NEWS

A Shakespeare Roundup

In ET2 we drew attention to some of the recent adaptations, permutations and reverberations of Shakespeare around the world, from the highly acclaimed cartoon series of Oval Projects in London through Akira Kurosawa's powerful version of Macbeth and King Lear in Japan to the re-trial on television of Richard III on London Weekend Television. Since then, there has been little let-up:

• In late 1985 the word's press reverberated with the news that Gary Taylor, a young American scholar of Shakespeare working at the Bodleian Library in Oxford had – or might have – uncovered a forgotten lyric by the Bard of Avon that began:

Shall I die: Shall I fly Lovers' baits and deceits. sorrow breeding?

Time magazine (9 Dec 85) quoted one enthusiastic Harvard Professor as saying: 'Every relic counts. Shakespeare's work has ceased to be a literary consideration. It has become part of our culture, almost part of our ideology and religion'. Also quoted was a Columbia professor who was less impressed: 'It's quite clear to anybody who doesn't have a zinc ear that this is not a poem written by Shakespeare.'

Writing in the Sunday Times (15 Dec 85), Taylor himself observed of the poem: 'The stranger I encountered in the Bodleian has made the acquaintance of many readers; perversely, in one month probably more people have read that poem than will read the rest of Shakespeare's poetry in a year.'

• Meanwhile, in his In Search of Shakespeare: A Reconnaissance into the Poet's Life and Handwriting (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), Charles Hamilton has not only identified - or claimed to identify - a number of additional samples of the Bard's own handwriting, but also speculates that he might have been murdered - poisoned with arsenic in fact by his son-in-law Thomas Quiney, who feared that his wife was about to be disowned in her father's will. Hamilton detects signs of a failing mind (the result of the poison) in Shakespeare's will. where the playwright refers to 'my neece Elizabeth Hall' when mentioning his granddaughter. The reviewer Robert Giroux (International Herald Tribune, 28 Nov 85), however, notes caustically: 'The Oxford English Dictionary's first definition of "niece" could have saved Hamilton from making a blunder of his own: "A granddaughter . . . (common till 17th cent.)".'

• Things were, however, looking better by 25 June 86, at least according to a



report in *The Times* of London beginning, 'A winter's tale of litigation may draw to a close today with an out of court settlement allowing Shakespeare's Globe theatre to be rebuilt on its original site on London's South Bank.' The legal battle in question was triangular, among Southwark Coun-

cil, the Shakespeare Globe Trust, and Derno Estates, a property company.

The legal complexities of the issue over a 1981 agreement to provide land for the theatre at Greenmore Wharf, as part of a redevelopment scheme to be carried out by Derno, would have been worthy of one of the Bard's plots,' says Gavin Bell, Arts Correspondent. The dispute arose when an earlier Labour council that had favoured the project was replaced in 1982 by one which had local employment and housing as their priority. They declared the agreement void in 1984, because some of its conditions had not been properly fulfilled - particularly the re-location of a road sweepers' depot. The new understanding will evidently compensate Derno and provide the Trust with a 125-year lease on the site (opposite St Paul's Cathedral) at 'a peppercorn rent'.

Pravda in English

But only, so far, in that land of capitalism and free enterprise, the United States of America. The translated version of the Soviet Union's official daily – Pravda or 'Truth' – costs \$2 a copy in the Land of the Free, whereas in the USSR it is five kopecks, or about seven US cents. Its publisher is Charles Cox of St Paul, Minnesota, whose aim in producing his Pravda is indeed profit. However, he has no legal arrangement with the Soviets whatsoever.

'We keep at arm's length with them, and they do with us,' Cox told T R Reid of the Washington Post News Service (June 1986), who adds: 'Pravda has printed, with apparent approval, the news that Pravda is being published in English abroad.'

The Minnesota publisher works on a

simple principle. He has taken out a \$47.50 subscription to the original newspaper, and distributes parts of each day's Russian edition to a number of translators, then prints a synthesized English version that follows the layout of the mother medium. But there is therefore an inevitable delay between the Russian and English versions – something in the region of a one- or two-month time-lag. Subscriptions are \$630 per year for every American issue, or \$99.50 annually for one paper a week.

'I was a little worried about it,' confessed Nancy Dean, who manages a newsstand in Cheyenne, Wyoming. 'We had one complaint, from a guy who had just moved here from California. He said, "You sell papers from Moscow and you don't even carry the L[os] A[ngeles] Times?"

A tongue for tombstones?

In April this year the dissident Afrikaner poet Breyten Breytenbach went back to South Africa for a brief visit, in order to receive a major Afrikaans award for literature. The poet, who spent seven years in prison for reportedly plotting against the government, now lives in exile in Paris with his 'non-white' Vietnamese wife, Yolande Ngo Thi Hoang Lien – a marriage that also served in times past to make him something of an outcast in his own community.

At the presentation of the prize, 46-year-old Breytenbach read several of his poems about prison, solitary confinement and interrogation to an audience that included many prominent members of the Afrikaner establishment. In a report for *The Observer* of London, Allister Sparks wrote from Pretoria that 'the granting of the award reflects the love-hate relationship that Afrikaners have with Breytenbach, who uses beautiful Africaans poetry to lambast his people for their racism and oppression of blacks . . . Since his imprisonment he has said that he no longer regards himself as an Afrikaner, and that because of its association with oppression he believes Afrikaans has no future "except as a language for use on tombstones".'