

Book Reviews

CHAKRABARTI Swapan, *Shakespeare*, Kolkata 1999, Papyrus

Reviewed by *Piyas CHAKRAVORTY*

Swapan Chakrabarti's *Shakespeare* is not only an excellent piece of scholarship but also a commendable effort to make the biography of the bard accessible to the non-English speaking adolescent reader. Shakespeare's reputation has long crossed the boundary of language, as Bengali translations of his plays have been avidly read and Bengali adaptations of his plays enthusiastically watched. However, the very process of making him more accessible has also led to a mythologising of the man: for those who have had little chance of reading his plays in English, he represents the quintessential *high culture* of the English speaking world. Swapan Chakrabarti's text, therefore, fills a long-standing vacuum, that of presenting the man behind the myth.

The author always has in mind his target audience; the language is deliberately simple and the tone conversational. The focus is always on the man, his context, life and achievements. The accounts are enlivened by Chakrabarti's excellent scholarship that helps him to move effortlessly from anecdotes to historical documents and to existing critical works on Shakespeare.

The book begins with the attempt to trace Shakespeare's ancestry through available historical documents and through a close study of some of Shakespeare's landmark characters. Acknowledging the impossibility of taking any single definite stand, Chakrabarti argues that going by the available data, Shakespeare has an equal chance of having descended from an entire range of possible options from a thief to a juryman! The characters in his plays are equally varied and do not help either: if there is the rowdy Falstaff then there is also the efficient Henry V. Chakrabarti views this complexity as a mark of greatness: Shakespeare, apropos John Keats's theory of *negative capability*, could be an assimilative everyman as he could not be limited to any one being. Chakrabarti finally designates Shakespeare as an *auctor*: an amalgamation of the author and the actor whose ability to assume multiple identities on the stage and in his books forms the bedrock of his success.

In the second chapter, Chakrabarti traces the steady rise of Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, to surmise that he was a moderately successful businessman. His social position reflects his growing material success, as he came to hold a responsible position in the city administration despite his humble peasant origins. The existing records cannot definitely state the exact date of William Shakespeare's birth, but from the eighteenth century it has been customary to celebrate his birthday on the 23rd of April. Like so many other things, William Shakespeare's religious inclinations are also not very clear. His plays resist any easy appropriation and if there are passages that ridicule the Jesuits then there are also sections that cause considerable concern to the Anglicans. As Chakrabarti points out, if the "porter scene" in *Macbeth* is a criticism of the Jesuits then the references to the sufferings of the innocent under Macbeth's evil regime and Macduff's insistence that Malcolm lead an armed revolution against such atrocities must have caused considerable consternation in the Jacobean camp.

The third chapter amplifies on the contradiction between Shakespeare's writing abilities and his *little* learning. Chakrabarti cites Jonson's poem in the First Folio that refers to Shakespeare's limited knowledge of Latin and Greek as well as Milton's comment nine years later on the occasion of the publication of the Second Folio that Shakespeare's easy flow of language can embarrass many a *learned* writer. However, according to Chakrabarti, this leads to the regrettable tendency of viewing Shakespeare as a natural artist in opposition to a cultured one. A look at the education system in Shakespeare's time reveals that he did have some exposure to classical languages. Moreover, living in the midst of an intellectual revolution in England, he could not have possibly remained untouched. A more prudent judgement of Shakespeare, the author advises, would be to consider his genius as a product of both natural abilities and careful learning.

The fourth chapter takes a brief look at Shakespeare's family life and estate while the fifth deals with the theatre houses of Shakespeare's time. Chakrabarti's easy humour is amply evident in his handling of the information on Shakespeare's married life. The young Shakespeare was exposed to various theatre productions of that time, as his father was by then an important figure in Stratford, and the influence of this exposure is clearly evident in his own plays. Many of his plays develop on plots found in the works of other dramatists, which led people like Greene to jeer at his lack of originality. The first commercial theatre houses of England were built outside the city limits, which meant they were outside the direct control of the city administration. Chakrabarti delineates in a lucid manner the basic structure and political locus of the early modern playhouses. The civic authorities' intense suspicion of the theatres is related paradoxically to the latter's universal appeal and the essential transgression of social borders necessitated by the very *act* of acting.

Shakespeare's excellence as a narrative poet and sonneteer is explored in chapter six. In chapter seven, Chakrabarti returns to Shakespeare the dramatist. By the end of the sixteenth century Shakespeare was famous as a dramatist though the same cannot be said about his acting career. By this time, he had learnt well the trick of saying what he had to say without antagonising the censor board. His rise in the society is evident, because by 1596 he was able to get a Coat of Arms, a necessary requirement to be considered a man of importance in the early modern English society. Chapter eight identifies the period 1603 to 1605 as the apex of Shakespeare's dramatic career citing the famous tragedies produced during the period where the quality of his writing was at its supreme best.

The last two chapters of the book deal with the last days of Shakespeare. He has been subject to endless scholarship since then. Chakrabarti's book is an important supplement to any Bengali speaking reader who wants to get an overview of Shakespeare's life and his age. The author is successfully able to bring Shakespeare to the common reader without diluting the high degree of informative and critical insight required to comprehend this very complex age. This is a book fit to cater to both the casual reader and the serious scholar of the early modern age.

