



**HAL**  
open science

# Shakespeare's Diplomacy: A European Language in Conversation with the World

Nathalie Rivere de Carles

► **To cite this version:**

Nathalie Rivere de Carles. Shakespeare's Diplomacy: A European Language in Conversation with the World. 2019. halshs-02145027

**HAL Id: halshs-02145027**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02145027>**

Preprint submitted on 31 May 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Copyright

## **Shakespeare's Diplomacy: A European Language in Conversation with the World**

Nathalie Rivere de Carles, Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès

So, what can Shakespeare do for us and what can we do with Shakespeare?

Shakespeare's plays tell us how to see through the tempting snares of populism which please individual instincts at the expense of the individuals themselves and for sure at the cost of a sense of a collective present, notwithstanding the future. Populism is a conversation with a blind and deaf self. Shakespeare's theatre is about negotiating our local self with the unknown wider collective and leaving us entirely free whether to perform such negotiation.

Shakespeare is a diplomat, then! To some, "ambassador", "diplomacy", "negotiation" may be bad words, but we are here to look beyond these clichés. The latter often betrays the tyrannical desire of those using them of imposing their sole will and opinion. The perspective of this short essay is not to dwell on the potential negative use of diplomacy and theatre, but to analyse their relationship, assess their shortcomings and share new questions and perspectives.

After all, we are all ambassadors. If you have been on an exchange programme as a pupil, a student or a teacher, then you have been an ambassador. An informal one indeed, an ambassador *extraordinary* who carried with you your local conversations and tried to make them chime with new ones. This is what Shakespeare does when he creates a sonnet or a play: he is a borrower and a lender. This is what European cultural and citizen diplomacy is about: borrowing and lending ideas, concerns, actions in Europe and beyond.

Shakespeare's drama contains its own specific diplomacy, a European diplomacy in conversation with the World, but a diplomacy which has been damaged because it has been used in a socially and territorially homogeneous way. It is time to reclaim Shakespeare as the

ambassador of a Europe united in its diversity, *in varietate concordia*,<sup>1</sup> an open Europe, mindful of the local and in respectful conversation with the global.

First, besides their gift and entertainment values, Shakespeare's plays were used as an idiom within the diplomatic language as soon as they were staged. Thus, his theatre progressively became a *lingua franca* for the diplomat and the layperson. Used to code and to decode, Shakespeare's plays eventually outgrew their idiomatic status to be the inspiration and the substance of a diplomacy emphasising a shared European culture in conversation with the world. However, the shortcomings of such diplomacy (whether governmental or non-governmental) are real and should be the basis of a redefinition of an internationalist Shakespearean diplomacy.

## 1) The Ambassador's Shakespeare: Plays as Diplomatic Language

When at Oxford between 1607 and 1619, Richard Zouche, a jurist in peacetime international law, penned a comedy, *The Sophister*. The play gives both a scholarly and a dramatic view of Renaissance diplomacy.<sup>2</sup> After becoming a professor of law at Oxford and serving on a commission reviewing the involvement of the Portuguese ambassador's brother in a murder in 1654, Zouch wrote *A dissertation concerning the punishment of ambassadors* which was widely circulated in Europe.<sup>3</sup> In this essay, he uses theatre-writing as the instrument for a systemic approach to the ambassador's identity and performance.

---

<sup>1</sup> Coined by French pupils during an informal contest, this Latin phrase means "united in diversity". It has been the European Union's motto since 2000, see [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto\\_fr](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_fr)

<sup>2</sup> Zouche, Richard, *The Sophister* (London, 1639), EEBO Editions, ProQuest, 2010. For a detailed study of the diplomatic content of the play see Nathalie Rivere de Carles, *Early Modern Diplomacy, Theatre and Soft Power*, London, Palgrave, 2016, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Zouche, Richard (1590–1661), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30302>, accessed 7 March 2017] Richard Zouche (1590–1661): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/30302.

The symbiotic relationship of theatre and diplomacy extends to the analytical level. Plays are not only an instrument of representation of diplomacy for an audience. Shakespeare's plays with their multiple layers, characters and spaces, and their elastic sense of time became a language to untangle diplomatic complexity: a practice shared by diplomatic and non-diplomatic actors which started in Shakespeare's own time and developed throughout the centuries. Let us see how Shakespeare and his plays became a diplomatic idiom to understand and explain complex others and situations, as well as the meaning they acquired in the diplomatic sphere, and how they became an unexpected form of soft power.

