

The Hamlet Zone

The Hamlet Zone:
Reworking *Hamlet* for European Cultures

Edited by

Ruth J. Owen

With an Afterword by

Ton Hoenselaars

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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Ruth J. Owen
Cardiff, 2011

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All translations into English are by the authors of the chapters or by the editor, unless otherwise noted. Quotations from published translations have been used where possible, but most of the primary works discussed in this book remain unpublished in English and are therefore quoted here in the original language and accompanied by a translation made for the book. For literary texts, please note that these translations are cribs designed to function in the context of a particular chapter and its arguments. In the case of non-literary texts, only an English equivalent is given.

The editions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* referred to in this book include bilingual editions and translations used for the various productions under discussion. Where no specific play text is relevant as the subject of enquiry, the Arden Shakespeare *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* ed. Harold Jenkins, 1982 edition has been used for quotations. Back-translations of Shakespeare translations also draw on this play text where the point is to identify direct borrowings. Where the point is to identify departures or special features of the non-English edition under discussion, an English rendering is offered that more closely tracks the wording in the edition cited.

INTRODUCTION

THE HAMLET ZONE

RUTH J. OWEN

Hamlet has been a common currency across linguistic and cultural borders for four hundred years. No other English-language play has been the subject of such lasting fascination and appropriation among Europeans. No other translated play has had such a prominent role in the formation of national theatres and national identities in Europe, nor been used there so often to denounce political complacency and oppression. For European cultures, Shakespeare has become “a natural constant [...] like the number pi”, according to one of Germany’s greatest living poets, Durs Grünbein (134). And *Hamlet* occupies the place at the very centre of that long-standing pre-occupation.

As this book exposes, *Hamlet*’s place has been secured only in and through translation in its fullest sense. Introducing a special section of the 2008 *Shakespearean International Yearbook* called “European Shakespeares”, Ton Hoenselaars and Clara Calvo refer to the “vital traditions [...] where Shakespeare has been roaming ‘without his language’ ” (7). A wide range of those vital traditions is examined in this book. Detached from Shakespeare’s English, *Hamlet* has been rewritten numerous times in European languages, the various translations into any one language jostling with each other for dominance and spawning new Hamlets that depart decisively from Shakespeare as a source. For this reason, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is present in the chapters of this book – yet simultaneously absent. For the enquiries here focus not on that play itself, but on its offspring: a cross-section from the rich tradition of drawing from *Hamlet* in European cultures to produce new, independent works, which include Hamlet theatre, Hamlet ballet, Hamlet poetry, Hamlet fiction, Hamlet essays and Hamlet films.

This book’s origin lies in the conference *Hamlet Reception in European Cultures* held at Cardiff University, in the UK, in 2009. The aim of the conference was to examine a varied selection of the other Hamlets

made in Europe after Shakespeare's, originating in the full spectrum of European languages and in East and West and Central European cultures. Hence the works discussed here were written in a wide variety of Europe's languages: from Portuguese, Hungarian, and German, to Spanish, English, and Swedish. The new Hamlet works look back to their pasts in those traditions, imitating, modifying, questioning, rejecting them. At the same time, they reflect and energetically respond to the cultural situations that constitute their present. They answer back to the previous instrumentalizing of *Hamlet* on the continent, updating what Jonathan Kalb identifies as an "Eastern European tendency (seen in writers from Witkiewicz to Kohout and Havel) to use Hamlet as a symbol for the modern intellectual's prevarications, hesitations, and rationalizations in the face of tyranny and terror" (109) or what Boika Sokolova declares *Hamlet* to be: "an instrument of self-analysis across Europe, representing national concerns – be they German, Russian, Polish or others – at moments of crisis" (Sokolova 2001, 101-2). The Hamlets of Europe have developed their own referential and semantic universes, such that new meanings have emerged from the re-encounters between Shakespeare and the linguistically diverse cultures of Europe. For this reason, the enquiries in this volume together make the case for regarding Europe as *the Hamlet zone*.