SOKOLYANSKY, Mark G., *Perechityvaja Shekspira. Raboty raznykh let* [re-reading Shakespeare]. Odessa 2000, Astro-Print

Reviewed by *Ekaterina RAKITINA, Artyom ZORIN*

The need for re-reading Shakespeare is once again urgent for the present-day world culture, especially for Russian culture. For the first time in post-Soviet Russia the opera *Hamlet* is on, an exhibition of paintings interpreting Shakespearean plots is being held, Shakespeare's "secondary" plays are insistently called up on stage and new genre modifications of apparently worn-out major plays are being presented. An author for all times, Shakespeare offers the scope to set off the concept of God-designed human being against modern aggressiveness. "Shakespeare is with us", states Mark Sokolyansky conclusively, the author of a new volume entitled suggestively *Re-reading Shakespeare*.

The book is a collection of this eminent scholar's papers on Shakespeare, both written long ago and new ones, prepared especially for this edition. It is the result of many years' reflections on the enormous scale of the bard's creative ability and an attempt to consider the classic author against new dimensions of socio-cultural realities. Sokolyansky believes that the rapid shift of ideological criteria and cultural paradigms are the reasons for re-evaluating classical heritage as a reference point within the system of *floating* co-ordinates. At the same time, he realises the boundaries of discussion – how current interpretations and modern ideas breach the ontological preoccupation of the classics. The author focuses on dialogues, fundamental for Shakespearean texts, on their extreme *responsiveness* to rhythms and events of any epoch. In the "Preface" (3–4), Sokolyansky refers to the term introduced by British and American New Criticism, "close reading", inviting one to read, re-read and analyse not just the original texts, but the interpretations presented in his own book as well.

The essays successfully reveal the degree of response to Shakespearean poetics in cultural space, and explore Shakespearean philosophy and ethics through modern spatial-temporal categories. Sokolyansky dedicates his work to the memory of his teacher, Alexander Anikst, and his own perception of Shakespearean demonstrates obvious spiritual and aesthetic links with the fundamental discoveries of this leading Russian Shakespearean scholar. In the first part of the book, the author reflects on the unique daring creativity of Shakespeare and presents a modern approach to Shakespearean genres related to Anikst's ideas of genre combination in most of Shakespeare's plays.

Re-reading is itself a bold experiment in genre combination. Literary criticism of the first part gives way to essays on classical authors' perceptions of Shakespeare in the second. The author presents an account of appropriations of and critical responses to Shakespeare by Henry Fielding, George Bernard Shaw and Leo Tolstoy. The analysis of criticism by different authors allows not only the reconstruction of the poetics characteristic to their specific epoch, but also throws new light on literary history and draws attention to the problem of accordance between historic interpretation and the playwright's original message. "A Voice Which Was Not Heard in Its Time: Henry Fielding on Shakespeare" is a brilliant essay, presenting both a new approach towards the evolution of Shakespearean reception and Sokolyansky's own methodology of *literary authorities' hierarchy*.

The Russian version of the book was first published in 2000, following the 200th Anniversary of Alexander Pushkin's birth, an author equal to Shakespeare on the Russian literary scale. Numerous scholarly and festive

events demonstrated the common attitude to classics as something already *conquered* and hence submissive to any kind of experiment. Revealing the grounds for anti-Shakespearean crusades, Mark Sokolyansky warns against both thoughtless rejection and blind adoration of the classics. He disagrees with Tolstoy's negative opinion of Shakespeare and yet admires the logic of Tolstoy's polemics. Comparing Shaw's and Tolstoy's thoughts on Shakespeare, Sokolyansky notes, "Tolstoy still recognised the global fame of Shakespeare, finding a positive aspect in his works – the ability to 'express the development of emotions'" (91). As an adherent of the drama of ideas, Shaw was less interested in the "development of emotions" than in the "development of thought", but he too had to acknowledge Shakespeare's skill in tracing and amplifying the latter (91).

Shakespeare is an indisputable authority to Sokolyansky himself. Commenting on an increase of interest in the Shakespearean authorship controversy and the publications by Ilya Gililov in the Russian press, in particular, the scholar is both mercilessly logical and emotional to the point of regarding literary problems as personal issues. Such hypotheses are, to Sokolyansky, "ghosts of the long-forgotten versions" and need to be countered effectively and this is one of the stated aims of his work (117–138). The essay on authorship controversy follows "Giant-like Rebellions and New Reality" that views Shakespearean irony as a clue to modern history. The article is replete with sarcastic remarks on dilettante guesses and on "literary critics influenced by the vulgar sociological methodology, popular in the USSR in the 1920–1960s" (109–10). The tone is that of an admirer never doubting the global importance of Shakespeare as well as a scholar dealing with facts.

The third part of the volume includes essays on theatre and cinema criticism, and miscellaneous notes. A variety of styles allows a constant shift of ambience, from mirth to wistfulness, inspired by original Shakespearean texts. Theatre and film criticism by Mark Sokolyansky – "Thalia's Season in Stratford", "From *Hamlet* to *King Lear*" – is in line with his literary studies. Sokolyansky knows what he likes in Shakespearean productions, preferring the works of Russian film director Grigory Kozintsev. Comparing theatre or cinema productions to Shakespeare's original plays, Sokolyansky is ever true to his own perception of Shakespearean drama.