### ***- The Shakespearean Code***

Diplomacy is famous for its use of coded messages, and Shakespeare's plays have been part of diplomatic coding since the Renaissance as the reference to *Hamlet* in *Sir Thomas Smithes voyage and entertainment in Russia* (1605) shows. The *Voyage* recounted the journey of English commercial diplomats to Russia and the succession crisis rocking the kingdom of Muscovy. In September 1604, King James I of England sent Sir Thomas Smythe along with a few other men to Boris Godunov to negotiate privileges for English merchants. However, the diplomatic party landed in the middle of a transnational dynastic feud known as the *Smuta* involving a dead emperor (Feodor Ivanovich), his brother-in-law (Boris), and the emperor's dead-then-resuscitated brother (Dmitry). Dmitry, backed by the Polish Nobility and the papal nuncio, challenged Boris' accession to power after Feodor's death.<sup>4</sup>

The *Voyage* is based on real diplomatic accounts and is thought to have been put together by William Scott, a member of the diplomatic party.<sup>5</sup> Being at a loss for an explanation

---

<sup>4</sup> Griesse, Malte (2014), *Mutual Observation to Propaganda War: Premodern Revolts in Their Transnational Representations*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, p. 58-59.

<sup>5</sup> The address "To the Reader" insists on the fact that the anonymous author is rather an editor as he got the details "from the mouths of divers gentlemen that went in the Iourney, and hauing some good notes bestowed upon me in

of the complex political landscape in Russia and Poland, the travelogue's editor chose Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to describe the situation:

that his fathers Empire and Government, was but as the *Poeticall Furie in a Stage-action*, compleat yet with horrid and wofull Tragedies: a first, but no second to any *Hamlet*; and that now *Revenge*, iust *Revenge* was coming with his Sworde drawne against him, his royall Mother, and dearest Sister, to fill up those Murdering Sceanes: the *Embryon* whereof was long since Modeld, yea, digested (but unlawfully and too-too viue-ly) by his dead selfe-murdering Father: such and so many being their feares and terrors; the Diuell aduising, Despair counselling, Hell it self instructing.

Using *Hamlet* could be just a topical parallel with a play reprinted many times between 1603 and 1637 and a way to charm the readership. Yet, the *Hamlet* analogy could also betray a desire to explain the situation clearly and thus to use the dramatic language to clarify diplomatic complexity on both sides: at this stage of the narrative, the point for the ambassador is to try to give a birds-eye view of the feud, but it also reflects the approach required from diplomatic staff when dealing with a political and territorial other. Making use of theatre to make a complex issue clearer shows that theatre is part and parcel of the performance of diplomacy beyond mere ceremonial gestures and theatrical uses of space. Theatre, and most particularly Shakespeare, is also part of the vocabulary of the ambassador and of his tools to understand complex situations and to report on them as clearly as possible.

### **- *The Shakespearean lingua franca***

Shakespeare is not only the language of English ambassadors or diplomatic agents. A survey of the French digital diplomatic archives reveals that Shakespeare, the man as well as his plays, is part and parcel of the language of non-English diplomats whether they address

---

writing". A member of the 1604 diplomatic party named William Scott stated in a letter to Robert Cecil his intention to write a detailed narrative of the embassy (see *Calendar of State Papers*, 1605, SP 91/1, 203-4). In the letter Scott explains how "the summe and argumente of the discourse is the Image of the ambassadors negociacion, the description of the Landes". In his edition of William Scott's *The model of Poesy*, Gavin Alexander points the "literariness" of certain passages of *Sir Thomas Smithes Voyage* as resembling Scott's style (see *The Model of Poesy*, Cambridge: CUP, 2013, p. lxxii). This would indicate that either Scott himself participated in the *Voyage* or that the *Voyage*'s editor had accessed Scott's detailed account.

English issues or not. In *The School of Ambassadors*, a 1922 essay written for the education of diplomats, Jean-Jules Jusserand, a French ambassador to the United States, quotes Jean Hotman regarding the way ambassadors should report incidents and public slandering of their master:

Hotman agrees [with Danès], adding one proviso, however, that is: except when the conveying of such information can only cause useless irritation and diminish the chances of that good understanding between nations, which is, as we have seen, the chief object of diplomacy. If however any untoward incident has been public the ambassador has no choice: “The matter would be different, if, in full council of the prince, or in the pulpit by preachers, or on the stage by comedians, or by writings or lampoons, the ambassador saw his master’s honor defamed, for then he must send the information at once (...) using however moderation to make the harm greater than it is, for the case is similar to that of ladies who often by over-defending their honor render it more suspected and doubtful.” The lady, Shakespeare thought, should not protest too much.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1603 treaty, *The Ambassador*, Hotman concluded his advice with Tacitus and the common place of virtuous feminine discretion: “*Convicia, si irascare, agnita videntur, spreta exolescunt.*”<sup>7</sup> Jusserand, an erudite reader of and writer on English medieval and Renaissance theatre, glosses Hotman’s advice and replaces Tacitus’ *Annals* by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.<sup>8</sup> He borrows the words from Gertrude about the actress during the play within the play that “The Lady protests too much” (3.2.216). The latter remark was generalized to the form “Too much protesting makes the truth suspected” and became proverbial.<sup>9</sup> Resorting to paroemia being a characteristic of diplomatic speech, Jusserand’s swapping a classical proverb in Latin for an early modern English phrase emphasises how much Shakespeare’s plays and the English language have by that time become a *lingua franca*.

