Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance
vol. 19 (34), 2019; http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/2083-8530.19.08

Nicole Fayard*

"Making Things Look Disconcertingly Different": In Conversation with Declan Donnellan[1]

Abstract: In this interview acclaimed director Declan Donnellan, co-founder of the company Cheek by Jowl, discusses his experience of performing Shakespeare in Europe and the attendant themes of cultural difference, language and translation. Donnellan evokes his company's commitment to connecting with audiences globally. He keeps returning to Shakespeare, as his theatre enables the sharing of our common humanity. It allows a flesh-and-blood carnal interchange between the actors and the audience which directly affects individuals. This interchange has significant consequences in terms of translation and direction.

Keywords: Declan Donnellan; Cheek by Jowl; Shakespeare in Europe; Translation; Direction; Archetypes; Brexit.

I

Declan Donnellan is well-known as "one of the most original directors working in theatre today" (Le Figaro). He co-founded the company Cheek by Jowl in 1981 and is its joint Artistic Director with his life partner and the company designer, Nick Ormerod. Both artists are renowned for staging innovative productions focused on the skills of the actors and have been repeatedly acclaimed as "responsible for some of the most imaginative and revelatory classical performances [seen over the past] decades" (New York Times). They produce work in English, French and Russian and have performed in about 400 cities in fifty countries over six continents (Cheek by Jowl).

Donnellan has to date directed over thirty productions, with half from the Shakespearean repertoire, such as the world-acclaimed *As You Like It* (1991) with Adrian Lester, performed with an all-male cast, *The Winter's Tale* (Maly

* University of Leicester, UK.

[1] Nicole Fayard wishes to thank the University of Leicester for a period of study leave during which this article was written.

Drama Theatre of Saint-Petersburg, 1999), *Romeo and Juliet* (2004) and *Hamlet* (2015) for the Bolshoi Ballet, and in 2018 *Pericles Prince of Tyr* (Maison des Arts de Créteil). The company is also dedicated to the staging of the European classics in their source language and in translation. Acclaimed performances include *Le Cid* (Avignon Festival, 1998), *Boris Godunov* (Moscow, 2006), *Andromaque* (Théâtre du Nord, Lille, 2009), *Hayfever* (Savoy Theatre, 1999), *Antigone* (The Old Vic, 1999), Verdi's *Falstaff* (Salzburg Festival, 2001).

Cheek by Jowl is one of the Arts Council England's National Portfolio Companies and since 2005 has been an Artistic Associate at the Barbican in London where it has an office. Donnellan also formed a company in Moscow at the Chekhov International Theatre Festival in 2000 and has affiliations with Lev Dodin's Maly Theatre in Saint-Petersburg and the Bolshoi Ballet. In France, they were invited by Peter Brook to work at the Bouffes du Nord in Paris in 1995 and are now associated with the Théâtre des Gémeaux near Paris. Donnellan is also the author of the play *Lady Betty* (1989), adapts plays for his companies, and his first feature film *Bel Ami*, co-directed with Nick Ormerod, was released in 2012. He wrote *The Author and the Target*, first published in Russian in 2001 and subsequently translated into fifteen languages, including English, French and Mandarin. The volume is an influential guide for actors providing invaluable insight into the director's and actors' craft as well as their relationship with the audience. In recognition for his ground-breaking work and services for the arts, Donnellan has received multiple awards in the UK and internationally, including in France, Russia, the US, and Italy.[2] He and Nick Ormerod both received OBEs in 2017.

Cheek by Jowl's unique association with theatrical partnerships across Europe reflects the company's commitment to connecting with audiences globally, making its work emblematic of the theme of this special issue. This interview with Declan Donnellan took place in October 2017. It took the form of a semi-guided exchange structured around his experience of performing Shakespeare in Europe as well as matters pertaining to language and translation. Whilst these themes relate to both the company's achievements and the subject matter developed in this volume, they are especially relevant to the new challenges brought about by Britain's likely imminent departure from the European Union. At times our exchange went into unexpected directions,

[2] Donnellan was the first non-Russian director to receive the prestigious Golden Mask award at the Moscow Festival in 1997. In 2003 he was made Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres—a prestigious award in recognition of significant contribution to the arts and literature—for his work in France. In 2013 he shared the highest award of the Sibiu International Festival in Romania with Ariane Mnouchkine and Eugenio Barba in recognition of their contribution to international culture and the arts.

providing truly fascinating insights. However, for reasons of space, not all material was able to be included in the transcript.

Declan Donnellan's view that the theatre reveals "what is eternal in the way our species is made" and helps us "share our empathy" takes us back to the very roots of Greek tragedy, with its realistic recognition of the commonalities and predictability of the human experience across time and space. The assumption in Greek theatre that all humans are imperfect is especially reflected in Donnellan's interest in the themes of unexplained violence and mental illness. These are topics which, for instance, haunt *The Winter's Tale*, which Donnellan first directed in Russian in 1997 and produced again in English in 2016-17, as well as Pericles (2018). What he sees as the destruction that human beings mete out on the people they love relates to the often-unarticulated anger suffusing contemporary societies. Thus, his fascination with people's inherent capacity for violence led us to discuss the 2017 terrorist attacks in Manchester and Las Vegas, UK politics, Brexit, and the pernicious impact of consumerism on our lives. The pivotal theme bringing these acutely germane topics together is, of course, Shakespeare. What makes both the theatre and Shakespeare unique for Donnellan is their ability to reveal our own hidden primitive forces by showing us people saying what we do not dare say or do. This is what makes it profoundly political. Shakespeare especially provides an antidote to the general sense of depression breeding the anger that tears our societies apart.