As a textual whole *Re-reading Shakespeare* has much in common with the well-known Shakespearean text constructions. It contains monologues and dialogues ("Genre System of Shakespeare's Plays"), author's remarks ("Ghosts of the Long-Forgotten Versions"), mass scenes ("Giant-like Rebellions and New Reality"), which probably account for the impression of a real *event*: a genius *arriving* to create a literature and philosophy of his own. This lends an appreciable vitality to the work.

***Klamliwe posłanie. Lektury sonetów Shakespeare'a*
[*The Deceitful Message. Reading Shakespeare's*
Sonnets], eds Marta Gibińska and Agnieszka
Pokojska, Kraków 2005, Universitas**

Reviewed by *Joanna SADOWSKA*

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are commonly believed to be a demanding and complex piece of literature. A number of factors can be cited as a possible explanation. Firstly, the poetry as such is considered a high-brow and sublime reading matter that is barely accessible for an indiscriminate taste of the man and woman in the street. Secondly, even if one has already mustered the courage to approach the *Sonnets*, one has relatively little critical commentary in Polish to fall back on. So, if the inevitable problems of interpretation arise, it may prove quite difficult to find one's way around.

In the light of the above, *Klamliwe posłanie. Lektury sonetów Shakespeare'a* [*The Deceitful Message. Reading Shakespeare's Sonnets*] (Universitas, Kraków 2005), eds Marta Gibińska and Agnieszka Pokojska, appears as a glimmer of hope. It is, in fact, the first monograph in Polish devoted wholly to Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. The book extends over 258 pages. It is a collection of fifteen essays contributed by people fascinated and intrigued by the *Sonnets*, as it is stated in the preface written by the editors Marta Gibińska and Agnieszka Pokojska. At the end of the book there is a thorough bibliography of both English and Polish editions of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, as well as an extensive list of critical and theoretical works.

For the bulk of the readership Shakespeare is a playwright in the first place. The *Sonnets* are popularly believed to be of minor importance in his oeuvre. Invariably, the majority of Polish readers depend upon the Polish translations of the *Sonnets*. Understandably, when dealing with the translation, we intuitively take it for granted that there before our very eyes it is Shakespeare himself. Yet, the question arises – is what we are reading in the Polish translation really what Shakespeare wrote in English?

This is precisely the issue that *Klamliwe posłanie* is concerned with. The very title comes across as enticing and mystifying. It is only a reader well-versed in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and their Polish translations that puzzles out the reference embedded in the title. Readers of lesser calibre have to tackle well over half of the volume and penetrate Joanna Podhorodecka's

essay [*Kłamlive Posłanie: sonet 138. Williama Shakespeare'a (The Deceitful Message – Shakespeare's Sonnet 138)*, pp. 113–123] to unravel the mysterious title.

The overriding aim of the contributors, declared in the preface, is to encourage the reader to study the *Sonnets* in the original. Not only do the essays inspire the reader to do so, but they also offer tangible tools to support the endeavour, e.g. sonnets in the original are always provided next to the Polish translation. The volume editors, Marta Gibińska and Agnieszka Pokojka, arouse our curiosity by arguing persuasively that the world created by Shakespeare in English varies from the one the translators into Polish (Stanisław Barańczak, Maciej Słomczyński, Marian Hemar, Jerzy S. Sito) present. Although the volume is in Polish, the original sonnets are deftly fitted into the essays so that they constitute a flowing, seamless whole. References to the English syntax and lexis employed by Shakespeare in his *Sonnets* are made in a very accessible way so that even a reader whose grasp of English is far from exquisite can appreciate fine linguistic and literary distinctions.

The essays in the collection are of twofold nature. The first group, essays subsumed under the title *Interpretations* (pp. 11–125), represents the results of mainly interpretative investigation, whereas the other batch of essays, entitled *On Translations* (pp. 147–223), is a critique of the *Sonnets'* translations into Polish. It is noteworthy that the first essay [*I wbrew zagładzie tylko mój wiersz ma nadzieję*] (“*And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand*”), pp. 11–49] by Marta Gibińska is the necessary starting point, as it lays the foundations and furnishes the basics indispensable for further reading. Gibińska introduces the reader into the recesses of sonnet-writing in Shakespeare's time. Importantly, some attention is also devoted to the ways in which Shakespeare deviates from the accepted norms and conventions of Petrarchan sonneteering. Gibińska argues that it is the poet rather than the lover that takes the centre stage in the *Sonnets* (pp. 19–22). The full magnitude of Shakespeare's originality and freshness, however, can be entirely acknowledged once all interpretative essays have been studied.

