

‘Shakespeare - International Influence’ meeting of the APPG on Shakespeare

Prologue 14:07

The meeting began with the showing of three films from Jack Jewers’ ‘InVerse’ series: Trailer; ‘All the World’s a Stage’; ‘The St. Crispin’s Day Speech’; ‘The Strangers’ Case’.

Jack Jewers spoke about the ‘InVerse’ project. He explained that the films were made to commemorate the anniversary of the First Folio, to bring Shakespeare to new ‘untraditional’ audiences. The videos find connections between Shakespeare and the modern world. They received a great reception, apart from ‘The Strangers’ Case’, which was targeted by online trolls.

Introductions 14:21

Manuela Perteghella, MP for Stratford-on-Avon, background in arts and drama.

Michael Dobson, Director of the Shakespeare Institute.

Jack Jewers, writer and filmmaker, history and historical fiction.

Martyn Bond, Director of the Shakespeare in Music Festival, former European Civil Servant.

Karl-Matthias Klause, deputy German ambassador.

Will Tosh, Co-Director of Education at Shakespeare’s Globe.

Lucy Cuthbertson, Co-Director of Education at Shakespeare’s Globe.

Jacqui O’Hanlon, RSC Deputy Executive Director.

Charlotte Scott, Associate Consultant and Research Fellow at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, background in higher education.

Tracy Irish, freelance theatre and education, RSC and Shakespeare Institute.

Kathy Dacre, Chair of the Rose Theatre Trust.

Lisa Allen, Shakespeare North Playhouse.

Allie Esiri, writer, actor, poetry curator and producer, ‘Shakespeare for Every Day of the Year’.

Alison Smedley, Policy Coordinator at the UK National Commission for UNESCO, representing James Bridge.

Lisa Cunningham, Director of Communications and External Affairs at the RSC.

James Morrison, former Chair of the APPG for Shakespeare, current vice-Chair.

Lord Hannan of Kingsclere

ACT I 14:27

Michael Dobson opened the meeting as a forum for discussing Shakespeare, International Relations and Soft Power, with the purpose of producing content and momentum around Shakespeare. The group will hear from different organisations about their plans and priorities about their work with Shakespeare abroad.

Jacqui O'Hanlon from the RSC opened the discussion by commenting that Shakespeare helps us build an understanding of ourselves, and the world we live in. Jacqui then provided the group with a summary of a 2012 research project conducted by the RSC and UNESCO:

In 2012, David Putnam, chairing the UNESCO conference, reflected that Shakespeare was the common thread uniting everyone at the conference.

We were interested in where, why and how is Shakespeare's work present in other education systems around the world?

Tracy Irish led a research project with the British Council, asking what the place of Shakespeare was in different education systems around the world. The project found that 50% of children in school worldwide are studying Shakespeare. This is a huge opportunity for global dialogue around arts and culture.

Jack Jewers noted that he had had a similar experience when working on the 'InVerse' series - Shakespeare resonated with children across the world.

Jacqui O'Hanlon agreed that Shakespeare teaches our children how to think. Jacqui then expanded that the UNESCO research survey was done 13 years ago, and they are now concerned about the US position in the light of recent political developments.

Tracy Irish contributed to the discussion with her own experience:

I spent time in seven different countries, and brought children and their guardians to England for a conference at the Tate. They formed an international Shakespeare ensemble and performed *King Lear*.

There were eighteen children, who spoke twelve different languages.

They were articulate about how the language of Shakespeare brought them together.

I work with students who have English as an additional language. Teaching Shakespeare with them is an excellent 'leveller' which both EAL students, and those who speak English as a first language, can access.

Performing Shakespeare is a good way to negotiate difficult topics and conversations, such as the place of women in societies around the world.

I put on a performance of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* which was able to facilitate difficult discussions.

Lord Hannan of Kingsclere commented on the often forgotten boy of Indian ethnicity around whom the plot of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* revolves, highlighting the ability of the play to speak to themes of ethnicity too.

Manuela Perteghella brought the discussion back to the UNESCO/RSC survey.

Jacqui O'Hanlon suggested that it would be great to do this survey again.

Kathy Dacre pointed out that there are thirty-eight different languages spoken in schools on the South Bank alone. Kathy would love to work on this survey with the RSC.

Michael introduced Will Tosh and Lucy Cuthbertson from the Globe into the discussion. Will and Lucy were both active at the Globe in transporting Shakespeare abroad.

Will Tosh explained that there has been less activity now than there was a decade ago, but now there is more opportunity and possibility about what composition can look like.

Lucy Cuthbertson confirmed that there are currently no big future plans for international touring, but there are many international students visiting the Globe. Many are German, and the Globe continues to enjoy a great relationship with German Schools. Many international students also visit from France and America. Lucy expanded on her previous experience:

There is a thirst to see productions.