---

<sup>6</sup> Jusserand, Jules (1922), *The School of Ambassadors and other essays*, in *American Historical Review*, vol. XXVII, n°3, April, p. 452. Jean Hotman’s quotation is adapted from *The Ambassador*, London, 1603, II. 12.

<sup>7</sup> “For things contemned are soon things forgotten: anger is read as recognition”, Tacitus, *Annals*, Trans. J. Jackson, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1937, Bk. IV, xxxiv.

<sup>8</sup> Jusserand was also a scholar and focused on English drama before and after Shakespeare: [http://data.bnf.fr/12003189/jean-jules\\_jusserand/](http://data.bnf.fr/12003189/jean-jules_jusserand/)

<sup>9</sup> Tilley, Morris Palmer (1950) *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, p. 614.

The latter is known as a common language adopted by speakers whose mother tongues differ. Latin was the common language for centuries, but at the time of Shakespeare, the shift to vernacular languages had already started in the diplomatic sphere. The Latin quotations in the second edition of Hotman's treaty *The Ambassador* in 1604 were tellingly removed and the author insists on ambassadors speaking the vernacular of the court they were sent to on top of their Latin.<sup>10</sup> This progressive transformation of the linguistic practices should make us consider another meaning of *lingua franca* in the late medieval and early modern eras, that of *sabir*, the Mediterranean *lingua franca*. The latter is a mixture of Italian with French, Greek, Arabic, and Spanish and its absorptive nature should be paralleled with that of the early modern English language and with the Elizabethan literature's enthusiasm for macaronism (*the mixture of languages within a sentence or a paragraph*). Although Shakespeare often mocks the macaronic style as pedantic, he nonetheless adapts it. His words and his tales, with their local and foreign sources, are absorptive and recreative, granting his drama the fundamental features of a *lingua franca*. Shakespeare's theatre is inherently apt to become a bridge, or rather a crossroad language, that enables cultures and histories to mesh.

### ***- Shakespeare's Literary Diplomacy: A Synchronic Language***

Jusserand chooses a dramatic performance, a public event, as the context of a potential incident. He pairs it with an implicit portrait of the ambassador as actor whose performance should be as natural as possible, as repeatedly advocated in *Hamlet*.<sup>11</sup> In Hotman's text, plays in performance are singled out as important but volatile political events.<sup>12</sup> In Jusserand's,

---

<sup>10</sup> Hotman, *idem*, I, 7.

<sup>11</sup> See Hamlet's advice to actors: "Pox, leave thy damnable faces and begin" (3. 2. 239).

<sup>12</sup> Hotman's discussion of public slander quoted by Jusserand starts with a survey of the places where it could happen: "It is another thing, if in full council of the prince, or in the pulpit by the preachers, or on the theatre by stage players, or by writing or libels, he see (sic) the honour of his master defamed" (II.12).

theatre takes a new dimension: Shakespeare's plays offer an education, a language and a behavioural pattern for the ambassador.

The absorption and use of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (and other plays) as part of a diplomatic *lingua franca* is not purely incidental or ornamental. Diplomats making use of Shakespeare exploit the synchronicity of his plots and language to perform an act of diplomacy, whether for peace or war. A 1932 review in the *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* of *Richelieu*, a biography by Saint-Aulaire, the ambassador of France to London, then noted that the author's analysis of diplomatic history reflected his expertise of both the French and the English diplomatic and cultural traditions.<sup>13</sup> Saint-Aulaire portrayed the French king, Louis XIII, as "a Hamlet who would have Richelieu in place of his will," a monarch whose "soul is heavy with great action and unable to perform it."<sup>14</sup> Saint-Aulaire juxtaposes Lamartine's analysis of *Hamlet*, the character of Hamlet, the founding figure of French diplomacy and a French King as if he was addressing a dual audience and about two different topics. First, using Shakespeare in an analysis of French diplomatic history is a subtle reassertion of the common culture and history shared by France and Britain and a reminder of the Entente Cordiale, thus furthering his task as ambassador to Britain. Besides, Saint-Aulaire offers a means to understand the part of the diplomat in statesmanship and might suggest a possible response to a head of state's paralysis.

---

<sup>13</sup> "Les souvenirs de son ambassade lui suggèrent des rapprochements ingénieux" [The memories of his embassy inspired him ingenious connexions], Duc de la Force, "Compte-rendu de *Richelieu* par le comte de Saint Aulaire", *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, Société d'histoire générale et d'histoire diplomatique (France), Paris, Leroux, 1932.

<sup>14</sup> "Louis XIII fait songer à un Hamlet dont Richelieu serait la volonté. (...) Comme le Prince de Danemark, il avait une âme chargée d'une grande action et incapable de l'accomplir." Saint-Aulaire, Auguste Félix Charles de Beaupoil, comte de (1932), *Richelieu*, Collection Historia, Volume 24, Paris Dunod, p. 82. Saint-Aulaire appropriates Alfonse de Lamartine's analysis of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "nous montrer une âme chargée d'une grande action et incapable de l'accomplir", *Shakespeare et son oeuvre*, Paris, Librairie Internationale, 1865, p. 134.



Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is again a synthetic analysis of a political situation, but Saint-Aulaire also uses it to perform some subtle European diplomacy. Saint-Aulaire displays a very diplomatic conception of time and memory which appear to be both diachronic and synchronic. The introduction of Lamartine's comment on *Hamlet* introduces another temporal layer to those of early modern France and Saint-Aulaire's own epoch. His analysis of Richelieu through Shakespeare is a way to discuss his own historical time and the lessons that can be taken from days of yore. However, Shakespeare is not used as a nostalgic literary artefact but as a temporal and territorial dissonance that automatically triggers critical distance.

Ironically or deliberately, Saint-Aulaire plays with Richelieu's use of theatre for diplomatic purposes and with the recurring use of Shakespeare for nationalistic exaltation in Britain since the French Revolution. At the end of the Thirty Years' War, Richelieu commissioned three court entertainments: the *Ballet de la félicité* (1639), the *Prospérité des armes*, and *Europe, comédie héroïque* (1642). Ellen R. Welch explains that "with *Europe*, the pedagogical dimension of allegory teaches the spectators to want above all else the well-being of this abstract entity who bears the continent's name."<sup>15</sup> No doubt, the Cardinal, then prime-minister, made use of drama to posit his own idea of Europe, but Saint-Aulaire's use of Shakespeare alters the initial diplomatic strategy. Indeed, turning the Cardinal into a playwright is not a random act of literary ornamentation, it is significant of Saint-Aulaire's literary diplomacy. He follows in the steps of Richelieu's dramatic diplomacy but gives it a twist: turning Richelieu into Shakespeare, the very playwright who had often been used for jingoistic nationalistic praise of the British Empire, is a way to tone down both the French and the English unmeasured ambitions, to reaffirm the Entente, and to assert the existence of a transnational

---

<sup>15</sup> Welch Ellen R. (2017), *A Theatre of Diplomacy*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 82; pp. 82-106.

culture in Europe. Richelieu's entertainments relied on allegory and classical mythology, but Saint-Aulaire uses another language to foster an embryonic sense of European commonalty: Shakespeare and his plays.

## 2) What kind of Shakespearean diplomacy?

Besides its inherent diplomatic virtues and the ambassador's adopting Shakespeare as a *lingua franca*, we need to consider the nature of a Shakespearean diplomacy. A systemic approach to the use of culture in international relations would lead us to posit that there are roughly three main types of diplomatic use of Shakespeare today. The first one is government-funded initiatives through education and subsidised cultural policies emphasising a shared European culture. A second use would be as part of a country's public diplomacy, i.e. using one's culture abroad to promote one's own interests. And the third one would be an artist-based diplomacy which involves both public and private funds but whose objective is clearly to favour a shared European culture that is in conversation not only with itself but with the rest of the world.

Public diplomacy is primarily one-sided, which explains its tendency to fail whether short or long-term. The involvement of Shakespeare in public diplomacy is more a matter of imposition than conversation. It parts with the humanist ethos underpinning Renaissance literature and above all with the view of diplomacy as a means to foster a good understanding between nations. By contrast, government-funded initiatives and artist-based diplomacy include a dialogic dimension of culture. The former aims to create a dialogic sense of citizenship while the latter partakes in the collective conscience at the core of an artist's creativity. In both cases, the point is to articulate the individual level with the collective level whether we speak in terms of a single person, a community, or a nation, with other individuals, a society, other nations.

**- Government-funded Initiatives and Internationalist Culture:**

Saint-Aulaire's use of Shakespeare reflects France's "diplomatie de l'esprit" [diplomacy of the mind] to quote Marc Fumaroli's phrase and is part and parcel of a policy of cultural internationalism that starts with the European level. Europe is only a first step in a gradual move towards a post-nation-state framework. You start fostering the links at the European level to show it is possible, and then you add the global level as Europe is a global crossroads. Paradoxically, this view (minus the Habermassian post-nation-state stance) has been at the heart of French cultural policies for a long republican while now. In 1899, Georges Leygues, the minister for Public Education and Fine Arts, under attack for subsidising the performance of Shakespeare at the Comédie-Française, made the following answer:

Why would you exclude foreign authors from our French theatres and operas repertory? Shakespeare belongs to the Comédie-Française. (*Applause*). Shakespeare is at home wherever in the world, and so are Molière, Voltaire, Dante and Goethe. No one in Paris, in a city that erected a statue of Shakespeare, will ever be able to challenge the immortal author of *Hamlet*'s right of citizenship. Subsidised theatres were founded not only to stage French plays, but also to bring to French audiences the productions of geniuses of all times and all races. Human thought does not have a mother country (*Applause*), and on this, I am an internationalist.<sup>16</sup>

Georges Leygues was not *stricto sensu* an internationalist by 1899's standards, but it is interesting that he uses the concept for a cultural policy and thus transfers it into the realm of diplomacy. Of course, Leygues speaks in the context of France and Britain working on what will become *the Entente Cordiale*.<sup>17</sup> However, this geopolitical agenda should not obscure the