It is hardly possible to put together all interpretative essays and assess them as a whole. Surely, they do share some common threads. The majority of contributors take one or two sonnets and approach them from a certain perspective, e.g. Clarinda E. Calma [*Zagadkowy melancholik (Mysterious Melancholic)*, pp. 51–63] scrutinizes sonnets 44 and 45 from the point of view of melancholy. Magdalena Lewandowska [*Płynny więzień*], czyli zapachy w „*Sonetach*” Shakespeare'a (“*A liquid prisoner*” – *Scents in Shakespeare's Sonnets*), pp. 65–84], by comparison, assumes scents as her perspective of analysis. In some cases, e.g. essays by Michał Palmowski [*Sonet jako inwencja wieloplanowa (Sonnet as a Multilayered Invention)*, pp. 85–98] and Joanna

Podhorodecka [*Klamliwe posłanie: sonet 138. Williama Shakespeare'a (The Deceitful Message – Shakespeare's Sonnet 138)*], pp. 113–123], only one sonnet is brought into focus and examined from the angle of its multilayered and many-sided character. Palmowski skillfully analyses the perversity and inherent paradoxes of sonnet 84, whereas Podhorodecka brings to surface the ambiguity and the strategy of deceit that underlies sonnet 138. This approach makes for the volume's innovativeness and represents the book's chief merit. The originality of the approach stems from the fact that the contributors do not discuss groups or sequences of sonnets that are traditionally recognized by critics. This traditional approach can be found in Philip Martin's *Shakespeare's Sonnets. Self, Love and Art* (1972), where sonnets are divided into groups, e.g. sonnets about self-love, poetry or transience of time, and discussed accordingly.¹ Thus, the reader is provided with an all-embracing, collective and, to put it bluntly, amorphous overview of the *Sonnets*. We know that there are 154 of them and that they fall into distinctive categories. Yet, can a sonnet exist as an independent entity? We know the categories sonnets fall into, but where is the taste of a sonnet as such? *Klamliwe Posłanie* is different in that respect. The contributors strive to reconstruct the world painted in individual sonnets.

All the contributors of interpretative essays draw on the works of authoritative and acclaimed critics such as Stephen Booth (1977), Katherine Duncan-Jones (2001), Leonard Dean (1951) and Helen Vendler (1999).² Occasionally, too much reliance seems to be placed on the interpretations put forward by the abovementioned scholars. In other essays, however, e.g. the one by Agnieszka Pokojaska [*Szekspirowskie "a jednak się kręci": sonety 153. i 154. (Shakespeare's sonnets 153 and 154)*], pp. 125–144], traditional criticism is defied and shattered. Pokojaska concentrates on sonnets 153 and 154, the banality and conventionality of which made the critics call into question Shakespeare's authorship. On the face of it, the two sonnets are mere adaptations of classical verses about Cupid. Surprisingly, in her essay Pokojaska takes the reader on a trip through the rhymes and metaphors threading through the *Sonnets* to prove that the two final sonnets are an integral part of the whole sequence and that they were purposefully put

¹ Martin, P., *Shakespeare's Sonnets. Self, Love and Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1972.

² *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited with analytic commentary by Stephen Booth, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1977.

Dean, L., "Introduction" in *Renaissance Poetry*, Englewoods Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall 1951.

Duncan-Jones, K., "Introduction" in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare, London: Thomson Learning 2001.

Vendler, H., *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1999.

at the very end of the cycle. Pokojaska argues perusatively that even the artistic deficiencies of the two sonnets are deliberate and meaningful.

Those of the readers who look for a thorough linguistic analysis of *Sonnets* will not get their craving satisfied. Granted, formal aspects such as stylistic and rhetorical tools, syntax or lexis are discussed in the book. A case in point is Palmowski's essay, where rhetorical devices and Shakespeare's quibbles are examined in greater detail. Yet, it is the themes, motifs, metaphors and imagery that prevail in the essays. Even if there is some pondering on a given phrase, the ultimate goal is to see the whole picture, the ultimate sense of a sonnet. It is praiseworthy that the authors never exhaust all possible interpretations. There is ample room for independent exploring left for the reader.

The essays constituting the other part of *Klamliwe poslanie* are in fact pretty similar in nature. Although the primary aim is to assess a given translation into Polish, it is the interpretation that is proposed prior to any translation analysis. Accordingly, each contributor takes one or two sonnets, proposes a given line of interpretation and finally evaluates the translation (in some cases more than one translation is assessed) from this perspective. Sometimes, the authors seem to be a bit too harsh on the translators and excessively dictatorial in their opinions. After all, each translator has their own interpretation and, hence, he or she translates a sonnet according to their own understanding and taste. Clearly, not every taste can be catered to, which proves one important and pretty striking thing. Namely, translation problems in the case of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are not connected with the sonneteer's archaic forms and stylization. They stem from Shakespeare's intricate quibbles, omnipresent wordplays, dizzying trains of images, elaborate and meandering metaphors and similies. It seems that paradox is the key word here. The whole issue of translation boils down to a simple question. Should the translator interpret these complexities for us and present us with a straightforward simplicity, or should he or she rather preserve in their translation the multitude of meanings and overtones? The above considerations boil down to a simple question: do we want to read Shakespeare in Polish translation, or rather an adaptation of his work in the Polish language?

Klamliwe poslanie has many faces. Some essays are very revealing and innovative in their approach. Other appear far more traditional and very much in line with available criticism. On the whole, however, the authors succeed in achieving their aim. Not only is our attention drawn to Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as such. One yearns to plunge into, say, sonnet 138 or 84 in the original and see a fresh reality of paradox emerge before our very eyes.

Theatre Reviews

The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)

By A. Long, D. Singer, J. Borgeson

Dir. Mario Ferreira

(With Damián Olivera, Leandro Núñez and Diego Arbelo)

“El Teatro del Notariado”

Reviewed by *Verónica D'AURIA*

The first thing that attracts your attention is a series of graffiti announcing the play. The repetition of the title on Montevideo's walls gives you the impression that it can't have been just an enthusiastic spectator: it is the decision of the director or the cast and the aim is perhaps to attract a young or unconventional audience with their underground tactics.