I went to New Zealand last year to see a play that was put on by the Globe at the Shakespeare Festival. There was great engagement from all of the schools in New Zealand.

Working there was a mixed bag of good and bad bits - I didn't like New Zealand kids doing English accents.

I also worked in the Dominican Republic, working with local arts teachers and the Ministry of Education, at their request. It is important to ask the question as to whether we should do Shakespeare in the Caribbean.

Yes we should, with discussion about what it means, and discussion about colonialisation. People are using Shakespeare anyway, and making it their own.

In the Dominican Republic they did a bilingual *Romeo and Juliet*, with great passion and very much their own spin.

When working on this project I asked if there was any taboo that they shouldn't mention. They said that 'LGBTQ is not a thing here'. Actually this topic was brought up organically

in the course of the production, and teachers came forward with their own stories. It was Shakespeare that brought about these discussions.

Will Tosh spoke about the financial change over the past decade:

Especially for provincial theatres, including hosting tours. Touring opportunities and touring ecology is broken. Global tours that might have bounced off domestic tours are not possible. The RSC and the Globe do not tour as they once did.

Michael Dobson commented that some International Shakespeare Festivals continue to flourish, but some have collapsed. At Giulya in Hungary government funding is no longer available for any performances not in Hungarian.

Charlotte Scott commented that the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is different, represents the family houses and has archives and collections. The draw is that you come to Stratford. Charlotte questioned how do we take Stratford out of Stratford?

At the Stratford Birthplace Trust we also celebrate Tagore and other international writers. Did a project on Stratford in China.

The work that needs to be done is in the collections – we have copies of works about Shakespeare in Indian languages, among others, that need to be translated. Decolonising the collection, making transparent the process by which things were acquired. Making museums a safe space.

The Birthplace Trust hosts various international scholarship meetings: it is as invested in international scholarship as it is in the notion of an exclusive national heritage.

Lord Taylor of Warwick arrived and apologized for lateness. Introduced himself as also from the House of Lords, has a commonwealth background. Lord Taylor suggested bringing Shakespeare and Stratford to the world through AI and the metaverse:

AI companies are looking to link with ethical causes. The nature of man isn't changing. I could help connect Shakespeare to the AI companies.

Manuela Perteghella then brought the attention of the group to Obhi Chatterjee's written contribution. Obhi works with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, he helped celebrate Tagore's birthday.

[Read Obhi's written contribution: executive summary, and three recommendations]

Charlotte Scott suggested that the term 'soft power' is problematic and something we need to think about.

Obhi brings the idea that Shakespeare is a cultural catalyst, and can be used to celebrate international writers across the world. Shakespeare is an important part of economic wellbeing, and should be a central focus of human wellbeing. He is part of an international network of writers.

The SBT test-piloted this idea with a celebration of Tagore. Thinking about working at Anne Hathaway's Cottage, how can individuals enhance their wellbeing in relation to Shakespeare projects.

Michael Dobson opened the conversation to representatives from the Shakespeare North Playhouse.

Lisa Allen introduced herself. Lisa has worked for Shakespeare North for only seven months. She explained the current work of the Shakespeare North Playhouse:

We're sending a production to Singapore, working with a group in Kyiv (as there is a large Ukrainian diaspora in Liverpool) based around *Macbeth*. Trying to get American tourists to get them to come from the docks to Shakespeare North, looking at a hologram.

Karl-Matthias Klause contributed that German schools are nowadays struggling to teach Shakespeare, it is disappearing from the curriculum. It is hard to convince German politicians of the importance of culture. Karl-Matthias pointed out that Shakespeare will only disappear from the curriculum of some schools, not all, which will create a social divide. Karl-Matthias Klause stressed that it is difficult to convince Germans to learn a foreign author. He asked whether the British Government would participate in this? Questioned whether Shakespeare was out of vogue as an 'old, white guy'.

Charlotte Scott reminded the group that storytelling is universal, and that is the crucial aspect of Shakespeare.

Jacqui O'Hanlon responded to Karl-Matthias Klause, and highlighted that the onus isn't on us to make an argument for Shakespeare. We must consider the views of the rest of the world, and the relationships that exist between Shakespeare and places around the world. What is meaningful in other cultural contexts?

Jack Jewers said it's about contextualising Shakespeare as part of the global context, rather than being about an English Shakespeare.

Lord Hannan suggested that Shakespeare makes this case himself - when you read the canon a personal interpretation jumps out.

Lord Taylor echoed this - Shakespeare is about the human condition, love, anger and revenge.

