UMABATHA: GLOBAL AND LOCAL
LAURENCE WRIGHT

There can be few shows that test the dimensions and pitfalls of ‘globalised’ theatre as thoroughly as Welcome Msomi’s Umabatha.¹ Gregory Doran responded to the performance he saw in Johannesburg in 1995 by calling it ‘the best production of [Macbeth] I’ve ever seen’ (Sher and Doran 238). After experiencing the 1972 World Theatre Season version the late Peter Ustinov remarked (one suspects tongue in cheek) that this was the first time he had ‘ever understood what Macbeth [was] all about’ (quoted in Trew). The worldwide success of the show, in box office terms, can hardly be argued with. And yet, in its very conception, the vehicle is so riven by intrinsic cultural, theatrical, gender, class and ‘nationist’ tensions that different audiences cannot but reap utterly different experiences, depending on their own cultural and intellectual inheritance. In a sense, like any piece of ‘globalised’ art, the show floats upon the presuppositions of the host audiences.

In this article, I want to focus on a particular response to the play, from a rather untypical source. In 1999 Kate McLuskie published in Shakespeare Survey her reaction to the 1997 version of the show, which was part of the inaugural season at Sam Wanamaker’s Globe Theatre on London’s South Bank.² Hers is a deliberate voice, generically different from the summary judgments of theatre reviewers, from the purple prose of promoters or the unqualified enthusiasms of naïve theatre-goers overwhelmed by notionally apprehended exoticism.

Her response is valid in its own frame of reference, a conscientious attempt by a well-informed academic Shakespearean to come to terms with and understand what she saw that evening at the Globe. I do not want to undermine her perceptions in any way. Instead, I want to use some of her commentary as a provocation to illustrate how global theatre tends to smooth out, homogenise, or simply eviscerate ideological and theatrical elements which tend to stand out rather stridently for more localised sensibilities.
‘Monotony’ in the Context of Global Theatre

Here is some of what McLuskie has to say, focusing mainly on those parts of her account that try to evoke what she saw, rather than those that attempt to analyse it. I shall ‘intervene’ after each extract to comment on and amplify her account:

Dancing and drumming provided the energy for the whole show. The dancers, though often huge men and women, were astonishingly agile and light of foot and the drumming, if somewhat repetitious in its rhythms, filled the open-air space, insisting on the shared physical relationship between audience and stage. The dancing and drumming also inflected the rhythms of the action, drawing out the battle scenes, giving a communal, celebratory quality to the key moments in the narrative. (154)

The first matter that begs for attention here is the cautious perception that the drumming in the production was ‘somewhat repetitious in its rhythms’. This perception, true though it may be, is also, inadvertently, an hilarious piece of polite (British) understatement. An important characteristic of African drumming is that its interest, which is physical and visceral rather than merely intellectual, depends on establishing a ground-bass of utter monotony.

‘There is something profoundly African about certain forms of monotony’, writes Ali Mazrui. ‘The drumbeat, going on and on; the story with a persistent uniformity; the dance which culminates in an ecstatic trance, are all familiar features of African cultural experience’ (278). One inevitable source of inauthenticity for Umabatha, accepted and circumvented in the production as far as possible, is the sheer impossibility of sustaining the drumming for periods sufficient to create the requisite monotony.

Though probably the nearest conceptual equivalent in westernised conceptual discussion, the notion of ‘monotony’ – as Mazrui himself would readily admit – is both inaccurate and inadequate as a descriptor for the cultural resonance, the physiological and
psychological access, afforded by African drumming. ‘Monotony’—the word carries inescapably pejorative connotations in English—is something from which a dominant strain of western artistic sensibility flees as if from the threat of potential paralysis or incipient cultural decline. Innovation, variety, extreme experiment, fantasies of total transformation, the paradox of perpetual iconoclasm: these are some of the values, artistic and cultural, that have been cherished by the western avant garde for the past two centuries and more. Even where writers such as Proust or Joyce, dramatists like Beckett or Camus, musicians such as Schönberg or Cage, react against ‘progressivism’ in their different ways by focussing on elements of mechanical repetition and ennui, they do so within a cultural ambiance dominated by an ideology of change.

