

"Caviar to the General"

Hamlet IN POPULAR CULTURE

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Hamlet: QUINTESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE

If we judge by the sheer number of popular works in which it somehow figures, there is a case to be made that *Hamlet* is popular culture's favorite Shakespeare play. It is indicative of *Hamlet*'s popular status as *the* quintessentially Shakespearean play that when the Klingon Language Institute¹ turned to translating Shakespeare, it chose not the play that perhaps best matches Klingon culture—*Macbeth*—but rather *Hamlet*, a play that has the cultural stature of the Institute's other object of translation: the Bible. Only *Romeo and Juliet* rivals *Hamlet* in the number of adaptations, parodies, and homages it has prompted, and like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*'s influence shapes our very image of Shakespeare as a playwright. Whereas the Shakespeare of *Romeo and Juliet* is popularly regarded as a poet of love, *Hamlet* is often invoked in popular culture to convey a very different impression of Shakespeare's work—as highbrow art. The play features many elements identified with this conception of Shakespearean theater: a courtly setting, a tone of tragic seriousness, a conflicted, highly self-conscious protagonist, and numerous emotionally wrought soliloquies. *Hamlet*, a college boy so intellectually inclined that nearly everything he confronts becomes an occasion for philosophical commentary, serves in popular culture to exemplify those qualities that modern audiences find most difficult in Shakespeare's writing: its high-minded philosophizing, verse dense with compacted imagery and learned allusions, and a plot short on action and long on talk.

THE MOST FAMOUS SPEECH IN THE WORLD

Two moments in *Hamlet* have become iconic in popular culture: Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy and Hamlet's address to the skull of Yorick, the dead court jester, at Ophelia's graveside. Not coincidentally, both exemplify Hamlet in his philosophizing mode. "To be or not to be," Hamlet's self-

loathing contemplation of suicide and his own inaction, has become the quintessential soliloquy in the popular imagination, perhaps the single most recognized, cited, and parodied speech in the Shakespeare canon. Because its opening lines are so very familiar, the speech has been a particular favorite of advertisers throughout the twentieth century, though allusions to this speech rarely get beyond its opening line. Because it is regarded as so quintessentially Shakespearean, "to be or not to be" has become a favorite for pop parodists. Ernst Lubitsch's anti-war comedy *To Be Or Not to Be* (1942), for example, makes comic hay of the solemn reverence that surrounds this famous speech. The self-important actor Joseph Tura tries again and again to perform "to be or not to be" only to be interrupted in mid-speech. Though Tura presents himself as a great Shakespearean, the only evidence the film offers of his status is his ever-thwarted attempt to perform this soliloquy. Ironically, his speaking of the phrase "to be or not to be" becomes the signal for a young airman in the audience to meet Tura's wife backstage for a tryst. A fantasy sequence in *The Last Action Hero* (1993) cleverly plays upon the disjunction between Shakespeare's highbrow theater and the conventions of contemporary action films. Arnold Schwarzenegger plays the role of the melancholy Dane who, unlike Shakespeare's protagonist, pummels and machine-guns everyone in sight. At the end of the sequence, he provides an action-movie riff on Hamlet's speech about inaction, offering the line "to be or not to be...not to be!" as he tosses a bomb that blows Elsinore to smithereens. The scene may be a wry response to Franco Zeffirelli's film *Hamlet* (1990) which cast action star Mel Gibson as Hamlet and cut nearly half of Shakespeare's text in favor of a less ruminative conception of the character.

"ALAS, POOR YORICK"

