

Shakespeare has been a central figure in German literature and theatre. In the twentieth century the question of how to produce Shakespeare's plays became not only an aesthetic but also an ideological issue. The political tensions and crises of German society were often played out on the stage, elevating the theatre to a uniquely important position. Shakespeare's plays were employed to highlight the mental and cultural changes wrought by the disruptions of German history.

This book tells the story of Shakespeare in the German-speaking theatre against the background of German culture and politics in the twentieth century. It follows the earlier volume by Simon Williams on the reception of Shakespeare during the previous 300 years (Shakespeare on the German Stage, 1586–1914). In surveying the twentieth century, Hortmann concentrates on the two most important and fruitful periods: the years of the Weimar Republic (1919–33) and the turbulent decades of the sixties and seventies, when the German theatre was revitalised by a stormy marriage of avant-garde art and revolutionary politics. Other chapters deal with the fate of Shakespeare during the Third Reich and the immediate post-war period, as well as with the dramatic changes of the theatrical idiom under postmodernism in the eighties. A separate section by Maik Hamburger covers developments in the theatres of the German Democratic Republic.

Hortmann refuses to be exhaustive, focusing on the most representative and colourful directors and actors. Individual productions are described, not as discrete events, but primarily to reveal a particular trend or movement. They are illustrated with numerous pictures, documenting changes in the visual presentation of Shakespeare.

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Wilhelm Hortmann

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The twentieth century

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WITH A SECTION ON SHAKESPEARE ON STAGE

IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

BY MAIK HAMBURGER

Wilhelm Hortmann



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For Ingeborg v. Kaler

CONTENTS

Illustrations xii

Preface xvii

I OLD TRADITIONS AND NEW BEGINNINGS I

'Our' Shakespeare, or: the bard in the rucksack 1

A more refined appropriation 5

Traditional production styles: Shakespeare on the stage of the Stadttheater 7

New beginnings 13

Appia and Craig 26

Max Reinhardt 30

2 SHAKESPEARE THEATRE IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC (1919–1933) 44

The political background 44

Theatres in troubled times: hard-pressed and triumphant 46

The artistic background 48

Expressionist Shakespeare 52

'Der Kampf um Shakespeare': debates, translations, adaptations 78

Saladin Schmitt, or: cultural politics in the provinces 93

Otto Falckenberg and the Munich Kammerspiele 101

3 SHAKESPEARE IN THE THIRD REICH (1933–1945) 112

Nazism and culture – an uneasy alliance 112

Theaterstadt Berlin 119

As they liked it: Comedies galore 121

Power, politics and morality: Shakespeare at the Staatstheater under Jürgen Fehling 136

Clarity and order: Shakespeare at the Deutsches Theater under Hilpert and Engel 148

A special case: Gustaf Gründgens – Mephisto as Hamlet 156

The 'Zürcher Schauspielhaus': Swiss bastion against Hitler 161

ix

X CONTENTS

**4 SHAKESPEARE ON THE POST-WAR STAGE – CONTINUITY OR
 A FRESH START? 174**

- Introduction: 'Die Stunde Null' 174
 In search of message and style 181
 Continuity with a difference 184
 Continuity at the Burgtheater 186
 Shakespeare performances at theatre festivals 191
 The fifties epitomized: Gustav Rudolf Sellner and 'instrumental theatre' 195
 Towards a new realism in the classics: Fritz Kortner's
 struggles and triumphs 203

**5 TRANSVALUATIONS: SHAKESPEARE AND THE REVOLUTION ON
 THE WEST GERMAN STAGE (1964–1979) 217**

- The new mental climate 219
 Shakespeare, the theatre and the crisis of authority 221
 History Lessons 226
 Heiner Müller's Shakespeare operations 236
 Theoretical difficulties 240
 Better than Shakespeare? Adapting on principle, or: the question of texts 243
 Questions of content and form: visual radicalizations 249
 Eros and imagination: the theatre of Peter Zadek 253
 Excursus: the problem of Shylock – Zadek, Tabori and others 254
 Anarchy and energy: Peter Zadek's zestful iconoclasm 262
 The end of a period: Heyme and Stein 268
 The aesthetics of iconoclasm 279
 Non-experimental Shakespeare ('Shakespearepflege') 285