In complete contrast, ‘monotony’ is essential to many traditions of African art and culture. Drumming is an integral part of ritual whose performance lifts participants out of ordinary into sacred or symbolical time. It is a rhythmical framework upon which subtle, patterned and significant variations strike with thrilling differentiation. Within many African cultures, acceptance of ‘monotony’ creates a powerful reaffirmation of ways of life dominated by the exigencies and regularities of nature and the cosmos, an acknowledged state of being from which western progressivism has been in headlong retreat since the Renaissance, if not before.

**Reliance on ‘Auditory’ Space**

McLuskie’s comments on the effects of drumming and dancing in eradicating spatial boundaries between performers and audience at the Globe are also interesting. In the cultural set-pieces which are the production’s fons et origo, there would be no audience, or at least no members of the audience who were not also intimately part of the occasion as participants. The production relies on choreographed versions of traditional Zulu dances, particularly Ngoma (‘drum’) dancing, associated with specific occasions and situations, for example the war dance (or umghubha) which prefaces the final confrontation between Mabatha and Donebane. The vivid invasiveness of the drumming and dancing—McLuskie found the drumming ‘deafeningly loud’ (154)—has the
Theatrical side-effect of drawing audiences into a shared auditory (and imaginative) space. It is no accident that the show was originally devised for outdoor performance. (*Umabatha* premiered at the open air theatre of the University of Natal, Durban, in 1970, as part of the thematic entertainment for a conference called ‘Communication in Action’. The other theatrical entertainment on offer was *Boesman and Lena* with Yvonne Bryceland and Athol Fugard in the title roles.)

When the decision was made to take the production to the Aldwych in 1972, one of the biggest challenges facing the Director, Pieter Scholz, was how to adapt the show to the limitations of an elderly proscenium arch theatre (the Aldwych opened its doors in December 1906). His response was to use the constrictions of the stage to create terror out of claustrophobia. He relied on the stark visual impact of a full line of magnificent Zulu warriors rushing down the length of a bare stage or streaming at speed through the audience in the stalls. This created a thrill unlike anything London theatre had hitherto experienced: ‘It is not everyday that you sit in a West End theatre and have stamping, chanting, fearsomely-clad and armed warriors storming through the isles and brushing your arm with their shields and assegais’ (Marcus; see also Note 8).

Ironically, the more open conditions of the new Globe diminished this effect, but may have brought the production a little closer—not much, but a little—both to its original conditions of performance and to a setting in which reminders of the ethnoculture upon which it draws seem more freely accessible, more ‘natural’. In a sense, by notionally moving the technology of Western theatre back in time, playing *Umabatha* at the *faux* Globe rather than in an authentic Edwardian theatre, the show could create that insistence upon a ‘shared physical relation between audience and stage’ to which McLuskie draws attention.

**The Earthy Ontology of Zulu Dance**

She also notices the agility and seeming lightness in the dancing of the ‘often huge men and women’. The athleticism of the performers has always been one of the strengths of
the show. However, there is in McLuskie’s very apt comment something of a perceptual lacuna. She notes the lightness and agility, but omits any mention of the tremendously earth-bound pressure of this dancing: the thunderous smashing of feet in unison onto the ‘ground’, the seemingly reckless physical abandonment of the young men hurling themselves backwards onto their upper shoulders. Western classical ballet habitually aims for the sky, the heavens, for transcendence, ever striving for the lift that lasts forever. Zulu dancing affirms humanity’s earthiness, confirming with each foot-stamp the solidity of humanity’s foundation in the earth.

This is much more than aesthetics. On the whole, western religion (at least since the introduction of Christianity) worships the heavens, reveres the sky-gods. African culture is far more circumspect in this regard. In many African traditions, humanity emerges from the earth, in some versions from a cave that leads down to its innards. (We might contrast western associations with the so-called ‘underworld’). Traditionally, Zulu people at their most formal put down a mat and sit on the ground. The beer pot is passed from hand to ground. The shades are buried in the cattle byre, though are sometimes to be found in the hearth. This affinity for the earth or earthiness is not confined to the Nguni. The San people or Bushmen—the colonial name is not as pejorative as it is sometimes assumed—also feel this very strongly about this: ‘The Bushman is the same as the land. The land, the earth. The Bushman, it’s almost as if he lives with the earth’ (Petrus Vaalbooi, quoted in Tomaselli and McLennan-Dod 11). When ‘good’ Christians die, they go to ‘heaven’. In African traditional religion, the ancestors never leave earth. They are in the rivers, the caves, and the waves, ever present.