---

<sup>16</sup> (Author's translation) "Pourquoi dès lors vouloir exclure du répertoire de nos scènes dramatiques et lyriques les chefs-d'œuvre des auteurs étrangers, quels qu'ils soient. Shakespeare a sa place marquée à la Comédie-Française. (Applaudissements.) Shakespeare est chez lui dans tous les pays du monde, comme Molière, Voltaire, Dante et Goethe. Et ce n'est pas dans Paris, qui lui a élevé une statue, qu'on pourra contester le droit de cité à l'immortel auteur d'*Hamlet*. (...) La fondation des théâtres subventionnés a eu pour but non pas seulement d'assurer la représentation des œuvres françaises, mais aussi de permettre au public français de juger des productions du génie de tous les temps et de toutes les races. La pensée humaine n'a pas de patrie (Applaudissements), et ici je suis internationaliste", Séance du 1/03/1899, *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés : compte rendu in-extenso*, Paris, p. 594.

<sup>17</sup> With thanks to A.J. Hoenselaars for emphasising the importance of Shakespeare's statue.

core of this speech given in the French parliament and aimed at a domestic political audience: it emphasises the will of a government to create a dialogic culture and not an inward-looking one. The phrase “right of citizenship” reinforces Shakespeare as an ambassador and his plays as fostering a transnational culture and more particularly at this stage, a European culture.

### *- The Artist’s Diplomacy of Shakespeare*

Jean-Louis Barrault who played and directed *Hamlet* in 1939 and 1946 wrote that “*Shakespeare manages to liberate himself from his own national and folkloric body to act as a reflector of what’s within or what moves men.*”<sup>18</sup> Shakespeare always manages to slip away from the stifling limitations of commemorations and a British soft-power redolent of imperial nostalgia. Shakespeare is not a conquering language, it is a *lingua franca*, but not only a bridge language but a shared language. By shared language we should understand the fundamentally dialogic nature of this *lingua franca*: the latter should not be viewed as a mere technical language, but the linguistic form given to commonality. Shakespeare’s writing is aesthetically and poetically too disobedient to be considered or used as a self-contained language imposing itself on linguistic and cultural others. Shakespeare’s plays are a flexible idiom travelling back and forth between “this England” where he flourished and this sometimes “distracted globe” that he kept imagining.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1606 and 1608, the Venetian ambassador Giorgio Giustiniani offered a performance of Shakespeare’s new play, *Pericles*, to the French ambassador, Antoine Fèvre de la Boderie, his wife, and Ottaviano Lotti, the Secretary of Florence.<sup>20</sup> In 2018, Declan

---

<sup>18</sup> (Author’s translation) “Shakespeare arrive à se libérer de son corps national et folklorique pour révéler à l’intérieur tout ce qui touche tous les hommes”, Demeure, Jacques (1975), *Portrait souvenir W. Shakespeare*, Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, <http://www.ina.fr/video/CPF86634923>.

<sup>19</sup> Shakespeare, *Richard II* (2. 1. 50); Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (1. 5. 97)

<sup>20</sup> *Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, Inquisitori di Stato, b, 155, c. 76v.

Donnellan's company Cheek by Jowl played a version of *Pericles* in French and performed by French actors. The diplomatic channels have changed but the diplomatic canvas is still Shakespearean. Pericles and his Odyssean journey across the Mediterranean are evocative of early modern issues as well as contemporary ones.

The play is a journey in European literature with sources ranging from Apollonius of Tyre's romance to Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and George Wilkins' own prose narrative entitled *Pericles*. Performing Shakespeare in French with English surtitles in front of a British audience in Britain is a subtle way of confronting the nationalistic uses of Shakespeare. It truly shows his plays are a language that can be spoken worldwide, and which speaks not for England but about it and about others at the same time, about what transcends the national experience.

Donnellan's production is set in a contemporary hospital room and alternates three narratives: the story of a man in a coma named Michel who is surrounded by his family, the history of Saint Paul and the Mediterranean played on a radio in Michel's room, and Shakespeare's story of Pericles. Michel is both himself now and Pericles then; he dreams the play's central plot. The radio show about the travels of Saint Paul and the background 1930s French song entitled "J'attendrai" [I'll wait] are the paradoxical leitmotifs linking both plots. The radio show replaces Gower as prologue and intersperses journalistic and academic commentaries on the various places Shakespeare's Pericles and his daughter Marina travel to. The song, chosen to evoke "a song that old was sung" (1.1.1), is about expectation. It has had a truly European life as it was covered in other European languages before World War II. It recalls Pericles' motto disclosed by Thaisa in 2.2: "in hac spe vivo" [in this hope I live]. This hope is challenged to its bitter limits by the play and the choice of the director to follow the Odyssean pattern of successive tableaux, each facing the protagonist with the woes of the forced wanderer wherever she or he goes: poverty, slavery, all forms of violence and death. The

contemporary setting and costumes, the voice over of the radio show and the juxtaposition of the performance in French and the English surtitles gently bring home to the spectators that the characters' mixed reception of Shakespeare's words, "thou shalt be welcome", is also their own.

