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Abiturprüfung 2011

Englisch, Grundkurs

Aufgabenstellung:

1. Outline Bassnett's view that *Shakespeare's in danger*. Consider the reasons she gives for her judgement and the solutions she suggests. (*Comprehension*) (16 Punkte)
2. Analyse the way Susan Bassnett tries to convince her readers of her opinion. Consider structure, use of language and rhetorical devices. (*Analysis*) (24 Punkte)
3. Choose one of the following tasks:
 - 3.1 In her article Susan Bassnett asks: "*Why are we still so obsessed with Shakespeare that we insist on boring teenagers out of their minds with plays in a language they find foreign?*" (ll. 18 – 20). With reference to your own experience with Shakespeare, comment on the author's view of Shakespeare's relevance today and her argument that his language needs to be modernized for a young audience.
(*Evaluation: comment*) (20 Punkte)
 - 3.2 One of Bassnett's students who firmly believes that Shakespeare should be read and performed in the original reads her article. She goes to Bassnett's office to have a discussion with her. Write the dialogue.
(*Evaluation: re-creation of text*) (20 Punkte)

Materialgrundlage:

- Ausgangstext: Sach- und Gebrauchstext (Kommentar der internationalen Presse)
Fundstelle: Susan Bassnett, *Shakespeare's in danger. We have to act now to avoid a great tragedy*, in: *The Independent*, 14 November 2001 (Auszug)
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/shakespeares-in-danger-we-have-to-act-now-to-avoid-a-great-tragedy-616966.html> (30.05.2010)

Wortzahl: 589

Zugelassene Hilfsmittel:

- Ein- und zweisprachiges Wörterbuch



Name: _____

Susan Bassnett

Shakespeare's in danger. We have to act now to avoid a great tragedy

The Independent, 14 November 2001

The other day I took my family to see one of my favourite Shakespeare plays. You'll love it, I told them. Nearly three hours later we tottered out into the night. Desperate to find something kind to say (there were friends involved), we praised one actor's Jim Carrey imitations and the flashing TV screens all over the postmodern set. And a costume made
5 out of CDs that flashed like disco lights. And one character's use of a mobile phone. The rest was silence.

An American friend walked out of a Globe production recently, claiming that it was insulting her child's intelligence. That sums up the problem of so many contemporary productions; much of the Shakespeare we see now is unintelligent. The actors can't
10 understand the words and compensate with silly antics. If the protagonist of the play I saw had lain down and kicked his legs in the air one more time I would have thrown a shoe at him. Directors, unable themselves, I suspect, to understand the text, resort to gimmicks, hiring designers to make the production more "relevant" or "meaningful". Nobody seems to have much idea how to pace a production. When in doubt, they insert a dance or a
15 procession. Boredom and Shakespeare go increasingly hand in hand.

At some point during the interminable evening, I found myself thinking the unthinkable: why bother with Shakespeare today? Why not relegate him to the dusty shelves along with Chaucer and the dozens of other Great Unreads in the literary canon? Why are we still so obsessed with Shakespeare that we insist on boring teenagers out of their minds with plays
20 in a language they find foreign? Isn't it time to rethink our relationship with the Bard?

Now, I am not advocating the silly, elitist idea that Shakespeare is so irrelevant to today that students should study the cultural significance of Hollyoaks instead. I believe there is such a thing as great literature, and it is important that every generation should have access to it. I've always been a believer in the importance of Shakespeare for everyone, because
25 not only did he create some of the most wonderful characters ever to grace a stage, but his language is truly marvellous. Listening even to the mangling of that language the other night, I found the familiar words flooding back into my mind, in much the way that people of my generation have the King James Bible lurking somewhere behind the modern English



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versions. But my children don't have that language in their heads. All a bad production will
30 do is deter them from going back to Shakespeare in the future.

The problem with Shakespeare today is linguistic. The language has become obsolete,
Shakespeare's jokes are meaningless, his witticisms miss their target. It isn't the actors'
fault: all they can do is struggle to make sense of a language that might as well be Tibetan.
Directors compensate with devices that are supposed to facilitate understanding, and the
35 whole enterprise falls apart, because the essence of Shakespeare is language.

[...]

What we need are good English translators to take Shakespeare in hand and liberate him for
a new generation. [...] What we need are two versions of Shakespeare's plays: the original
written version for anyone with specialist knowledge of Renaissance English; and the
40 performance version, in good modern English. Shakespeare would doubtless be grateful.
What writers want to feel that audiences can't understand their jokes? Please, someone out
there, commission a good English translation of Shakespeare and save the Bard from
extinction.

*The writer is Professor in the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies at
the University of Warwick*

Annotations:

3 Jim Carrey Canadian-American actor, best known for his performances in comedies –
5 f. The rest was silence Hamlet's last words in Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet* –
14 pace a production *here* provide a performance with dramatic rhythm and variety –
18 Chaucer Geoffrey Chaucer (1340 – 1400); English writer, author of the *Canterbury Tales* –
20 Bard a professional poet in medieval Britain, employed by a patron. Shakespeare is often
referred to as "the Bard" (also cf. l. 42) – **22 Hollyoaks** a long-running TV soap opera of the late
1990s centring round teenage students at a fictitious college – **28 King James Bible** English
translation of the Bible dating from Shakespeare's time