The first two chapters of the book consider individual performances in the light of networks of performances that borrow and quote from one another. Francesca Rayner focuses on two stagings of *Hamlet* at the same Portuguese theatre, in order to argue for their essential relationship being one of supplementarity. Her analysis highlights the way that *Hamlet* performance has taken on the issue of theatrical misogyny. By reading the two performances alongside and against one another, this chapter demonstrates the absences revealed by "supplementing" *Hamlet*. The second chapter of the book then discusses a ballet made for television that supplements in a different sense. By examining its situation at the break-up of the Soviet Union, its situation in the tradition of Russian Hamletism and in the Soviet tradition of ballet, Nancy Isenberg teases out the political significance of the performance. Through a close examination of choreography, costume and set, her enquiry understands the Hamlet ballet as contributing to the story of a community. The book's third chapter develops this idea, arguing for *Hamlet's* role in national-cultural identity formation from a complementary angle of vision. By elucidating the case of Hungarian Hamlet poetry, Márta Minier reveals *Hamlet* to be a "text of identity". She separates out two strands – a patriotic tendency and a poetological tendency – in her corpus, exposing the range and texture of Hamlet poetry from Hungarian cultures.

The fourth chapter compares three *Hamlet* reworkings written in exile from Spain in the 1940s. Helena Buffery uses the Derridean spectre to frame an analysis of the Hamlet figure as the Spanish intellectual. Like the previous embedding of Hungarian poems in a tradition of translation and adaptation, where Hamlet is a figure of the poet, this chapter's Spanish texts are illuminated by the network of Hamlets that precede and accompany them. Hamlet emerges as a spectator figure struggling with the experience of exile. The fifth chapter takes the Derridean spectre of Hamlet into the philosophical sphere by examining the reception of *Hamlet* by the German intellectual Walter Benjamin. Joshua Billings' analysis of his essay from 1928 concerning German tragic drama reveals the importance of Hamlet to philosophical criticism. Hamlet as a philosophical thinker is shown to develop out of, and ultimately beyond, the tradition of reading *Hamlet* as the tragedy of an individual whose outlook makes him unsuited to the world. The chapter argues that Benjamin's interpretative practice reveals a Hamlet expressing the dialectic of melancholy, in both its mournful and its playful aspects. It finds Benjamin's Hamlet finally a spectator of his own life as a play.

The sixth chapter in this book concerns site-specific theatrical production and the dialectical relationship between locality and authority. Alexander C. Y. Huang examines a *Hamlet*-inspired performance in Elsinore, under the director Ong Keng Sen. The chapter exposes the way that performance site reworks the fictional, focusing on the dynamics between the production's geographical location and its cultural location. The Hamlet performance custom-made for Kronborg eliminated the role of Hamlet, reconfigured localities and used a multinational cast to articulate a vision defined here as one of rooted cosmopolitanism. The seventh chapter comes to the idea of the performance site reworking the fictional by focusing on an online reworking of *Hamlet*. Conny Loder interprets a twenty-first-century German project as siting *Hamlet* in a virtual space. The chapter describes the multimedia project *hamlet_X* as a fragmenting of the Hamlet myth and particularly draws attention to its engagement with contemporary concerns about surveillance.

Two chapters then examine the role of *Hamlet* behind Europe's Iron Curtain, under conditions of censorship and restrictions on expression. The eighth chapter evokes an oppressive East-European culture in the first two decades after World War II and the uses and abuses of Hamlet texts in that context. Nicoleta Cinpoș elaborates on the political significance of *Hamlet* translations and the ideologically loaded paratexts that accompanied them in Romania under communism. The ninth chapter examines a Hamlet reworking made under East-European censorship in

the late 1970s and used to address the legacy of a failed revolution in Hungary. Veronika Schandl reveals the political significance of Géza Bereményi's play *Halmi* and its thematization of the clash between generations. Her analysis contextualizes the play in terms of experiences of exile and inner emigration, drawing on song lyrics by the playwright to illuminate how the play entered into live debates over Hungarian history, despite the taboos.