The *Pericles* experience for the spectator is decidedly transnational and confronts the spectator with a long-shared history of travellers crossing the Mediterranean in hope for some reconciled existence. The tale of *Pericles* echoes Shakespeare's speech about the "wretched strangers" written for *Thomas More* in 1603. Jonathan Bate emphasizes the dialogic diplomacy of Shakespeare: "More asks the on-stage crowd, and by extension the theatre audience, to imagine what it would be like to be an asylum-seeker undergoing forced repatriation."<sup>21</sup> This Shakespearean negotiation could be paired with Donellan's E.M. Foster-inspired statement that "if theatre does not seek to *connect* with people, it is not theatre anymore."<sup>22</sup> *Pericles* is a play about strangers performed in front of strangers in 1608 and ultimately by strangers in 2018, at a time of a new rupture between England and the continent, and at a time when the continent's humanist values are tested by the refugee crisis. The dialogic diplomacy of Shakespeare based on surrogating and empathy comes full circle here, but it is faced with a major obstacle: its target-audience.

### 3) Self-Centred Cultural Diplomacy v. Shakespearean Internationalism

In 2012, the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in London directed by Danny Boyle started with Kenneth Branagh dressed as Isambard Kingdom Brunel speaking the words of Caliban: "Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight

---

<sup>21</sup> Bate, Jonathan (2011), *Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind and World of William Shakespeare*, London, Penguin, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> Declan Donellan, *El Mundo*, June 2018.

and hurt not.” (*The Tempest*, 3.2).<sup>23</sup> Britain was welcoming the world during what is the epitome of sports diplomacy: Branagh, a Belfast-born actor, celebrated for making Shakespeare popular again, impersonated Brunel, the son of a French refugee who had fled the Terror and had participated in the technological and social evolution of Victorian England. Shakespeare’s words were not meant to partake in a nostalgic or jingoistic celebration, they spoke for themselves with their English music and their borderless echoes, or at least they were supposed to. Caliban’s words were an apt choice for a prologue of entente, but the rest of the ceremony was not a dialogue with the world, but a gazing-in-the-mirror moment for England alone. The show missed the Caliban target and included Shakespeare in a mission of self-aggrandisement rather than dialogic openness. This work of public diplomacy was symptomatic of a nostalgic approach to culture and history that would soon backfire. So, when we ask what Shakespeare can do for Europe (or more generally for international relations), it starts with his own words and continues with *how* we make them available and *to whom*.

### ***- Linguistic and Historical Dialogues***

Cheek by Jowl’s French production of *Pericles* testifies to the ongoing vitality of the long-standing tradition of the touring theatre companies and their role in cultural exchanges. Declan Donellan’s Cheek by Jowl’s English / French and Russian company tours Europe with surtitled productions of Shakespeare in English, French and Russian. Ivo van Hove tours with his company performing his own take on Shakespeare’s works such as *The Roman Tragedies* or *Kings of War* in Dutch with surtitles fitting the local audience’s language. He also exports his scenographies and directions worldwide to be reprised by local actors in their own mother tongue. Thomas Ostermeier does the same and has perpetuated and anchored the multilingual

---

<sup>23</sup> Watch the speech at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioN5-I3Iq9c>. The choice of Elgar’s Nimrod from his *Enigma Variations* as background music also raises questions regarding the production’s unconscious jingoism.

tradition of the Schaubühne theatre of performing Shakespeare's plays in German with surtitles when touring abroad. His Berlin theatre offers the same experience of plays in German with English and French surtitles every month.<sup>24</sup> Theatre, and more particularly Shakespeare's drama, is a flexible idiom that can be augmented and reinvented in the macaronic fashion of the Mediterranean *lingua franca*. These initiatives coupled with their historical precedents such as the Festival d'Avignon, for which the creation of a European culture is one of the founding tenets,<sup>25</sup> use Shakespeare's plays as a *lingua franca*, a language that blends with others, a vocabulary which is part of a transnational language of theatre.

The Shakespearean diplomacy relies on several artistic methods and the combination of these artistic methods with technical considerations. The previous examples of contemporary touring companies shed light on the first method in modern-day Shakespearean diplomacy: the multilingual approach to performance. The latter includes translation, surtitling and multilingual performances (when each performer speaks in a different language), with the caveat of not making multilingualism a source of obscurity for the audience.

A second method is Shakespeare-based new writing: adaptations, tradaptations of Shakespeare's plays and new writing based on his works such as Priti Taneja's King Lear-inspired novel, *We That Are Young* (2018) or Djanet Sears' transtemporal *Othello*-based play, *Harlem Duet* (2012). Thus, the Schaubühne is the home of the Festival of International New Drama where new productions from all around the world are performed in the original language of the company and/or the actors. Regularly, the programme includes companies and directors offering their take on Shakespeare's plays in the form of new drama, reworking that

---

<sup>24</sup> The website clearly states the policy of the company: "We have a special service for our international audience: you have the opportunity to see several surtitled performances with English or/and French surtitles each month." <https://www.schaubuehne.de/en/pages/programme-surtitles.html>.