The play's second famous moment—Hamlet's address to Yorick's skull—rivals the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* as the most widely evoked Shakespearean image in popular culture. The image of Hamlet holding a skull aloft has become so iconic that a pop character need only hold up a skull-shaped object to bring the reference to mind. Its familiarity helps explain why this image too appears in advertisements, despite the fact that the scene from which it springs stresses the transitory nature of all earthly things. Some-

times the image is intended to evoke matters Shakespearean. Such is the case with Poor Yorick, a web-based company that specializes in Shakespearean educational materials; the company's original logo was a skull raised in hand. In other examples, the connection between pop references to Yorick's skull and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are somewhat looser. Examples from comic book covers illustrate the point. The cover of the June 1992 issue of *Justice League Europe* features a villain holding the severed head of the superhero Power Girl (aka Kara), with the caption, "Alas—poor Kara!" The allusion seems gratuitous until we learn that the villain is Deconstructo, devoted to destroying revered objects, including superheroes and classic art such as Shakespeare, both of which here Deconstructo mutilates. On the cover of *Lobo* 36 (1997) we see the ultra-violent Lobo hovering over Shakespeare himself as he types out a script for *Lobo*, the very comic we will be reading. In the foreground is a skull with "Yorick" incised on its forehead, a reminder of Shakespeare's tragedy but also a wry foreshadowing of the blood-and-guts violence to come. Hamlet's words as he addresses Yorick's skull are often misquoted in popular culture: he says not "Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him well" but rather "Alas poor Yorick, I knew him, Horatio." The difference is subtle but important. The popular (mis)quotation treats Hamlet's speech as a solitary address—a soliloquy—rather than Hamlet's remembrance of the court jester in the company of Horatio and the gravedigger. Perhaps this explains why this moment is so often conflated with "to be or not to be," Hamlet's most famous soliloquy.

Hamlet AND *Film Noir*

Hamlet has also provided many motifs for *film noir*, that distant generic relative of Renaissance revenge tragedy, of which *Hamlet* is the most famous example. Central to *Hamlet* and *film noir* are the following:

- an alienated protagonist (Hamlet) pitted against systematic corruption, the scope of which he discovers in the course of the plot;
- an antagonist (Claudius) who appears benign but who is in fact sinister;
- a woman (Gertrude) somehow implicated in the corruption;
- a spectacular moment in which the antagonist is confronted with his crime;

- the protagonist's erratic, mad, or ill-judged behavior as he pursues justice;
- an innocent or naive woman (Ophelia) who pays a price for her devotion to the protagonist;
- the protagonist's spectacular revenge upon the antagonist, often completed with an ironic twist.
- a fatalistic tone;
- the protagonist's melancholic introspection (in *film noir*, this is supplied by voiceover; in Shakespeare, by soliloquy).

Though *Hamlet's* influence upon the contemporary thriller tends to be oblique, sometimes elements from Shakespeare's play appear in relatively direct form. *Strange Illusion* (1945), a film by the much-admired Poverty Row director Edgar Ulmer, tells the *Hamlet*-inspired tale of Paul Cartwright, whose father, a judge, is tragically and mysteriously murdered. As Paul's widowed mother prepares to marry the suave stranger Brett Curtis, Paul has nightmares warning him that Brett is not to be trusted. Eventually Paul pieces together that Brett is really Claude Barrington, a murderous con-man and his father's killer, and Paul gathers his friends Hardy-Boys style to expose the villain. The film is noteworthy not only for its creative adaptation of Shakespeare's play and resourcefulness on a very low budget, but also for its interest in psychoanalysis. Indeed, Paul's Hamlet-like "madness" leads him at one point to be confined in an asylum where he is menaced by an evil analyst. The film's emphasis upon the Oedipal content in Paul's dreams testifies both to the twentieth-century interest in psychoanalytic approaches to *Hamlet* and to *film noir's* fascination with nightmare imagery and pop Freudianism. Michelle Manning's *Blue City* (1986) deals with somewhat similar material with a bigger budget and much less panache. The influence of *film noir* also runs in the other direction. As if in recognition of the connection between Shakespeare's play and this popular genre, Laurence Olivier's 1948 *Hamlet* borrows heavily from *film noir's* cinematic style, using such techniques as voiceover, angular compositions, unusual camera angles, and stark lighting to tell Shakespeare's story.