Envisioning the theatre as the sharing of one's common humanity is a profoundly political act, especially in the ways in which it helps to clarify Donnellan's production choices. It entails that seeking to communicate *specific* ideas via a production could be seen as inauthentic.[3] Thus, Donnellan emphatically believes that a play is about *de*conceptualization and defends his own directorial right to "shar[e] with the audience my incomprehension with their incomprehension." Incomprehension and the mystery of things here provide compelling forms of communication, which directly correlate to the need of human beings to connect with each other and to probe, as suggested above, the complexities—and vulnerabilities—of human nature. By performing Shakespeare's plays, Donnellan's aim is to demonstrate that the human need to share also includes our failure to communicate with each other, as well as our capacity for self-deception. This has significant linguistic as well as psychological resonances: Donnellan's analysis of Shakespeare's drama illustrates the extent to which "we also use words to *un*-communicate". Donnellan's forensic analysis of Shakespeare's texts and characterization thus focuses on the ways in which words can be used to obscure or distort meaning. This analysis is based on two overarching principles. The first is that "the important thing about Shakespeare

[3] Authenticity is to be understood in the existentialist sense of personal responsibility (the opposite of alienation).

is what he leaves out": for Donnellan, the purpose of Shakespeare's soliloquies, especially, is not necessarily to reveal the characters' true thoughts or motivations. Rather—this is the second overarching principle of his analysis—in their speeches, Shakespeare's characters lay bare their own lack of self-awareness. For Donnellan, "Shakespeare is all about self-deception. And you *see* the deception."

Such language analysis has strong critical and dramatic potential. Arguing that Macbeth, Othello or Richard III exemplify the dislocation governing human paradoxical behaviours, Donnellan offers us a compelling reading of the plays as a theatre director. Equally importantly, his awareness of the human psyche both in Jungian terms and through the language of transactional analysis[4] presents the theatre as a potentially healing tool for individual spectators. In *The Structure of the Psyche* (342), Jung claimed that "all the most powerful ideas in history go back to archetype", defining archetypes as universal patterns and images based on primitive and ancient myths that are part of the collective unconscious and from which we inherit patterns of behaviour. The significant implication for Jung is that, as a locus of projection and identification, the theatre is a psychotherapeutic space where human nature can be staged and understood, leading to self-realization. This is because encountering the less desirable aspects of the self rather than keeping them repressed is more likely to encourage a sense of authenticity (Jung). It is therefore unsurprising that Donnellan keeps returning to Shakespeare. For him, Shakespeare's plays are about people "really *doing* things" rather than abstract considerations: "Shakespeare keeps reasserting what it is to be a human being." This is also likely to explain, according to Donnellan, why Shakespeare endures globally as one of the greatest playwrights: like Greek tragedy, his theatre portrays a well-defined range of human life. It is concerned with how humans interact with each other and the belief that analyzing unproductive or counterproductive transactions might enable individuals to understand and change their own problematic behavior (*Games People Play*).

Such insights open important areas of enquiry where working in another language is concerned. In this interview, Donnellan states that Shakespeare's plays demonstrate the ways in which language—any language—fails to communicate. His reflections on incomprehension reminds us that all texts are inhabited by undecidability—understood as Derrida's term for the condition of not belonging to dichotomies, but also the nature of what is neither possible or impossible (Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*). Undecidability also draws attention to

[4] "You hope that there'll be a good pair of parents actually in place." Created in the 1950s by Eric Berne, Transactional Analysis is a psychoanalytical theory which departs from Freud's theories. It seeks to analyze social interactions to uncover the client's ego states (*Games People Play*).

the paradoxical nature of translation which, as a palimpsest simultaneously seeking to preserve its source and to rewrite it, is both a possible and impossible entreprise (Derrida, *Critical Inquiry* 179). It is now well recognized that the process of translating generates a proliferation of meanings, and is therefore a performative activity (Derrida, *Critical Inquiry* 198) with manifold social and political consequences. If theatre, as Donnellan puts it, is "the idea […] made flesh" before an audience, then theatrical translation also plays multiple performative roles as its target text is embodied by both actors and viewers. The survival, suppression or modification of the source message, including when it involves confusion and incomprehension, are therefore of considerable significance. This is, again, a matter of authenticity:[5] Donnellan argues that the need to decode, recode or clarify in translation can deprive Shakespeare's drama of its mystery, when its role should be to preserve the haunting quality of the theatrical enigma.

Donnellan's fascination with enigma may well be what, ultimately, fuels the appeal of working abroad for him. He insists that cultural differences are no barriers to communication, and he is again strongly motivated by the belief that we are not so much defined by our differences than by our common humanity. This is why, for Donnellan, defining Shakespeare or his theatre as "European" makes little sense: "we are all human beings on a planet, and it's very strange that we should suddenly identify with a small crop of earth that we actually live on." This also explains why he believes that there is not just one Shakespeare. He speaks instead of each country creating its own Shakespeare, and this multiplicity of Bards, all different from each other where their language and cultural traditions are concerned, is made possible because Shakespeare is about what both unites and divides human beings. Far from restricting Shakespeare to any real or symbolic "blessed plot",[6] therefore, Donnellan's theatre is likewise intended for anyone who takes an active interest in people, whatever their location. As indicated by its name, Cheek by Jowl's theatre is about connecting people and restoring intimacy. This is achieved, as Donovan puts it, through the flesh and blood "carnal interchange" between the actors and the audience. It is this physical interchange that makes the audience an active participant in the act of theatre, and that enables art to change us.[7] This experience alone makes

[5] Authenticity here is not to be confused with the notion of "correspondence" in Translation Studies.

[6] Shakespeare 3:1:50.

