

Introduction

In *Tardid/Doubt* (dir. Varuzh Karim-Masihi, 2009), a stylish and innovative Iranian film adaptation of *Hamlet*, 'To be, or not to be' is allusively referenced. In an archivist's cluttered and grimy basement office, the camera zooms in on a framed quotation in Farsi hanging on the walls, but, rather than the words of the Qur'an, as might be expected, it is the opening lines of Shakespeare's most famous soliloquy that are visualized. The power and reach of the lines were brought home to me on a blustery autumnal day in 2014 as I made plans to interview *Tardid's* director and speak at the inaugural 'First International Conference on Shakespeare in Iran'. In search of an elusive visa, and in the context of the closure of the Iranian Embassy in London, I presented myself at the Iranian Embassy in Dublin. Once beyond the forbidding gates, the official in charge leaned in towards the glass separating us and inquired rather fiercely as to the purpose of my visit. Eager to ingratiate myself, I explained that I was keen to speak at the first Shakespeare conference in Iran. The official seemed uncomprehending, and a barrage of unpromising questions followed. At no point did I mention *Hamlet*. But, after ten minutes back and forth, he beckoned me closer and, with a half-smile playing around his lips, whispered, 'To be, or not to be', before whipping away my passport for approval. Left alone, I wondered if he knew of the Qur'an-like soliloquy in *Tardid* or perhaps was aware of the long-standing traditions of translation and performance of Shakespeare in the Middle East. Whichever way, the brief moment of connection was typical of the often humbling encounters that have informed my thinking about *Hamlet's* cinematic kudos and power in the world.

This book makes a case for *Hamlet* as the world's most frequently filmed text and reveals a rich and diverse history of cinematic production reaching across the globe. It explores adaptations of Shakespeare's most celebrated play outside of the UK/US screen axis, moving between a range of periods from the 1930s to the present day. Case-studies are angled towards

illuminating some of the earliest German and Italian adaptations and extend to the most recent explosion of Indian screen interpretations. This means that the book addresses cinema produced in a multiplicity of languages, including Danish, Greek, Japanese, Malayalam, Romani, Tibetan and Turkish. In terms of numbers, *'Hamlet' and World Cinema* introduces thirty adaptations not generally recognized in order to identify the extent to which Shakespeare's play functions as a creative hub and transnational touchstone. Focusing on non-Anglophone registers, the approach prioritizes several genres of adaptation, including crime drama, urban thriller, corporate parody, comic fantasy and martial arts epic. In this way, works generated from the film industries of Africa, Asia, Central, Eastern and Western Europe, Latin America and the Middle East are uncovered and the relationship between creative appropriation and economic-industrial praxis is contextualized. With such a wide canvas, a gamut of categories and classifications comes quickly into view – state-sponsored product, commemorative contribution, censor-sensitive grassroots intervention, big-budget cinematic statement, commercial and non-commercial creation, low-budget art-work, community initiative, professional undertaking, *avant-garde* reflection and amateur experiment. Among the multifarious *Hamlet* cinematic adaptations there are degrees of visibility (most of the examples in this book have not been critically examined previously) and accessibility (several films discussed are no longer extant). Investigating the place of the play in the cinemas of over twenty nation-states, I argue that world cinema adaptations of *Hamlet* are consistently characterized by the ingenious identification of alternative habitats for Shakespeare's work. Wherever it is transposed – to a working *favela* or a village of mud huts, a western ranch or a ruined Islamic cinema, a gypsy encampment or the Himalayan mountains, a samurai residence or a South Asian temple complex, a luxurious French *chateau* or a fantasy Italianate court – *Hamlet* is made to speak in and to a variety of locales. Exposed to *Hamlet* in world cinema, audiences find ratified the play's manoeuvrability – its capacity for commenting on local situations and ideologies that run along asymmetrical lines. If there is huge generic and regional scope in the sample, there are also marked differences in meaning and import, with adaptations taking up sometimes conflictual positions in terms of political vision and responsiveness. Where there is consistency is in the ways in which *Hamlet* has been taken up by filmmakers worldwide in order to allegorize the energies, instabilities, traumas and expectations that have defined the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By refusing the unidirectional flow

that invariably travels from the 'west' and to the 'rest', this study reveals the multiple constituencies that have claimed the play as their own, reinstating a vital and as yet unexplored part of the *Hamlet* story.