Several other adaptations of *Hamlet* exhibit an affinity for the sub-genre of corporate *noir*, that is, *film noir* set in the realm of big business. *The Bad*

Sleep Well (1960), a little-known film by acclaimed Japanese director Akira Kurosawa, freely reimagines the narrative of *Hamlet* within the world of a corrupt Japanese corporation. In Kurosawa's version, Koishi Nichi, the Hamlet figure of the story, emerges as a mysterious avenger of his father's forced suicide who battles post-war Japanese corporate corruption from the bombed-out ruins of a munitions factory. Though Nichi dies in the end—the result of one of many double-crosses in the film—his nemesis, Iwabuchi, receives a phone call at film's end that indicates the pyrrhic nature of his victory. *The Rest is Silence*, Helmut Käutner's film of the year before, offers a similar transposition of *Hamlet* to a business environment—here Hamlet is the son of a German industrialist supposedly killed during the war—and is equally interested in using the play to address post-war national guilt. Aki Kaurismäki's *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987) treats his corporate *noir* adaptation with icily black humor, situating the plot in a timber company that turns to manufacturing rubber ducks. *Strange Brew* (Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis, 1983), starring the beer-swilling Canadian duo Bob and Doug Mackenzie, treats its *Hamlet* subtext with an even lighter touch, though it too concerns a corrupt corporation—the Elsinore Brewery. *Let the Devil Wear Black* (Stacy Title, 1999) and Michael Almereyda's slacker tragedy *Hamlet* (2000) also use motifs derived from corporate *noir*.

Hamlet AND POPULAR GENRES

Hamlet has also been adapted to musical form, though the fit has typically been less than ideal. Though several operatic versions predate it, Ambroise Thomas's opera *Hamlet*, first performed in 1868, is the only *Hamlet* opera that has secured a place, albeit minor, in the classical music repertory. Several orchestral suites and tone poems based upon *Hamlet* have also appeared. Of these Hector Berlioz's *Tristia* (1848), Franz Liszt's *Hamlet* (1858), Peter Tchaikovsky's *Hamlet* (1888), and Frank Bridge's "Lament for Strings" (1915) and "There Is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook" (1928) are the best known, though none rank among the composers' best works. By and large popular musical versions have been even less successful. Cliff Jones's *Rock-abye Hamlet* (1974) and Pierre Groscolas's *Halliday Hamlet* (1976, featuring French rock star Johnny Halliday) sought to graft Shakespeare's play to the rock opera format, but they garnered small audiences and little critical

acclaim, a fate shared by more recent examples. Only *Musikal Hamlet* (2000), an adaptation written by and starring Czech pop idol Janek Ledecy, has enjoyed any lasting notoriety, and then only thus far in Eastern Europe. It is indicative of the uneasy relationship between *Hamlet* and music that so many musical parodies of the play exist. One notable example is "The Producer" (1966), an episode of *Gilligan's Island* in which the castaways perform Shakespeare's play to the tunes of famous operatic arias. Rap versions such as Moe Moskowitz and the Punsters' "Hamlet Rap" (1994) and Robert Krakovski's *The Trage-D of Hammy-T* (1999) play their adaptations for comedy, suggesting the incompatibility of *Hamlet* and contemporary hip-hop. One of the more curious musicalized *Hamlets* is Orpheus's 1997 version featuring cult film star Richard E. Grant's overwrought performance of "to be or not to be" set to house music. By turns danceable, dreamlike, and campy, Orpheus's dance mix exemplifies post-modern deadpan parody, at once flaunting the absurdity of combining Shakespeare with club music while offering a surprisingly effective piece which uses the phrase "perchance to dream" as its focus.

Transpositions of *Hamlet* to other genres have provided more interesting results. For example, the conventions of the spaghetti Western have proved surprisingly amenable to *Hamlet*, for three such adaptations appeared in the genre's heyday (*Apocalypse Joe*, dir. Leopoldo Savona, 1971; *Lust in the Sun*, dir. Richard Balducci, 1971; and the best of the lot, *Johnny Hamlet*, dir. Enzo G. Castellari, 1972). "To be or not to be" even makes a small but thematically crucial appearance in John Ford's classic Western, *My Darling Clementine* (1946), when Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp save a bumbling Shakespearean actor from being harassed by the Clantons. Holliday's troubled nature is revealed by the fact that he completes the speech when the Shakespearean runs dry. Because a devotion to Shakespeare seems quixotic in the modern age, another group of adaptations make *Hamlet*, in its role as the quintessential Shakespearean tragedy, the centerpiece of stories about idealists determined to perform the role or teach the play in the face of considerable obstacles. This plotline underpins, for example, Penny Marshall's film *Renaissance Man* (1994), which chronicles the struggles of Bill Rago, a downwardly-mobile former executive, to teach *Hamlet* to underprivileged army recruits; Kenneth Branagh's film *In the Bleak Midwinter* (aka *A Mid-*