[7] This theme led to a discussion on current debates around live streaming, including the true democratizing potential of the exercise, the nature of the entertainment being offered (is it theatre or something else?), the aesthetic choices necessitated by the need to frame the action and the absence of interactivity between house and stage. Donnellan's main priority is to ensure that his live-streamed shows should not become substitutes for the real thing.

Shakespeare transgressive. It is from this perspective, Donnellan concludes, that translating and performing Shakespeare's plays "has to give you a way of looking at things in a way that's disconcertingly different from how you thought things looked before."

II

Nicole Fayard (later as NF): The European network of companies and affiliations that supports Cheek by Jowl makes your company unique, as is the multilingual nature of your work. In many ways, your theatre is distinctly emblematic of what working both in *and* with Europe represents. What is the attraction of performing Shakespeare and other classics in Europe with European actors and collaborators?

Declan Donnellan (later as DD): One reason that theatre is very important is because it helps us to share our humanity and develop our empathy. And what's always interested me of course cross-culturally is the thing underneath, "the things that remain the same", that gives us more of a sense of what is transcendentally human. In other words, cultural differences wear away to a certain degree, at least that aspect that presents as a wall, and you start to see what is eternal in the way our species is made. So, it's always very interesting to see that very similar things make people laugh. I remember once rehearsing at the Maly in St Petersburg doing *The Winter's Tale* with Lev Dodin's company, and we were demonstrating some kind of musical shtick to the actors. It was about the comedy in the rhythm of three and how you fall over not on the second beat, not on the fourth beat, but on the third. And the actors were saying: "How do you know so much about the Russian sense of humour?" It had nothing to do with the Russian sense of humour, but with humans always laughing on three: dududum–dududum–dum–boom! These examples are like archetypes or pre-cultural in a way, but I find those simple things moving and important. Rampant consumerism has confused us so much now about what it is to be a proper human being. Adverts tell us that to have human values you need to bank at one bank rather than another. It's quite interesting to think: what happened before, what are those things that we have which are inbred into us. It's not all that we're about, but it's just something that I notice.

It is better to look at things in three dimensions. To look at the great themes of loss, love, self-deception, from slightly different places, you really find you need to see the same thing from slightly different angles. And so, you get a more rounded vision of it. With one eye you only get two dimensions. From more than one culture.

Is it a lie? No, it's not a lie. Is it the truth? No, it's not the truth. If you look at it with two eyes you get more of a sense of distance and depth. Is that a lie no it's not a lie, but it's not the truth either. You get a slightly more rounded view of things. No one has a full view of the truth and the camera lies.

NF: And working abroad strengthens this sense of perspective.

DD: Yes, exactly. Everything is absolutely the same and absolutely different. And that's what's extraordinary. So, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice says to Benedick in English: "I know you of old". These wonderful Saxon words. And in French it's: "Je vous connais depuis longtemps". Which is the exact translation, and it's completely different. So, it's like the same thing and yet is completely different. And that's fascinating.

NF: And it's not just about meaning: the French translation communicates a radically different perspective of the past, doesn't it? You say in *The Actor and the Target* that history is subjective, that "history has got nothing to do with the past".[8] And of course, history is always reconstructed and re-elaborated. The example you've given above is a very apposite example of that.

DD: And also, in *Macbeth* Lady Macbeth says, "Is Banquo gone from court?" It comes up in French as: "Banquo, est-il parti de la Cour" [laughs]. "The court" equals "la Cour"??!! Again, it's the exact translation and it's completely different, all the different references and associations. "Court" and "la Cour"... I can't even begin to put it into words.

Well most words are controlled by the left part of the brain which cannot compute mystery, so must always pretend it doesn't exist. What's interesting is that it's a mystery really. Some things you can explain, some things you can't explain. The bit that you can't explain is the interesting bit, and the bit you can't explain that is interesting is of course also the bit that frightens people. We often get scared by what we cannot pigeon hole. Some of us more than others. So much so that sometimes we may say that ultimately it is all understandable, it's just a matter of time. But I think it is more interesting to see them both as a mystery, and to accept that we will die not knowing that much about ourselves.

NF: I'd like to dwell on the notions of archetypes and mystery you have introduced. It is my belief that Shakespeare's use of archetypes in his drama is one of the major causes of its enduring popularity. How does the archetypal nature of his plays combine with the mystery to make Shakespeare's theatre so popular throughout Europe and most of the world?

[8] "History has nothing to do with the past. History is how we perceive previous events now. History is only a sequence of reinventions." (Donnellan 123)

DD: I think the important thing about Shakespeare is what he leaves out. And the important thing is that he gets straight to the point, he does not let his vision get cloudy. It's the complete opposite of the media which confuses us with far too much detail. What you need is an expert and adult (where are they now that we need them so badly?) to say: "That's not important, *this* is important. *That's* not very important, *this* is important."

The mystery of things is really important, we shouldn't become indignant about the mystery. What worries me sometimes is the loss of awe in the face of the mystery of things. No-one likes to think and talk about darknesses, like the enormous rage within. And we need to tell stories not because they are trying to communicate a hidden meaning. It is because we don't understand them, because those stories haunt us. Why for example is it we destroy the people we love? And it's really important to be present with that, and part of being present with it is paying our respect to the enormity of the situation.

Understanding can be a defence against accepting. These are archetypes or similarities in these appalling things that Shakespeare can put his finger on. Human beings have intimacy problems. We don't like to get too close to other people, or we like to be in control of it.