**6 RECONSTRUCTION, DECONSTRUCTION, POSTMODERNISM:
 REDISCOVERING SHAKESPEARE IN THE EIGHTIES 293**

- The new mental climate and the crisis in the theatre 293
 Beyond catharsis, or: the escape from history 298
 Posthistoire, or: the thrills of despondency 306
 Word into image, triumphs of postmodernism 314
 Dieter Dorn and the Munich Kammerspiele 323
 Peymann and company: Stuttgart, Bochum, Vienna 332
 The Bremer Shakespeare Company 341

7 THEATRE UNDER SOCIALISM: SHAKESPEARE IN EAST GERMANY	350
In another country: Introduction by Wilhelm Hortmann	350
Politics, culture and identity	352
The theatrical background	359
A theatre of opposition?	365
Shakespeare on the stages of the German Democratic Republic (by Maik Hamburger pp. 369–434)	369
Consolidation and subversion in East German Shakespeare productions. The first twenty-five years	369
Beyond politics? <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> and <i>Twelfth Night</i> after 1970	396
Unprincipely Hamlets (1973–1983)	410
Some notable regional events	420
1989 to 1990: <i>Hamlet</i> at world's end. Heiner Müller's production in East Berlin	428
8 THE END OF AN EPOCH – AND SOME NEW FACES	435
1989 and after: the mental climate	435
Changes in the world of theatre	437
Shakespeare recycled	439
Novelties and rareties	449
Festival Shakespeare: cultural events at Salzburg and Vienna	454
Leander Haussmann	461
Karin Beier	468
Select bibliography	476
Index	485

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 *Julius Caesar* 1874 Berlin. The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's conception of the Forum scene. 8
- 2 *Twelfth Night* 1907 Berlin. 11
- 3 Peter Behrens's model for *Hamlet*. 15
- 4 Louise Dumont as Lady Macbeth, Düsseldorf 1906. 21
- 5 Woodcut by Edward Gordon Craig 'Hamlet welcomes the Players'. 28
- 6 Craig's design for *Hamlet*, 1907. 29
- 7 Drawing by Ernst Stern of Oberon, Puck and a faun for Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1913. 31
- 8 Gustav Knina's legendary forest for Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1905 Berlin. 34
- 9 Max Reinhardt's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1913 Berlin, 'Die Birke' (The Birch). 36
- 10 Oberon, Titania and the fairies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1930 Berlin. 37
- 11 Alexander Moissi as Hamlet, Berlin 1909. 39
- 12 Alexander Moissi as Hamlet – caricatured by Hans Rewald. 40
- 13 *Julius Caesar* at the Grosses Schauspielhaus 1920. Ernst Stern's vision of the Forum scene. 42
- 14 Emil Orlik's studies of Kortner as Richard III. 54
- 15 *Hamlet* 1926 Berlin. The Mousetrap scene. 59
- 16 *Richard III* 1920 Berlin. The 'Jessner-Treppe'. 61
- 17 *Richard III* 1920 Berlin. Kortner as Richard, Rudolf Forster as Buckingham. 62
- 18 *Othello* 1921 Berlin. Kortner and Johanna Hofer in an expressively stylized tableau. 65
- 19 *Macbeth* 1923 Frankfurt. Ludwig Sievert's sketch of the set. 68
- 20 *Othello* 1928 Frankfurt. Sketch by Leo Pasetti. 71
- 21 Brecht's adaptation of Marlowe's *Edward II* 1924 Munich. 82