The play itself was written and performed in New York, Montreal, Tokyo and even London by a three-man troupe that calls itself “The Reduced Shakespeare Company” – an irreverent group of Americans who decided to compress Shakespeare's 37 plays into a 97-minute comedy that includes a *Hamlet* performed “front, back and sideways”, a “rap *Othello*” and even *Titus Andronicus* as a “galloping gourmet”. The comedy has been running successfully for eight years and has been praised for its “silly sophomoric foolery” as well as for its intelligence and “surreal fancy”.

Why would the Uruguayan audience find this comedy both enjoyable and full of meaning?

To begin with, the play is a send-up not only of tedious high school readings and interpretations but also of the intricate and excessively intellectual methods taught at acting schools or the jargon employed by Shakespearean scholars at University.

Secondly, in this play the audience is not meant to be passive. At one point of the “front” version of *Hamlet*, for example, a female member of the audience is asked to go on stage to do Ophelia, and only after listening to the voices of her Ego, Id and Superego (all performed by the rest of the audience under the directions of the cast) is she finally allowed to scream in response to Hamlet's bitter attacks.

The director, Mario Ferreira, is young – but nevertheless experienced – and fond of a risky approach to Shakespeare – risky because the critics in Uruguay are indeed unwilling to praise a commercial success which is too close to the humour of the popular parodists of the Carnival.

Despite the irreverence and farcicality of the play, this cast of young actors manage to convey the sense of beauty underlying some of the most renowned Shakespearean texts. This feeling is reinforced at the end by the low-keyed song by Sylvia Meyer – a Uruguayan composer and singer of urban ballads – with the harmony of its music and lyrics describing Hamlet’s suffering: the parody here is subtler than the clowning and the acrobatics, or the ridiculous costumes.

Like the original troupe of Americans, these Uruguayans are young, agile and versatile in their multiple roles, laying special emphasis on the metadramatic, probably a growing concern among actors who have recently graduated from acting schools.

All in all, the comedy is hilarious. Madness with method; the mingling of kings and clowns; the demystification of an author who would probably have hated so much formality and so much pedantry around his figure and his writings.

King John

Dir. Nikos Hatzopoulos

“Amore” theatre (upper stage)

(A production by “Theatro tou Notou”)

Measure for Measure

Dir. Thomas Moschopoulos

“Porta” theatre

(A production by “Theatro tou Notou”)

Troilus and Cressida: First Shot

Adapt. and dir. Raia Mouzenidou

“Dipylon” theatre

Reviewed by *Xenia GEORGOPOULOU*

Writing a review on *one* of last season’s (2004–2005) Greek productions of Shakespearean plays would be a hard task, as it would entail choosing from a handful of really interesting works. Thus, I decided to spread this review over three of them.¹ Last season several Shakespearean plays appeared

¹ Although the space does not allow a full review of three productions, I thought that even a brief account would give an idea of the directors’ interesting approaches.

on the Athenian stage. Three of them were presented by “Theatro tou Notou” [“Theatre of the South”], based at the “Amore” theatre. These were *The Winter’s Tale*, directed by Lilo Baur, on the main stage; the rarely performed *King John* (first production of the play in Greece), directed by Nikos Hatzopoulos, on the much smaller upper stage; and *Measure for Measure*, directed by Thomas Moschopoulos, presented at the “Porta” theatre.² The other two productions were *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot* at the “Dipylon” theatre, adapted and directed by Raia Mouzenidou;³ and *The Tempest* at the “Amphitheatre”, directed by Spyros Evangelatos.⁴ My short reviews will deal with *King John*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot*.

Before I comment on *Measure for Measure*, the most elaborate of last season’s Shakespearean productions by “Theatro tou Notou”, I would like to say a few words about the simpler but interesting production of *King John* by Nikos Hatzopoulos, who proved that a good performance does not have to employ elaborate sets (a plain table and a few stools did all the work) or costumes (the different parts played by the six actors⁵ were indicated by minimal props);⁶ all that is really needed is a strong text (although *King John* may not be one of Shakespeare’s strongest plays, it is still Shakespeare) – and, in the case of a production in a foreign language, a strong translation (provided in this case by Hatzopoulos himself⁷) – and a team of actors who can deliver it properly, especially when movement is restricted by a small space, like the upper stage of “Amore”. Hatzopoulos added short introductory pieces to clarify the dramatic time and place of a rather complicated play in these respects, and used percussion instruments (played live by the actors) between the scenes, providing the production with a crystal-clear structure. It is notable that in his *King John* Hatzopoulos underscored an element added by Shakespeare to the history he dramatised: the comic element, which often emerges in this play. However, the director

² The three plays were chosen along with other non-Shakespearean plays by the artistic directors of “Theatro tou Notou”, who this year concentrated on the theme of betrayal. It is worth mentioning here that “Theatro tou Notou” provided a “Shakespeare card”, with which one could watch all three shows at half price.

³ Mouzenidou also adapted and directed *Romeo and Juliet* in 2003 (and staged the play itself in 2003–04).

⁴ Evangelatos has staged various Shakespearean plays, among which the rarely presented *Titus Andronicus* in 1977 (the only production of the play in Greece).