I often talk about movement and space on stage, to determine whether we are too close or not too far, so that effectively we are never still, we are always caught in this "unstable treaty" as I say, not too close not too far, so there's always slight movement—it's a process, it's not a state. And if some actor will ask: "Where do I stand?" And I say, "Well, you need to find a good position to be, not too close not too far". "And where is that?" And you continue, "well that would change from second to second". In fact, you've kind of lost when you're giving somebody a position, because you're taking your coordinates from the living life that's around you.

NF: Has that ever become a problem when working across Europe? Research shows that people's perception of their personal space and their interactions with others are influenced by their geographical environment.[9] So, I wonder whether the concept of "where do I stand" in relation to the other person changes according to the physical location of the company you work with, and to the actors' nationality.

DD: Although there are cultural differences, that's not the problem. A problem for example may be in getting somebody to accept the fact that you're not too close not too far, and everybody will understand that.

But yes, there are differences between cultures. For example, some people talk very loudly, and you don't know if they're angry or not, and there

[9] See Eisler *et al.* and Rapoport for further information.

are funny things that you don't know about. But that's really not a big problem. It's like not understanding the words of a language, that's a tiny problem in a rehearsal. That's like half of a percent. The main battle is actually accepting the fact that where you are is open. So, they can be speaking any language, and that's the main battle. The problem isn't "Which language?" The problem is that the play is written in any language!

We say and believe that we use words to communicate, but actually they are also the best possible defence against communication. In a great text a character often speaks to you with words, but you have also to listen to the gentle tap-tapping behind them. It's like the tap-tapping of two prisoners trying to communicate through a cell wall. That is the crucial communication. Ironically the words are often the wall!

NF: In your opinion, has Brexit got the ring of a Shakespearean tragedy?

DD: Well I could find it in that. Some of the elements are there. There's the vanity of David Cameron, who thought he could charm his way out of it. He was plausible too. But politicians become very unpopular when they communicate a sense of superiority. There's also the fact that they didn't understand how angry people are. They've foolishly allowed the country to vote, they've given them an anger protest vote on a matter of a major constitutional issue. So, it's that kind of arrogance, and the complete misreading of the mood of the country that leads to tragedy. When we ignore the rage, you get into terrible, terrible trouble. And now we know that a disaster is going to happen. What depresses me is how so many arguments were exclusively economic. To change the Bush quote—"It ISN'T the economy, stupid!" One of the central pillars of the EU was to protect us against war and it is frightening how many people will scoff at that now as if European war were impossible.

In July 1914 there were many people scoffing that war was impossible because the global economy was too interconnected. Too many rich companies would lose money, so they wouldn't let there be a war. The big baddy global corporations suddenly get co-opted as a protective parent. And then they were proved quite phenomenally wrong.

NF: What is your understanding of the recurrent claims that Shakespeare's theatre is inherently European?

DD: Well, most of his plays are set in Europe. He loved the Italian Ovid. He had read the great Frenchman, Montaigne. England was very conscious and frightened of rich Catholic Spain, rich Catholic Italy, all were illegal to visit and so extremely glamorous. Many of Shakespeare's plays are set up in Europe, and that would give them a sense of glamour to the audience. Courtesans could be more glamorous, and cardinals could be evil. You also ran into much less censorship if the plays were set in the enemy states, so tyrannical things could be

done by Spanish, French and Italian kings rather than English ones. I also think the word "king" is only used in *Macbeth* once or twice about Macbeth, because he [Shakespeare] would have been worried about kings being killed onstage. So, he obviously knows about Europe. I just find the suggestion [that Shakespeare's theatre is inherently European] a bit strange, actually, as far as we are all human beings on a planet, and it's very strange that we should all of a sudden identify with a small crop of earth that we actually live on. Shakespeare always refuses to poke fun at the Catholic church and he probably lost a lot of box office by not pandering to the anti-Catholic, anti-European mood.

NF: Who goes to see Shakespeare in Russia, in Poland, or France? Who would you say makes up your audiences, on the whole?

DD: I don't know, I always see quite a young audience out there when we're there. Different people go at different times to see different Shakespeares. And of course, there's no such thing as *one* Shakespeare.

And then there's this other one that comes from school, saying that Shakespeare writes these wonderful exciting thrillers. But I find that very dangerous really in the end. If you want just a thrill you might as well watch *Double Indemnity* because *Double Indemnity* is really good, and you don't have that much spiritual complexity. But in *Macbeth* it's not a genre, it's its own thing**,** but it's all about self-deception. It's not about two people wanting to kill a king. It's all about two people convincing themselves to do something that they don't want to do. So, they don't want to do it, they do it, and then they realize not only that they wish they hadn't done it, but also, they had never wanted to do it in the first place. And it's about the rubbish that we talk to ourselves into doing things that we know we shouldn't be doing. And when we do it, it's so clear in *Macbeth* that he does it out of fear of *not* doing it. Which is so true—by true, I mean that it's such a human thing to do. To leave it undone would be somehow terrible. And Macbeth does it the way we do a lot of things, to keep away our black dogs. But they'll come back. No matter how much you drink or how many drugs you take or which reckless behaviour you indulge in, the black dogs are only gone for a bit. So, it's about a very complex thing. It is a mystery.

The reason we go to see Shakespeare is because he's better than other things. I don't want to say that he's better because he's very "complex" because that word makes it sounds like you have to be clever. I don't think you have to be clever or sophisticated to appreciate Shakespeare, sometimes that sense of sophistication will make you have a problem seeing Shakespeare. But what you need to see it with is common sense, and you need to understand that when Othello says "put up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them" he is a bit fake. And then, he talks about the pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war? With a little bit of common sense, you realize that's not how soldiers talk about war! It's how a journalist or a politician talks about war.