- 22 *Coriolanus* 1925 Berlin. 84
- 23 *Richard II* 1927 Bochum. 98
- 24 Johannes Schröder's design for *Titus Andronicus* 1937 Bochum. 99
- 25 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1925 Munich. The mechanicals. 105
- 26 *Troilus and Cressida* 1936 Munich. A study by Eduard Sturm. 109
- 27 *Troilus and Cressida* 1936 Munich. 110
- 28 Nazi-Berlin in all its pomp. 115
- 29 The Düsseldorf municipal theatre 1934. 118
- 30 Pyramus and Thisbe in Hilpert's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1940 Berlin. 125
- 31 *Twelfth Night* 1937 Berlin. 130
- 32 Heinrich George as Oberon. 134
- 33 *Richard III* 1937 Berlin. Krauss and Minetti. 138
- 34 *Richard II* 1939 Berlin. Richard on Flint Castle drawbridge. 143
- 35 *Julius Caesar* 1941 Berlin. 144
- 36 Traugott Müller's set for act 4 scene 1 of *Julius Caesar* 1941 Berlin. 147
- 37 *Coriolanus* 1937 Berlin. 150
- 38 *The Tempest* 1938 Berlin. 153
- 39 Gustaf Gründgens as Hamlet, Berlin 1936. 159
- 40 *Mutter Courage* 1941 Zurich. 166
- 41 *King John* 1941 Zurich. A sketch by Teo Otto. 167
- 42 The Düsseldorf municipal theatre in 1943. 176
- 43 The new Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus. 187
- 44 *Much Ado About Nothing* 1953 Vienna. 189
- 45 'Art for Coal' – Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen 1951. 192
- 46 Will Quadflieg as Hamlet 1953. 194
- 47 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1952 Darmstadt. Stage model by Franz Mertz. 197
- 48 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1952 Darmstadt. Oberon and Titania. 202
- 49 *Julius Caesar* 1955 Munich. 208
- 50 *Twelfth Night* 1962 Berlin. The letter scene. 213
- 51 Rolf Boysen as Othello. 214
- 52 Fritz Kortner as Shylock. 216
- 53 *Measure for Measure* 1967 Bremen. 218

xiv ILLUSTRATIONS

- 54 *Henry VI* (The War of the Roses) 1967 Stuttgart. 228
- 55 Theatre of cruelty: *Macbeth* (Shakespeare/Heiner Müller) 1972 Basle. 238
- 56 *Macbeth* (Shakespeare/Heiner Müller) 1974 Recklinghausen. 242
- 57 *Othello* 1976 Basle. A vicious end for Desdemona. 245
- 58 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1978 Munich. Titania and the fairies. 250
- 59 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1978 Munich. Theseus/Oberon and Philostrate/Puck. 251
- 60 *The Merchant of Venice* 1957 Düsseldorf. Ernst Deutsch as Shylock, Joana Maria Gorvin as Portia. 255
- 61 *The Merchant of Venice* 1957 Düsseldorf. Jessica and Lorenzo in act 5 scene 1: 'in such a night as this'. 256
- 62 *The Merchant of Venice* 1972 Bochum. 258
- 63 *Othello* 1976 Hamburg. La Belle et la Bête. 264
- 64 *Othello* 1976 Hamburg. 265
- 65 *Shakespeare's Memory* 1976 Berlin. 272
- 66 *As You Like It* 1977 Berlin. Karl-Ernst Herrmann's Forest of Arden. 274
- 67 *Hamlet* 1979 Cologne. A hero beyond recall. 277
- 68 A rainbow for Klaus Michael Grüber's *The Tempest* 1970 Bremen. 284
- 69 *The Taming of the Shrew* 1971 Munich. 289
- 70 *Twelfth Night* 1972 Salzburg. 290
- 71 Helmut Lohner as Andrew Aguecheek looking the part. 291
- 72 Bruno Ganz as Hamlet, 1982 Berlin. 299
- 73 *Hamlet* 1982 Berlin. The vast space of the Schaubühne. 301
- 74 *Hamlet* 1985 Frankfurt. 305
- 75 *Hamlet* 1986 Hamburg. 309
- 76 *Macbeth* 1982 Cologne. 311
- 77 *King Lear* 1982 Cologne. 313
- 78 *Twelfth Night* 1989 Bochum. 317
- 79 *Twelfth Night* 1989 Bochum. 318
- 80 *Timon of Athens* 1990 Bochum. A play of masks. 320
- 81 *Timon of Athens* 1990 Bochum. 322
- 82 *Troilus and Cressida* 1986 Munich. Hector's death. 326
- 83 *King Lear* 1992 Munich. 330
- 84 *King Lear* 1992 Munich. Gloucester and Lear. 331