As registered in the total sweep of the show, the cosmologies of *Umabatha* and *Macbeth* show areas of considerable convergence, most notably in the acceptance of ‘witches’ as real social phenomena and belief in the presumed power of potions (or *muthies*). This is probably the sphere in which perceptual responses overlap most powerfully. There is also a palpable synergy in the emphasis on *umona* (envy) and *ukuphindisela* (revenge) in the two dramatic worlds. In other ways they are significantly different. Even though the name descends from a founding ancestor called Zulu (meaning ‘heaven’), the Zulu
cosmos is much less ethereal, more down-to-earth—though no less hospitable to the so-called ‘supernatural’. In *Umabatha*, appropriately enough, the characters equivalent to the ‘three weird sisters’ emerge unequivocally from the earth, home of the shades or ancestors:

*Kamandosela (Listening)* On the day of our victory

Came three Sangomas out of the earth

And spoke strange truths.

(2.1.1-3)

*Sangomas* are not witches. They are diviners and healers. The fact that these figures emerge from the earth suggests that they are not mere mortals who have undergone the training and apprenticeship (*ukwethwasa*) to become *sangomas*. Rather they are ancestral spirits, shades, appearing to fulfil their watching brief over humanity. As far as we can make out, Shakespeare’s witches are either regular Scottish women, with ‘the gift’, or else demons in the form of witches, or both. It really doesn’t matter from a dramatic perspective, and the ambiguity is enticing.6

By making the witches into *sangomas*, *Umabatha* refuses the demonic possibilities of Shakespeare’s play. Witches, or *abathakathi*, in Zulu cosmology, would be something very different from *sangomas*: these are fearful beings who exercise *ubuthakathi*, a field of discarnate evil power, for criminal or malicious purposes. They are irrecoverably, unambiguously evil, incapable of redemption.

Like Shakespeare’s witches, among other things *abathakathi* are capable of riding through the air, and of becoming invisible. When Shakespeare’s witches disappear in 2.5, we are told ‘they made themselves air, into which they vanished’. In *Umabatha*, Kamadonsela reports that the *sangomas* ‘became shadows of the night’: in other words, they resumed their invisibility as shades or ‘spirits’, shutting themselves off from human perception. Shakespeare’s witches, by contrast, are capable of appearing in (or as)
thunder, or lightening, or rain (1.1.2). They have nothing to do with the earth, unlike Caliban, who endures Prospero’s withering insult: ‘Thou, earth’ (1.2.314).

This earthward orientation has an enormous impact not only on the transculturation of Shakespeare’s poetry, but also on the philosophical outlook achieved. Where Shakespeare gives us that marvellous image of Pity personified as ‘a naked new-born babe / Striding the blast, or heaven’s Cherubins, hors’d / Upon the sightless couriers of the air’ whose impact will be to ‘blow the horrid deed in every eye, that tears shall drown the wind’ (1.7.21-25), Msomi’s text offers:

A thousand throats will howl his death
And fall upon his murderer.

(2.3.16-17)

There is no sense here that the outrage is other than human—although perhaps the shades are to be imagined joining in the general uproar—and the anticipated reaction is one of immediate vengeance rather than an intimation of existential guilt or cosmic sinfulness. Culpability hinges on heeding the shades—or not. The Shakespearean (and Greek) sense of a living cosmos intimately responsive to human morality, guilt, wickedness, or virtue, is utterly absent in Umabatha. Responsibility rests fully on human shoulders.

