

A Third Book?

David Crystal

For me, the Sam Wanamaker lecture will be a very special occasion, for he was the first actor I have any distinct memory of seeing. I cannot remember the role, but I can see him now on a Liverpool stage during the late 1950s - the pre-Everyman Playhouse, possibly - on what may have been my first-ever visit to classical theatre. Funny how some performances stick in your mind like that. The play's the thing? Sometimes, but the actor's the thing more often. And, in the case of the Globe, the place is the thing, too, for - if I mentally type Globe into my memory-banks and allow it a free search - the images which arise are all to do with the dynamic impact of the performance-in-situ.

The Globe has made me rethink all my theatrical values. It has brought home to me the real meaning of dramatic interactivity, demonstrating the creative power of the playgoer. My most vivid memories are those where that mysterious border between actor and audience is crossed. And it is language that usually provides the bridge. I had never realised that Caliban was the true hero of *The Tempest* until I heard us all, football-crowd-like, rooting for him. I had never achieved a full sense of the patriotic fervour implicit in *Henry V* until I heard us all, pantomime-like, shouting support for one side and against the other. I had never truly got inside Hamlet's head until I found myself placed on the spot, responding vocally to Mark Rylance's mental full-frontal question, 'Am I a coward?' Each regular Globegoer will have a personal picture-album of memories to match mine.

What has all this to do with my lecture? The message I pick up from Sam is: be ready to rethink. Don't take things for granted. Respect tradition, but dare to be critical. See things in context. That's several messages, I see - but they are all relevant to my choice of topic.

Well, I say 'my choice'. In fact, I have been given a brief by the heavy mob in Globe Education, who have chosen as the theme for the spring season, 'Shakespeare: the Kings's Man?' 'Would you' - my letter said - 'give a lecture about the two great books produced in James' reign and be able to bring together the 1611 Bible and the 1623 First Folio in one lecture?' Would I! Try stopping me. Because this is precisely the kind of orientation which allows me to address all these messages at once.

I am a linguist, so my topic will be the language of the two books. I will re-examine the old question of just how many words Shakespeare and the Bible used, reporting a fresh count carried out specially for the occasion. There are some surprises in store, because the totals are much smaller than people think. Shakespeare didn't have as much influence on the vocabulary of English as is often claimed.

But why bother counting vocabulary at all? Because people think of 'number of words' as a sign of an author's linguistic creativity. I need to nail that myth on the head too. That is not where creativity is bred. I know of no dramatist who was as linguistically original as Shakespeare - but you won't capture that brilliance by counting his words. I shall be looking elsewhere for that.

And there is more to King James's reign than these two books. Do you remember that scene in *The Third Man* when the title of the film is explained? A caretaker describes the accident which happened outside his flat, and tells Holly Martins (aka Joseph Cotton) that a mysterious 'third man' helped carry Harry Lime (aka Orson Welles) to the side of the road. We learn who that third man was later in the film. I did think of calling my lecture 'The Third Book', for, when we are talking about the influence of the King James period on the future of the English language, there was another book which out-influenced both the Folio and the Bible. I use the title now instead.

If you come to the lecture, you will discover what this book was. If you don't - and haven't guessed in the meantime - all will be revealed in the next issue of *CueSheet*.