

## The Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon

On Tuesday 29 November 2022 the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon held its 950<sup>th</sup> meeting, welcoming its current President, the distinguished actor Dame Harriet Walter in conversation with Professor Carol Rutter. The two have known each other for many years: Walter was one of the *Clamorous Voices* who featured in Rutter's book of the same name about women performing Shakespeare published in 1988. The meeting was chaired by Susan Brock.

Harriet Walter's career has been extremely varied, and unconventional. Many who are familiar with her playing aristocratic or genteel roles might have been surprised to hear that she began her career with the fringe Joint Stock Theatre Company. Politics, especially feminism, has been a strong element in the work she has chosen.

Her first Shakespeare was Ophelia in *Hamlet* with Jonathan Pryce at the Royal Court, and her most recent Shakespeare work has been the trilogy of parts she played with Phyllida Lloyd and her all-female company in London when Walter played Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Henry IV, and Prospero in *The Tempest* between 2012 and 2016. This experience has led her to conclude that when attempting to redress the gender balance in Shakespeare, all-female stagings are more successful than merely casting some male roles as female.

Walter has played most of Shakespeare's female leads for the RSC including Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*, Viola in *Twelfth Night* and most recently Cleopatra. In 1999 she was offered the part of Lady Macbeth by director Gregory Doran, to play opposite Antony Sher. After at first dismissing the role as rather small, she took it after being assured that Sher's Macbeth would *need* his lady. She felt that the production changed Sher's acting style for the better and led to further collaboration between them in 2015 when they performed *The Death of a Salesman*. Harriet Walter answered many questions from the appreciative audience, the largest turnout of members and visitors since the start of the pandemic.