



South African National Society

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NEWSLETTER & PROGRAM FOR JUNE 2016

THE DATE: 14TH June 2016

VENUE: KwaMuhle Museum, Bram Fischer Road [Ordnance Road] Durban.

TIME: Meeting commences at 17h30; Refreshments will be served from 16h45.

PARKING: Off Bram Fischer/Ordnance road [next to the Museum]; security person is present

ADMISSION: R20 per person towards the cost of snacks and drinks

FEATURE: **The Old Durban Forest by Professor Donal McCracken**

Where now stands Durban used to be an extensive area of swamp, sand-dune forest, grassland, woodland and, most surprising, high-standing forest. The talk will look at the nature and extent of the old Durban forest, investigating its composition; its exploitation; as well as the animals and birds which inhabited the forest. The attempts in the Edwardian era to re-green the Berea will also be covered. The talk will make mention of some of the eccentric characters who lived in forest.

Before Professor McCracken talks Roy Cowgill will show the short Mount Moreland video that would not display in February.

May Meeting Report

William Shakespeare's 'Much Ado about Nothing' Professor Debbie Arlene Lutge

Debbie Lutge came to speak as part of the society's celebrations of the life of William Shakespeare and to mark his death 400 years ago on 23rd April 1616. Briefly covering some of his life we heard that:

- Shakespeare was Christened 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon
- Son of Mary (landed gentry) and John Arden (yeoman, glover, commodities merchant) who rose to hold the position of Bailiff (Mayor)
- Attended local grammar school in Stratford until 15 and probably studied Latin, rhetoric, logic and literature
- In 1582 at 18 married Anne Hathaway a local farmer's daughter 8 years his senior
- 1583 1st daughter Susanna
- 1585 twins Judith and Hamnet
- The dark years – Two years without much info
- Actor Playwright of some note by 1592 in London

Moving to the second phase of his life we learned:

- Wrote and acted for numerous companies – Pembroke's Men, Strange's Men (Later Chamberlain's Men) where he remained
- 1592 Plague closed theatres for 2 yrs.
- In those 2 years Shakespeare wrote narrative poetry (Venus & Adonis & The Rape of Lucrece dedicated to the Earl of Southampton – thought to be Shakespeare's friend and benefactor) &

exercised his ability to write sonnets (published without his consent in 1609 shortly before his retirement)

- 1594 theatres open again and he returns to writing plays
- 1596 death of his only son Hamnet (11 years)
- 1599 London partner in the New Globe built by the Chamberlain's Men
- 1612 Shakespeare wrote little but completed Henry VIII
- 1613 while Henry VIII in performance the Globe caught fire and burnt to the ground

The only known surviving illustration of a theatre of the period is that of the Swan Theatre. It is believed the Globe would have been of similar design.

Reproduced courtesy of the Telegraph

For the third phase of Shakespeare's life we heard:

- 1610-1613 Shakespeare returned to Stratford where he owned a house and property to spend the remaining years with his family
- Retirement in Stratford as a moderately wealthy gentleman
- Died at 52 on 23 April 1616 & buried 2 days later in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church
- Literary legacy: 37 Plays, 154 sonnets, 5 major poems
- Most Shakespeare extant plays were acting scripts stored at the Globe and only published in pamphlet form
- Theatre scripts were not considered literary works of art but merely a basis for performance and popular entertainment
- 2 of Shakespeare's company, John Heminges & Henry Condell preserved his 36 plays (minus Pericles, the 37th)



TACKLING Shakespeare's LANGUAGE In Contemporary South Africa

Consider the following:

- 11 official languages and an **antiquated English** that needs unravelling for speakers of English
- 400 years means- a few **obsolete words** and sometimes meanings are not exactly the same
- unfamiliar **word arrangement** determined by poetic rhythm impedes understanding for many

- Verbs precede subjects – “Be you constant in the accusation, and my cunning shall not shame me (Act II sc ii) Was not Count John here at supper” (Act II sc i) - **Inversions** that feature predicate adjectives before verbs and subjects modifies the action or subject – “Him I saw”
- **Word separations** - MAAN: “His grace hath made the match, and all grace say amen to it.” (Act II sc i) “The savage bull may [bear the yoke], but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull’s horns, and set them in my forehead” (Act I, sc i) “The bull may bear the yoke but if I bear the yoke transplant the bull’s horns” (p.4)
- The latter loses poetic rhythm and shifts emphasis.
- **Long interruptive sentences** or parenthesis add to/ create suspense or provide further character dimensions:
- “...I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviours to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love” (Benedick Act II sc iii) “... that incestuous, that adulterate beast, With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts— O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power So to seduce—won to his shameful lust The will of my most seeming virtuous queen. (Hamlet Act V sc ii 43–47)
- suggests Hamlet’s mother is the victim of an evil seduction and deception. The delay between the subject, “beast,” and the verb, “won,” creates a moment of tension filled with the image of a cunning predator waiting for the right moment to spring into attack. This interruptive passage allows the play to unfold crucial information and thus to **build the tension** necessary to produce a riveting drama.“ p 7)
- Sometimes sentences heap detail upon detail V other times when **sentences are elliptical** – words are omitted. Antonio: “A good sharp fellow.” instead of “He is a good sharp fellow” (MAAN Act I sc ii)
- **Intentional vagueness** – Don John: “For my brother, I think he holds you well and in dearness of heart hath help to effect your ensuing marriage – surely suit ill spent , and labour ill bestowed” (Act III sc ii) This avoids clarifying how Don John knows the Prince’s involvement.
- **Modern interpretations** allow for readings within readings that shift meaning:
 - Dogberry: but to write and read comes by nature.
 - Watch: Both which, Master Constable –
 - Dogberry: You have. I knew it would be your answer (Act III sc ii)
- **Uncommon words** – “rechate” the horn for the hounds and “Signior Montanto” European fencing term meaning upward thrust – “Mount-anto” sexual connotations are taken further and a mountebank implies a con man.

