use of English words and phrases, particularly in reference to technology or popular culture, is one of the defining characteristics of our global economy. To restrict this practice and to ignore the commonplace hybridization of language as much as culture produced a particular artifice that insisted on the performances as 'other'. Furthermore, in some productions where older forms of the language chosen were unfamiliar to the actors themselves, this required learning new words and phrases in their own languages that might be incomprehensible to compatriots in the audience. Other companies took the opportunity provided by the Festival to raise awareness of languages in need of protection or promotion (as in Ngākau Toa's Māori *Troilus and Cressida* or even Deafinitely Theatre's British Sign Language *Love's Labour's Lost*). If we are to propose a common purpose in the expression of language at the Festival, it would be the desire to be understood, to have stories witnessed, identities and languages recognized, and for all of this to happen in a place that passes as hallowed ground. In short, the Globe in these six weeks was a deeply affective space.

At the same time, it is important not to overestimate the shock value that English-speaking spectators might be presumed to experience in hearing 'their' Shakespeare in so many different tongues. Certainly there were resistant spectators and critics. It was not unusual to hear a few voices grumbling in the intermission about the injustices being done to Shakespeare – non-naturalistic theatrical practices and often irreverent approaches to the texts were sometimes too much for audience members raised in the English performance tradition of the plays that depends on naturalism and textual fidelity. For the more adventurous theatre-goer, however, there was the cumulative effect of Festival performances: over a six-week period, repeat customers simply got better at working with different languages and different

performance styles. More generally, it is surely the case that over the last two decades there have been more and more opportunities to experience Shakespeare outside those two encoded places of ‘authenticity’, the RSC’s Stratford theatres and the Globe itself in London. International festivals market diversity of experience fostered by a roster of participants drawn from across the world, and audiences have come to expect, and become familiar with, non-English-language performance of all kinds. Equally, the Globe itself has long had an audience base believed by many not to understand Shakespeare anyway – or at least not to properly understand him, as W.B. Worthen noted in reviewers’ ‘general condescension to (and ritual skewering of) the Globe’s foreign, tourist audience’.²⁵ Tourist audiences have sought out Shakespeare not just at the Globe in London but at very many different venues around the world, not all of whom deliver the plays in English. Indeed, there is, by now, an established history of the ‘foreign Shakespeare’ which Kennedy introduced in his 1993 monograph, reminding readers there that Shakespeare was not just ‘by far the most popular playwright in England and North America’ but ‘actually the most performed playwright in the world at large. He regularly crosses national and linguistic boundaries with apparent ease.’²⁶

More recently, Kennedy revisited his ideas, this time in an essay for the Festival’s souvenir programme, where he suggests that Shakespeare’s global popularity is not so much the result of ‘the universality of his texts’; rather, we should understand it ‘as the result of their flexibility’.²⁷ Kennedy reminds us that Shakespeare has been seen in a variety of Asian cinemas, as well as in Manga comic books, along with many styles of stage performance. In an examination of both film and performance interpretations of Shakespeare’s work ‘world-wide’, Sonia Massai has argued for a complex and interactive relationship between ‘local’ Shakespeares designed for local audiences and those intended for national or international reception that both evidences and challenges the idea that Shakespeare ‘has become one of the powerful global icons through which local cultural markets are progressively Westernized’.²⁸ In other words, audiences have been explicitly and implicitly prepared by the Shakespeare marketplace for the Globe to Globe Festival; what was new, in the end, was not the ‘foreignness’ of the experience. The excitement derived more thoroughly from the ‘specialness’ of each performance to its constituency spectatorship and, as much, to other theatre-goers who got a double show – watching the action both on and off stage. The Olympians, as they were called, who saw every show in the yard (for the bargain inclusive price of £100), were in many ways keener to talk about the ways audiences interacted with the action and with each other than to discuss what was or wasn’t Shakespearean about the performances.

This volume takes the form of a chronological record of the productions not just to document the events in the order in which they appeared on the stage but also to trace the debates that developed over the Festival’s six weeks. For example, the

first week was characterized by the novelty of each production, and responses rarely moved beyond the celebratory. Each new show was received as a discovery and a joyful theatrical gift. But as the weeks and productions accumulated the stories from around the world became more complicated and more apparently political. Parts of the audience began to develop a collective understanding of how to shift from one culture to the next as a new audience appeared and took over the dominant language (spoken, of course, but as much physical, cultural, social, religious and theatrical) of the hour. Everyone else in the theatre had learned to adapt very quickly. The pattern of constant arrival, technical rehearsal, matinee performance, evening performance and departure for each company meant that there were five companies at some stage in this process every day. Tickets for the groundling Olympians required them to attend the matinee performances, and, given the afternoon shows were the first of the company's usual two performances, this often created the feel of a dress rehearsal, where the audience was leading and teaching the actors in their use of the Globe space rather than the other way around. The back and forth between the audience and onstage action was often wonderful to watch.