The book emerges from a critical context that has consistently prioritized *Hamlet* as an object of scrutiny. The play is among the small number of Shakespeare's works that merit a monograph in their own right. Some recent examples include Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2001), Margreta de Grazia, *'Hamlet' Without Hamlet* (2007), Andrew Cutrofello, *All for Nothing: Hamlet's Negativity* (2014), William F. Zak, *Hamlet's Problematic Revenge: Forging a Royal Mandate* (2015), András Kiséry, *Hamlet's Moment: Drama and Political Knowledge in Early Modern England* (2016), Gabriel Josipovici, *Hamlet: Fold on Fold* (2016) and Rhodri Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (2017).¹ Insightful and sophisticating, these studies elucidate the play by returning it to its early modern contexts but, via such a critical focus, bypass the play's afterlives or its cinematic manifestations. The emphasis on, variously, the play's religious intertexts, its investment in humanist traditions of learning, its structural felicities, its use of political knowledge as cultural capital, its tragic design, its concern with property and territory, its absorption in the workings of government, and its philosophical disenchantment means that *Hamlet* is situated firmly inside European contexts, with its being taken up to affirm particular linguistic and cultural circuits of interpretation. In an alternative camp, several works have solely addressed *Hamlet's* posthumous histories. Important investigations into *Hamlet* on film and in performance include Anthony B. Dawson, *Shakespeare in Performance: 'Hamlet'* (1995), Mary Z. Maher, *Modern Hamlets and Their Soliloquies* (2003), Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction* (2007) and David Bevington, *'Murder Most Foul': 'Hamlet' Through the Ages* (2011), stimulating and influential works that position the play in relation to a number of later reception contexts.² But the difficulty with these studies is that *Hamlet's* screen appearances outside of the UK/US axis receive scant mention, an omission which inevitably compromises the books' conclusions about *Hamlet's* circulation and its wider significances. Apart from isolated analyses of the Japanese *The Bad Sleep Well* (dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1960) and the Russian *Gamlet* (dir. Grigori Kozintsev, 1964), and, to a lesser extent, the Chinese *The Banquet* (dir. Xiaogang Feng, 2006) and the Indian *Haider* (dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014), little attempt has been made to address how pervasively the play has been taken up by filmmakers worldwide. Instead, much ink has been spilled on variations on a familiar quartet of directors

(Laurence Olivier, Franco Zeffirelli, Kenneth Branagh and Michael Almereyda) and their English language *Hamlet* adaptations, as a clutch of older and recent studies attest.³ Despite the fact that, as Samuel Crowl acknowledges, 'the world of *Hamlet* on film' is 'the richest for any of Shakespeare's plays', non-Anglophone traditions of film interpretation tend to be represented by Kozintsev and/or Kurosawa only, with these two directors standing in for a plethora of other examples.⁴ The result is not only a skewed cinematic canon but, more fundamentally, a failure to grasp the crucial importance accorded Shakespeare's most celebrated hero in the international imaginary. By charting the play's presence in more extensive cultural and linguistic registers, the majority of which are non-Anglophone, this book adjusts conventional axes of argument and provides new materials for discussion and debate. Where David Bevington has argued that the play is a paradigm for 'the English-speaking world', *'Hamlet' and World Cinema* argues for a fresh awareness of Shakespeare's play's global malleability and transformative energies.⁵