winter's Tale, 1995), in which Joe Harper, a down-on-his-luck actor, gathers a rag-tag troupe to perform *Hamlet* in a small village during the Christmas season; Paul Rudnick's play *I Hate Hamlet* (1994), which portrays Andrew Rally, an insecure sitcom actor, as he attempts Shakespeare's most demanding role with the help of John Barrymore's ghost; or the Canadian TV series *Slings and Arrows* (2003), which in its first season details the trials of a dramatic company struggling to mount a production of *Hamlet*. Heroic versions of this motif, both set in prison camps and using *Hamlet* as a medium for resistance, can be found in Don Chaffey's *Breakout* (1958) and David L. Cunningham's *To End All Wars* (2001).

Hamlet FROM OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Perhaps because Shakespeare so strongly emphasizes Hamlet's perspective on the events at Elsinore and even the play's minor characters are vivid in the popular consciousness, several writers have been prompted to imagine how the plot of *Hamlet* might look from other characters' points of view. Though other Shakespeare plays have prompted the same kind of reimagining, *Hamlet* is by far the most popular choice for such adaptations. The variety of points of view is remarkable. Claudius's perspective is featured in John Turing's novel *My Nephew Hamlet* (1967) and Ken Gass's play *Claudius* (1993); Gertrude is the main character in Lillie Buffum Chase Wyman's novel *Gertrude of Denmark: An Interpretive Romance* (1924) and Margaret Atwood's delightfully acid short story "Gertrude Talks Back" (in *Good Bones*, 1992). Both are the protagonists of John Updike's novel *Gertrude and Claudius* (2000). Fortinbras's point of view is offered in two surreal plays, Janusz Glowacki's *Fortinbras Gets Drunk* (1990), and Lee Blessing's *Fortinbras* (1991). In Terrence Ortwein's play *And Flights of Angels* (1991), Horatio directs a group of players in telling Hamlet's story, and Alethea Hayter's novel *Horatio's Version* (1972) provides exactly what its title promises. Even Yorick gets his say in Salman Rushdie's short story "Yorick" (in *East and West*, 1994). Perhaps the most beloved of these adaptations is Tom Stoppard's extraordinary play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966; the 1990 film version was directed by Stoppard himself). In Stoppard's adaptation, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are hapless minor characters caught up in a predetermined sequence of events they never fully understand and in

which they are powerless to intervene. The two reflect upon the absurdity of their fated condition as they participate in bits and pieces of Shakespeare's play that rush them to their deaths. Stoppard's play is, however, not the first version to elevate Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to prominence within a *Hamlet* adaptation. W. S. Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) wrote a Shakespearean burlesque entitled *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* in 1874 (first performed in 1891). In Sullivan's version, Rosencrantz is in love with Ophelia, who, betrothed to Hamlet, conspires with Guildenstern and his friend to break the engagement. Their plan involves tricking Hamlet, a serial soliloquizer, into performing a tragedy which Claudius (Hamlet's father in this version) wrote in his youth and which out of embarrassment he banned all mention of at court.