McLuskie observed, as have many earlier commentators, a thoroughgoing shift in tone between the two theatrical vehicles: ‘[The witches] performed their magic with giggling insouciance, a sort of girlish trick on the heroic men. Lady Macbeth was a large and equally cheerful woman whose early encounters with Macbeth were more comic harangue than evil insinuation’ (154). On one level this is a perceptive comment on aspects of traditional gender relations as they surface in the performance; on another it signals the absence of highly-wrought western tragic emotion in Umabatha. Similar perceptions were induced by the 1972 Aldwych production. Derek Mahon noted that the character Mabatha ‘is so gentle and agreeable as to neutralise the evil supposedly inherent in the character—which would be just about workable if Daphne Hlomuka as his wife weren’t the very incarnation of comfortable good humour. Considering also that
Lawrence Sithole plays Bhangane as a joker…and that the Witch-Doctors are for ever going off into peals of quite un-devilish laughter, what you’ve got isn’t a tragedy at all but a black comedy’. Nick Curtis felt in 1997 that ‘Throughout, Msomi keeps his tongue firmly in his cheek’.

This change of tone is utterly conscious, a deliberate ‘rewriting’ of the Shakespearean world. Msomi himself has said: ‘When you watch Umabatha, you will laugh. When I saw Macbeth, I never laughed. In [the] Zulu culture, we celebrate the death of a king, the ritual. We celebrate the deeds and contributions in life, and we remember the funny moments that were part of that individual’ (see Pacio 1997). The combination of retributive violence and ubiquitously cheerful social emotion makes Umabatha sometimes more ethically disturbing (and, oddly, more modern) than most productions of the Shakespearean original.

‘Embarrassment’

Perhaps we can now move to McLuskie’s comment that ‘Bare-breasted women with beaded hair and dancing warriors in furry leggings are a slightly embarrassing image of Africa for the sophisticated consumer of post-colonial Shakespeare, though the young, mostly (but not exclusively) white audience at the Globe lapped it up’ (155). ‘Embarrassing’—what a word! It has extraordinarily ‘English’ connotations. One thinks, for instance, of Christopher Ricks’s fine study of Keats and Embarrassment. What is embarrassment? Very often it is a physiological reflex, a shorthand signal registering complex emotional responses to feelings of social awkwardness or gaucherie, and rooted in experiences of past inadequacy. Here it is suggested that ‘the sophisticated consumer of post-colonial Shakespeare’ will find this ‘image of Africa’ embarrassing. Why? Overtly because Umabatha invites interpretation by such an audience as ‘a form of tourist theatre which invites us to celebrate the exotic’ (155)—as the Guardian review deployed by McLuskie puts it. But there may also be more compromising levels of embarrassment at work.
*Umabatha* unavoidably directs the informed European gaze—those ‘sophisticated consumers of post-colonial Shakespeare’—to colonial and pre-colonial Africa. In addition to stimulating class-inflected metropolitan touristic voyeurism, among other things it may recall the primal Africa destroyed by colonial incursion; reductive nineteenth century anthropological notions of ‘the primitive’; the Conradian ‘heart of darkness’. Perhaps there might be a resurgence of guilty stereotypes stemming from British nineteenth century escapades in Africa; from vaguely remembered novels like Rider Haggard’s *Nada the Lily* (1892) or his other African fantasies; filmic recollections of the 1963 movie *Zulu*, with Jack Hawkins and a young Michael Caine; or the controversial TV series *Shaka Zulu* directed by William Faure. Or is the embarrassment here occasioned largely by an absence: failure to represent an Africa surmounting European colonial depredations and on the march to modernity? Among its disparate resonances, McLuskie’s reaction, intentionally or otherwise, captures a multivalent form of European political embarrassment.

**Loss of Cultural Meaning?**

If this general political embarrassment is the tenor of McLuskie’s observation, it is rooted in specifics of costuming and presentation—or what she terms ‘style’. The decorated shields, the leggings, the intricate beadwork and other items of dress upon which the *Umabatha* costumes draw are, in their original settings, highly articulate. Historically, they varied regionally according to clan, and modulated over time.