Three chapters examine aspects of *Hamlet* appropriation in European theatre history, by focusing on actor-directors, on casting and on scripts, respectively. The tenth chapter conceives of Shakesperean Hamlets in German performances as Janus-faced figures, looking back to traditions behind them as well as forwards to their own time. Peter W. Marx uses historical theatre reviews from archival sources to trace the impact of Hamlets created for the stage in successive politicized German cultures: in the Weimar Republic, in early Nazi Germany, and in three post-war decades of the Federal Republic. By looking at the reception of the Hamlets created in these eras by two outstanding actor-directors, Fritz Kortner and Gustaf Gründgens, this chapter shows how Hamlet performance bends to the cultural concerns of the time. The eleventh chapter examines a Swedish Hamlet play from 2006 that recasts the main characters as Muslim immigrants. Ishrat Lindblad's account of *Mohamlet* captures features both of the unpublished script and of the first performances, in order to extend our understanding of contemporary theatre's means to address the issue of European immigration. The twelfth chapter examines four related Spanish Hamlet plays made as translations between 1772 and 1825, not from Shakespeare's English but from the French by Jean-François Ducis. In a comparative approach, informed by theatre history, Keith Gregor compares the Spanish texts to each other and to their common French source, highlighting use of key additions to make plays suited to the neoclassical theatre of the day. The chapter exposes how inappropriate the concept of staging authentic Shakespeare is as applied to Europe of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how the conceptual continuum between translations and adaptations prompts a fruitful revisiting of previously sidelined Hamlet plays.

The thirteenth chapter revisits a German Hamlet narrative not so much sidelined as miscategorized. Gijsbert Pols argues that the use of radical quotation in Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf's *Papa Hamlet* has been obscured by the authors' association with Naturalism. His analysis culminates in an understanding of how Hamlet's voice, coming loose from the German translation of Shakespeare's play, can raise awareness of the way human reality is constructed by language. The fourteenth chapter

focuses on Ophelia as a culturally mobile figure recurring in German-language cultures. Ruth J. Owen construes the death of Ophelia as a crucial gap that allows Ophelia to come loose from *Hamlet* and be incorporated into, for instance, German crime narratives. By examining a set of Ophelia poems in German, it highlights the interactions between literary and visual culture, creating networks of image patterns. This enquiry finds that to open the channels between and through cultures requires female death and a body in the water.

After the chapter focusing on Ophelia reworkings, the following chapters take up further individual figures from *Hamlet*. The fifteenth chapter explores a play that quotes verbatim from *Hamlet*, albeit to a lesser extent than *Papa Hamlet*. Holger Südkamp uses the subgenre of biographical drama to explain the relationship between *Hamlet* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* of 1966. He argues that Stoppard takes the Hamlet myth as a source of biographical data, in order to create metadramatic and metabiographical reflection. The sixteenth chapter compares the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the ghost in a 1985 novel by Christoph Hein, in order to examine memory and disturbance. Robert Blankenship draws on theories of spectrality in exploring the command to remember. The chapter shows how a novel making no claim to be *Hamlet*-inspired can be illuminated by its ghost's intertextual relationship to Shakespeare's play.

Having travelled outwards from Stratford, so to speak, across the farthest reaches of the Hamlet zone, even to a German novel in which the *Hamlet* intertext is unmarked, this book closes with an afterword that takes us back to Shakespeare's play. It is a return informed by our excursions into many cultural corners of the Hamlet zone – from plays in Portuguese, to Russian ballet, to Hungarian poetry, Spanish exile writing, German philosophical criticism and more. Having exposed the reworking of *Hamlet* as a preoccupation across the cultures of Europe, how do we reconceive Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? Ton Hoenselaars' afterword posits *Hamlet* as an infinite space, in which to dissect and construct concepts of Europe. It finds that the play Shakespeare penned is steeped in European geography, history, culture and religion. In turn, the reworking of *Hamlet*, as the chapters of this book demonstrate, reinvigorates the Hamlet myth by bending it to specific geo-political and cultural locations. In the process of translation, adaptation and reinventing, *Hamlet* has become the common cultural currency of Europe.