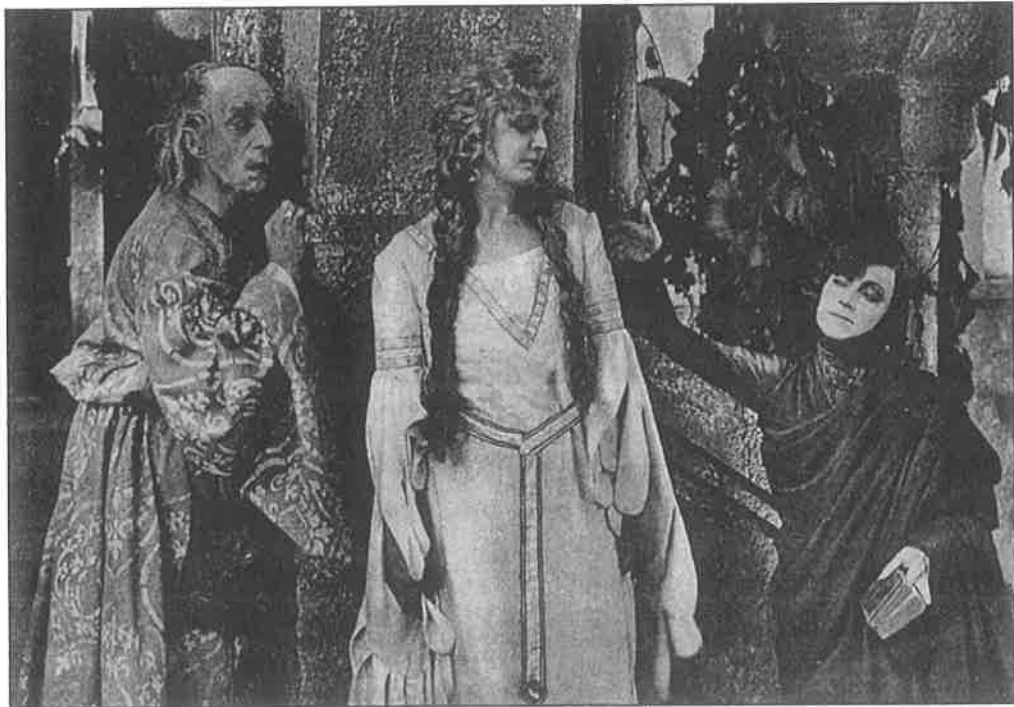
VERSIONS OF OPHELIA

Of all of the subsidiary characters in *Hamlet*, Ophelia has had the most vigorous afterlife in popular adaptations, where she serves as a symbol of the jilted lover. Ophelia was a favorite subject for nineteenth-century painters. Of these paintings the most famous is John Everett Millais's 1852 depiction of Ophelia as she floats briefly in the brook before her billowing dress pulls her under the water. Typical of nineteenth-century portraits of Ophelia, Millais's emphasis falls upon her helpless madness and tragic beauty. The image is of fallen innocence, a moment of young erotic awakening followed almost immediately by madness and martyr-like death. Millais's image—and the conception of Ophelia that informs it—has had wide influence, providing, for example, the model for staging Ophelia's death in Olivier's 1948 film *Hamlet*. Prompted by Shakespeare's scenes of Ophelia's singing, several Ophelia-themed song cycles—most famously by Johannes Brahms—also partake of this theme of melancholic beauty. Avant-garde composers such as John Cage and Oliver Knussen also used Ophelia as compositional inspiration, finding in her mad music a metaphor for their own unconventional works. The close association of Ophelia and music may also explain why "Ophelia" is one of the most frequent Shakespeare-themed song titles in popular music.

After the advent of the feminist movement, Ophelia has taken on a different resonance, that of an unjust victim of patriarchy. Mary Pipher's influential book *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*

(1994) uses Shakespeare's character as a metaphor for teenage girls who, Pipher argues, are psychologically maimed by a "girl-poisoning" culture. One measure of the book's influence is that it has spawned a number of related "Ophelia" titles on similar subjects—Sara Shandler's *Ophelia Speaks* (2000) and Cheryl Dellasega's *Surviving Ophelia* (2001). A feminist re-envisioning of Ophelia found wide cultural expression in art as well, underpinning such diverse works as Jean Betts' comedy *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (1993), Byrony Lavery's play *Ophelia* (1997), Natalie Merchant's song "Ophelia" (from the 1998 album *Ophelia*), Jurgen Vsyh's strange but rewarding film *Ophelia Learns to Swim* (2000), and Stephen Berkoff's epistolary play *The Secret Love Life of Ophelia* (2001).