<sup>25</sup> March, Florence (2012), *Shakespeare au Festival d'Avignon*, Montpellier, L'Entretemps, pp. 142-4.



Shakespearean *lingua franca* linking actors, directors, and audiences. In 2017, the festival featured *Shakespeare's Last Play* (after *The Tempest*), by Dead Centre, a Dublin-based company. Bush Moukarzel, the director of the Dead Centre, explained: "Shakespeare's project is a never-ending event. We are all going to the Island to do Shakespeare, to the author to understand ourselves better."<sup>26</sup> The discovery and the dialogue is not an insular one though, but one that proves resolutely dialogic in terms of languages, eras, cultures, and media as shown by the performance during the Festival's 2018 issue of Rodrigo Garcia's *Evel Knievel contra Macbeth na terra do finado Humberto*. Garcia's play is performed in three languages by two actors and a xylophone player and is set in north-eastern Brazil. Garcia "appears in the guise of Orson Welles who, immersed in his film role of Macbeth, has forgotten his real existence and now, in the company of the Greek rhetoricians Demosthenes and Lysias, is trying to obliterate the traces of his own origins. But he has failed to reckon with the stuntman Evel Knievel and the Japanese Manga dragon Neronga."<sup>27</sup> The play relies on the collaboration between two playwrights, Shakespeare and Garcia, and a dead director famed for his film adaptations of Shakespeare, Orson Welles. Shakespeare's play is the canvas on which Garcia creates his own and literally stages the multilingual dialogue it implies and that will be transposed to the audience.

Garcia's show is itself a communal creation that implies multiple encounters between different territorial dramatic traditions. The play was co-produced by two theatres in France, one in Spain and one in Argentina. It also illustrates the third level of the Shakespearean diplomacy: the transfer of the tradition of travelling companies to the production level through multinational partnerships. This is a more technical level, but an important one as it favours

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Pearson, "Shipwrecked with Dead Centre and *Shakespeare's Last Play*", *Theory*, 23 April 2018. <https://www.schaubuehne.de/en/blog/shipwrecked-with-dead-centre-and-shakespeares-last-play.html>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.schaubuehne.de/en/produktionen/evel-knievel-contra-macbeth-na-terra-do-finado-humberto.html>.

concrete cultural and social exchanges in terms of approaches to work and time. Another asset of this type of Shakespeare-theatre-based diplomacy is to perform on both local and international levels. The Schaubühne Festival of International New Drama is supported by the German Federal Cultural Foundation, the Franco-German Youth office, New York University, Conservatoire National Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, and the Allianz Kulturstiftung for Europe.<sup>28</sup> The mix of government-funded and non-for-profit organizations sponsoring this festival raises interesting points. Notwithstanding the prosaic motivations of the diverse stakeholders for investing in such form of culture-based diplomacy, it shows international cooperation as a way to counter the dearth of local public investment (on the condition it supplements public investment not replaces it). It can also be a form of check-and-balance when confronted with governmental attempts at hijacking culture for the promotion of cultural autarchy (one thinks of certain governments' recent anti-NGO legislations aimed at favouring inward-looking populist nationalism by destroying any possibility of international exchange).

### ***- The Risk of Creating an Echo-Chamber Culture***

However, if the various methods and approaches of established artists emulate early modern touring companies as vehicles of a common culture, we need to question their audiences. We must admit that in terms of audience, there is something missing. When one watches the audience during the filmed performance of *Pericles* at the Guildhall in London, the social and ethnic homogeneity of the group of spectators is quite striking: there is a vast majority of white urban middle-class people. Indeed, these are big touring companies speaking to very metropolitan audiences. But how do you work towards non-metropolitan, non-academic-related and genuinely socially mixed audiences? It will rely on the old methods of government-funded

---

<sup>28</sup> The Allianz Kulturstiftung for Europe is openly performing a form of non-governmental diplomacy by funding "education projects in Europe and the Mediterranean fostering mutual understanding and dialogue that transcends borders." [https://kulturstiftung.allianz.de/en/about\\_us/the\\_foundation/mission\\_statement/](https://kulturstiftung.allianz.de/en/about_us/the_foundation/mission_statement/).

educational and cultural initiatives country-wide and being mindful of reaching new audiences as well as subsidising and favouring artist's initiatives to reach these new audiences outside the cultural megalopolises.

It is well-known that Shakespeare, just like Molière, had the ability and the will to speak to different audiences simultaneously during the span of a play. Sometimes, it seems that this inherent trait of his writing has been left aside. Witnessing the obvious divide between town and country which has become again an instrument to divide and promote a false idea of what commonalty is, and especially European commonalty, the diplomacy of Shakespeare perhaps needs to be performed in new spaces and not only through new media.

