

Book Review

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Hamlet Translations: Prisms of Cultural Encounters across the Globe. Márta Minier and Lily Kahn, eds. Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Assn; Legenda, 2021. 264 pp. \$115 (cloth). ISBN 978-1-781889-23-7; ISBN 978-1-781889-24-4; ISBN 978-1-781889-25-1.

This collection brings together an impressive range of case studies from among the “communities of receivers” (2) of Shakespeare’s Danish tragedy, demonstrating what its editors, Márta Minier and Lily Kahn, describe as the prismatic nature of *Hamlet*’s international circulation—not merely imposition or appropriation, but refraction in which the receiving culture and the text received combine to change one another. Across the fifteen essays by a host of international scholars, we see *Hamlet* as a “text of identity” (3), an endlessly transforming and transformative cultural agent that facilitates the telling of stories other than its own. The volume will be of interest for students of translation studies, global Shakespeare, reception history, and adaptation, opening new approaches to previously neglected histories in the afterlife of Shakespeare’s most iconic play.

The book opens with a trio of chapters, each surveying the translation history of *Hamlet* in particular national contexts. Martin S. Regal explores the Icelandic *Hamlet* in relation to the wider phenomenon of Scandinavian Shakespeare, as well as the main differences between the two Icelandic translations of 1878 and 1970. This serves to inaugurate themes that will continue throughout the volume: the relative importance of sense, meter, lyrical flourish, accessibility, suitability for performance, and language differences. Marcia A. P. Martins provides a remarkable history of Brazilian *Hamlets*, situating each instantiation in changing political and aesthetic contexts, one of the volume’s best answers to the question, “Why retranslate?” Roger Owen’s chapter on the three Welsh *Hamlets* shows the changing status of Welsh in relation to English over a century and a half, as Shakespeare is interiorized in different successive ways: as a means of proving the viability of Welsh, as an instrument in the demonstration of the superior antiquity of Welsh, and as a problematic representative of British imperial culture.

A series of chapters then focuses on a few individual translations. Helena Agarez Medeiros takes us through an 1877 Portuguese *Hamlet* translated by King Luís I, who tried to forestall any comparisons between Denmark’s rotten state and his own. Nely Keinänen details the role of Paavo Cajander’s 1879 *Hamlet* in the process of Finnish nation-building and the elevation of Finnish to a literary language. In these chapters we see how

Shakespeare and his tragedy have become symbols not only of English but of European identity, with nations like Finland using Shakespeare translation as a path to continental belonging. Kahn positions Haim Yehiel Bornstein's Hebrew *Hamlet* within the intellectual context of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, while providing numerous examples of the domesticating methodology of this version, where "Christian burial" becomes "burial of the upright" (104) and "Hercules" becomes "Samson" (111). Through a close reading of a Slovak *Hamlet* from the 1970s, Jana B. Wild demonstrates the ways in which a translator, who by the favor of the communist regime was given a decades-long monopoly on Shakespeare translations, produced an authoritarian *Hamlet* that eliminated the original's ambiguity and championed patriarchal hegemony.

Returning to the long view, the next section is as preoccupied with *intracultural* dynamics as it is with *intercultural*. Marija Zlatnar Moe examines five Slovene *Hamlets*, translations that become increasingly less reverential before a recent *Hamlet* reverts to a more traditional rendering. Vasso Giannakopoulou compares a series of Greek *Hamlets* as rewritings in the context both of debates over the linguistic controversies of modern Greek and the political and philosophical inflections of the several versions. Minier's own chapter uses the theoretical framework of rhetorics of mastery and discipleship to explore the taboo around János Arany's 1867 Hungarian *Hamlet*, a classic of Hungarian literature and an example of a translation whose venerated status comes to influence, often prohibitively, all subsequent retranslations that attempt to improve upon this "Ur-translation" (165).

The remaining chapters turn most explicitly toward issues of performance. Yichen Yang, for example, shows how two different productions of Shenghao Zhu's classic Chinese *Hamlet* manifested entirely distinct visions of the play, emphasizing the impact of directorial decisions in appropriation in performance. Jozefina Komporaly shows how the cultural status of Shakespeare allowed Romanian productions of *Hamlet* to perform subversion despite the totalitarian restrictions of censorship under Ceaușescu. Carmen Levick uses *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet*, a bilingual production in Shona and English, to develop a theoretical model of intercultural performance while exploring the appeal of Q1 for those who wish to defamiliarize Shakespeare's most familiar play. The absence of translation haunts Aleksandra Sakowska's consideration of Eimuntas Nekrošius's *Hamlet*, the Lithuanian representative at the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival in London, a production whose lack of English surtitles obscured the strengths of the production while constraining Anglophone audiences to unhelpful presumptions about the necessarily political nature of an Eastern European *Hamlet*. Finally, and fittingly for Hamlet's own ultimate lapse into silence, Sheila T. Cavanagh champions the wordless *Hamlet* of Washington, DC-based Synetic Theatre, a mute provocation to greater academic consideration of the kinesthetic dimensions of performance.

Again and again throughout this volume one finds the question implied, if not directly confronted, of why Shakespeare, and particularly, why *Hamlet*? Common suggestions emerge, such as this hyper-canonical play's ability to showcase a given language's literary sophistication, or the appeal of Hamlet himself as a voice of political and existential scrutiny, or even the status of the play as a kind of English crown jewel that might

be retributively plundered by cultures whose heritage was misappropriated by the British empire. Yet, as the editors argue in the introduction, these “rearticulations and reimaginings” (2) of *Hamlet* should not be thought of as supplemental or even parasitic to the integrity of *Hamlet* as a literary entity. They are, rather, a fundamental contribution to the ongoing vitality of the play. Harnessing the diverse expertise of a global roster of scholars, this volume shows how an edited collection can tessellate a picture broader than the scope of an individual perspective.