Somewhat related to this reconception of Ophelia are examples of Hamlet reimagined as a woman. Several nineteenth-century actresses—Charlotte Cushman and Sarah Bernhardt among them—played the role of Hamlet to demonstrate their theatrical talents. One of the finest silent films of the play, Sven Gade and Heinz Schall's *Hamlet* (1921, starring Asta Nielsen) takes



Hans Junkermann as Polonius, Lilly Jacobson as Ophelia, and Asta Nielsen as Hamlet in Sven Gade and Heinz Schall's 1921 silent film
Courtesy of Douglas Lanier

cross-gender casting further, rewriting Shakespeare's plot to accommodate a feature-length story about a female Hamlet. In this version, in an effort to hide the fact that the heir to the Danish throne is female, Hamlet, a woman, is forced to pretend to be a man even as s/he later pursues revenge against the usurping Claudius. Complicating matters, this Hamlet falls in love with Horatio but dare not reveal her secret. This film resonates in fascinating ways with women's movements of the twenties and with lesbian subculture, a subject of periodic interest in early German cinema.

For a more contemporary example of a female Hamlet, one might look to Daniel Sackheim's *The Glass House* (2001), a "grrl-power" thriller inspired by elements from Shakespeare's play.

The Glass House reminds us of another important link between *Hamlet* and the youth culture of post-World War II generations. It is striking that so many of the *Hamlet* adaptations of this period use Shakespeare's play as a vehicle for expressing intergenerational tensions, reconceiving of Hamlet as an icon for youthful rebellion against or alienation from the older generation. That theme emerges in works as different in tone and audience as *Strange Illusion*, *The Bad Sleep Well*, and *Let the Devil Wear Black*, to name a few. It is particularly strong in Claude Chabrol's *Ophélie* (1963). In Chabrol's film, Yvan Lesurf, a young man whose businessman father dies and whose mother quickly remarries, becomes obsessed with the *Hamlet* narrative, convincing himself—erroneously, it turns out—that his own life mirrors Shakespeare's play. Chabrol's elliptical film both evokes Hamlet as an emblem for a vague sense of youthful disaffection from elders and critiques that connection at the very same time. Hamlet's status as a symbol for the alienation of modern youth has strongly influenced performances on film and stage of the character from the mid-twentieth-century on. Richard Burton's justly famous 1964 stage portrayal emphasized Hamlet's savage, ironic intelligence, his caustic contempt for authority, and his anguished and angry sense of entrapment in a situation not of his own making. Burton's Hamlet provided a powerful analogue for the feelings of alienation of the emerging sixties' generation. Nicol Williamson's performance in Tony Richardson's 1969 film of *Hamlet* strikes similar chords.

This conception of the character remains just as powerful with the current generation. Hamlet is now routinely considered a young actor's role,



Ethan Hawke as Hamlet, Diane Venora as Gertrude, and Kyle MacLachlan as Claudius in the 2000 film directed by Michael Almereyda
 Courtesy of Douglas Lanier

rather than, as it was in previous centuries, a role for the mature Shakespearean. Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) reimagines Hamlet as a disaffected slacker engulfed by the trappings of postmodern culture—anonymous cityscapes, corporate business, and media saturation. Epitomizing that culture is his glib uncle Claudius, mogul of Denmark Corporation, against whom Hamlet instinctively rebels. That this Hamlet desires to carve out a mode of expression of his own—he is an independent filmmaker—from the media products that surround him speaks to the difficult contradictions an aspiring young artist—and a Shakespearean filmmaker—must navigate in contemporary culture.

To take an example farther afield, the notion that *Hamlet* concerns a young man coming of age also suffuses the Shakespearean borrowings in *The Lion King* (1994), where the young lion Simba must rebel against his usurping uncle Scar in order to grow into maturity and take his rightful role as king. Though *The Lion King* plays down the darker elements of Hamlet's

youthful disaffection, the sense that *Hamlet* provides the film with a plot about intergenerational strife testifies yet again to how contemporary culture views the play.