And the wonderful thing about Othello is that he is the real thing, he is black, he is a warrior, he is a very brave warrior, and he is an extraordinary man, he's done extraordinary things, but he feels fake. And Desdemona too is another one, she cautions Emelia when she starts talking about men, men, any men, who wouldn't accept another man outside marriage? They would become very rich and so on. And we don't notice the line, it's very creepy, it's: "Do you think there are women who have sex outside marriage?" And that's not innocent or naïve, that's creepy. Has she read the Bible? Of course, she has! And she was the one who fancied Othello because he's scary.

NF: And fundamentally different because he embodies the Other.

DD: Yes. And they're not what they seem. We are so romantic now, we see characters as heroic rebels, so as a woman against a man, youth against age, individuals against the state, we have all these fine romantic late-eighteenth century notions—the Enlightenment's got a lot to answer for. But that's not what the plays are about. The main point is that you need common sense, you need to pull back and you need to think: Do I believe this? And very often when the characters are talking to us they're talking rubbish! And what's wonderful at the end of *Othello* is when Othello says, "I have done the state some service, and they know't." It's the first time he starts to talk like a human being. So, when critics tell me about the nobility of the Moor, it's like he's read the critics and he's now behaving like Othello ought to behave! And when he kills himself, he kills himself in the third person. And Shakespeare fully understands this dislocation we have from ourselves, and he understands this right from the beginning of *Richard III*. At the beginning of *Richard III*, Richard comes on and says: "Look, I'm a man playing an actor playing a man playing an actor playing a king." He's going through all these different things. So, he's saying: "You and me, we are both puppets, but the advantage I have is that I know that I am, actually I know that I can play this part and this part and this part. Are *you* that intelligent? Because *I* know I can do anything." Then he goes to the audience: "Do you think I played that well?" So, then the self-deceiving attitude towards that is that he's such an awful person, he sounds authentic.

And what you need to say is: While you think you're authentic, you're really, really vulnerable. Because until you admit you are a puppet, somebody else is going to be pulling your strings. And I think, in a way, in order to appreciate that you have to empty things from your head. Otherwise, cleverness gets in the way and we can't see the simple, brutal things. Think about *Three Sisters* when Olga says in the first line: "Father died just a year ago, on this very day". There's a reunion and they're having a party. This should make you think: it's very odd having a party on the anniversary of your father's death. And again, they are totally dislocated from their feelings. And the big cry at the end is: Don't cry don't cry, we'll live. And I believe the great, great writers are quite obsessed people, performing being themselves.

NF: From your observations and conversations, would you say that Shakespeare is considered as a key cultural text abroad, in Russia or France, for example?

DD: Of course, yes. He's just adopted by the Russians as one of their own, from the early translations. So, he inspired Pushkin, so he is seen as being Russian. There are always all sorts of surprises when we do it. When we do it in Czech or Russian, they know what not to say, they know what's not interesting and they know what's really large. What's so terrible about listening to the news is that they don't know what news not to tell you. I've listened to twenty-five minutes on the World at One about people complaining about their flight being cancelled in Luton. Twenty-five minutes' worth of that. And think what they're *not* telling us for that twenty-five minutes. What's amazing in Shakespeare is what he does not tell you. So, he just doesn't get confused by detail, and he doesn't confuse you with details.

NF: Sometimes there is an awful lot of details, in some of the soliloquies for example, and their purpose seems to be to obfuscate.

DD: Yes, and sometimes the soliloquies are rubbish. So, you're thinking, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait! And "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well It were done quickly". You want to say: "What's *it*, exactly?" It's all about something that really is worth to communicate, and we also use words to *un*-communicate. Most of the soliloquies are people trying not to tell you something. The big thing to ask about Shakespeare's soliloquies is, why is he saying this to me? Why does he want me to think this about him? Why does he want everyone to think he's so warm and emotional? Why does Orsino want us to think that he has feelings? Because the only people showing they have feelings are the people afraid that they don't. So, with each soliloquy you have to ask yourself, why is he telling me this? It's not that it's necessarily *lying*. We don't like to talk for other people, but we want them to see us in a certain way.

NF: And is that part of our self-deceptions?

DD: Yes, I think Shakespeare is all about self-deception. And you *see* the deception. So, in *Macbeth* in a way, you should watch them [Macbeth and Lady Macbeth] on the stage and say: "Don't do this, you don't want to do this, this is all rubbish". When she comes on and says, "unsex me here", it's all nonsense, she's doing this evil talking, but she's not like that, she's really a boring housewife, and she doesn't want to *be* evil, as it were, but she's afraid she's going to be a failure. And he's afraid he's going to be a failure. And like many couples they're afraid, or she's afraid, that they'll end up as the crazy lady and the loser.

And in the end, he *is* going to be a loser! Everything gets predicted right at the beginning, and the more they try to worry about fate, the more they bring

it on. We know it all, from the start, we just don't know where to put it in order of priority. "Who would have thought the old man has so much blood in him": she always knew, that line is about showing you how much blood came out. And about what they needed thinking about. When you think about blood, then you get more sympathy, far more sympathy from the blood than from thinking about life and death. Life and death are rather abstract. Blood's real. That's also why theatre's very important. You're actually going on the carnal presence of the actors and you hear them. You can sometimes hear them breathing. You see the imperfections. It reaffirms you in your life because you're sharing something in the living breathing space with people. And then it's very dangerous compared to what I can see from the close-up in live streaming. You're really thinking about what you're losing.[10]

NF: This year your production of *The Winter's Tale* has been made available internationally via live streaming with French and Spanish subtitles. How does one reconcile trying to capture new and more diverse audiences with giving them an experience that does not compare with the real thing?