Figure 1: Ophelia (Lígia Roque) as ghostly bride in *Hamlet* at the Teatro Nacional São João in 2002. Photograph by João Tuna.



Figure 2: Gertrude (Luísa Cruz) mourns the death of Ophelia in front of a video screen showing Hamlet and Ophelia, in *One Hamlet too Many* at the Teatro Nacional São João in 2003/4. Photograph by João Tuna.



CHAPTER ONE

PERFORMANCE AS IRONIC SUPPLEMENT: PORTUGUESE *HAMLET* AND *ONE HAMLET TOO MANY*

FRANCESCA RAYNER

In his 1985 essay “Theatrical Performance: Illustration, Translation, Fulfilment or Supplement?”, Marvin Carlson discusses various approaches to the relationship between dramatic text and performance. The first three terms he sees as privileging either text over performance or performance over text. However, the notion of performance as supplement, based on Jacques Derrida’s reading of the supplement as both adding to but at the same time revealing an absence, seems to Carlson to create a dynamic, dialectical relationship between text and performance. As he argues,

a play on stage will inevitably display material lacking in the written text quite likely not apparent as lacking until the performance takes place but then revealed as significant and necessary. At the same time, the performance, by revealing this lack, reveals also a potentially infinite series of future performances providing further supplementation. (Carlson 10)

To what extent might this notion of performance as supplement be useful not only in analysing the relationship between text and performance but also between performances? After all, it is a critical commonplace that audiences and reviewers tend to read a given performance in the light of previous performances of the play. Performances consciously or inadvertently borrow from and cite each other across different historical periods and geographical contexts. An approach to performance which is more properly interperformative has the advantage of introducing a comparative methodology into performance studies, which more often considers individual performances in isolation rather than as part of networks of performances of the plays. It also suggests that any performance of a play is inevitably supplementary, introducing elements

which may not have formed part of previous performances but as such also pointing to the inevitability of future performances, which will illustrate its own gaps and limitations.

In this paper, I have chosen to focus on two Portuguese performances of *Hamlet* which seem to deliberately flaunt their supplementarity. In 2002, Portugal's second national theatre, the Teatro Nacional São João in Porto, produced a rather conventional and disappointing *Hamlet*. Just over a year later, in 2003/4, the same theatre and several of the same performers produced an innovative, experimental version of the same play somewhat cheekily called *Um Hamlet a Mais* [One Hamlet too many]. This promotes an immediate sense of excess and unnecessary supplement, of not following the acceptable path for national theatres of producing the play at regular intervals. Why did the theatre feel the need to perform *Hamlet* twice in such rapid succession? How might the two performances be interrelated?

Histories of Hamlet in Portugal

The translation used for both the *Hamlet* productions under discussion was made by the academic António M. Feijó. In order to contextualize what might at first glance seem a bizarre scenario of repeat performance, it is useful to look historically at the reception of *Hamlet* in Portugal and in particular its sporadic performance history by national theatres.¹ Indeed, it is difficult to speak of a sustained theatrical appropriation of *Hamlet* in Portugal. Perhaps more accurately, we could speak of particular moments when the play has come to prominence and particular local contexts for its performance.² Apart from a flurry of interest around the time of the installation of the Republic in 1910, twentieth-century performances are notable for their absence. Crucially, after 1916, there was no performance of the play by a national theatre until 2002.

From the 1970s to the end of the millennium, the play was performed mainly by visiting foreign companies, university groups in Coimbra and Lisbon, and amateur local companies. However, this initial semblance of neglect needs to be nuanced. There were some significant performances of the play outside national theatres, such as the 1987 performance by the Artistic Service of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (ACARTE), which brought together practitioners from the national theatre and the Experimental Theatre of Cascais (TEC) in a cycle dedicated to the play. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was also a series of performances that took *Hamlet* as a starting point even if they did not perform the play itself. There were four different performances of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine*