Michael Dobson added that Shakespeare is about dialogue, not about a single editorial viewpoint telling you what to think. It is about interpretation. Michael suggested that in some overseas contexts it could be a positive advantage that Shakespeare's work is in English, requiring new translation, rather than connoting a local cultured elite.

Tracy Irish spoke of how teachers in the African countries she has worked in had told her that this is the language of power, and that they want their students to know this language of power:

Teachers are told they shouldn't teach Shakespeare, and are told to teach African authors instead, but their politicians are quoting Shakespeare all the time and they want their students to have access to this language of power. It is one way in which a certain level of society is accessing Shakespeare.

Jack Jewers suggested that if we don't teach Shakespeare widely, it becomes elitist.

Karl-Matthias Klause asked what networks will support this? And how do you approach an international organisation to finance this? Karl-Matthias pointed out that there is much competition for funding.

Will Tosh considered the benefit of inbound and domestic tourism, in the sense of 'come to the source'.

Tracy Irish pointed out the parallels between this strategy and the slogan 'Football's coming home' that was first used during the 1996 Euros. Tracy pointed out that we gave football to the world, but it is owned by different countries around the world - similar to Shakespeare.

Michael Dobson added that the Globe's strapline for its '36 Plays in 36 Languages' programme during the 2012 Cultural Olympiad alluded to this.

Lucy Cuthbertson emphasised that she only feels comfortable responding to requests to collaborate from international partners, rather than initiating these collaborations:

I was uncomfortable at the US Shakespeare Theatre Association Conference. The Globe was treated like the mothership of Shakespeare, but we have as much to learn from others as they do from us.

Jack Jewers pointed out that this is why soft power is a problematic term.

Tracy agreed that you can learn more about Shakespeare through others' eyes

Kathy Dacre spoke on how politics in Shakespeare is useful internationally:

Shakespeare speaks truth to power - tradition which goes back a long time. When working in America I was asked by the University of Dubai to recommend three plays that dealt with monarchy and getting rid of dictators, but that had no sexual references.

Similarly at the Goldsmiths Fall of the Wall Celebration, fringe groups from East Germany and Poland visited. They felt connected because of the poverty involved.

I was an external examiner for the University of the West Indies. They spoke about decolonising the curriculum - they were copying RADA. I suggested they study an American playwright, because many of the students go to America. They told me please do not take Shakespeare away from Jamaica. Shakespeare will enable my students to go anywhere they want, they will be able to speak as a politician anywhere in the world.

Jack Jewers reminded the group that liberal democracy is under strain.

Will Tosh seconded this, and expressed his concern at the increasing restriction as to what minors are allowed to see on stage in terms of gender presentation, in certain states of America:

It is impossible for some of Shakespeare's plays to be shown, but the politics of the plays allow us entry points to talk about gender politics. Shakespeare gets a pass that others don't.

Lucy Cuthbertson agreed:

I worked with Colorado Shakespeare, a Shakespeare and anti-violence project. The school rang up worried about homosexuality in *Twelfth Night* - the climate for American teachers is hostile. Will's book is banned in most states. But Shakespeare can fly under the radar.

Lord Taylor suggested this could be related to the inner city, too - rap poets. Lord Taylor suggested a partnership, and that there was plenty of money in organisations such as Warwickshire Cricket and Aston Villa.

Michael Dobson agreed that there is a thriving Shakespeare rap scene.

Martyn Bond added that music has a universal appeal in the same way as Shakespeare:

We have a privileged role as native English speakers. It is a world language now, but Shakespeare wrote when it wasn't. What would we be discussing if Karl was making this case about Goethe?

English is a very widespread second language. People who might be open to learning about Shakespeare, in English, are much denser here in Europe and in America,

Australia, Canada, New Zealand etcetera. Europe has changed and is English-speaking. Shakespeare is taught. It's a privileged point.

Manuela Perteghella returned to Will Tosh's point about touring, to ask what could be done from a Parliamentary standpoint. Manuela asked which current policies are an obstacle to progress.

Will Tosh said that the issues are two-fold:

It is a more difficult scene in international travel especially UK-to-EU. We need simpler means of accessing Europe for British artists. At the moment the cost is prohibitive, particularly large scale productions. They can't get commercial returns, and have to rely on added external funding.

Jacqui O'Hanlon informed the group that the Arts Council is doing research on the state of touring. There would be 'incentivised touring', where the Arts Council would take the risk - but not for international touring. This might not be perfect because it focuses on a commercial return. Jacqui asked whose responsibility is this - could be Business and Trade, or DCMS? Noted that the British Council is good at supporting small productions, but questioned who will support bigger projects.

Manuela Perteghella suggested that Business and Trade and DCMS may be able to help.