⁵ The parts were shared among Maria Kallimani, Eleni Kokkidou, Despina Kourti, Fanis Mouratides, Yiorgos Simeonides, Cosmas Foundoukis.

⁶ The set was designed by Maria Vassilaki and the costumes by Ioanna Tsami.

⁷ Hatzopoulos also provided the translation for the same season’s production of *The Winter’s Tale* by “Theatro tou Notou”.

did not eliminate the moving nature of other scenes (such as those of Arthur's plea for mercy or Constance's madness). Hatzopoulos's *mise en scène* presented a timeless troupe of skilled actors performing the vicious circle of power.

Thomas Moschopoulos's *Measure for Measure* was a modern costume production, supported by electronic music (by CotiK⁸) and technology (mainly the use of video). The set was also modern, almost minimal (mostly consisting of a long plexiglas table used in various ways), with symbolic connotations.⁹ The conference room where the Duke appointed his representative and where the latter's decisions were made was half black and half white, and so were the chairs on the two sides of the room, possibly implying the dangerous mixture of virtue and sin in a power figure like Angelo. It is not by chance, I think, that the good Escalus sat on the white side, whereas Angelo moved mostly on the black side. After the Duke's departure, an empty armchair at the back of the stage, and in the middle, lit from above (as if to indicate his appointment by God), seemed to denote his absence.

Although Moschopoulos's production was rather dark, it was not exclusively so. The comic element (ideally supported by a translation that was otherwise a clumsy mixture of vernacular, slang and archaic words, of prose and rhyme¹⁰) was present even in the serious scenes, without effacing, however, the gravity of certain moments. The various comic touches reminded the audience that the play is supposed to be a comedy, and secondary characters such as Lucio, Pompey and Barnardine¹¹ often offered a much more enjoyable performance than the leading parts.¹² However, the final scene clearly underlined that the play is a *problem* comedy. Isabella's long pause before she silently accepted her place by the Duke's side, the forced kiss by her future husband and the general numbness is what remained at the end of the play.

Although the moral theme of the brothels was used as a Leitmotiv throughout the production, the main issue was obviously political corruption. The prostitutes (played by both female and male actors) were rather treated with sympathy, and the *mise en scène* was clearly set against Angelo, taking

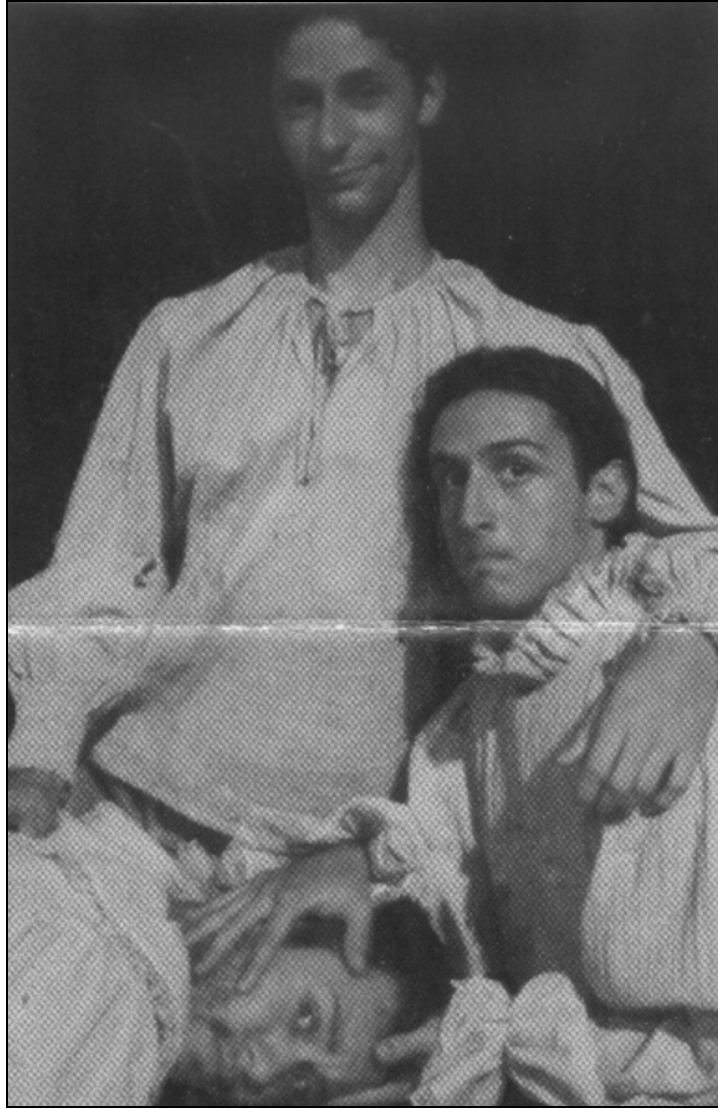
⁸ CotiK also wrote the music for the same season's production of *The Winter's Tale* by "Theatro tou Notou".

⁹ The set and costumes were designed by Elli Papageorgakopoulou.

¹⁰ The play was translated by two of the leading actors of the production, Anna Mascha and Yiannis Dalianis; the translation was subsequently modified for the show by the director.

¹¹ The above roles were played by Yiorgos Glastras, Thanassis Demou and Dimitris Pleiones respectively.