- 85 *The Winter's Tale* 1983 Bochum. Chamber music. 336
 86 Gert Voss as Richard III at the Burgtheater 1987 Vienna. 338
 87 *Twelfth Night* 1987 Bremen. 345
 88 *Titus Andronicus* 1992 Bremen. 347
 89 *Hamlet* 1945 Berlin. 371
 90 *Othello* 1953 Berlin. 374
 91 *King Lear* 1957 Berlin. 376
 92 *Troilus and Cressida* 1962 Dresden. 378
 93 *Coriolanus* 1964 Berlin. 382
 94 *Hamlet* 1964 Karl-Marx-Stadt. 386
 95 *Hamlet* 1964 Berlin. 388
 96 *Hamlet* 1964 Greifswald. 391
 97 *Hamlet* 1964 Greifswald. 392
 98 *Richard III* 1972 Berlin. 395
 99 *Richard III* 1972 Berlin. 396
 100 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1971 Halle. 398
 101 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1980 Berlin, Deutsches Theater. 400
 102 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1980 Berlin, Deutsches Theater. 401
 103 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1980 Berlin, Maxim Gorki Theater. 404
 104 *Twelfth Night* 1986 Weimar. 408
 105 *Hamlet* 1973 Schwerin. 411
 106 *Hamlet* 1977 Berlin. 415
 107 *Hamlet* 1977 Berlin. 416
 108 *Hamlet* 1983 Potsdam. 419
 109 *The Merchant of Venice* 1985 Berlin. 423
 110 *Romeo and Juliet* 1986 Schwerin. 424
 111 *The Winter's Tale* 1986 Schwerin. 426
 112 *Hamlet/Maschine* 1990 Berlin. 432
 113 *Hamlet/Maschine* 1990 Berlin. 433
 114 Members of the Dresden theatre demonstrating in October 1989. 436
 115 *The Tempest (Sturm vor Shakespeare)* 1994 Berlin. 448
 116 Marianne Hoppe as King Lear 1990 Frankfurt. 451
 117 *King Lear* 1985 Berlin. Lear and Fool. 452

xvi ILLUSTRATIONS

- 118 *Julius Caesar* 1992 Salzburg. The Forum scene. 457
 119 *Antony and Cleopatra* 1994 Salzburg. 459
 120 *Antony and Cleopatra* 1994 Vienna. 460
 121 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1992 Weimar. Athens Wood. 463
 122 *Romeo and Juliet* 1993 Munich. 467
 123 *Romeo and Juliet* 1993 Düsseldorf. The 'balcony' scene. 472
 124 *Romeo and Juliet* 1993 Düsseldorf. The final tableau. 473
 125 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1995 Düsseldorf. Titania and Bottom. 475

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PREFACE

Students of theatre history are familiar with Haroun's dilemma in Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. They start out on what appears to be a straightforward investigation, and before long they are both on a fabulous quest and in deep water. And like Rashid's listeners they learn how amazingly histories and stories intermingle and that there is never only one story to tell or one history to write. This was also my experience in preparing this book, which cannot pretend to be more than a sketch of *a* (not *the*) history of Shakespeare on the German stage in the twentieth century. The reason for the moderate claim is unfortunately not author's modesty but the dimension and complexity of the subject.