In so doing, *'Hamlet' and World Cinema* chimes with current orientations in Shakespeare studies. In recent years, 'global Shakespeares' have assumed a prominent place, with attention increasingly focused on Shakespeare's global afterlives. Conference programming, academic posts and book series are signs of the health of a more internationally angled playwright, while college and university courses are featuring in greater numbers illustrations of the ways in which Shakespeare's works are translated across different nations, cultures and media. Over the course of 2012, the Olympic year, a host of festivals, exhibitions and events centred on Shakespeare as a dramatist newly alive in different languages and contexts, as the 'Globe to Globe' season and the 'World Shakespeare Festival' abundantly demonstrated. When, in 2016, attention again turned to Shakespeare to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of his death, an even greater volume of world-facing activities was launched. Emphasis lay firmly on the extent to which Shakespeare was a vital and relevant instrument, speaking to a range of constituencies (to women in Arabic and Indian contexts, for instance, as in the British Council 'Shakespeare Lives' initiative) and resonating with shifts in convention, ideology and viewpoint; as Sonia Massai writes, reflecting on that celebratory year, 'Shakespeare is no longer anchored to ideals of Englishness understood as a combination of blood, land and language'.⁶ The academic expression of this change in perspective is reflected in essay collections and volumes that push at existing boundaries of knowledge and entertain new performance and representational scenarios. Hence, studies of the 2012 'Globe to Globe'

season demonstrate the appeal of a globally inflected Shakespeare while, at the same time, exploring cultural programming practices and officially sanctioned expressions of national identity.⁷ The 2016 festivities were similarly generative, evidencing the historical global reach of adaptations of Shakespeare and the place of the plays in Africa, China, India and elsewhere. Inasmuch as these studies examine potential areas of common understanding, and promote intercultural dialogue for the purposes of the commemorative occasion, they also shine a light on distinctive constructions of Shakespeare in different parts of the world, contested legacies of engagement and particularized reception modalities.⁸ Such has been their effect that the conjunction of 'Shakespeare' and 'world' is now a familiar one: Shakespeare is becoming indivisible from his 'world' manifestations, these two terms being bracketed together in recent discussions as an indication of a paradigm shift.⁹ While the focus in this methodological development has generally been on theatrical performance, cinema is also being looked at anew. Critic Greg Colón Semenza describes 'world cinema' as 'the next, if not the final, frontier for Shakespeare on film scholarship', and, in my own work, I have attempted to push parameters, and interrogate canons, by reimagining the field.¹⁰

Inside cultural practices centred on Shakespeare as a global icon, and against the backdrop of worldwide celebrations and commemorative events, the pre-eminence accorded *Hamlet* is striking. Over the course of 2014–2016, a Shakespeare's Globe *Hamlet* production toured the world, each country finding in the production local resonances.¹¹ Meantime, *Hamlet*, as it signifies in particular regions and nation-states, and as a play that carries with it distinctive traditions of appropriation, has continued to establish itself as a key object of investigation.¹² And, slowly but surely, the cinematic landscape is following suit, a smaller number of salutary and invigorating studies testifying to a recognition that the play's global screen manifestations are all-important.¹³ To be sure, the global complexions of Shakespearean film and theatrical performance are more widely accessible than ever before. And a resource such as the 'Global Shakespeares' website, which features extracts of key examples, continues to change thinking, teaching and interpretation.¹⁴

'Hamlet' and World Cinema is a contribution to this ongoing discussion as well as to *Hamlet* studies. Crucially, 'adaptation' is understood throughout this study as a film which either translates *Hamlet* directly or models its narrative closely, meaning that the works examined here are characterized by intricate, allusive and energizing relations between cinematic idiom and 'source'. Fredric Jameson sees the process as inherently competitive,