Brief History of Much Ado About Nothing

- 1613 performed at court for Princess Elizabeth & Frederick Elector Palantine
- David Garrick gave it its first performance at Drury Lane on Nov 14, 1748 and played Benedick regularly until his farewell performance on May 9, 1776
- 19th C when performances tended to be lavish spectacles include Miss Helen Faucit’s rendition of Beatrice noted as “a performance of rare beauty” by the *Manchester Courier* of May 9, 1846
- Henry Irving’s Benedick of “infinite grace” was performed at the Lyceum Theatre and noted in the *Saturday Review* of October 21 1882.
- 20th C renditions have frequently changed the time and locale – American Southwest shoot ‘em up era, the bicycle riding Edwardian era, the Teddy Roosevelt era of gramophones and keystone cops.
- Therefore there is a universal appeal that withstands chameleon-like experiments

Debbie spoke to an enraptured audience about the much acclaimed DUT production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, a production which some of us were privileged to have seen at DUT on the 400th Anniversary of Shakespeare death.

We listened enthralled as Debbie explained how this centuries old work had been performed by her students, not one of whom has English as first language. We learned how adaptations to work around the Zulu culture had led to changes allowing for greater understanding of the work and the nuances of Shakespeare's use of English. We saw how local materials were used for costumes and stage and how local skills like gumboot dancing and stick fighting could be used to create a relevant local theme. But for those familiar with the play one still followed the work with relative ease.

There is a biannual Shakespeare Festival held in Germany so with money found for travel the cast from DUT were off to show their skills. And by all accounts this they did superbly well for the audience not only gave them a terrifically long standing ovation but DUT has been invited back to the festival two years hence; an unheard of accolade.

FOLKWANG SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL 2016 – note all described in German

Participant 1: - Folkwang Universität der Künste, Deutschland

Regie: Simina German

In deutscher Sprache

Participant 2: - Staatliche Theatreakademie PWST Kraków, Polen

Regie: Brian Michaels

In polnischer Sprache

Participant 3: Durban University of Technology, Südafrika

Regie: Deborah Arlene Lutge

In englischer Sprache

Participant 4: - University of Melbourne, Australien

Regie: Tony Smith

In englischer Sprache



The German Production of Much Ado About Nothing which employed an empty stage but shiny copper floor.

Note all Photos courtesy of Robin Junicke

German Interpretation

- Introduction of characters
- No set except for the copper glossy dance floor with a few stairs at either side where actors sat to watch the action on occasion and a concave slide from the platform to the stage floor
- Don Pedro, Leonato, Dogberry and the Sexton were all played by females
- Double cast Benedick and Beatrice who performed alternative scenes and simultaneous dialogue for the banquet (Act II sci), declaration of love (Act 5 sc ii) prior to the second wedding Act 5 sc ii.
- Masque ball was a club setting with gold masks and a club dance song Fergie's "A Party Never Killed Nobody" used in Baz Luhrmann's film "The Great Gatsby"
- Sexton was played by Hero in glasses who used Margaret/Ursula as the table as there was no set except for the glossy copper dance floor. Ursula additionally doubled as Margaret and Verges.
- The veil was Hero's, and both Beatrices hair
- Interpretation was modern, eclectic, absurd in places.

Polish Interpretation



- Messina was an Italian Restaurant with four square tables covered in check cloths
- The restaurant allowed for plate juggling, singers, and dances, while the tops of tables and chairs added levels to the performance.
- The story centred around Hero as victim
- Dogberry and Verges were played by females who were also the watch and posed questions they struggled to answer
- Use was made of the sides of the theatre and as the cast are all Theatre Dance specialists their agility as physical theatre specialists was used.
- The Masqued ball was a feast, a family dinner, a Mafiosi get together with disguises Groucho moustaches rather than masks and a plaintive singer in the restaurant to which the cast locked into a sensuous tango.

- The Sexton was also the Rabbi
- The wedding was a photograph and the actors spoke directly to the audience while posing until Hero collapsed. There was no second wedding as Hero removed her black veil to reveal a mask of macabre flowers. The final moment Hero revolts against being the victim in a Haka like scream.
- Interpretation resembled a black comedy with sinister Sicilian overtones, lighting used cinematic shadow and dramatic red and blue periods, with mafia elements evident in the leather assassin coats and hats and in Don Johns penchant for knives. His European dress smacked of aristocratic class with white dress suit, bow tie and neck scarf and a handlebar moustache almost post WWII in places.