Shamlet: POP PARODIES

Hamlet's status as the quintessential Shakespeare play has prompted all manner of lampoons in popular culture. Indeed, it was John Poole's *Hamlet Travestie* in 1810 that is widely credited for starting the Victorian Shakespearean burlesque craze. In the twentieth century, parodies of *Hamlet* often exploit the perceived divide between elite and popular culture, treating Shakespeare's play as an exemplar of highbrow culture that becomes absurd when transposed into the current pop idiom of the day. There are myriad examples. A short interlude in Woody Allen's *Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid To Ask)* (1972) recasts bits of the "to be or not to be" soliloquy in terms of a bad stand-up comedy routine; *Green Eggs and Hamlet* (1995), an amateur film directed by Michael O'Neal, retells the events of Shakespeare's play in Dr. Seuss rhymes; and *The Skinhead Hamlet* (1982), a short play by Richard Curtis, writer for the *Blackadder* TV series and *Bridget Jones* films, converts Shakespeare's dialogue into a series of comically inarticulate "oi"'s and expletives. In several cases, the parody targets less Shakespeare's play than its reputation or performance. "Another Point of View, or Hamlet Revisited," an episode of the classic radio show *CBS Radio Workshop* (broadcast 1956), offers an elaborate mock-argument concluding that Hamlet is the real villain of the play, sending up the penchant of scholars to offer perverse interpretations of the play; the second act of the Reduced Shakespeare Company's *The Compleat Works of Wllm Shk-spr (abridged)* (1994), devoted entirely to *Hamlet*, lampoons the burden of the past faced by any performer of the play—one of the actors runs away when he hears the group will attempt it—as well as the vogue for psychoanalytic interpretation—the audience is invited to enact Ophelia's unconscious by portraying her ego, superego, and id. Curiously, political lampoons using *Hamlet* are relatively rare. One exception is "Shamlet," a 1988 comedy routine by political parodists The Capitol Steps concerning the inability of a Democratic candidate to decide to run for the presidency.

Hamlet GOES GLOBAL

As one might expect of a play so widely regarded as quintessentially Shakespearean, popular adaptations of *Hamlet* have appeared in nearly every culture in which Shakespeare has been performed. Many adaptors have creatively transposed the play to their native cultures. To offer but a sampling:

- Dev Virahsawmy, a noted Mauritian translator of Shakespeare, has written two adaptations, *Hamlet 2* (1995) and *Dokter Hamlet* (1997).
- The opera *Revenge of the Prince* (2005, produced by the Shanghai Peking Opera) shifts the action to ancient China and adds musical, acrobatic, and dance sequences.
- Ozualda Ribiera Candeias's film *A Herança* (1970) reimagines the narrative as a tale of rural Brazil.
- Metin Erksan's film *Intikam Melegi - Kadın Hamlet* (1977) offers a surreal modernization of the play and stars Turkish film siren Fatma Girik cross-dressed in the title role.
- Eldar Ryazanov's *Beregis avtomobilya* (1966) examines how an insurance agent's pursuit of a car thief comes to mirror Laertes's pursuit of Hamlet.
- Krsto Papic's film *Predstava Hamleta u Mrdusi Donjoj* (aka *Acting Hamlet in the Village of Mrdusa Donja*) (1974), an adaptation of Ivo Bresan's 1971 play, chronicles a village performance of Shakespeare's play led by a local commissar, a performance which ends up exposing the commissar's crimes and precipitating revenge against him.

Though the number and variety of *Hamlet* performances and adaptations worldwide precludes any easy survey, certain distinctive traditions of adapting *Hamlet* have developed in some cultures. In Western Europe, the non-English-speaking avant-garde has often been attracted to *Hamlet* as an example of modernism *avant la lettre*, and it has been willing to treat the play more subversively than their English-speaking counterparts, as is exemplified by the work of Carmelo Bene, Celestino Coronado, Heiner Müller and Giovanni Testori, to name a few. Moreover, whereas recently the West has tended to treat *Hamlet* as a play about intergenerational conflict or Oedipal

psychology, Eastern Europe has tended to treat the play as a political work, using performances of *Hamlet* as a vehicle for covert protest against repressive regimes. *Hamlet* is now firmly established as a classic of world literature, and the sheer range of interpretations and adaptations it has inspired ensure that its long, vibrant cultural afterlife is sure to continue.

NOTES:

(1) <http://www.kli.org/>