[Hamletmachine] and Paul Rudrick's *I Hate Hamlet* was staged by Portugal's main national theatre in its studio space in 1996. Often, excerpts of the play were included in performance pieces designed to introduce audiences to Shakespeare, particularly in university productions, and it is important to stress that even if the play was not regularly performed, it was certainly the subject of many essays by literary and theatrical critics (see Serôdio and Rebelo, as examples) and was translated by important figures in the Portuguese cultural milieu, such the poet Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen. Moreover, in a context of limited financial resources, several experimental pieces were performed in the 1990s with small casts and a concentration on particular characters or incidents from the play. An interesting example of this trend is three separate performances towards the end of the 1990s and in the early years of the new millennium created around the figure of Ophelia. In 2002, for instance, *Hamlet e Ofélia* drew a parallel between the Shakespearean character and Ofélia Queirós, the girlfriend of Portugal's equally unable to deliver modernist poet, Fernando Pessoa. There was a strong multidisciplinary focus to these experimental pieces, blending dance, theatre and music and making use of new technologies such as video. To appropriate the title of Andy Lavender's book on avantgarde performances of the play therefore, the history of twentieth-century *Hamlet* in Portugal might be characterized as one of *Hamlet in Pieces*, in the sense that it was often adapted or fragmented rather than performed in its entirety, although this should not lead to a conclusion that the play was absent from Portuguese cultural history.

The early years of the new millennium represent an extended moment for *Hamlet* performance in Portugal. In purely quantitative terms, there were more performances of the play in the seven opening years of the new millennium than in the final three decades of the last millennium put together. Additionally, the period witnessed a more diversified reception of the play, where performance in national theatres ranked alongside performances by touring companies, university theatre groups and municipal theatres. A more pro-active socialist government and Ministry of Culture contributed greatly towards such momentum. Understandably perhaps, given the dearth of earlier twentieth-century performances of the play on national stages and seeking to take advantage of a window of opportunity in political and financial terms, when the São João performed *Hamlet* it did so twice within the space of two years, as if to a certain extent to make up for the absence of a performance tradition in national theatres and to take advantage of the money while it was there. Equally understandably, given that we can more accurately speak in terms of

various localized traditions of performing the play rather than a single national tradition, while their 2002 *Hamlet* was a very canonical reading of the play, a sort of *Hamlet* for posterity, its 2003/4 sequel *One Hamlet too Many* was an avowedly postmodernist performance, building on experimental, transdisciplinary approaches at the end of the twentieth century which foregrounded roles for women. In the rest of this chapter, I will therefore concentrate on relations of supplementarity between the two performances, with a particular focus on questions of gender.

From Hamlet to One Hamlet too Many

The sporadic performance history of *Hamlet* in Portuguese national theatres meant that the São João had to negotiate a significant faultline when it came to perform the play, that between an elite and a wider audience. While the former were more likely to have seen at least a version of the play performed in Portugal or abroad or to have read the text at university, unless the latter had had access to a performance by a local amateur group or had read the text in translation themselves, they may well have been quite unfamiliar with the play. Crucially, while an elite audience might be more receptive to an innovative reading of the play which defamiliarized the text, there was also a wider audience for the play seeking familiarity with the textual narrative in what they took to be its entirety. Although not conceived in this way, it is tempting to see *Hamlet* and *One Hamlet too Many* as separate responses to these differing audiences.

The first *Hamlet* was very much pitched towards those who had little or no prior knowledge of the play. Marketing of the performances concentrated on almost pedagogical interviews with the director, Ricardo Pais, or with the glamorous television star who played the main role, João Reis. Critical material that appeared in newspapers did little more than provide a synopsis of the plot even after the performance run had begun. Such an approach seems to have paid off with audiences across Portugal, who were more able to see the play because of the theatre's strategy of co-production with other theatres. Performances were sold out well in advance in Porto, Viseu and Lisbon and 9,000 people had already seen the play by the time it reached Lisbon. In an enthusiastic comment on the early performances in a local theatre in Viseu, Ricardo Pais noted "I had an audience from all social classes, from the cleaner and the taxi driver to doctors and lawyers. It wasn't the usual middle class public that attends Portuguese theatre".³ He also admitted, however, that he had been unsure how this audience would react to the performances because of the

simplicity of the staging. Pais' comments indicate an understanding of theatre performance for this audience as both a social and pedagogical event, but also awareness that the initial reaction of an audience more familiar with television, film or the Internet to an almost empty stage might be one of disappointment rather than appreciation.