Michael Dobson suggested that the support of the Home Office would be welcome for visas. Michael noted that there are inconsistencies in how the rules are applied, making it hard for hosting arts organizations to be confident that foreign performers would be admitted.

Jack Jewers asked if there are untapped opportunities to build funding partnerships with other companies abroad.

Jacqui O'Hanlon expressed her concerns about funding cuts, especially severe in the US. Jacqui said that finding co-producing partners is possible, but the framework to develop and nurture these relationships isn't there. These are relationships formed by 'who you know', rather than helpful structures. Jacqui asked what the imperative is to get the Government departments to work together to find a solution to this issue. She also asked what is the role of the British Council.

Will Tosh seconded these sentiments. Will added that some of the problem is obscured by schemes such as Broadway transfers, because this is a type of international tour, but not the same as supporting grassroots or Shakespearean drama.

Lucy Cuthbertson agreed that their priority is domestic rather than international.

Allie Esiri noted that in her dealings with DCMS they seem very interested, might just not have been flagged to them.

Manuela Perteghella let the group know that officials from DCMS were invited. Manuela suggested that parliamentarians and organisations can write to them collectively about touring issues.

Lisa Allen informed the group that Shakespeare North Playhouse is struggling to make its own work, let alone fund a tour. They have to find three co-producers per piece of work. These producers are found through informal networks, all based on personal relationships rather than a formal supportive structure.

Tracy Irish agreed, and pointed out that this is part of the issue of elitism in the arts.

Lord Taylor asked whether 'national treasures, like Lenny Henry and Judi Dench could be asked to support such projects.

Jacqui O'Hanlon wondered which of the many asks should be supported by such figures.

Lord Taylor spoke of the NFL event he hosted in the House of Lords as an example of fresh partnerships between unlikely collaborators that could be launched.

Charlotte Scott pointed out that the arts do not tend to be at the top of anyone's agenda - part of the reason why they are in such a deep crisis.

Lord Taylor emphasised that there is money in the private sector, not just in Government.

Manuela Perteghella suggested there may be opportunities where big corporations feel they need to show social value.

Lisa Allen agreed, but expressed that it's difficult to find an ethical partner.

Karl-Matthias Klause pointed out that there is lots of money in the private sector. He wondered whether tech billionaires could be convinced to invest in a new sector such as education or the arts, like Bill Gates did in health.

Michael Dobson suggested that the group now discuss the UNESCO Intangible Heritage application.

Alison Smedley, from UK National Commission for UNESCO (and representing James Bridge at this meeting) explained the current progress of the application:

The UK is a signatory of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The UK National Commission is part of UK membership of UNESCO, and funded by the FCDO. We work with the permanent delegation based in Paris.

We will be hosting the application process on behalf of DCMS (the application is on our website), but DCMS is responsible for the decision making.

Anyone can apply for the inventory.

This is the first step of the UK complying with the 2003 convention, which was ratified last year.

The application process will launch in Autumn on a rolling, long-term basis. DCMS can then decide what gets to be included in the list sent to UNESCO.

Michael Dobson pointed out that there is a long back-history of the bid to get Shakespeare recognised by UNESCO. Michael also expressed his concern about UNESCO's definition of living heritage:

I am disturbed by UNESCO's definition of living heritage. They take it to mean largely the preservation of local minority cultures - living heritage is considered to belong to a particular community in a particular place, and has to show that practices are done in a single place over time.

Like Victorian folklore studies, like copyrighting an obscure cheese rather than recognising the work done across borders by a cultural form in the world.

DCMS is talking about registering the continuous heritage of costume making, set-building, stage-crafts in single places such as Stratford, but it is harder to fit the continuous but disparate performance of the plays worldwide into their definition. They come and go in different repertoires, different people in different places.

UNESCO already recognises the least interesting bit - the documents attesting to his life, like the entry in the Stratford baptismal register, are already in the UN Memory of the World.

Will Tosh asked whether there are parallels with other playwrights or individuals of similar stature who have been granted intangible heritage status by UNESCO.

Karl-Matthias Klause commented that Shakespeare is fascinating if you add together all the local performances over the world. Karl wondered whether a Parliamentary delegation could make the case to the President of UNESCO directly.

Kathy Dacre added that groups all over the world have built replica theatres because they want to perform in a certain way - architectural stage design could be considered.

Manuela Perteghella suggested that the group together could put-together the application.

Closing comments 15:55

Manuela Perteghella expressed her thanks to the group, and said that the next meeting in September is likely to focus on Education.

There was no other business, but a special thanks to James Morris for the past work he did as the former Chair of the group.

Actions

- Write to the British Council about re-doing the survey
- Letter to the DCMS about touring, with the lords
- Make the case for UNESCO