#### ***- Internationalism Starts at Home: Shakespeare For and By All***

The work of a company like Antic Disposition raises an interesting question regarding how Shakespeare can bring different audiences to be entertained and to ponder on similar issues. Antic Disposition is a London-based company which blends English and French actors, and which tours the English and French countryside with Shakespeare's plays, but also plays in bigger urban venues such as London's theatres or the national theatre of Nice. They rekindle the European tradition of traveling players performing in churches, inns or courtyards.<sup>29</sup> They perform exclusively in English in front of local audiences.

The pattern is not perfect, but the principle is interesting as it calls for creative new cultural policies and citizen's artistic initiatives that would blend the urban and rural worlds through the promotion of touring companies performing in their mother tongue but with linguistic aide and expanding their touring zone outside the big urban centres. At a time when Europe seems for many to be a remote entity, Shakespeare and his blended tales of reinvented

---

<sup>29</sup> See the company's work at: <https://www.anticdisposition.co.uk/about.html>.

territories could be the perfect language for an artist-led diplomacy emphasising that Europe is not to be built as it is already here and has always been, it is to be perfected and the Shakespearean *lingua franca* should help.

An example of the way Shakespeare's plays can inspire a cultural internationalism that starts at home and creates a comprehensive culture is the summer festival named *Les Nuits Shakespeare* in Pamiers, a small town in the French department of Ariège. The latter is one of the poorest territories of rural France facing economic and socio-political challenges partly due to its enduring geographical isolation. Frédéric Lafond and Philippe Rahon who run the festival as part of Scènes de Pamiers, the local state-funded cultural mission, in collaboration with the local town hall and a syndicate of local cultural associations (Pamiers en scènes), launched this summer a new theatre-based cultural rendez-vous. It aims to energise local life but not in a venture that would be closed on itself, but would gather creative forces from the town and outside, articulating local and foreign stories and histories. In Rahon's words, what they want is a "festival that is popular not populist", and the key to this is collaborative endeavour that relies on a creative macaronism.<sup>30</sup>

Lafond invited Mala Noche, a theatre company from Franche Comté, to become a resident artist and to use local buildings such as the former Carmelite convent that had been closed to the public for decades and to create an interactive festival. Guillaume Dujardin, the director of Mala Noche, offered to work on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and sonnets in a mix of scaffold theatre for the play and a musical show for the sonnets paralleled with Shakespeare-themed theatre practice workshops and a ball. The point was to get the play as close to the audience as possible and to get the audience as close as possible to Shakespeare's

---

<sup>30</sup> Philippe Rahon, interview by the author, 6 September 2018.

drama. Dujardin's choice of Shakespeare made it easier as the Bard's plays already offer a template that mixes the local and the international, the high and low brow, concreteness and abstraction. Lafond and Dujardin were assisted by a violinist from the US who reinvented the French tradition of the three knocks to call the audience: he mixed the sound of Ariège-born world-renowned composer Gabriel Fauré's music, with the bell of the convent and the sound of the local factory press. This synchronic soundtrack to local history would call locals and transient visitors to hear in French the story of a Roman general and his Egyptian queen told by an English playwright.

By the Festival director's admittance, Shakespeare was chosen by Dujardin because of his own familiarity with his drama and as a way to put the festival on the map. However, very early in the creative process, Shakespeare's drama was approached as a familiar language that could speak of oneself and be used to speak to others. The successful attendance testified to this capacity of Shakespeare to be a *lingua franca* absorbed, modified and shared by all, it was definitely not the preserve of the urban few.

The positive effects of such endeavours as *Les Nuits Shakespeare* are felt locally in economic terms but not only, as testified by the manifold impact of a local festival such as The Oregon Shakespeare Festival.<sup>31</sup> It is measured in non-material terms: it brings self-confidence in one's own creative powers and raises the awareness of foreign influences as not being that foreign or threatening. Shakespeare's theatre is a creative language that brings diplomacy home or rather shows that international relations start at home.

---

<sup>31</sup> See the recent PBS article on the economic, social and educational impact of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/in-rural-oregon-community-theater-sparks-a-creative-revival>.

## Conclusion

Shakespeare is the best argument you could find to refute the accusation of Eurocentrism thrown at those who still defend the European project. Why? Simply because Shakespeare's theatre is not only a European language but a global language. It favours a European conversation not with itself but with the rest of the world. It is a linguistic and cultural transnational passport that looks at borders of the self as well as of national communities critically and invites us to look beyond.

Shakespeare does not pit Europe against the world, no more than he did pit England against the continent: he was too cognisant of European literature and arts to reject them and had a sense of a common yet not homogeneous culture. That is the diplomacy of Shakespeare or maybe what could be tagged as the Shakespearean doctrine: plays that create and testify to a citizen's European conscience in the sense of a shared yet not homogeneous culture. Shakespeare tells us that Europe is a constant, sometimes tense, but ultimately fruitful, conversation and negotiation between a variety of local concerns and an ineluctable appurtenance to a wider world. If Shakespeare could become a *lingua franca* for diplomats, why can't he be each European's local language in conversation with the world?