suggesting that 'individual works, either as external adaptations or as internal echo chambers of the various media, be grasped as allegories of . . . never-ending and unresolvable struggles for primacy'.¹⁵ It is as a two-way struggle, with points of contestation and complementarity in between, that I seek to explain how the play and a film adaptation reinforce and enlighten each other. As part of that push-and-pull, additional interpretive communities are created and new texts forged out of old. The emergence of new works of art has been a focus for several commentators. Julie Sanders, for example, defines adaptation as a 'transposition' that 'take[s] a text . . . and deliver[s] it' to 'new . . . audiences', while Colin MacCabe contends that the films that emerge from the multiple transactions that inform the adaptive process are of 'real value'.¹⁶ Adaptations, of course, are not free-floating. Further informing this book's understanding of adaptation is the notion that any engagement with the ways in which *Hamlet* signifies in world cinematic cultures must be historically situated. 'Media shift and change over time', writes Daniel Fischlin, adding, 'adaptation . . . shapeshift[s] across a wide continuum [of] . . . contexts, voicings, histories'.¹⁷ Absorbing this caveat into the book's approach, I situate each adaptation in terms of a nexus of factors, including material crises, population shifts, regime change, regional self-assertion, political protest and the status of national film industries.

The method whereby each adaptation is appreciated is therefore multi-layered. Approaching examples on their own terms, *'Hamlet' and World Cinema* closely situates the work of art at a micro-level, using local traditions (such as translation, music, religious mythology and theatrical performance) to point up the films' indigenous creativity. In this, there is often aesthetic delight, and it is for this reason that individual chapters are oriented towards unpacking the adaptations' formal features, finding in *mise-en-scène*, sound and style a key with which to unlock location-specific visions and constructions. Such an approach does not necessarily prioritize the 'original'; as Maurizio Calbi notes, adaptations 'need to be judged . . . as . . . critical response[s] to Shakespeare's play, and not on the basis of . . . faithfulness to the language of the "original"'.¹⁸ Indeed, as the majority of the examples discussed in this book suggest, it is the ways in which *Hamlet* is transposed into other languages, or non-Anglophone languages are utilized, that becomes the focal point. For example, in *Hamlet* (dir. Stephen Cavanagh, 2005), Irish is reserved for the 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy, a potent choice given the film's Londonderry/Derry setting and interrogative engagement with Northern Irish politics. *Hamlet* (dir. Alexander Fodor, 2007) also makes an arresting language decision.

The “travelling troupe” comprises ‘classically trained, fierce-looking, German-speaking actors’, the idea being that audiences will be liberated from an “addiction” to standardized versions of Shakespeare’ and so stimulated by “foreign Shakespeare” that the “original” appears less powerful and spellbinding.¹⁹ The notion of how language figures, and what role language plays, are central to definitions of ‘world cinema’. Definitions tend to circulate around the question – if not problem – of the English language, with most discussions of ‘world cinema’ arguing for the need, in Shekhar Deshpande and Meta Mazaj’s words, to ‘displace . . . Hollywood as a dominant player’: ‘Hollywood cannot be equated to world cinema despite its own claims’, they observe.²⁰ This study enlists a working application of ‘world cinema’, arguing that, in the context of the general neglect of non-Anglophone *Hamlet* adaptations, an account that eschews the domination of Hollywood – and the English language – is a political obligation. This is not to suggest that the terminology of world cinema is always unproblematic, or that a geographical template is sufficient in itself. Any spatial understanding of *Hamlet* afterlives must recognize the fact that its subjects (i.e. the film adaptations) do not uniformly emerge across the globe. Rather, the numbers of adaptations discovered in any one geographical site are intricately linked to historical processes of education, colonialism and empire. In this sense, this book works with an additional definition of ‘world cinema’ – what has recently been termed the ‘latitudinal’ approach. According to Rob Stone, Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison and Alex Marlow-Mann, as much as it is incumbent on us to take full account of national and regional diversity, we also need to recognize and integrate ‘theoretical, industrial, thematic, aesthetic, technological and commercial imperatives and parameters’.²¹ Accordingly, *‘Hamlet’ and World Cinema* pursues a mixed methodology, combining close readings of the films’ adaptive procedures with an informed sense of issues around audience, reception and distribution as well as reflections on production praxes.