On a quantitative count alone the difficulties appeared alarming: during most of the period under review Shakespeare was the most frequently performed dramatist, averaging between one and two hundred productions per year, which occasionally added up to two thousand performances or more. These astonishing figures may be evidence of vigorous theatrical life and Shakespeare's lasting popularity, but the nine thousand or so productions for the whole period are quite beyond any researcher's capacity to investigate. German scholars are often told to have the courage to leave gaps ('Mut zur Lücke'). However, taking less than a tenth of one's material into account, as was done for this study, would seem to take the advice about 'Mut zur Lücke' to foolhardy extremes.

The qualitative aspect was even more daunting. Theatre is a composite art, uniting actors, directors, stage designers, painters, lighting specialists, musicians, etc. in a single effort. As long as all of these continue in the grooves of tradition there is only a conventional story to tell. Yet when they are masters of their craft – as they must be to justify inclusion in a survey of this kind – it is quite impossible to do justice to the individual and combined excellencies of so many superb artists. The story then becomes painfully inadequate, yet as a challenge fascinating and complex. It has to relate how theatre flourishes and is transformed under multiple pressures: those exerted by the artistic individuals engaged in it, those arising from the material changes within the medium itself, and those generated by

theatre responding – much more directly than other arts – to the temper and demands of the time. And when the age proves as revolutionary and explosive as the twentieth century, pressure in the theatre mounts, interrelations between art and politics intensify to the point where the story of theatre becomes inseparable from general history.

The German case is unique. Owing to its relative freedom from commercial considerations and the traditional respect for education and culture or 'Bildung', German theatre acquired a peculiarly extensive brief: it does not only, in Hamlet's words, 'show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure', it also, in Schiller's words, functions as 'the nation's moral academy'. Immorality and politics being closely linked in certain phases of twentieth-century German history, and politics and ethics – according to progressive schools of thought – being mutually interdependent, German theatre entered the political arena as a matter of course. This was less pronounced in the years before the First World War and seems to be wearing off as the century draws to its close. But for the rest of the period and under the impact of the four great traumatic blows to German identity (1918/19, 1933, 1945 and 1968, to which, for the former GDR, the years 1953, 1961 and 1989/90 must be added) theatre and politics were locked in a close and usually antagonistic relationship.

In the theatre the 'battle of identities' was primarily waged for 'possession' of the classical heritage. This was not just a cultural quibble. Redefining the meaning of the classical canon was tantamount to changing attitudes and values – an eminently political act. Nor was the parallel struggle for new aesthetic forms only stylistically relevant: it carried distinctly ideological overtones. Shakespeare was at the heart of the struggle. His significance for the development of German literature and intellectual life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is well known and has recently been powerfully restated by Simon Williams in the preceding volume. In the twentieth century it was the theatre which referred to Shakespeare as ultimate proof and final arbiter. The 'great continent Shakespeare' invited all kinds of approaches: from submissive reverence and joyously wondering discovery, to brutal conquest and wilful destruction. For German directors and dramatists Shakespeare's work was both infinite continent and black hole; it would reward travellers with amazing discoveries as well as dark confrontations with self. For Brecht and Heiner Müller, Shakespeare was creative spur and trauma in one. Müller's cryptic conclusion that 'we have not yet come into our own as long as Shakespeare writes our plays' expresses resigned insight and respect; it also hints at an

undefined ache and insufficiency which has nothing personal about it but seems to point at a German dilemma, in theatre and politics.

In thinking about German Shakespeare it is difficult not to align the two. That is why this book is both history and story. It tells the story of important movements and individuals, directors and actors mostly, and describes significant productions. The canvas, however, on which this is inscribed is that of twentieth-century German intellectual and political history. This may be a narrowing of the scope; it seemed unavoidable in view of the searing process of self-searching that German theatre was involved in throughout most of the period. From the beginning of the Weimar Republic in 1919 to the end of the GDR seventy years later German theatre was caught up in and often self-confidently raised its voice in the political discourse. Of the latter, Maik Hamburger's contribution to this book 'Shakespeare on the stages of the German Democratic Republic' (in chapter 7) furnishes a highly instructive example.