DD: I am delighted with our shows being live streamed as long as they don't become substitutes for the real thing. It's good to give people a taste, but with live stream it's very very clear that the people who are watching the live stream are second class citizens compared to the people watching the play. This elitism is very useful, it helps to defend that actually if you were there at the real thing it would be better. Streaming is not the same as the carnal presence, and the carnal presence is very healing. It's really extraordinary that people think that the real thing might not be different from the fake.

NF: I'd like to come back to what you said about Shakespeare being Russian in Russia. It's a bit like "unser Shakespeare" in Germany.

DD: It's completely like that.

NF: What are the consequences of that? Are there any major differences in the way Shakespeare's plots and language are understood by actors, or critics, compared to the UK? Do you find that Shakespeare tends to be perceived from the perspective of the history and the geography of the Russian culture, for instance?

DD: I don't really think like that. I just know that they take it quite for what it is. They have a very intimate connection with it. I can't possibly generalize about how all Russians would see it, I just know many Russians love it. Shakespeare is

[10] Recently actors have also commented on the detrimental effect of the capturing of theatrical performances for digital broadcast on their acting and engagement with audiences in real time (Sanderson).

only popular in countries where people are interested in people, and most Russian theatre goers want their theatre to be alive and human. One of the great Russians pieces is *Hamlet*, it's absolutely central to their repertoire, they generally get to do the well-known Shakespeares over and over again. And the lesser known Shakespeares they don't tend to perform. So, you might find *The Tempest* and they perform that not quite so often and the tragedies are done all the time.

NF: Political appropriations of Shakespeare's theatre have been widespread in Eastern Europe, especially as a way of criticizing the regime.

DD: Well yes, it depends on what you mean by the politics of Shakespeare. I did the politics of *Richard III*, about self-deception and so on. But I don't think a coup d'état is very political. Saying that a character's good and another one's bad is not political. Politics is about negotiation, and it's about mediation between one thing and another. It depends on how you define the word political. But somebody that wants to make me more politically aware of how power shifts work, or how people see from their point of view, of how people manipulate, then it becomes political. Just because it is about the state, it does not necessarily mean to say it's political. In all Shakespeare's plays somehow, it's going to be about how you connect to your family, to yourself, to the birth politics in your family, and then how you connect to the state.

But I think theatre is very simple. It is about people. If it's not about people, it is boring. Shakespeare's got a lot to say, he's got a lot of ideas and they are all about people. Otherwise it's not theatre at all. And it's so simple: whether it's about being at the theatre, whether it's about putting on a play, you simply have to remember, it's always about people. That doesn't mean to say it can be clumsy or old-fashioned. Because then it's not about people, it's about some weird concept of national heroes and, you know, "le patrimoine", national heritage and so on. And that's another kind of weird idea.

The thing has actually got to be about actual people, carnally sharing blood in the presence of each other, really *doing* things. And avoiding things and lying about the things that they're doing. That's the important thing about Shakespeare. Shakespeare really reasserts our carnality. He has Prospero putting all his enemies together, and he basically says: I've put all my enemies together, and I don't know what I'm going to do to them. He says, well basically they're only human beings and I forgive them. He *explicitly* states that a spirit is no better than a human being, that a human being is better because a human being shits, bleeds, eats, copulates, and also as another function, can forgive. If you're a spirit you can't forgive. You have to be carnal in order to forgive. And that's the most beautiful part of being Shakespeare: he keeps reasserting what it is to be a human being. And if we lose sight of that, we just don't know what we're talking about in Shakespeare. It's all about humans being together and participating and sharing.

NF: In *The Actor and the Target* you explain that people go to see great plays in order to see people whose lives are going to change.[11] From what you are saying here, it is also a two-way process: the characters' lives change, but I think the spectators' lives are also deeply affected through this carnal exchange.

DD: Yes. I'm not saying theatre is not about ideas, but if it's about ideas it *must* be mediated through people. You can't just present an idea. The inauthentic thing to do is just to write a good programme note when people have a good idea and talk to the critics and so on. Then everything can take place without the inconvenient intimacy of humanity happening in the middle. But for me that's not the theatre, that's something else.

The important thing is that theatre is felt through human interchange. So, the audience have to be implicated in the act of theatre. Because they contribute to the event, they co-own it with us. You can't go into any art or cultural study as a retreat from humanity. If you read history, it's supposed to put you back into the predicaments and the terrible sufferings, terrible corners in which people found themselves. You can't escape it. I don't understand the expression 'decorative art', to me it's an oxymoron. Art is not decorative, it's there to change you. On one level it can be about flowers, but somehow, it's going to connect you with humanity in a *carnal* way.

NF: Is this what is needed for a great play to reflect our current realities?

DD: We [Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod] choose plays because we get a smell and a sniff that it will be interesting. But if you try to *make* it about now, then you might as well write a new play. Actually, you're using an old play to syncopate with now, you're juxtaposing it with now. You do it in modern dress as we often do, but these two will sort of sing together, and that's the important thing.

NF: What makes a play—especially a play by Shakespeare—interesting to you in the here and now at a given moment?

DD: It makes Nick and me miserable looking for plays, because certain actors are anxious to know what the play's for, and it's got to be a great play for everyone to do. We also need to feel it's somehow connected in a special way to the world that we're in, and audiences will want to see the play. That we'll be able to tour with it and develop it. With Shakespeare, he always automatically connects it himself, you know, it's always timely. There is hardly anything that's

[11] "One of the chief reasons we go to see a great play is to see someone making a choice that will change their lives. What happens in the balcony scene? Juliet makes an extraordinary choice to defy her family and marry Romeo. And that choice moves us." (Donnellan 64)

not to do with now. Shakespeare teaches us about ourselves because he wrote plays that are about human beings and can resonate in any time or culture. Shakespeare understands that it's our carnality that makes us human—he's full of love and loss, tenderness and violence, shit and spit.