Satirist Max Beerbohm famously remarked that ‘Hamlet is a hoop through which every very eminent actor must, sooner or later, jump’.²² A final aspect of the book’s approach is its use of interviews with directors, screenwriters and cast attracted to the play’s aura as a measure of quality and achievement. The acknowledgements to this book spell out the detail, but suffice it to say here that the method integrates actors such as Kofi Middleton-Mends (*Hamlet* in the Ghanaian *Hamile: The Tongo ‘Hamlet’* [dir. Terry Bishop, 1965]), directors such as Martin Šulík (the Slovakian and shantytown-set *Cigán/Gypsy* [2011]) and screenwriters such as

Chenaktshang Dorje Tsering or Jangbu (a Tibetan poet who collaborated on the screenplay for a 2006 Chinese adaptation, *Prince of the Himalayas*). These interviews have been conducted face-to-face and *in situ* where possible, the priority being to highlight original voices as an essential part of the warp and the weft of the imaginative undertaking. The deployment of witnesses allows us to identify not only the local but also the often personal circumstances surrounding the fascination of the play, permits a more nuanced sense of how *Hamlet* operates as a text associated with 'high culture' and imported values, provides us with content that illuminates films as processes rather than as finished products, and reminds us of the ways in which Shakespeare's drama possesses a critical and cultural currency. In the light of the interviews, one also gains a fuller appreciation of the cinematic opportunities the play presents to artists and practitioners. Several directors emerge as auteur figures: they include, for example, the Greek Angelos Theodoropoulos, who, in *Ithele Na Ginei Vasiliias/He Wanted to Become King* (1967), starred, directed and wrote music, financing through his own production company, and the Italian Carmelo Bene, who, in *Un Amleto di Meno/One Hamlet Less* (1973), assumed an even greater number of roles, directing, writing, acting, designing, selecting music and creating costumes. Yet, however much auteurship enables, it simultaneously limits, illuminating gaps, fissures and constraints. Most obviously, where world Shakespearean cinematic direction is concerned, auteurship tends to be a male preserve. In interview, Mireia Ros, the only female director to have helmed a long feature world cinema *Hamlet* (the Spanish adaptation, *El Triunfo/The Triumph* [2006]), speaks of the challenge – as well as directing, writing and contributing to the score – of adapting a male-authored play that has already been mediated in a male-authored novel. 'I did try to introduce a woman's point of view', she notes, 'by changing the method of narration, inventing new situations, writing some of the songs and playing up the emotive rather than the physical'.²³ Here Ros registers, via her flagging of a purposeful rewriting of source and script, the difficulties involved in confronting gendered accretions and constructions of Shakespearean authority, perhaps finding in representations of historical subjects and places options for thinking through her own position – and exceptionalism – as a cinematic creative. As the example of *El Triunfo* may suggest, adapting *Hamlet* gives access to an eloquence not always permitted to practitioners as speaking subjects and, in conditions of seeming impossibility, allows for representational possibility. Cinematic *Hamlet* adaptations matter globally because pertinent conversations cannot always be held publicly, and, as a result, many of the film examples

discussed in this book refract the extent to which in particular nation-states and communities the play is mediated in the belief that the word and the image can serve an interventionist, transformative purpose. Chapters attend, therefore, to how cultures of censorship impact on the production of a *Hamlet* film and explore the workings of individual modalities of dissemination inside often repressive state machines. The Brazilian *O Jogo da Vida e da Morte/A Game of Life and Death* (dir. Mário Kuperman, 1971) is a singular instance of an adaptation that exploits the classic mandate of *Hamlet* to skirt the restricting dictates of a military government. Placing *Hamlet* on screen in some parts of the world, then, is to subscribe to a self-protecting semiotics; it is to recognize a vulnerability to institutional operations while taking advantage of the opportunity, through Shakespeare, to pass critical contemporary judgement; and it is to endorse the affective functions of adaptation in the same moment as expressing a civic need for questioning, comment and argument.

