

Remembering Jurek, Manfred Pfister, Freie Universität Berlin

“A fellow of infinite jest and wit“: I have known Jurek as long as Hamlet had known Yorick. Indeed, I first met Jerzy Limon so long ago that I don't remember the year, only the place of the occasion: a British Council seminar at Cambridge. It must have been in the late 1980, because then I knew already his name as the author of a book which changed quite literally our mental and cultural map: His dissertation – normally not a genre of writing to make a big splash with – his *Gentlemen of a Company. English Players in Central and Eastern Europe*, had just been published by Cambridge University Press and had re-drawn for all Shakespeareans in painstaking archival work the Baltic routes of the *Englische Komödianten* across Europe, relocating them further East, along the Baltic coast, with his own hometown Gdańsk as a nodal point. This discovery was to have a lasting impact on his career, as he soon moved from archival reconstruction to archeological digging and from that to actually re-building Shakespeare's theatre in Gdańsk and to stage live performances in it, engaging for all this with indefatigable persuasion the support of the city magistrates of Gdansk and the *województwo* of Pomerania, the Polish government and the European Union – not to mention His Royal Highness, Prince Charles. My first encounter with his bright intelligence, personal charm and catching enthusiasm for our scholarly pursuits was already a revelation to me and made me follow his further development from theatre historian and theorist of theatre and drama to man of the theatre with bated breath. And that not only from afar, through his articles and books, but in the growing intimacy of friendship. He was my first Polish friend ever and he deepened not only my understanding of the role of Shakespeare in his culture but unravelled for me the traumatic complexities of German-Polish relations with a tinge of Middle-European melancholy. Having no Polish, alas, I never managed to read his literary writings, which, I understand, revolve round the multi-layered and plurilingual culture of Gdańsk.

Jurek was a great organizer and as such he managed to invent ever new occasions in Gdansk and Berlin to share our passion for the theatre, the last time in spring 2018 at the Berlin Deutsche Theater to view and consider Karen Henkel's Shakespearean *Rom* for a possible guest performance at the Gdańsk Globe. And before that I had spent a quarter of a year at his invitation in Gdańsk, teaching at the university there

and searching on his suggestion in the Pomeranian Library for Anglo-Italian traces of Shakespeare, spending much of our free time with his lovely family and – the absolute climax of our spring there! – attending at the splendid opening night of the Gdańsk Globe. This treasure of a theatre, together with his writings, will remain a lasting monument, perhaps even more so than his Festschrift *This Treasure of Theatre*, beautifully produced by his friends, students and colleagues for his seventieth birthday in 2020. To be one of its contributors is a great honour to me, though one over-shadowed now by sadness for our loss.

And here is my last farewell to him, Catullus' *Carmen CI*, translated by Aubrey Beardsley into English and retranslated from there by me into German for Jurek as a tribute of one to another translator, „il miglior fabbro”:



By ways remote and distant waters sped,
Brother, to thy sad grave-side am I come,
That I may give the last gifts to the dead,
And vainly parley with thine ashes dumb:

Since she who now bestows and now denies
Hath taken thee, hapless brother, from mine eyes.
But lo! these gifts, the heirlooms of past years,
Are made sad things to grace thy coffin shell,
Take them, all drenchèd with a brother's tears,
And, brother, for all time, hail and farewell!

Auf Wegen weit und über ferne Wogen
Komm, Bruder, ich zu Deinem düstern Grab,
Zum letzten Wort an Dich, den stummen Toten:
Deiner Asche vergeblich letzte Liebesgab'.
Denn die Macht, die schenkt und nimmt zurück,
Hat Dich, armes Bruderherz, entzogen meinem Blick.
Doch ach, die Gaben, Erbschaft alter Zeit,
Und als zu karger Grabschmuck kaum geschätzt:
Nimm sie doch hin, von Bruders Trän' geweiht.
Gruß Dir nun, Bruder, und leb wohl zuletzt!

Manfred