NF: And you're working on *Pericles* at the moment.

DD: Well that's not what it's about. Yes, *Pericles* is about some search that goes on, somebody escaping from home and coming back home. So, it's about that great kind of Peer Gynt theme when he leaves home and gathers a lot of strength and comes back and it's very very moving. That's completely carnal. This old man who's got very lost…

NF: And there's also the theme of incest in it, which also relates to carnality in other, but very specific ways.

DD: Well, that's interesting in terms of when somebody might run away from himself. If he feels that he's got to escape, from a vague but violent fear, a paranoia.

NF: A prevalent theme in your book is that of conflict. Does this correlate to your interest in Shakespeare and some of the reasons why you keep returning to his plays? The centrality of conflict in Shakespeare's work provides another archetype to explain its ever-increasing presence onstage and its popularity with all kinds of audiences.

DD: There's only conflict. I think that we need a correction to the psychosis of everyday life that results from our denying the invisible. People are driven insane by the society we live in and by the consumer values. And there's a kind of psychosis of the rational that we forgive, a kind of disassociation, so that people don't want to talk about the rage that's obviously present. I've noticed increasingly the way that people will de-psychologize politics. And the news also is de-psychologized. I think Shakespeare acts as an enormous antidote to this. Not just Shakespeare but all forms of art.

But first of all, theatre and art must never provide "answers". If you provide an "answer" you become a politician, a prince. It's their business to tell the truth. It's not our job to tell the truth, it's our job to create illusions. It's our job not to *lie*, that's very important, that's a very solemn undertaking. But you can't tell the truth. As soon as you start telling the truth you're really going to start lying. You've got this illusion you're going to start examining things that way and think a little bit about this illusion. But it always, always, always has to be digested with your sense of judgment and your common sense. Nothing overrides that. It's when principles start clouding our common sense that things start going really, really, really wrong. Common sense is slightly different from conscience. It's much more to do with prudence and to do with practicality.

For me one of the most moving lines in Shakespeare is Emelia's. They all talk such rubbish in Othello! Desdemona is so dull... From Othello's first lines right to the moment when he kills her, Othello is a disaster waiting to happen, he doesn't need Iago. He's so constructed he's fake. And then Emelia shouts and she's so sensitive at Iago: "What place, what form, what time, what *likelihood*?" And the way the word "likelihood" falls always make me cry, because Emelia has this ordinary common sense. "What *likelihood*"—yes, it's possible, yes, it makes sense, etc. But is it *likely*? And in some way, yes, it's true, unlikely things happen, but every now and then you need somebody, you hope that there'll be a good pair of parents actually in place. For instance, the asteroid *could* land on the earth. And a real neurotic *will* convince you that it could land any moment. If you've got bad values, you'll really believe the asteroid will land on earth. So, you need Emelia there asking about the likelihood.

NF: And another character similar to this is Paulina, in *The Winter's Tale*?

DD: Paulina's more obvious. Yes, she's good. She looks down, she looks at what death is doing.

NF: And she's angry. She's very angry.

DD: (Laughs) Ah, she's a nightmare! In some respect you can play it another way, so she creates disaster in a way, because she handles him [Leontes] when they wake her [Hermione], because how do you handle a mad person? You're borderline—you can't really handle borderline. And if she did, Paulina would end up in jail.

NF: She also does what she has to do in protecting the victim of domestic violence.

DD: She does, but she manages to get the child isolated or alone. And you can say, in certain situations it is better to stand by and do nothing. Montaigne, who I am in love with, would say: It depends. Because sometimes, when Paulina intervened, she managed to make things worse. And she says a couple of things that light a fire. I prefer Emelia. She tries to say "what likelihood" to Othello, but he is actually mad. And it's impossible to deal with somebody who's in the grip of that sort of delusion. And sometimes you have to say: This is a terrible situation and you don't have an adult to see your solution. Not daring to say: "We can't protect you from that" makes you weak.

NF: And that's the adult position.

DD: Yes. But that's very unpopular because it involves judgement and it involves having to drag yourself, and you'd rather have railway lines to run on rather than meadows that criss-cross one way to another.

NF: Translation is at the very heart of your work, since you direct Shakespeare both in English and in translation. Have you ever found translation, rather than language, to be a barrier to communication and/ or directing? And if so, in what ways?

DD: Translation is always a problem. The main problem in general is you can't translate. But you need to make sure that the translation is as accurate as possible. What's particularly difficult in Shakespearean translation is things that are simple. A classic example is when we were doing *Macbeth* in Finland thirty years ago and in the scene "why have you left the chamber? Hath he ask'd for me? Know you not he has?" They call each other "you". And then the great supreme moment is when Macbeth says, "But if we fail?", she says: "We fail. But screw your courage to the sticking-place, And we'll not fail." It's the first time they've said "we". And the translation turned out to be: "What happens if it doesn't work".

In *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina's line to Leontes "Look down and see what death is doing" was translated in Russian as: "Look, he's turned quite cold". It doesn't work. In Hedda Gabler, when she says: "This house smells of death", in Russian the translation says: "The house has a rather posthumous air about it". And that doesn't work.

Translating is a little bit like making a speech over a friend that's died at their funeral. You have to keep yourself out of it but keeping yourself out of the picture is *so* hard. And I've noticed it's the simple things translators can't translate—it's got nothing to do with the big complexities.