Hamlet, in the case-studies that this book presents, is consistently differently inflected: if, for one filmmaker, the play intrigues because of its association with past history, for another it is the drama's present purchase that appeals. Often, individual interpretations clash and conflict – if one group of representations approves *Hamlet*'s free-floating cultural pedigree, an alternative group responds to the play's association with capital and the market. What is more, differences in emphasis and orientation slip and slide according to location. Taking on board a further definition of world cinema (the 'longitudinal' approach that embraces the determining role of 'geographical, national, regional, transnational and global' factors), *'Hamlet' and World Cinema* organizes its material inside seven regional and/or national configurations – Western Europe, Africa, Brazil, Asia (China and Japan), India, the Middle East (Iran and Turkey), Russia and Central and Eastern Europe.²⁴ This arrangement allows for a conceptual focus on the key domains of filmic activity, crucially without privileging rigid notions of 'the regional' or 'the national'. At the core of the book's 'longitudinal' approach is a recognition of the provisional and constructed nature of location identifiers: 'Middle East', for example, is a western term discursively created in the crucible of colonialism and imperialism.²⁵ As several commentators have argued, however, notwithstanding their histories, some identifiers are interpretively enabling. Pertinent is Shohini Chaudhuri's observation that 'Middle East' helps to designate territories that possess 'historical and cultural commonalities that validate cross-cultural comparisons'.²⁶

If there is elasticity in how regional and/or national categories are conceptualized, there is flexibility in terms of content. Some chapter case-studies consider four to eleven primary examples (invariably indicative of well-established Shakespearean traditions), while others concentrate on just two isolated examples (suggestive of contingency and discontinuity). Different foci are reflective of the fact that, in some parts of the world (such as Western Europe), *Hamlet* is reproduced across a longer historical era and in substantial numbers; in contradistinction, in other environments (such as in Brazil), it is possible to identify the phenomenon of a small number of films released within a single year. By letting extant material dictate its shape, *'Hamlet' and World Cinema* allows for a series of creative and open encounters. The culminating effect of the study is to underscore the shifting nature of borders, nations and even regions across time. For example, in the discussion of *Hamile*, the 1965 African adaptation, the assertion of Ghana's national identity in the wake of independence is read as part of the film's *zeitgeist*; similarly, *Karmayogi* (dir. V. K. Prakash, 2012), a South Indian adaptation, summons a long-standing dialogue about the extent of Kerala's influence and possessions within the larger Indian landmass. *Hamlet*, in these instances, becomes a reflection of territorial instability *and* a means to intervene in territorial dispute. In the absence of definitive boundaries, I have opted for a self-conscious approach. Mirroring the play's own location in history, chapters are organized so as to mime a typically Renaissance trajectory, a circumnavigation beginning and ending with Europe. The book, then, imitates a journey that brought the world into view in an unprecedented way, inaugurating, for better and worse, processes of globalization that persist into the present day. There is a disciplinary dimension, too. As film scholars have argued, assessing world cinema involves mapping of various kinds. Writing on the need for an 'atlas of world cinema', Dudley Andrew proposes understanding the field not only in terms of topographies but also demographics, orientation and language. Such a method necessitates identifying 'specific "cinema sites"' and applying to them a mixture of methods – in Andrew's reading, 'coordinates for navigating'.²⁷ Or, to put the point in another way, as does Fredric Jameson in a study of cinema and space in the world system, 'cognitive mapping', as much as it involves locations, is a 'retrospective and analytical instrument' that brings 'critical and historical' methods into play so as to spotlight 'new geotopical cartographies'.²⁸ Working with distinctive places enables a consideration of politics and histories, and deploying the map allows for the local conditions underpinning a particular film product to move into visibility. Contextualized within