

Introduction

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This collection of essays results from a research and publication programme entitled “The Southern Hemisphere Spread of Shakespeare”, which was launched internationally at the World Shakespeare Congress in Brisbane, in 2006. The intention of the project, conceived some two years earlier, was to try and describe in more detail the cultural and socio-political sub-system which enabled Shakespeare to “spread”, take hold, and move backwards and forwards in different ways between England, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Around this central issue, the project prospectus floated several provocations:

How and why has Shakespeare made his way in the evolving cultural landscapes of the southern hemisphere? Does Shakespeare ‘spread’ uniformly like jam on a slice of toast? Like an infection among a captive populace, a seemingly immaterial (book or performance-based) virus? Or does Shakespeare transplant and take root like an exotic organism in foreign soil? Does he ‘shed’ from metropolitan touring companies like grain dropped from a peripatetic harvest-wagon? What causes Shakespeare to mutate in unfamiliar social and political surroundings? Is Shakespeare intentionally ‘imported’, and if so does he pay ‘customs’ duty? Is Shakespeare ‘dumped’ on colonies as cultural surplus? Can there be ‘indigenous’ Shakespeare? (“Project Rationale”)

While the project has certainly produced a considerable volume of work, including the present volume and a special issue of *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* entitled *South African Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century* (see Volume 9, 2009), it was evidently problematic for collaborators to move beyond a nationalistic or at most a regional purview (see the Checklist included in this volume). The honorable exception here is Richard Madelaine’s work on Oscar Asche’s 1912 tour of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, published in *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*. In that case funding was secured to hire a research assistant to access the South African material. Sustaining reliable long-term research funding for the larger project proved difficult. The main South African funding agency, the National Research Foundation, hit a glitch when the second phase of the research design, involving expensive international

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collaboration, was about to go forward, and the larger scheme had to be put on hold. That issue aside, participating researchers (including myself) found themselves more readily attracted to local and relatively recent Shakespearean developments, rather than the rich and under-explored material which documents “travelling Shakespeare” in the nineteenth century. The story of the great touring companies moving to and fro, and their impact on the seeding of indigenous theatre, has yet to be told as a coherent development. We evidently prefer to linger on impacts in our own back yards. Despite this, what has been achieved in these essays makes fascinating reading, opening up large areas for further investigation. Let us hope that this foray into Australasian and South African Shakespeare stimulates other researchers to take up the theme. There is some great material upon which to build.

The articles assembled here are introduced and contextualised in the opening piece, “Interrogating the Spread of Shakespeare”.

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