Beadal symbolism is—or, rather, was—intrinsic to oral communication in Zulu culture, incorporating an historically evolving social symbolism including, in some instances, forms of social protest (see Magwaza). The meaningfulness of these codes is rapidly expiring from general awareness among the Zulu themselves. For the vast majority of *Umabatha*’s ‘global’ audience, in countless performances and production variations, this aspect of the show becomes either debased in essence (as when the cast knowingly accepts, as they must, that the codes are indecipherable by their intended audiences) or utterly effaced, becoming a form of generic ‘folk costume’. One gains a sense of this
cultural disorientation and displacement in a comment by Ian Christie discussing the 1972 Aldwych production:

The most effective moments are those where the warriors throng the stage dressed in bits of animal skins and creating with their shields a vigorous picture reminiscent of a 1930’s Hollywood musical.

Bare-breastedness, foregrounded by McLuskie’s syntax, is for her a significant (and ‘embarrassing’) component of the production’s ‘style’ (155). This is actually a rather more complicated issue than at first might appear. The politically correct stance has generally been to temper inflamed European eroticism with gestures towards Zulu cultural authenticity and an attendant caveat that bare breasts in public are not regarded as particularly erogenous by the Nguni people. But the conventions governing exposure of the breasts in traditional Zulu culture are nevertheless highly determinate. Specifically, married women wear a beaded bodice (the upper body garment or ingubo yesifuba) and, normally, only young unmarried maidens go ‘topless’ (to use that curious locution). Umabatha sometimes flouts this convention: photographs from the production during various runs sometimes show not only the young dancers but some of the matrons with bare breasts. Their assumption of (inappropriate) Zulu dress is thus merely a matter of theatrical costume.

With globalised art, theatre not excluded, cultural authenticity must of ten submit to a contemporary interpretative context. For instance, in an interview with the present writer the original director, Pieter Scholz, remarked in passing that none of the women were topless in the first South African production. They specifically refused (Wright). This probably speaks to the legacy of mission Christianity in inculcating a sense of social impropriety regarding this aspect of traditional dress. It may suggest a sensitive reluctance on the part of cast-members to parade ‘primitive’ customs before ‘civilised’ audiences (scare-quotes seem inevitable here); and also perhaps the authority of Calvinist prudery as sensed by a subject people in apartheid South Africa, even though the director wished it otherwise. Actually, even some other African peoples (such as those of West
Africa, especially under the influence of Islamic tradition) find the issue of young female semi-nudity in Southern African dance and ritual a trifle awkward, somewhat at odds with their own sense of propriety, while acknowledging its authenticity.

In Durban, the women wore loose singlets which can be seen in the photographs gracing the 1972 World Season Programme, reproduced from this production. At the Aldwych breasts appeared, to great acclaim, and remained on view when the show returned to South Africa. It would be naïve, I believe, to attribute this merely to a sudden compulsive urge for cultural authenticity now achievable theatrically in a more liberal climate. The exigencies of commercialism and the temper of the time in Britain also played a part. Swinging London was in mild decline. The early 70s was exactly the moment when the London red banner tabloid press initiated the ‘topless’ page 3 girl as a means of selling papers. What better way to pep things up in a world theatre season than by exploiting the exotic, the wild, the ‘primitive’ Zulus! The effect on reviewers and theatre-goers alike was all too evident.]

**The Verbal Dimension**

But it was not only the visual and choreographic dimensions that inevitably suffered (and suffer) from the interpretative constrictions imposed by ‘globalised’ performance. The verbal dimension, too, undergoes an irreparable sea-change. Let us concede that in a British context knowledge of the Macbeth story can be taken for granted. (This was the founding assumption of the initial production according to Pieter Scholz; see Pearce 41). In 1972 the audience could listen on headsets to a simultaneous English translation of Umabatha, the script of which was written by Scholz, re-translating Welcome Msomi’s text back into English with the help of Msomi himself (Wright). Contemporary productions usually resort to electronic sur-titles, as with the 1997 Globe production which McLuskie saw.

Nevertheless, in the globalised arena, very few members of the audience can understand the Zulu spoken on stage. This is a critical issue when it comes to assessing the coherence
of Umabatha as a global phenomenon. An early and prescient review by ‘Mshengu’ in the South African journal S’ketsh (1974/5) homed in on the problem:

[W]hat happens if your play is performed from the very beginning to people most of whom don’t know a word of Zulu?