So, another thing in Finland was "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow", "Huomenna ja, huomenna, huomenna" with only one "ja". I said "does "ja" mean "and"? they said yes, and "huomenna" means "tomorrow". I said it has to be "Huomenna ja, huomenna ja, huomenna". They complained that in Finnish you can't really have "and" twice in the sentence. And I said it's bad English too, but Shakespeare's quite happy to write bad English, and he makes up words. The repetition of those "ands" is crucial for the whole meaning of the line. That's really difficult for people to understand.

NF: And this is where individual cultures comes into play. This takes us back to our earlier discussion: making Shakespeare "ours" in each of our individual cultures is likely to entail that our cultural habitus seeps out to modify our understanding of Shakespeare, as we conceptualize the world according to our culture, in slightly different ways.

DD: Yes, but I wouldn't want you to think that different cultures have different ways of approaching translation. It always pans out to the same thing, it's always to soften it. It's never to make it harder. I've never come across a translation

that was more edgy. It's always slightly more "embourgeoisé".[12] My worst experiences were with interpreters, when many times I've had to get cross. Because the interpreter's in your head. I was teaching students in Spain and I said: "The idea must have blood in it". And the interpreter went on and on and on and on. And I did want to hear the word "sangre", and I said what are you saying? She said I'm trying to explain what you said. I said no, "the idea must have blood in it", just use my words in Spanish. I knew in my Spanish that she hadn't said that. Then she said: "That's not a concept my students would understand." And I said I don't actually think that's your choice. I don't understand it, it's my right to speak in metaphor, it's my right not to be understood. I think you'll find if you have even the most basic reading of Lorca that you'd understand "the idea must have blood in it", you'd understand that! So, the danger is that the interpreter will think that their job is to make something comprehensible, and that's not necessarily true. It's your job, in a way, to try and reproduce the original.

NF: To transmit meaning, to transmit the message. I can see where she was coming from, but of course her job was to check with you what you meant first before intervening.

DD: Which I required, and I am haunted by enigma. So, I'm giving them enigma. The idea must have blood in it. I don't understand it, but I know it's very important. And the thing that means that the enigma works is that it must have that haunting quality. But the interpreter got herself in the way. And she made it all about her. And we're not interested in her idea of working. I mean, it's not that different languages have a need to conceptualize in different ways, because of course they do, the problem is the *need* to conceptualize, because in a way, a play or a piece of poetry is about a *de*conceptualization. So, in other words, the idea is made flesh and dwells among us,[13] it's like a Christian sacrament, the thing that's theoretical and abstract is being made carnal in front of you. So, it's the other way round. I find the problem is fascinatingly international, and a problem is that always the concrete will be made slightly more abstract, and everything will be put slightly into the past tense. So, translations will be slightly blunted, and they'll be masticated too. It's like some bird that chews the food for its chicks, that it's not going to be chewed in the way the person wants it to be chewed. So, translators and interpreters are doing too much, really.

[12] Derogatory French term referring to the championing of a conservative lifestyle or beliefs.

[13] See the *Bible*, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

NF: That's a really important and useful insight. Would you go as far as saying that some translators are unconsciously trying to improve Shakespeare in the way translators did explicitly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

DD: Yes, they're sort of patronizing the audience. Because they think that people can't deal with not understanding things. The problem is because *they* can't deal with not understanding things. So, it's my job to say: I'm going to share. If I put on *King Lear*, I'm sharing with the audience my incomprehension with their incomprehension. It shouldn't be totally incomprehensible, but the essential mystery here that is always centrally, something *must* be incomprehensible.

That's why it's so challenging when people ask me to explain my work. If you could say what your work means you'd write an essay, that's not how it works, it's not about *meaning*, and it's very, very hard to say that to people. It's very different with an interpreter because they want to make something comprehensible.

NF: Yes, they have to make sense of what was said and then reproduce it. On the subject of communication, would you say that performing Shakespeare in different European countries helps to connect people's voices throughout Europe and beyond its borders?

DD: Yes, and I'll put it much more simply than that, it's a way of sharing our common humanity, and that's very important that we understand that we share a common humanity. Something I should say, though, some years ago I was invited to a Shakespeare conference and I was quite appalled by a lot of the things that were being said. I think that need to conceptualize can lead to one person boring 150 people, in five languages, talking rubbish. Boring someone is not harmless. It's a political act that changes them and it's very dangerous. So, one has to be a little bit careful about cultural exchanges, that they don't become virally infected by people who want safe jobs saying nothing, because they do a lot of harm.

I think that Shakespeare is always transgressive, is always surprising. And if it's not transgressive then it's not Shakespeare. You know you've gone wrong if what he says is dreary, it's not Shakespeare because he's very vital. So, you need to know that the translation actually does that. It must have some surprise element. Or the production must have somehow. It has to give you a way of looking at things in a way that's disconcertingly different from how you thought things looked before.

WORKS CITED

Berne, Eric. *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964.

Cheek by Jowl. 5 September 2017. <http://www.cheekbyjowl.com/declan_donnellan.php>.

Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Donnellan, Declan. *The Actor and The Target*. 2nd ed. London: Nick Hern Books, 2005.

Eisler, Anna D., Hannes Eisler and Mitsuo M. Yoshida. "Perception of Human Ecology: Cross-cultural and Gender Comparisons." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 23 (2003): 89-101.

Jung, Carl Gustav. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Vol. 8. The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. 4th ed. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969.

Rapoport, Amos. *The Meaning of the Built Environment: A Nonverbal Communication Approach*. London: Sage Publications, 1982.

Sanderson, David. "Filming Shakespeare on Stage has a Tragic Flaw: Actors Hate It." *The Times*, 16 January 2019: 3.

Shakespeare, William. "Richard II." *William Shakespeare The Complete Works*. Eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. 367-395.