¹² The leading parts were played by good old members of "Theatro tou Notou", such as Yiannis Dalianis [Angelo], Anna Mascha [Isabella] and Akis Sakellariou [Duke].



The cast of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)* (dir. Mario Ferreira)



Marvina Pytichoutis (Cressida) and Yiannis Gounas (Pandarus) in *Troilus and Cressida*: First Shot (dir. Raia Mouzenidou)



The cast of *King John* (dir. Nikos Hatzopoulos)



Sara von Schwarze (Gertrude), Itay Tiran (Hamlet) and Gil Frank (Claudius) in Hamlet (dir. Omri Nitzan)

the side of the Duke. However, the tableau vivant of the finale, the Christ-like Duke surrounded by twelve characters in positions that clearly alluded to paintings of Christ's Last Supper with the twelve apostles, ironically underscored that most of the onstage unions were *forced* by the omnipotent Duke. The very last image before the curtain falls, an eye figuring on multiple screens (symbolising, perhaps, the omnipresent Duke) was reminiscent of Queen Elizabeth's gown in the Rainbow portrait, full of eyes and ears, and, at the same time, of the omnipresent CCTVs of the 21st century.

The adaptation of *Troilus and Cressida* by Raia Mouzenidou proved that the director had not yet finished with *Romeo and Juliet*, a play she had been exploring for at last three years. In fact, *Troilus and Cressida: First Shot* was to a great extent a comparison of the two plays. Focusing on the love story of Troilus and Cressida,¹³ Mouzenidou compared it with that of *Romeo and Juliet*,¹⁴ putting the two plays together in a parallel construction (comparing, for example, the vows the two sets of lovers make, or Pandarus and Friar Lawrence¹⁵ as intermediaries). Mouzenidou kept the story of Troilus and Cressida at the centre of the stage, whereas the *Romeo and Juliet* part was presented in some kind of sub-stage on the left side of the main space.

While focusing on the love stories, Mouzenidou could not possibly eliminate their context (even though no battle or fight was represented on stage). Recalling the motto "make love, not war", the director approaches the two plays as Shakespeare's chief anti-war dramatic works and underlines their globality. She regards the Trojan war in *Troilus and Cressida* as the equivalent of a world war and the feud between the two families in *Romeo and Juliet* as a kind of civil war. The relevance of the plays in any era was articulated in *First Shot*. The set and costumes by Giuliano Monotti were minimal, alluding to no particular historical era. The mannequin body members scattered on the stage, heads and torsos, arms and legs, could belong to any soldier or civilian killed during any war. And the video art by Nikos Zappas¹⁶ was, as the director states, a modern comment on Shakespeare's always modern text.

¹³ Troilus and Cressida were played by Dimitris Moroyiannis and Marvina Pitychoutis (who also played Helen) respectively.

¹⁴ *Romeo and Juliet* were played by Marios Leonidou (who also played Diomedes) and Yakinthi Papadopoulos respectively.

¹⁵ Both Pandarus and Friar Lawrence were played by Yiannis Gounas.

¹⁶ Nikos Zappas also played the part of the Trojan Paris.

Hamlet

Dir.: Omri Nitzan

(with Itay Tiran)

The Cameri Theatre of Tel-Aviv *

Reviewed by *Tali SILBERSTEIN*

The recent production of *Hamlet* at the “Cameri” Theatre of Tel-Aviv, directed by Omri Nitzan, tells the story of a dark prince, in both disposition and attire, confronting his mother’s and uncle’s white world of royalty and scarlet world of lust. It is the story of power – the power of state, the power of love, in its many forms, and the power of art. It is the sad and cruel story of the annihilation of two families and the rise of a new regime, a new order. But what is most striking in this production is its manifestation of this most famous play as the story of space and distance.

In the Cameri’s new production there is no stage. Or, rather, there are several stages – the royal stage, the bedchamber stage, the family-home stage, the world-beyond stage. There is no conventional stage and no conventional auditorium. There are no regular rows of seats, but two clusters of revolving chairs, arranged around the centre of what was originally intended for a car park at the theatre’s basement. The action takes place mainly on the wide central passage between the two areas of revolving chairs, and around them. The central passage stretches between two elevated platforms: one at the back of the space, on which the thrones of the king and queen of Denmark are situated; the other near the entrance, which presents Polonius’s household in the first part of the performance, and the play-within-the-play after the intermission.

Consequently, the central figure of Hamlet moves in a constant pendulum-like way between the world of state and crown (which in this production he undoubtedly craves for) – a world motivated by self-interests and complicated plots, a cold world of political calculation and rationality – and the world of love, of family love and of romantic love, combined with the world of art. The impressive Itay Tiran in the role of Hamlet is always on the move, always seeking something, indefinitely torn by his different callings physically surrounding him in this production. He longs for the crown and for revenge in the realm of state, for Ophelia’s love in the comfort of her school-girlish room, for artistic expression awaiting him at

* The Cameri Theatre of Tel-Aviv has recently received the most honoured prize in Israel, The Israel Prize, for “a special contribution to state and society”.

the piano by the players' stage, and for his lost father, away in the realm of the spirits, which is defined by another platform, stretched by the wall and thus forming a path between the palace and Polonius's home.