Your dialogue falls to pieces, your saying of the lines tends to be superficial and careless and you take advantage of audience ignorance by relying on sound instead of meaningful expression. All this happened in uMabatha…. Very few actors showed an even minimal concern for the meaning of the lines they were reciting. The basic interpretive work of an actor was hardly touched on. What one had instead was grand and sonorous recitation of rich Zulu melody, whether it was appropriate or not.

This is, almost inevitably, the long-term destiny of the Zulu text of Umabatha as performed before non Zulu-speaking audiences (i.e. most audiences outside South Africa, and the majority of those within). Every performance of Umabatha runs according to a multivalent ‘three-track’ verbal score: the audience’s variable memory of Shakespeare’s play, the English sur-titled translation of Msomi’s text, and the Zulu lines uttered by actors on stage. Each track is subject to the idiosyncrasies of particular audience members. This is a semiotic goulash of formidable complexity! Where to find the coherent art-object? Would one even want to try?

One way out of the dilemma would be to characterise the show as a prescient piece of post-modernism, where any search for stable and coherent dramatic meaning is stymied in a nexus of conflicting and incompatible cultural, iconic and narrative drives. I think such a move would be too forgiving. Countless audiences have come away from the show having enjoyed (or constructed) a riveting theatrical experience. It is in the search for the compelling power and coherence of serious art that Umabatha disappoints.
The Umabatha Problematic

None of these arguments problematizing the synergy of various elements in the show should be taken as denying the theatrical vitality or zest of Umabatha. However, they certainly signal a theatrical vehicle whose fissile energies transgress any normal latitude of interpretative possibility. Much of this dialogic complexity will be, must be, masked in most responses from any putative ‘global’ audience. To reiterate, McLuskie’s perceptive interrogation is far from the norm. One can’t but suspect that the ‘global’ success of Umabatha is based on some very superficial and under-informed responses, and that, generally speaking, this is a fact accepted on both sides of the footlights. The show has always been something of an ideological porcupine, and none the worse for being so. But I wonder whether the centre of gravity of globalised reactions to the show isn’t rather lower than Shakespearean fans commonly accept.

The underlying crassness of the theatrical impulse informing the lionisation of the Umabatha phenomenon by the London theatre world in 1972 was revealed all too nakedly in comments that emerged from the impresario of that famous World Theatre season, Peter Daubeny, when his efforts to bring the show to London for a second run failed.

After the initial triumph of the Aldwych season, such was the production’s commercial success that Daubeny wanted a return visit (the repeat show was to have concluded the 1973 World Theatre season). A contract was duly entered into, but on the Company’s return to Durban (in fact, even before), things went fatally wrong. The discipline of the cast collapsed amidst demands for exorbitant salaries, and fears on the part of management that the show would be held to ransom once cloistered in London amid the financial pressures generated by performance exigencies. Elizabeth Sneddon, Director of the Natal Theatre Workshop Company, cancelled the contract.

Peter Daubeny was at first puzzled, then outraged. He gave a frank and very impolitic interview, widely carried in the South African press, which blazoned forth his personal
estimate of the theatrical merits of *Umabatha*: ‘the feature of “UmaBatha” [sic] which was absolutely staggering was the dancing not its bloody old acting and skeletal story’. With some R30,000 in advance bookings, he was unabashed about attempting to replace *Umabatha* simply with a troupe of Zulu dancers. This was by no means merely a hasty response engendered in pique. Scholz recalls that before the tour ‘when Peter Daubeney came out to see it, he was bowled over by it, but the one thing he said, which I refused to do, he said, “We must have more song and dance”’ (Pearce 42). So much for the African *Macbeth*!

**Conclusion**

Nowhere should the points I am making be taken to indicate that *Umabatha* ought never to have been created, or that it is inferior as entertainment. What I hope my comments are leading towards is some sense that the vehicle is inescapably problematic, and that its awkwardnesses stem in large measure from tensions between a ‘globalised’ theatre and interpretive possibilities available to more culturally localised sensibilities. Global audiences love the production, but perhaps they make fewer distinctions between *Umabatha* and shows like *Umoja, African Footprint* or, notoriously, the original *IpiTombi* (its orthography recently corrected to *IpiNtombi*), than Shakespeareans would like to think.