Australian Interpretation

- Contemporary Messina was a Country Club in Australia complete with lawn white diaphanous surround curtains, and furniture comprised of green acting blocks
- Costumes were contemporary country club informal wear with long shorts, jackets, occasional sporting styled sweaters worn around the neck, sunglasses, sunhats, cell phones, newspapers and cocktails.
- Focus was squarely on the delivery of text and props added beers, take away coffee cups, all supporting the endless party syndrome of the idle rich
- The curtain was used both to conceal and reveal as well as to provide a draped wedding venue when the time came.
- Dogberry complete with police whistle and Verges were Australian police and were featured as brute force that lacked subtlety and Dogberry was portrayed as stubborn while Verges was rather dumb.
- The Masqued ball featured the cast with masks either in slow motion behind the curtains or in front with canned music as the party became progressively wilder
- Don John was portrayed as the outcast on the outskirts of the social circle.
- Conrad was a girl as was Antonio.
- The first wedding had the long white wedding gown, the second a short white dress suitable for the remarriage.



- The interpretation alluded to a comic colonial romp where the wealthy set party relentlessly, law and order is officious, Beatrice lashes out with her hand to show Benedick disapproval when questioning his manhood, and the colonial drive is to party hard and live the lifestyle of the rich and famous, while bright lighting and pastel clothing added to the sunny Australian environment of the country club atmosphere.

SOUTH AFRICAN Interpretation

- The set merged quasi-Ndebele designed cardboard boxes, floor design, bamboo trees, drums as chairs or supports for benches or tables, umqombothi pots, Juba containers, occasional isiZulu phrases and a fusion of contemporary and rural African clothing.
- Soldiers returned doing gumboot and there actually was a Prince in umblaselo, Umqhele and faux leopard skin.
- Costumes were contemporary mix of beads, leopard print boob tubes, skirts, African suits in black and in white, men's African shirts, tyre skirts and fighting sticks.
- Focus was squarely on a fusion of tradition and contemporary African dance and song, mascanda guitar, isiscathimiya, Shembe, traditional wedding and funeral songs, capturing our roots and their reinterpretation as we look back from our democracy and on the story in the circle of the kraal and the slow motion movement of the storytelling on the outskirts depicting the story between the lines.
- Dogberry and Verges were in army attire and arrive by train a la physical protest theatre style & Verges corrected all Dogberry's Malapropisms.
- The Masqued ball featured the cast with scrap metal masks by Karl Cornelius' balanced on fighting sticks and danced in a weaving motion to mascanda guitar
- Don John wears sunglasses and a wry smile and is portrayed as bitter.
- Conrad is referred to as comrade. Benedick as Bene Dick
- The wedding turns to high drama and Leonato threatens to beat Hero after the false discovery. Hooped skirts are created from rings of bicycle tyres.
- The interpretation is that of a colourful, emerging rainbow nation, looking back to African roots and forward to a new Africa by embracing a continent without a Western stamp of approval. It embraces the syncopated accent rhythms, the traditional flavour of songs, isiZulu izimbongi, a loose fusion of African cultures with frequently borrowed allusions to the use and misuse of Ubuntu through civil war, mistrust, deception, and revenge positioned alongside comic bumbling courts and uneducated colonially impaired arresting officers.



TOWARDS A MERGED INTERPRETATION

- Riverside Shakespeare provided by the Folkwang Shakespeare Festival with cuts
- 12 Actors only + 1 director
- Selection process – Sept 21, 2014 Dec 2014, March 2015 Finances secured, Prof Hanns Schmidt visit 29 February – 2 March, Courtyard 11-14 March, Germany 7-17 April, EASA 23 April, Wushwini Arts Centre 6 May
- Finally the Aim was to merge all productions under one vision by Brian Michaels 15 & (Official opening) 16 April
- Preset – Dogberry and watch scene with diff languages on copper floor with Ndebele boxes and green boxes drums and a band scene with piano, drums, bass clarinet, beat boxing, singer and rappers 'Don John and The Bastards' themed around Leonato as the club owner.



One can only marvel at what was achieved in so short a time. We also marvelled at Debbie's statement, 'That many of the actors performing and 'Stick Fighting' had never done this before but we developed a simple routine which satisfied 'health and safety' with nobody getting hurt in what is usually really complex and not without risk.' And it appears the young cast members from around the world quickly mastered a gumboot routine.

Particularly to this mainly older audience it was really heart-warming to hear how these young actors had been exposed to a very different world which should prove of such value to their 'spiritual' as well as career development. Thank you Debbie for this eye opening presentation and for such a rewarding evening.

Hardy Wilson

Book Sales

Members appear to be taking to our book sales table which is encouraging and of course rewarding for those who grab a bargain. Next month the society will have some new books as well as members for sale books. Furthermore we will have copies of **'The Durban Forest-Past, Present and Future'**, at the really special price of R250 a copy plus Ronald Ingle's, **An Uneasy Story: The Nationalising of South African Mission Hospitals 1960 – 1976** at R140.00.