
Renaissance Shakespeare – Shakespeare Renaissances

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17. 7. 2011, *National Theatre*

Ladies and gentleman, dear colleagues,

dear participants in the 9th world Shakespeare congress,

and also you, faithful viewers for whom the theatre with a fitting name The Globe never ceased to exist,

at its beginning was a word that was not consumed by flames (as was the wooden construction), and therefore today it sounds in all languages of our global world. Without it, our world would be poorer, emptier and less cogent...

It is a honor for me and a pleasure to greet you in the name of the Charles university in Prague whose faculty of Arts is a co-organizer of this important, unique and at the same time traditional gathering.

Vancouver, Stradford-upon-Avon, Berlin, Tokio, Los Angeles, Valencia, University of Queensland – Prague. What these seemingly disparate places in all corners of the world have in common is the fact that they served as locations for world Shakespeare congresses so far. And they are a proof and illustration of how that word, which is the basis of Shakespearean theatre World this world also permanently creates, permeates and universally connects. And how this word is powerful and at the same time intimately close, and regardless of when it was first pronounced it is permanently incredibly alive and crosses all boundaries of space and time, still having internal imagination and strength to address all those who are willing and capable to listen.

Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and Merchant of Venice have no problem to communicate with their viewers around the globe. Not because they would be traveling cosmopolitans speaking by all current languages, but because they touch us with messages that make our lives richer. They make richer our world (even though we ourselves are unable to make it a better place) in which Shakespeare's „Theatrum mundi“ is not only a metaphor and allegory, but primarily a genius act of creativity, filled with fascinating content and becoming a globally shared experience.

I have no doubts that also this congress with its thematic leitmotiv “Renaissance Shakespeare – Shakespeare Renaissances” will be such a shared inspiring experience. Since Shakespeare's legacy is not only a cultural constant, but also (and perhaps primarily) a living inspiration challenging us to look for new forms, shapes, meanings and interpretations. I am proud that Charles University is home to important creative personalities that proudly and successfully take up on that challenge.

As examples standing for many I would like to mention a lecturer in English language at CU, graduate of it Faculty of Arts, famous Czech author, poet and translator of the Josef Václav Sládek, who had translated 33 Shakespeare's dramas. Many of these translations are seriously respected even today.

Another is the cofounder of the world Shakespeare congress, professor of English literature at FA CU Zdeněk Stříbrný who focused his research interest especially at the life and work of William Shakespeare. And with a special pleasure and respect I remind you of a honorary member of the Order of the British Empire and professor of English lit. at FA CU Martin Hilský (who is also a member of the present ISA Congress Committee), who started his modern translations of WS at the beginning of the eighties' and (for now) crowned them with recently completed translation of Shakespeare's complete work which is unique in being the first complete translation of entire Shakespeare's work by a single translator.

In addition to famous names and large projects there are also seemingly marginal, small and large Shakespearean confessions, which I like because their bearers are students of our university. In particular I mean students of English and American literature FA, who created a theater association Charles University Workshop Production, which since 1996 prepared 11 Shakespeare's plays in original language of the Elizabeth England era. It comes as no surprise that many of them participated in seminars of prof. Hilský, but is shows how contagious is the enthusiasm for Shakespeare. The accompanying program of this year's congress is enriched by their performance of Winter's Tale and by a feeling that a new generation is finding Shakespeare for themselves (and also for us). And it is a source of optimism that world's universities (and the ISA – International Shakespeare Association) already prepare those who will have not only qualification, but also strong personal enthusiasm and commitment to continue in your work, dear colleagues.

Actually, in the grandiose Shakespearean concept of Theatrum Mundi there is not a large gap between the world of university and the world of Shakespeare's immortal stories. It is their common dimension of universalism, universal approach that can generalize human experience both in the crystalline form of drama and in experimental scientific description. It is also the similar accent on the importance of words, which in Shakespeare's texts evokes emotion and participation, while in the scientific discourse it defines the achieved level of understanding and knowledge.

Both these worlds are close to each other also because they are not self-centered enclaves where everything has already been said and closed. Every time we enter them, when we watch a new performance of Romeo and Juliet, or when we are starting a new series of experiments in a biochemistry lab, we have a chance to discover something new – for our soul, knowledge or intellect. No doubt we need all of that and that is why these two worlds, seemingly so disparate, are in fact close and we need their harmonic context to form and provoke us. It leads us to ask all the time new questions and seek new answers. It nurtures that unresting spirit that is never content with what has been already achieved. From this point of view, also the Shakespeare's legacy is not something finished but rather it is a permanently repeated challenge and inspiration for discovery.

I am convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that this is one of the important motives of these meetings and I want to thank you for your never ending and inspiring dialogue with William Shakespeare. And I also want to congratulate and to wish. My congratulations go to the President of the International Shakespeare Association Mrs. Judi Dench who has lived with William Shakespeare not only on prestigious British scenes, Royal Shakespeare Company or National Theatre, but also on the film screen, where she was awarded Oscar for her role of Queen Elizabeth in "Shakespeare in Love". A few days ago Mrs. Dench received a Crystal Globe at the international Film Festival Karlovy Vary for her exceptional contribution to world cinematography. Cordial congratulations.

And I wish all of you days filled with discovering encounters with top theatre of Queen Elizabeth times. I wish you discussions as bright as Shakespeare's dialogues and thoughts worthy replies of his wise fools. I wish you another great time with the Master. And let be fulfilled the ancient slogan of our university:
QUOD BONUM, FELIX, FAUSTUM, FORTUNATUMQUE EVENIAT