McLuskie, to whom I am indebted for the stimulation of her response to this extraordinary theatre phenomenon, avers that ‘[t]his particular show, both a repeat and a revival and a tribute to Shakespeare, offers a way of understanding the process by which theatre practice is connected to political and aesthetic discourse, the way one culture connects to another, whether those connections are historical or geographical, Zulu or English, pre or post imperial, pre or post modern’ (155). I see this show somewhat differently. It seems to me to demonstrate, in many respects, exactly the opposite: how theatre practice (sometimes) obfuscates political and aesthetic discourse, how cultures substantively miss each other and fail to connect—especially in the Forsterian sense—
and how easily specific historical, geographical and imperial associations are swamped by shallow ‘globalised’ audience response.

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NOTES

1. In recent commentary (as well as in some early South African criticism—see the piece by ‘Mshengu’ cited below) it has become fashionable to ‘correct’ the orthography of the show’s title by restoring the status of the prefix, thus: ‘uMabatha’. I have chosen to retain the original on the grounds that this is the form by which the show is known internationally, that it is true to the era from which it emerged, and that to change this minor aspect might lend spurious authenticity to a theatrical phenomenon fascinating in part for just such cultural and linguistic slippages. Similarly, for instance, Kamadonsela should really be kaMadonsela.

2. Not least of the difficulties in writing about this show is the extent to which it has modified over the years. To capture the historical changes is well-nigh impossible because many of them are untraceable in the surviving records. However, early
productions are relatively well documented, and the points made in this article are general and not affected by later developments. Certainly, McLuskie’s 1997 observations, venue aside, seem apposite to the show’s entire 35 year life.

3. ‘The carpenter at the Aldwych Theatre is a busy fellow these days knocking nails back into the stage floor. Never before have these sturdy boards…taken such a trouncing as [they] are getting from the dancing Zulu warriors’ (Trew). According to director Pieter Scholz’s recollections, during the 1972 World Season run at the Aldwych the floor had to be replaced ‘several times’ as a result of the physical impact of the dancers (Pearce 41; see also note 8).

4. Sotho legend says that the first men and women emerged from a cave of Nsuanatsatsi, north of the present-day town of Harrismith. Similar myths are found all over Southern Africa (see Etherington 2).

5. One Zulu myth of origin tells how the sky-god descended to marry Uhlanga, a primeval swamp land where there grew many types and colours of reeds and rushes. The sky-god broke off many of these reeds and rushes and made them into people of different colours, in pairs, male and female (see Knappert).

6. W.C. Curry was particularly influential in purveying the sense of the Macbeth witches as demonic; later, materialists and feminists have resorted to more mundane, sociological explanations for their outcast state.

7. An 1972 review by John Barber in the Daily Telegraph conveys a typical impression:

   It is full of simple excitement. Repeatedly the stage thunders under the feet of 55 stomping actors, the women bare-breasted, the men flailing burnt sienna arms and legs in shaggy white fur till the stage fills with fluff—or else parading with spears and tall shields and looking for all the world like a picture in ‘The Children’s Encyclopedia’.

8. Pearce 42; Scholz’s memory may be at fault here. In a letter to Peter Daubeny, shortly after the latter’s visit to South Africa to assess the initial production, he wrote ‘the words of the prophet [Daubeny] should always be heeded’, and
reported that ‘I have added three dances and tightened up the final battle considerably—in fact choreographed a mass dance/battle to create greater impact and excitement for the final climax of the play’. The increased emphasis on dance at the Aldwych was noted by Tim Aitcheson writing in the *Daily Telegraph Magazine*. Aitcheson worked on preliminary publicity for the Aldwych run, and knew the earlier version of the show well.

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Exercise books:
1. ‘Tudor Scribbler’ (unlined), 53 sides, containing Act 1.i–Act 2.3. Scene iv omitted.
2. ‘Springbok Scribbling Book/Kladboek’(ruled-feint), 39 sides, 
containing Act 3.i –Act 4.i
3. ‘scribbler/kladboek’ (unlined), containing Act 4.2 – Act 5.7. 
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