The word 'German' in the title should not offend Austrian and Swiss readers. It is used in the sense of 'German-speaking' and is totally free from any intimation of cultural hegemony. Theatrical relations were intense. With the exception of the Nazi period (and with certain restrictions relative to the GDR) the three countries were a common job market for theatre people. Appropriation of Shakespeare differed only when politics differed. This becomes plain when one compares the approach of the Zurich Schauspielhaus with the contemporaneous treatment of Shakespeare in Berlin in Nazi times (chapter 3) or by studying the uses and fate of Shakespeare under socialism (chapter 7).

As one takes leave of a book, one thinks ruefully of all its inadequacies. I regret above all that many devoted artists and companies have found no place in this book. There are some grievous omissions. To enumerate them here would be adding insult to injury. To all of these I tender sincere, if unhelpful apologies.

My debt of thanks is great. I remember gratefully the help and encouragement I have received from friends and colleagues. Jo Rippier and Kuno Schuhmann read the manuscript; the one saved me from stylistic blunders, the other from errors of judgement – those that remain are all my own. Dennis Kennedy and Simon Williams, masters in the field of Shakespeare theatre research, gave expert advice and warm support. Maik Hamburger warned the novice against all-too-common ideological pitfalls in western judgements of East German cultural affairs. Sarah Stanton of Cambridge University Press generously extended a number of deadlines and greatly

supported the project and its author with her patient confidence. I have also profited in more respects than can be named from discussion and exchange of views with many friends, scholars and Shakespearean experts, among them Ingeborg Boltz, Klaus Börner, John Russell Brown, Claus Clemens, Ulrike Dibbelt, Kurt Dörnemann, Günther Erken, Vilem Fried, Manfred Gaul, Dominique Goy-Blanquet, Frank Günther, Lawrence Guntner, Dietmar Haack, Werner Habicht, Andreas Höfele, Peter Holland, Christa Jansohn, Dieter Mehl, Renate Möhrmann, Markus Moninger, Ingrid Nowel, Marvin and Mary Rosenberg, Christa Schuenke, Zdenek Stribrny, Ulrich Suerbaum, Christian W. Thomsen, Katharina Ullmer, Günther and Eva Walch, Sibylle Wirsing. I also remember thrilling post-performance discussions with theatre people and members of committed and agitated audiences. The energetic exchange within this theatre community was a bracing experience and at times gave my labour the keen edge (or illusion) of relevance.

Parts of chapters 5, 6 and 7 contain material adapted from reviews and articles previously published in *Shakespeare Survey*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch*, in *Foreign Shakespeare*, ed. Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge, 1993), in *Images of Shakespeare*, ed. Werner Habicht, D. J. Palmer and R. Pringle (Newark, London, Toronto, 1986) and *Shakespeare and Cultural Traditions*, ed. Tetsuo Kishi, R. Pringle, S. Wells (Newark, London, Toronto, 1991). I wish to thank both the editors and publishers concerned for their permission to use this material.

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Documentation and illustrations

References in the text are given in full at the first mention and short-titled subsequently. Translations from German sources, unless otherwise stated, are my own (or Maik Hamburger's, in chapter 7). Quotations from Shakespeare come from *The Arden Shakespeare*, edited by Kenneth Muir.

The illustrations are identified in the captions by title, date, city, director, designer and photographer – wherever applicable and known. The sources of the illustrations can be found on p. xvi. Great pains have been taken to identify copyright holders of illustrations and to secure permission for their reproduction. I apologize if any infringement should have occurred.

Abbreviations used in captions

- D director
- S set designer
- Des designer (set and costumes by same person or team)
- C costume designer
- Ph photographer