What exactly performers and spectators learned from the Globe to Globe Festival remains hard to quantify, and Kennedy's suggestion of flexibility is a useful one. For an audience comfortable in their knowledge of the plays and of the space, the challenge of each new day and each new play was significant. For an audience unfamiliar with Shakespeare's plays the challenge was certainly different, and, time and again, it was simply important to be there. The essays that follow examine the ways we have come to think about Shakespeare in the present and recent past – as national and international, as colonial and postcolonial, as a cultural icon and intercultural paradigm, as conservative and radical. The Globe to Globe Festival was the host to thirty-eight performances, each with its own story to tell, and this book tries to achieve something of the same: each essay here addresses some element(s) of Shakespeare beyond English, and together they suggest, like the performances themselves, the limits of contemporary assumptions about and expectations for these plays. Readers may well dip in and out of the volume as audiences did with the Festival, preferring to pursue their particular interests (whether geographical, thematic, generic or other), but however these essays are engaged, we hope they bring new ideas about how and where Shakespeare makes a home.

ENDNOTES

- 1 'London beats Paris to 2012 Games', 6 July 2005, news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/front_page/4655555.stm, 27 October 2012.
- 2 Official London 2012 website, 'Cultural Olympiad', www.london2012.com/about-us/cultural-olympiad/, 27 October 2012.
- 3 Ibid.

- 4 Display at 'Shakespeare Staging the World', British Museum, 19 July–25 November 2012.
- 5 World Shakespeare Festival 2012, 'About the Festival', www.worldshakespearefestival.org.uk/about/, 27 October 2012. This site records seventy productions under its sponsorship that took place across the UK.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Published by Cambridge University Press in 2008.
- 8 Dennis Kennedy, ed., *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance*, first published in 1993 by Cambridge University Press. In an afterword to this, the first collection to address performances by non-English-speaking companies, Kennedy provided a field-changing critique of the Anglo-centrism of Shakespeare studies.
- 9 Globe press release, 'Shakespeare's Globe announces success of the Globe to Globe Festival as it completes its six-week marathon', 7 June 2012, www.shakespearesglobe.com/about-us/press/releases/globe-theatre, 27 October 2012. There are inconsistencies in how the number of plays/performances are counted. Thirty-seven represents the number of Shakespeare's plays; the staging of *Venus and Adonis* raises that count by one. The number of 'languages' is also the subject of some debate in the essays and elsewhere, particularly in reference to Deafinitely Theatre's *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Q Brothers' hip-hop version of *Othello*.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Mark Rylance, 'Discoveries from the Globe Stage', in Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, eds., *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 103.
- 12 See p. xxiv.
- 13 Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, *Globe to Globe, 37 Plays 37 Languages*, Souvenir programme (London: Shakespeare's Globe, 2012). p. 10.
- 14 See pp. 13–14 in this volume.
- 15 Arts Council England, 'Achieving great art for everyone: A strategic framework for the arts', 4 November 2010, www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/strategic-framework-arts/, 27 October 2012.
- 16 Globe press release, 7 June 2012.
- 17 See p. 14 in this volume.
- 18 For further discussion of the event, see Rob Hand, 'Year of Shakespeare: Review of "Sonnet Sunday"', <http://bloggingshakespeare.com/year-of-shakespeare-sonnet-Sunday>, 7 November 2012.
- 19 Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, *Globe to Globe*, p. 11.
- 20 'Dismay at Globe invitation to Israeli theatre', *Guardian*, 29 March 2012, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/29/dismay-globe-invitation-israeli-theatre, 27 October 2012.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Howard Brenton, 'Denounce, don't censor: Globe's invitation to Habima should stand', *Guardian*, 3 April 2012, www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2012/apr/03/denounce-dont-censor-habima-globe?intcmp=239, 27 October 2012.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Globe press release, 7 June 2012. In fact, several companies had three, and not two, performances, scheduled over weekends (*Venus and Adonis*, *Richard III*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet*, along with the Globe's own *Henry V*).