Tiran's and Nitzan's Hamlet is an intriguing figure. Physically, he is a classic Hamlet – very young (Tiran is 25 years old), fair-haired, slightly built. A delicate prince, with a kitchen knife permanently stuck in his belt, concealed and openly worn at the same time. He brandishes it in the air violently and sometimes hysterically many times during the play, but uses it only against his uncle/step-father. He kills him with this knife not once but three times – first when he slashes his picture, then when he kills Polonius (the highly proficient Itzhak Heskia) in his stead, both actions taking place in his mother's bedchamber, and lastly in the final scene.

This last violent act of Hamlet's is presented quite grotesquely, with Claudius dying with the microphone from which he has made his speeches during the play stuck in his throat. Hamlet hugs him in a false gesture and then stabs him in the back. This final act of his is directly opposed to the emotional and desperate way in which he clings to his real father, the dead but most physically present king, played by the same actor who plays Claudius (the excellent Gil Frank), when he meets him at the beginning of the play. The two faces of the prince – the artist and the killer, the loving son and the hateful nephew – are as manifest as those of the king, who can come either in the form of the black-haired and murderously ambitious Claudius or in the white-haired and graceful form of Hamlet the elder.

The distinct effect of the unique setting is evident not only in the performance of Hamlet, but in the other performances as well – in Claudius's wonderfully human, increasingly frantic running around, in Ophelia's (Neta Garti) more sad than mad flowers procession, or in Laertes's (the emotionally moving Amir Krief) and Hamlet's fatal fencing contest. But its most interesting effect is on the audience, or, to be more precise, on the viewing experience of this production.

The effect of the unusual seating is twofold. First, it has to do with the distance from the action. Some of the scenes may be seen in "long-shot" and some in "close-up" (to use cinematic terms), depending on one's specific location in the auditorium. It is obviously not just the effect of the usual distance of a member of the audience from the stage in conventional productions. Here some may view, for example, the bedchamber scene between Hamlet and Gertrude (Sara von Schwarze) in a close-up/medium-shot fashion and some may watch it from a great distance, even a little hidden from view, as it is situated in a corner of the space. One's viewing angle alternates during the performance, which is not only cinematic but also more authentic and life-like than usual. Of course, the more distant viewing is familiar,

being the common way of viewing in the theatre. The most remarkable and exciting experience is watching the “close-ups”, which is quite unfamiliar to a theatregoer. This excitement was expressed by my companion, who nudged me during Ophelia’s madness scene, pointing to the tears rolling on Laertes’s cheeks, standing opposite her, an arm’s length away from us.

The second effect of the seating design on the audience is the expansion of its role from passive onlookers to active participants, thus making true Hamlet’s words: “You that look pale and tremble at this chance, / That are but **mutes or audience** to this act, ...” (5.2.286-87ff). The audience is on a constant lookout, not knowing in which part of the space the next scene will take place. Like Hamlet we are thrown from side to side, sometimes experiencing the action with him, sometimes awaiting him, at other times chasing him in our revolving chairs and gazes.

On the one hand, we are free to choose where to look during a scene, and from where to avert our gazes. We might turn our heads to watch Laertes watching Ophelia, or capture Hamlet lurking in the shadows while a scene is being played without him under the lights. But on the other hand, and most importantly, we as an audience have a critical role – we are the people; the Danish people in the context of the play, and the ruled masses everywhere in a more universal sense. We follow our leaders – the king, the queen, the prince – everywhere, literally. We breathlessly await their next word, their next gesture. The dynamic of the audience is the dynamic of the regular crowd – imprisoned (voluntarily!...) in our seats, following our leaders and each other’s example by turning around eagerly together, being “pushed around” like puppets on strings. We are the stuff that dreams are made of – the dreams of a king and the dreams of a theatre director... But it is not only the experience of a captured audience, nor of the subjects of an ancient kingdom, actually a dictatorship. It is also the experience of modern democracy.

The political message of this production is boldly manifested not only by several expressions that are winked at as appropriate for the current situation in Israel, but especially by two interesting choices. First, the bold choice to put emphasis not on the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, which is moved to a much earlier point in the play and performed in an almost matter-of-fact way by Tiran, but on the “What is a man” soliloquy, from Q2, much later in the play: “[...] to my shame, I see / **The imminent death of twenty thousand men** / That, for a fantasy and trick of fame, / Go to their graves like beds, **fight for a plot / Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, / Which is not tomb enough and continent / To hide the slain**” (4.4.50-56). After his first meeting with Fortinbras’s army, Hamlet/Tiran jumps on the royal platform, and with great meaning and intent delivers this speech from the speakers’ podium.

But Fortinbras is yet to return. And when he appears to end the play he is not “a delicate and tender prince”, as Hamlet has described him in 4.4.39 (in the Q2 version), but a crude conqueror, a thug, devoid of any trace of civilised and dignified behaviour. He appears in battle fatigue, rolls the dead Hamlet off the throne, seats himself heavily in his place, and while taking big mouthfuls of bread from one hand and drink from the other, with a big grin on his soiled lips, he states: “I have some rights of memory in this kingdom” (5.2.343). These words, and not Fortinbras’s original dignified gesture towards the dead Hamlet, and thus towards the former regime, end the play. The royal house of Hamlet and the loyal house of Polonius are annihilated. Actually, they have annihilated themselves. And the future is Fortinbras.