This performance context contrasted sharply with that of *One Hamlet too Many*. References in the press to the set, an onstage white box formed by four transparent panels, drew parallels with the artwork of Francis Bacon. Electronic music composed specifically for the performances replaced the songs by Richard Strauss in the first production. Actors became performers, interacting with the production's omnipresent sound and visual technologies. Effectively, the two productions embody a move from theatre to performance, defined by Elin Diamond as a shift "from authority to effect, from text to body, to the spectator's freedom to make and transform meanings" (68).

The critic Miguel-Pedro Quadro, writing in the *Jornal de Notícias*, echoed several others in seeing the second production as Pais' definitive version of the play, contrasting the "canonical" first reading, with the "utopian" second run (43). Eduardo Prado Coelho, writing in the newspaper *O Público* under the title "*Hamlet* – second reading" noted that the first *Hamlet* had been "disappointing because it started from a classical format and merely introduced a few touches of modernity" (5). He liked the second production better and noted that Pais was "more successful with projects such as these than with restoring classical authors to their original purity" (5). Yet Prado Coelho conceded that *One Hamlet too Many* might not be easy to follow for those not familiar with the play because it staged a reduced version of the text. The director himself seemed to enjoy the second performance more, although he emphasized its continuities with the first. He explained in an interview that this second *Hamlet* play,

was only made possible by what we did in 2002, in which we investigated all possible angles of a traditional interpretation of the work. And, because we were already comfortable within it, we embarked on others, which are probably more our own thoughts, our concerns, our own psychoanalysis, our delight and pleasure in making theatre. (Tomás 12)

Misogyny in performance

In the closet scene with Gertrude, played by Emília Silvestre, in the first *Hamlet*, the actor and actress struggled with each other on a large, blue poof, a potent theatrical metaphor for Hamlet's paranoid vision of being

swamped by the maternal. Yet apart from this sequence, gender politics were barely noticeable in the performances. In *One Hamlet too Many*, on the other hand, gender politics and misogyny in particular were upgraded into one of the central themes. Pais commented in interview,

My concern was to construct the performance around two themes which are in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The first of these is misogyny and its victims, Hamlet's mother and Polonius' daughter. The other theme is war, which takes place far from the court but remains in the background, introducing itself into the atmosphere of the court and creating permanent tension. (Pais)

The fact that the women are seen only in their relation to male characters here is worth noting. In another interview, Pais cast the thematic net even wider, identifying as the production's concerns "misogyny, war as a game of castration, the contamination of politics by crime, and corruption as a lack of personal responsibility" (Ferreira 4).

There was an extensive social and media debate in Portugal around this time about the status of women, centred around new measures on domestic violence in particular, but also the changing structure of the family and abortion.⁴ In opposition to traditional Church-based teachings, more progressive opinion emphasized the need for women to take active control of their lives and for men to disengage themselves from patriarchal stereotypes. Therefore, it is tempting to see such statements from the director merely as adroit marketing of the performances to an educated, middle-class, mainly female target audience that the theatre was working hard to secure. It might seem to be another example of directors sexing up their performances by yoking together topical concerns with misogyny and war. There is certainly an element of this, but it is also true that if *Hamlet* tended to reproduce the play's gendered blind spots, *One Hamlet too Many* seemed to look back critically on this absence and was much more aware of the ways in which such repetition leads to the reinforcement of a gender-biased theatrical tradition of performance of the play.

An important first question to ask is what the performance understood by misogyny and here I would like to invoke Burkman and Roof's definition of theatrical misogyny as "the register of the woman's dramatic othering" (12), which suggests a view of misogyny as the repeated and enforced citation of woman as onstage other. Theatrically, it is a useful definition for investigating the gendering of words, spaces and bodies in performance and comes close to the understanding of misogyny in *One Hamlet too Many*. However, it also raises a specifically performative question, in other words, how do you illustrate the processes by which a