

Shakespeare Comes Home: the Plays Themselves!

The *Globe* is to start its next season, 21 April–9 June 2012, with “the plays themselves”, the complete dramatic works of Shakespeare, 37 plays *and* a stage version of *Venus and Adonis*. The series will end with *Henry V*, in English. The other plays will be in a number of languages including Mandarin Chinese, Korean, Bangla, Shona and Albanian. *Othello* will be in a sort of English, but not Shakespeare’s. It is advertised as “A fresh urban take on Shakespeare’s tragedy spun out, smashed up and lyrically rewritten over original beats”.

In the Polish *Macbeth* “Raves and binges lighten the nights . . . transvestites, addicts and tracksuited gangsters wander the corridors and teeter on the brink of sanity.” The play itself.

The *Globe* was built (helped by donations from people commemorated on stones) more or less in the spirit of performing old music on authentic instruments. Shakespeare was to be allowed the instrument of a theatre he would have recognised. Would he have recognised the planned multicultural romp?

Would the Artistic Director know a Shakespeare play if he saw it? The last question is prompted by the letter, over the signature of the Artistic Director, accompanying the brochure, as well as by the brochure itself. (The first item, the dramatised *Venus and Adonis*, is offered as “Shakespeare’s great story of seduction and loss of innocence”. Whoever wrote that has never read the poem, nor has anybody who edited, proof-read etc. The last item, *Henry V*, “celebrates the power of English . . . to summon into life . . . battlefields.” On the contrary, the Chorus is constantly apologetic.) This letter is consistently semi-literate.

It begins with a floating clause, “As a regular Globe visitor, we are delighted . . .” but *we* are not a regular visitor. Para 2: “In just six weeks . . . we will [English *shall*] present all of [English just *all*] Shakespeare’s plays, each in a different language, each by 36 international companies.” This announces, surely untruly, that every play will be performed by 36 different companies, a total of 1296 productions (not counting the one play in Shakespeare’s English). The next paragraph has an anacoluthon. “Hearing Shakespeare in a foreign language is a huge pleasure, a wonderful blend of the familiar – stories, characters and moments that we know so well – seen through a new and unfamiliar prism – the languages and cultures of others.” “A wonderful blend of . . .” demands *the familiar* to be blended with something else, but the construction wanders off. Then, if you want to see anything you do not try to look at it through a prism—but perhaps this image was intentional. The next paragraph uses “stories” in a different sense, one unknown to English, apparently to mean “theatre companies”.

“The world comes to the Globe next summer. And Shakespeare comes back home.” (So during the ordinary seasons of performance in English Shakespeare was not at home?) “Above all, there are the plays themselves.” They are still Shakespeare, then, if rewritten like the *soi-disant Othello* and *Macbeth*? The poetry is not *Venus and Adonis* itself?

The confidently affirmative answer of the *Globe* management explains this season of plays in any available language except Shakespeare’s. It is also unsurprising that a man who cannot write English should be uninterested in Shakespeare. It still takes an effort to realise that knowledge of English and of Shakespeare is unnecessary in the artistic director of the *Globe*.